

Restore My Soul

Reimagining Self-Care
for a Sustainable Life

“A recipe book for the soul.”

Alice Fryling, author of
Mirror for the Soul

Janice
McWilliams

A practical and must-read primer for anyone struggling with self-care and longing for soul care. Grounded in Scripture and her experiences as a Christian minister and professional therapist, McWilliams challenges us to better care for our thoughts, emotions, and inward experiences. She leads us on a journey toward establishing new, sustainable rhythms and a kind of self-care that restores the soul and enables us to live the fulfilling life that Jesus wants for us!

TOM LIN, president and CEO of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

This book is not a book to read and put on the shelf. It is a treasure chest of valuable insights and teaching. It is a recipe book for the soul. It is a book for those who want to live a fulfilled life and don't know how to get there. This is a book for people who want help as they seek to untangle their thoughts and emotions, to learn from them, and to experience transformation.

Janice McWilliams offers her wisdom as a therapist and spiritual director against the backdrop of how Jesus responded to his own emotions. The book is full of Scripture, practical advice, and the perspective of an author who is authentically journeying with her readers.

ALICE FRYLING, spiritual director and author of *Aging Faithfully: The Holy Invitation of Growing Older*

Restore My Soul is a beautiful tapestry of wisdom woven with threads of spiritual guidance, honest assessments of our needs, psychological insights, and heartfelt personal stories of transformation. Janice McWilliams has captured something you may not even know you're longing for, but as you read this book,

you'll come to know what it is, and you'll have practical and attainable steps forward to a more sustainable life.

MARILYN VANCIL, author of *Beyond the Enneagram: An Invitation to Experience a More Centered Life with God*

In *Restore My Soul*, Janice McWilliams has given us a gift: gentle, wise, biblical counsel on how to grow and thrive as thinking, feeling creatures. This book is as practical as it is insightful and comes at a time when many of us need a little restoration for our souls.

REV. DON EVERTS, author of *Discover Your Gifts: Celebrating How God Made You and Everyone You Know*

A holistic, practical guide to self-care! Janice does a wonderful job helping us rethink the importance of self-care and provides step-by-step instructions so that we can easily integrate these principles into our daily lives. A must-read!

DR. MARK MAYFIELD, author of *The Path out of Loneliness: Finding and Fostering Connection to God, Ourselves, and One Another*

Restore My Soul

Reimagining Self-Care
for a Sustainable Life

Janice McWilliams

NavPress 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

For more information, visit NavPress.com.

Restore My Soul: Reimagining Self-Care for a Sustainable Life

Copyright © 2022 by Janice McWilliams. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers

NavPress and the NavPress logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. *Tyndale* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Ministries. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team:

David Zimmerman, Publisher; Deborah Sáenz Gonzalez, Acquisitions Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor; Olivia Eldredge, Operations Manager; Libby Dykstra, Designer; Sarah K. Johnson, Proofreader

Cover photograph of circles copyright © MirageC/Getty. All rights reserved.

Author photo by Arpasi Photography, copyright © 2022. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64158-461-6

Printed in the United States of America

28 27 26 25 24 23 22
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For my clients. It has been an honor to walk with each
of you and witness your courage and growth.*

Contents

Introduction *1*

ONE Reimagining Self-Care *7*

TWO Living Well with Our Thoughts *23*

THREE Thoughts: The Essential Skills *43*

FOUR Living Well with Our Emotions *67*

FIVE Emotions: The Essential Skills *85*

SIX Establishing Soul-Restoring Rhythms *107*

SEVEN Rhythms: The Essential Skills *125*

EIGHT Living a Life of Fulfillment *151*

NINE Fulfillment: The Essential Skills *169*

Gratitudes *189*

APPENDIX Soul Restoration by Enneagram Type *191*

Notes *196*

About the Author *199*

Introduction

*The journey of a thousand miles does not begin with one step.
It begins with a desire to be somewhere else.*

PETE PEARSON, MENTOR

As a therapist, I often hear clients complain that the thought of addressing self-care in a meaningful way is overwhelming. I always point out how exhausting the alternative is. Think about it: How much energy do you expend on tamping down emotions, ruminating, or worrying? How defeating and depleting is it to work on something for hours and feel like you've gotten nothing done? How is the strain of not connecting well with family or friends working for you? And what cost is there to having an anemic or stunted relationship with God? This is the stuff of exhaustion and burnout. Doing the work of learning how to practice soul-restoring, life-sustaining self-care may require intention and effort, but the result is freedom and energy! In the end, an unhealthy soul will exhaust you far, far more than a restored one.

