

Self-care as Good Stewardship

This model of self-care is based on the principle that we are made in the image of God, but we are not exactly like God. We are spiritual beings in a physical body having human experiences. We are limited beings and, as stewards, we were meant to connect to God as we discern how to balance our lives. Self-care is an act of humility, a way of expressing our need for God's care and his wisdom to know our boundaries. We also get to care deeply for ourselves simply because we are made and loved by God—people with dignity who are worthy of affection, attention, and care. Developing practices for caring for ourselves should not be dependent on how hard we work or how good or deserving we are, but should overflow from our stewardship of what God has entrusted to us.

Holistic self-care can be nurtured by paying attention to 5 vital domains of life, easily remembered with the acrostic **ROPES: Relational, Occupational, Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual**. Much like real ropes, attuning and attending to these domains can serve as a daily anchor or lifeline during life's difficult storms, reminding us of the ways we've been shaped and providing tools for maintaining vital connections.

No domain is isolated; they are all connected. When explaining this ROPES chart on page 2 to clients, first acknowledge the interconnectedness of these domains. Then help them contextualize ways that they could address their particular needs within each domain of life.

Domain of Life	Things to Remember:
<p>Relational</p>	<p>You were built for relationship with God and designed to coregulate with others. Invest in your relationships.</p> <p>Be intentional about: spending time with family and friends. Regularly contribute (time, money) to the communities you live in/ belong to.</p>
<p>Occupational</p>	<p>Your identity is not rooted in your work, but in your immutable status as an Image bearer.</p> <p>Be intentional about: God’s design for people to be good stewards of things entrusted to your care. Do your work diligently and take time for lunch, set healthy boundaries, leave work at work, take vacation, find value in what you do each day.</p>
<p>Physical</p>	<p>Your body (especially your nervous system) impacts other domains of life, particularly your emotions.</p> <p>Be intentional about: attending preventative care appointments and activities, exercising, focusing on nutrition and sleep, attuning to your physical surroundings and nature.</p>
<p>Emotional</p>	<p>Your emotions impact and are impacted by the other domains of life, particularly your nervous system.</p> <p>Be intentional about: observing and describing your feelings in healthy ways (through journaling, friends, counseling), affirming yourself, limiting social media.</p>
<p>Spiritual</p>	<p>Your entire being thrives when you are connected to God and experience his love, strength, and peace.</p> <p>Be intentional about: praying, fasting, worshiping, meditating on scripture, connecting with your body and emotions, as well as reflecting on Christ’s place in your relationships and work.</p>

We want to build habits and rhythms around the ROPES for ourselves and help clients do the same. Consistent care is better than sporadic care and will yield more growth in our lives, so we should be intentional about developing daily self-reflection habits.

As caregivers, one of the most important habits for long-term stability is to consider our own needs as we walk clients through their self-care journey. We can learn to observe how our body reacts and responds before, during, and after sessions, as well as in our own personal life. We should share moments of struggle with supervisors, colleagues, family members, friends and others. Allow yourself to be supported, knowing that you don't have to hold any of it alone. God is ever-present and walks with you as you journey with your clients in their pain. Self-care can be difficult for many people as it is for us. Use the chart to help yourself and those you care for troubleshoot obstacles and guide self-reflection. With these questions, we encourage journaling.

Self-care Troubleshooting and Reflection Questions

Troubleshooting Questions	Daily Self-Care Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What prevents me from practicing self-care? • What is missing in my life that I once enjoyed? • What is at risk if I don't practice self-care? • Who are the people I can share with when I feel stuck? • Which idols (things I put above God) surface as I practice self-care? • Which idols surface as I avoid self-care? • What important values or needs are not currently reflected in my life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do I want / need to experience today? • How do I commune with the Lord today? • Who will I connect with today? • How am I taking care of my body and mind today? • What am I learning / creating well today? • What am I grateful for today? • What am I looking forward to today?

Keep in mind that clients who struggle with anxiety, depression, or have trouble focusing and making decisions, may feel overwhelmed by lists or charts with lots of information or questions. Feel free to discuss the concepts with these clients broadly and then highlight a particular ROPE, self-care or troubleshooting question at a time. There is no need to rush. And as caregivers, we can go slow with our own processing, as well. We can allow ourselves space and time to regroup when we feel overwhelmed and consider one area at a time.

