

## Self-Care For Pastors and Leaders

Life is a gift from God. God has given us so many things that deserve and require our stewardship. He has given us intellect, free will, emotions, marriage, children, material wealth, joy, love, talents, spiritual gifts, our unique mission, and our body. Our body houses the spirit and the soul. It expresses love, creates children, and carries us around to fulfill our mission. Our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made. God's plan from the beginning was for the first human body to live forever. Then death happened. Yet God redeems our bodies, heals our bodies, and uses our bodies for His glory. When He sends us somewhere, our bodies take us there. Our bodies deserve to be stewarded with the highest level of care.

God's hope for us as whole people doesn't exclude our bodies. He wants your body to operate as He intended. He wants you healthy. He wants your energy levels high. He designed you to be able to carry out your mission until your body is done. That means God wants you fit! Would you like to have no chronic issues your entire life? Would you like to hike miles in your 80's? (If you like hiking). Would you like to enjoy your life in your 60s, 70s, and 80s with no limits? Do you want to go wherever you set out to go? Self-care is so we can self-sacrifice better and longer. When Jesus said He came to give us remarkable life (John 10:10), He meant all of life, including our physical bodies. The Spirit wrote in 3 John 2 that the prayers and requests of the Apostle were for our souls to be well and our bodies to be healthy. It is God's design and plan.

Our brain is a part of our body. What we do with our bodies affects our brains. Our brains are our control center and, therefore, need to be taken care of with nutrients, myokines, endorphins, neurochemicals, rest, enjoyment, and a host of other things that only happen when caring for our body. Your brain is responsible for much of your thinking ability, including regulating emotions. How we think has so much to do with how we live. You cannot exclude the body from the recipe for self-care. Taking care of ourselves is paramount. Our physical body deserves our honor (value).

Some pastors and leaders believe a few things that need to be challenged. The primary theological assumption is that this body is decaying and will die. Therefore, it deserves little or no attention. Many verses are quoted to prove this assumption, including 1 Tim. 4:8, and a few verses from 1 Cor. 15. This theology could not be further from the truth. Our bodies are the temple of God! (1 Cor. 3:16) They have great importance to God.

*1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (ESV)*

*<sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

Holy Spirit ends with this after saying that the body is the Lord's, and He will raise it. Let me reiterate: your body belongs to God. He is the Lord (kurios-Greek), the decision-maker of what happens with your body.

*Romans 12:1 (ESV)*

*<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

Paul writes here that giving ourselves to God specifically includes giving our body to Him. Almost everything in the Kingdom is a partnership with God. There are special times when God does something. He intervenes without a prayer or any help from humanity. However, usually, life is a partnership with

God since He gave us the charge to take care of, rule over, take dominion, fill the earth, and multiply ourselves. We preach and counsel people to steward money, marriage, learning, etc. It is the same for the body. God is our healer. There is no doubt about that. Yet He gives us the responsibility of taking care of the gift of our physical body.

The Tabernacle and the temple had precise instructions on how to build them. If our body is the temple, we must have specific instructions. In the Old Covenant, they had stringent dietary rules. However, we live in the New Covenant! Praise God! Unlike our ancestors, who had an innate knowledge of how to live a healthy life, we don't eat their food, move our bodies like they did, or rest like they did. We do have the Holy Spirit to guide us. He will tell us how to live if we ask Him and listen. Paul writes that everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. (1 Cor. 6:12) He goes on to say something compelling, "I will not be mastered by anything."

When we are seriously ill, we seek remedy. It is normal. Our bodies, incredibly designed by God, can heal themselves because they are made in His likeness. If you cut your finger, skin your knee, or break a bone, your body heals itself. You have an immune system that fights foreign invaders. When something foreign comes into your body, your body identifies it, surrounds it, kills it, and excretes it. Amazing! Let's learn about God from the very nature of our bodies.

As I said, we partner with God with our physical health. I have been healed miraculously and have seen hundreds and maybe thousands healed in my ministry, but that does not release us from responsibility for taking the gift (talents/minas) that Jesus gave us and creating an environment where our bodies can thrive. My question is, will you settle for less than remarkable health and fitness?

I am concerned that we have been sucked into a cultural norm. You get old, you get sicker, you get weaker, you go on medication, you can't do things, and then someone has to take care of you. That wasn't how Moses aged! He was 120 and full of strength. Caleb asked Joshua for the hill country and said he was as strong and able as he was when they spied out the land. He was 85. My friends, most of what we call aging is decaying, and we don't have to decay. We are not sentenced to ill health. However, we must partner with God in our health and fitness if we want it to be remarkable. How we live today determines how we will live tomorrow.