RESTORE MY SOUL

The idea of a restored soul makes most of us remember Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.

PSALM 23:1-3, NRSV (EMPHASIS ADDED)

The green pastures and still waters where the Shepherd leads his sheep make me think of our very practical needs: rest, safety, eating and drinking. Then there is the little phrase about the Shepherd “restoring my soul” (see verse 3). The meaning of this is so vast and deep! I think of movement from discouraged to encouraged, from fatigued to rested, from fractured to whole. The idea of a restored soul evokes a feeling of peace and steadiness that intersects with the deepest cravings of my spirit.

In his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, W. Phillip Keller explores this idea through his vocation as a shepherd.

Now there is an exact parallel to this [restoring my soul] in caring for sheep. Only those intimately acquainted with sheep and their habits understand the significance of a “cast” sheep. . . .

A cast sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up. . . . It lies there lashing about in frightened frustration.

If the owner does not arrive on the scene within a reasonably short time, the sheep will die.¹

The image of the “cast” sheep is rich, real, and a little too close to home. How often are we stuck on our backs, struggling mightily,

INTRODUCTION

with no clear idea how to help ourselves or access the help of the Shepherd? Scripture is clear that it is the Shepherd's work to restore souls, to put the sheep back on their feet. But I have become passionate about helping people learn about the reasons they keep finding themselves stuck in the first place. That's where my idea to reimagine self-care began. I wanted to help my clients see and believe that the best self-care addresses the way they manage their inner experiences moment to moment, hour to hour, and day to day—*before* they wind up helpless on their backs, struggling.

I've been an Enneagram enthusiast, student, and teacher for twenty-five years. You don't need to know the Enneagram to appreciate this book. But these sentences might make more sense to those of you who do: I experienced a breakthrough in understanding how we tend to wind up as stuck sheep when I took a course on stances and repressed centers from Suzanne Stabile. I realized that when it comes to life-sustaining self-care, we wind up struggling in unique ways depending on our repressed centers—which correspond to our Enneagram types and what she calls our *centers of intelligence* (whether we're in the head, heart, or gut triad and which center of intelligence is dominant and which is repressed).² It's far too much to fully explain here; the gist of the teaching is that some types are *thinking repressed*, some are *feeling repressed*, and some are *doing repressed* (see the appendix for more detail). In other words, different people have different challenges in regard to healthy patterns of thinking, feeling, or doing.³

This repressed-centers theory gave overwhelming validation to what I see in my office. Certain skills are especially hard for certain people, and without intentional effort, this may never change. This helps explain why so many of us get stuck in life patterns that keep us overwhelmed and exhausted. To be at our best, we need to think effectively, feel without resistance, and do things that reflect the way

RESTORE MY SOUL

we want to live. Self-care in each area means getting better at tending to ourselves in real time, as challenges arise. Certain chapters in this book may present greater challenges to you—and, therefore, may be the most important work for you to tackle.

The thoughts chapters (2–3) are designed to help you learn that self-care in this area involves recognizing unhelpful thought patterns and creating better ones in the moment, as they arise. The emotions chapters (4–5) debunk the idea that certain emotions are off-limits. They encourage you to experience the range of emotions and teach you how to respond well to them. The rhythms chapters (6–7) reveal that self-care means having good rhythms of moving fast and slow, of work and rest, modeled after the way Jesus lived. And the fulfillment chapters (8–9) bring these streams of focus—thoughts, emotions, and rhythms—together by helping you develop self-care patterns for a meaningful and fulfilling life.