I see the Word of God with so much to say about health. While it doesn't tell us to go to the gym, the farm was their gym. It does specifically tell us over and over again about the danger of food. It is such a gift from God, yet the first sin involved food, as did the first murder. Esau gave his birthright away for food. Reread that. Will you give your birthright, being healthy and fit, away for food? The Word of God also talks about rest. The first mention of the Sabbath isn't in Exodus 20. It is in Genesis 1. It's a gift! Yet the reality is pastors and leaders have a hard time taking a day off to enjoy life and Jesus, which will give us what the Sabbath is designed for rejuvenation. I am not even going to talk about vacations or sabbaticals. (Even the ground was supposed to take a year off every seven years). Somehow, we feel guilty for taking time off. My friends, that needs to change.

Finally, we are more than conquerors. Nothing is too hard for us. We have dominion over our bodies. We are not people with no choice or power to make those choices. You may have used food to comfort you. You may have worked yourself without rest to prove yourself. You can be free from every emotional, mental, and physical restraint to live as God desires. Self-care is stewardship.

1 Corinthians 9:25–27 (ESV)

*<sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

There are many factors in physical health and well-being, including the way you think, the way you handle stress (actually, this is a significant factor in disease), and the more minor yet important physical factors like sunlight, toxins, breathing correctly, touch, and laughter. However, for our purpose, we will concentrate on three fundamental pillars of health:

- What you eat and drink (intake)
- Your activity level (output)
- Your sleep and rest (rejuvenation)

Let's get back to what God created and how He intended our body to operate at a remarkable level and use that as our measuring rod.

### **Intake**

Water - To be properly hydrated, drink at least 40 ml of water for every kilogram of body weight. Drink more if you are sweating a lot because of activity or weather. Take a few grains of good sea salt when you drink a full glass. It helps your body hydrate.

Food – Unprocessed is the food God created. Eat unprocessed food 75% of the time. Unprocessed foods include the natural edible food parts of plants and animals. Minimally processed foods have been slightly altered so they can be more easily stored, prepared, combined, and eaten; this processing level does not substantially change the nutritional content of the food. If the food is “fortified” or “enriched,” it is processed. If you can't pronounce the ingredient, it is processed. If it stays on the shelf for months, it is processed. Obviously, this includes fast food since it is highly processed.

Vegetables – Eat four or more servings of vegetables per day. Remember, our axiom is: did God create what I am eating? Also, eat your vegetables before you eat anything else in your meal.

Protein – The older you get, the more protein you need. Proteins (amino acids) build every cell in your body. You need 30-50 grams per meal.

Oils- Avoid all vegetable oils and use avocado or coconut oil for cooking and olive oil for anything cold or room temperature.

Drinks – Irradicate all sugary drinks such as soda, juices, and sports drinks from your diet. Remember, God didn't make artificial flavors and sweeteners. If you are going to drink a sugary beverage, drink it after you have had 1/3 of your meal.

Desserts, Candy, and Sugar – Greatly reduce anything high in sugar. Although God made sugar, He didn't create our body to be able to handle a lot of it. A diet high in sugar is a primary cause of every chronic disease. Eat fats and proteins with your sugar to mitigate the sugar spike in your blood.

Planning – Plan what times you will eat and what foods you will eat at the beginning of the day or the day before. Eating is a crucial function of fueling your body. Eating to fuel your body is a godly way of eating. You can enjoy the fuel all you want!

## **Output**

Exercise - The broadly accepted target for exercising in the gym, on the field, or a court is 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week.

Strength Training – 60 minutes out of the 150 minutes per week should be strength training. Muscle is life. For quality of life and longevity, building and maintaining muscle mass is essential.

Cardio – 60 minutes out of the 150 per week should be spent on exercises that raise your heart rate above 70% of your max heart rate. You can accomplish this through running, biking, or swimming, as well as any exercise that elevates your heart rate, such as HIIT training or CrossFit.

Mobility and Flexibility – At least 5 minutes per day should be spent in this area of fitness. To keep our ability to move as we did when we were young, we must focus on flexibility and mobility. A stretching routine keeps your muscles more elastic, and a mobility routine keeps your joints able to move through their natural and God-intended range of motion.

Core Stability Training – I suggest you work on your core musculature for 5 minutes every other day at a minimum. Your core stabilizer muscles will keep you from back issues.

## **Rejuvenation**

Sleep – Your body needs 7.5-9 hours of sleep per night. Sleep brings incredible health to the body and brain. Some have trained themselves to sleep much less. God made the sun and the moon day and night. At night, we are engineered to sleep. Just because we artificially break with the cycle that God created doesn't mean it is correct. If you fall asleep in less than 3 minutes, you are sleep-deprived. If you need an alarm to wake up, you aren't getting enough sleep.

Sabbath – Every seven days, you are gifted by God with one day off from your labors. This is to be a day of enjoyment. Do something that recreates you, gives your soul and body rest, and creates a sense of well-being that readies you for the next week.

Vacation – Although I can't prove this with an explicit Bible verse, there is much to say about enjoyment and joy throughout the Word of God. A rest between harvest and planting is a natural ebb and flow. Our work never ends, so we have to insert a time to get away. In addition, your family will thank you because they need your full attention for more than one day.

Date Night – I know this may look like it doesn't belong in this discussion, but you must provide time for your marriage to flourish. Your spouse needs it. Your kids need to see it. Your church or organization must have a healthy marriage role model with passion, focus, and priority. At least once a week or twice a month, go out with your spouse. Go for a walk, a movie, dinner, or even do an activity together. It will rejuvenate your union.

## **Gut (Microbial) Health**

There are a few easy ways to improve your gut flora (microbes). There are over 20 different microbiome (bacteria) colonies that weigh 3-4 pounds and number over 100 trillion. These bacteria, among other things, are master signalers of physiological processes. There are the “good, the bad, and the neutral”. All of these must be kept in balance. Here are a few ways to improve your microbiome and, therefore, improve your health.

Probiotic foods – Sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, fermented cucumbers, and other vegetables contain different strains of good microbiome.

Probiotic drinks – Kombucha and other fermented drinks that don’t have much or any sugar or alcohol.

Probiotic supplements – Without a microbiome mapping to see what you need, this won’t be exact and could create an imbalance. However, most people will benefit from a general broad-spectrum probiotic.

Prebiotics – Garlic, onions, leeks, asparagus, barley, chicory root and apples are prebiotics. (Food for the good microbiome).

Fiber – 28g per day at a minimum, although don’t go too high either. Split peas, lentils, black beans, broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, raspberries, pears, and plenty more real foods are higher in fiber.

Avoid - sugar, sweeteners, starchy foods as that feed the bad bacteria.

### **Measurement tools**

BMI index – look it up online and take the “overweight” category lightly. If you are above that category, you need to consider getting help or support to increase your health.

Hip-to-waist ratio – Use an online calculator to understand this metric, which is better than the BMI index.

Bar Hang – This is an excellent way to see if your strength is equal to your body weight. Hang on a bar above your head as long as you can. Women should be able to hang 1:00, and men should be able to hang at 1:30.

Wall Squat or Chair Sit – this accesses lower body strength and stamina. To perform this test, sit either against a wall or like you would be sitting on a chair (without the chair). Your legs need to be at a 90-degree angle, and your feet should be flat on the floor. A good level is to hold that position for 2:00.

Push Ups – 60 seconds to perform as many push-ups as possible. You may rest but may not take your hands off the floor. Men should be able to do 15-20 and women 3-8.

Plank – This accesses core strength and endurance. Hold the plank position as long as you can without breaking form. Men should be able to hold for 1:30 and women 1:00 at a minimum.

Cardio – This will look at your cardio recovery, which indicates a certain level of cardiovascular fitness. After a good warm-up, perform any cardio exercise rigorously (safely) for at least 2 minutes. At the end

of 2 minutes, take your pulse immediately. (Count how many beats in 15 seconds and multiply by 4). After 1:00 of rest, retake your pulse. Your pulse should be reduced by 20%.

Stretch Test – This tests your posterior (backside) flexibility. Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Put a line where your heels are, and with your legs staying straight, reach forward as far as possible and touch the floor. You should be able to touch 5cm past the line.

Shoulder mobility – This tests your shoulders range of motion. Stand up straight and look into the mirror. With your arm completely straight, raise it in front of you and keep it as close to your head as possible, with the ending position being your upper arm touching your ear. Repeat with the other arm. Then, try it with both arms at the same time. Good mobility is being able to touch both ears with your upper arms simultaneously.

Balance – Safely test your balance. With one foot on the ground and that leg straight, put your other foot on the side of your knee (like a stork). Hold it there without losing contact. You should be able to attain 30 seconds at a minimum.

3 John 2 (NIV84)

<sup>2</sup> *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.*