There are two chapters on each topic. The first chapters on each topic answer the question *Why?* and make the case for the centrality of health in that area to one’s overall self-care. The second chapters on each topic—the “essential skills” chapters—answer the question *How?* and give concrete ways to practice the skills that will help you grow in each area. I envision the book as a manual of sorts, a resource that you’ll be able to return to over time to refresh these skills. There is no need to read the chapters in order; you can easily begin with the content that interests you most or that feels most relevant. You can return to the chapters that help you through various experiences and life stages. But I do encourage you to read all of it—even the sections that cover areas you perceive to be your strengths. I have yet to come across a person who wouldn’t benefit from considering how to live better with their thoughts and emotions or how to create more soul-restoring rhythms. And not enough people have thought

INTRODUCTION

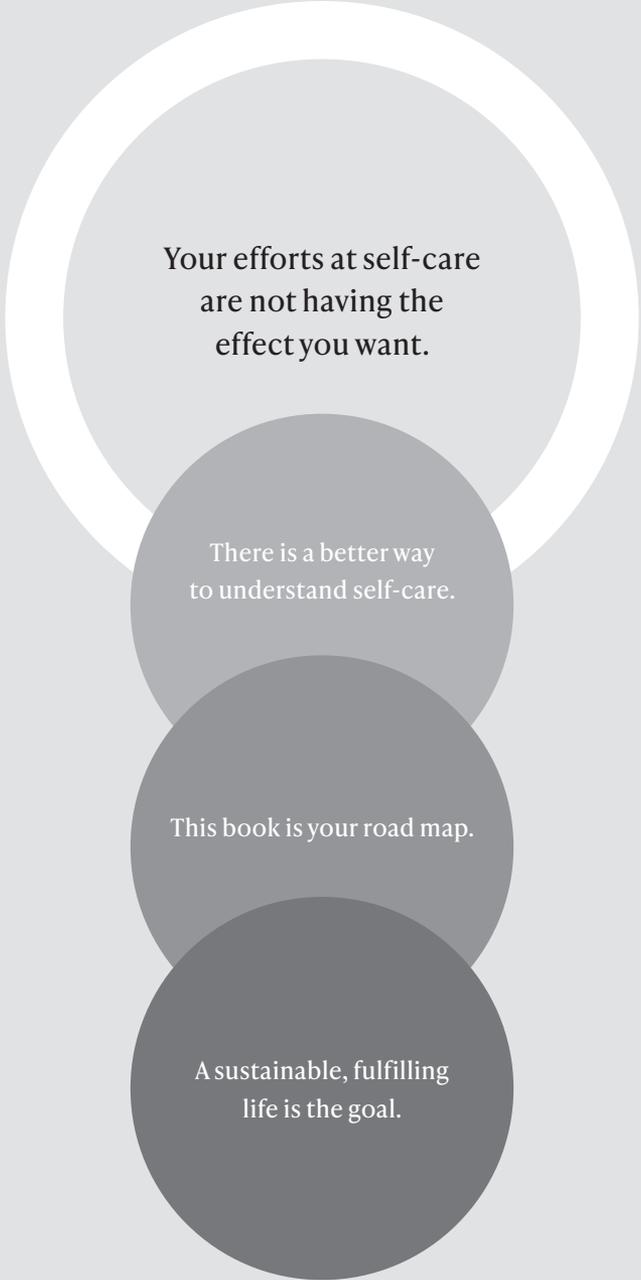
intentionally about how to live with more fulfillment in the hours and days of their lives.

My spiritual-direction and therapy clients have inspired me with their remarkable journeys of struggling and overcoming. It has been an honor to walk with each one, and their stories are reflected in this book. In order to protect their privacy and honor their confidentiality, many details (such as names, professions, ages, histories, and genders) have been altered. Most of the characters in this book represent composites of several people. The anecdotes are no less genuine, as so many people wrestle with similar inner tensions that leave them depleted.

I have walked with many of my clients as they have shifted from the idea that self-care is an occasional activity to the notion that it is a moment-to-moment, day-to-day endeavor. This journey moves them from an untenable and overwhelming life to a fulfilling, sustainable one—the life of someone with a restored soul. Nothing gives me more satisfaction than seeing that transformation take place. The journey to a restored soul involves starting to see your inner world more clearly and then learning to apply life-sustaining self-care. The themes that I've found to be most important to the process are reflected in this book.

I haven't held back in this book. I firmly believe that the ideas in it are keys to preventing being a stuck sheep and living with a restored soul instead. The skills in this book have proven critical to restoring weary souls and recovering an overall sense of well-being in my clients. In turn, my clients have been empowered to live the lives God has called them to. The better we are at life-sustaining self-care, the freer we will be to give time, energy, and talents to the things that matter in the Kingdom of God.

So, dear readers, I pray this book will move you from muddled to clear, from unstable to steady, from unsatisfied to fulfilled. For the sake of the gospel and our souls, let's live better.



Your efforts at self-care
are not having the
effect you want.

There is a better way
to understand self-care.

This book is your road map.

A sustainable, fulfilling
life is the goal.

Reimagining Self-Care

My friend Úna forwarded me the link with a text: “Did you know there is a line of self-care Barbies?!?!?” I was hard at work on this book at the time, wrestling with popular concepts of self-care, and the two of us had enjoyed several conversations on the topic. I quickly clicked on the link, and there she was: Barbie, in a pink bathrobe, with her iconic lipsticked smile. The play set had cucumbers to put on her eyes and Barbie dough, presumably to use for her facial treatments. I quickly texted back, “Oh wow, just . . . wow.” By this time I was hooked, so I did a little more digging. The copy below the doll read, “The new line of the iconic doll has been designed to introduce girls to the benefits of self-care through play.”¹ The doll is ready for the spa with a face mask and a puppy who is geared up for a spa day as well, with its own little eye mask resting on its head.

Cute.

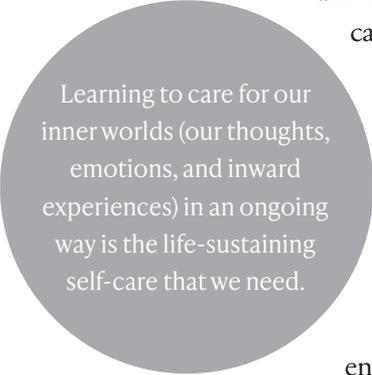
But not helpful! Too many people are suffering from inadequate concepts of self-care, and they (and quite possibly you) are suffering as a

result. Incidentally, a Google search of “self-care Ken” gets you nothing, reflecting the commonly touted idea that soul care and self-care are tasks that only women pursue or need. Our society’s prevalent portrayal of self-care as merely skin-deep pampering and not applicable to men confirms my suspicion that self-care is a thoroughly misunderstood topic. Most men and women fail to recognize the most important aspects of self-care or that all of us need it to thrive. Most of us consider self-care when we are at the end of ourselves, exhausted and overwhelmed. We plan a day fishing or at the spa—great, restful activities—but then resume the life patterns that made us exhausted and overwhelmed! In my therapy practice, I have treated many dear clients who do a lot of Barbie-style self-care while their lives continue to disintegrate.

This makes me sad. You, dear reader, were not born for such a fate. Neither was I! John 10:10 tells us that Jesus came so that we might have “a rich and satisfying life,” life to the full! Not an anemic and struggling life. Not an exhausted and depleted life. Not an overwhelmed and unfulfilled life. No! A rich and satisfying life. Barbie-style self-care isn’t getting us there, and Jesus has so much to teach us. Jesus was an exceptionally healthy and balanced individual who was actively tending to his inner world, and we can learn from his example.

Puzzling over Jesus’ life—his emotional health, his capacity to be busy, his ease in being slow, and the way he lived so focused and present—is what led me to this conclusion: Learning to care for our inner worlds (our thoughts, emotions, and inward experiences) in an ongoing way is the life-sustaining self-care that we need.

Thousands of hours of walking with clients have only added to my conviction. So, I’ve



Learning to care for our inner worlds (our thoughts, emotions, and inward experiences) in an ongoing way is the life-sustaining self-care that we need.

developed a bit of a bad attitude about what we typically think of as self-care and a wild passion for something deeper and more sustainable.

Exhaustion in the Name of Service

A turning point in my understanding of the problem came when I was leading a self-care workshop for tired, discouraged, and disillusioned refugee-resettlement workers in an organization with shrinking funding. These caseworkers described their lives to me: erratic hours, bureaucratic obstacles, frequent tears, near-constant frustration, and tedious persistence in working within dysfunctional systems. Yet their own self-care stayed in the shadow of their incredible passion to attend to the needs of refugees. Most of them defined self-care as last-ditch efforts to prevent dropping from exhaustion or having health problems. And for some, self-care felt like a frivolous add-on that had no place in their lives of service. One worker shared,

When I take care of myself, you know, watch shows or go to bed early, I just feel bad! Then I think that I deserve to rest, and I get mad at anyone who demands anything of me. I'm all over the place!

Another added,

I am running all day long, fuming one minute, berating myself for my anger in the next, wanting to cry for the pain my clients are going through a few minutes later. I'm on the phone trying to get through to the right person at one agency while I'm waiting in line at a different agency with a client who's getting the runaround. The tasks never end, and every single one of them has gotten harder to accomplish. I want to scream half the day.

RESTORE MY SOUL

As I clicked through my slides and continued to listen, the challenge of a different mindset felt at once necessary and daunting. These dear individuals who were working so hard to fulfill a difficult call in their lives needed more than Barbie-style self-care. They needed to know how to manage their inner lives as they navigated the pressures and obstacles they encountered every hour of every day. They needed to learn to care for their minds and souls; that is what would empower them to love the refugees they served over time. How could they each learn to reframe their idea of self-care from one of selfish frivolity to moment-by-moment tending to their inner experiences? How could they learn to order their hours, days, and weeks so that their souls and bodies could enjoy some much-needed pacing? I felt my workshop was barely scratching the surface! Somehow, an unsustainable lifestyle had become the norm in their organization, without anyone setting out to make it that way. And that is true in businesses, family lives, and our society more generally—so much so that deciding what healthy expectations even look like is a major challenge!

I'm sympathetic to the confusion of expectations. Every time I get a call asking if I'm taking new clients, a dozen or so questions come to mind. *Have I felt too busy lately? Is my caseload too heavy?* I see other therapists answer this question definitively, and I marvel at how they respond with such ease. "I have one slot at 11:00 a.m. on Thursdays; will that work for you?" I wonder at the predictability of their clients and what in the world is wrong with mine . . . or rather, with me! *I don't require my clients to come at the same time every week. Should I? More often, our appointments roam around my schedule. And how many come on a weekly basis? Should I know that? Are these other therapists doing regular audits or something? Do they have this self-care thing in the bag? Am I just handling things wrong?* I'm convinced that none of us is immune to the challenge of boundaries and balance in work,

family, and other responsibilities. I've yet to come across someone who couldn't do with some help.

The Pressure to Never Slow Down

Cora is no exception. She's an executive at a successful, large business. I've been working with her for a couple of years, helping her process the many challenges of balancing an exceedingly demanding job with a home life. I'm reacting to her report of a recent day off.

"Wait, did you say you were submerged?"

"Yes, it's a floating rest pool."

"What does it do?"

"It accelerates rejuvenation."

"How?"

"Oh, I have no idea, but there's lots of research. And hey, if it's fast, I need it!"

"So you lie in it . . ."

"Yes, for thirty minutes."

"And . . . what?"

"It's supposed to be as helpful to your body as three massages and ten hours of sleep."

"Wow."

Cora is lit up, like she often is, explaining this to me. Our sessions are at 7:00 p.m., and she comes straight from the office. It often takes her half the session to stop vibrating from the relentless pace of her workplace. And I truly feel for her; her employer's expectations are intense, and quitting is fraught with complicated trade-offs. Cora is wonderful at what she does, but she seems to enjoy her job less and less. We've been talking for months about the quality and quantity of her sleep, among other things. I fear that Cora may think she has

temporarily solved this problem with her thirty-minute float. As I consider how to continue, she absentmindedly reaches for her phone, checking the notification that has popped up on the screen.

“That can wait.” She looks up from her phone. “Anyway, I couldn’t spare the whole day . . . too much to do at home. So, speedy float it was!”

“Did it . . . work?”

“Oh, heck if I know! But I’m off the hook for self-care, right? At least for this week.”

She gives me a wry, sideways smirk, knowing that I regularly bring this up. I worry that she is going to drop from exhaustion one day. Just when I think she cannot handle any more, another giant work project lands in her lap, or her husband gets demoted, or they lose a babysitter, or her father moves into a care facility. Cora just keeps going, and nothing seems to let up. Our conversations about self-care often devolve into a defensive “Well, I’m coming here, aren’t I?”

In my weaker moments, I feel the responsibility of this phrase, as if the whole of Cora’s self-care rests on me and our fifty-minute sessions. And, in a way, that’s what Cora hopes. The “Well, I *am* seeing a therapist!” antidote for a jam-packed, frenetic, and relentless life feels like a huge commitment to someone like Cora. But when every day of Cora’s life is a proverbial sprint triathlon, how can seeing me and spending thirty minutes in a floating bath really help? Cora needs to revamp how she lives her days so that she experiences something other than adrenaline-pumping high gear. She lacks pacing and rhythm in her life. The trouble is, she cannot bring herself to take time for even the shortest breaks or mindful moments. She fears backing off because one of the plates she’s spinning may drop. And the messaging is abundantly clear: In her job, those who slow down are downsized.

Self-Care, Barbie-Style

Cora is like many of us in thinking that doing a nice thing for herself constitutes self-care. It does! The trouble is, the floating pool isn't enough. Don't get me wrong; I'd rather her take the time to do that than do nothing at all, but she needs more. Several assumptions about self-care block the process of long-term life change. We get stuck when we assume that self-care that is practiced only sporadically or that only addresses one aspect of our lives is adequate.

Here are some common ways self-care gets reduced to a one-dimensional action:

- *“Me time”*: Self-care is seen as doing things to pamper yourself or engaging in a recreational activity, usually alone. Self-care is reduced to a way of justifying doing pleasurable things.
- *Emergency measure*: Self-care is understood as a measure to prevent catastrophic physical or emotional overload. Self-care is reduced to a last-ditch effort to survive.
- *Dieting*: Self-care is considered to mean giving up sugar, tackling whole-food nutrition, practicing time-restricted eating, doing a Whole30, or using one of countless food plans. Self-care is reduced to a consideration of the body.
- *Exercise*: Self-care is all about the “right” exercise program, which can mean anything from attending yoga class to training for a triathlon. Self-care is reduced to being in shape or expending energy.
- *Saying no*: Self-care is seen as developing one's ability to say no and create limits. Self-care is reduced to justifying the need for boundaries.

What I see is that very few people experience a balanced, flourishing life even if they are serious about one or two of these themes. And their attachment to any of these themes tends to make them feel that they've conquered self-care, even if gaping pockets of their lives remain out of control. Their souls are anything but restored.

Life-Sustaining Self-Care

My conclusion? These self-care themes aren't enough. We need to learn how to live better in an ongoing way. I think of the man who is a rock star in terms of regular exercise and diet but who has no idea how to deal with his emotions. Or the woman who gets regular pedicures but is plagued with worry the better part of most days. We need a model that encourages the care of oneself in the moments and hours of everyday life instead of just an isolated day off work. Self-care needs to go beyond a one-dimensional concept like "me time," and it ought to consider the body and boundaries. It should involve both external practices and internal realities. Life-sustaining self-care implies a bigger picture that will result in better outcomes. I don't want to end another self-care workshop with the young-adult attendees still feeling stuck in cycles of *exertion* → *burnout* → *withdrawal* that they cannot break.

Life-sustaining self-care is a call to moment-by-moment, hour-by-hour, and day-by-day living where we are increasingly confident that we know how to handle everything that is happening inside us. We move away from a mindset of "paying our dues" with a one-dimensional, Barbie-style self-care measure like taking a spa day or doing a Whole30, and we move toward tending our inner experiences in a way that translates into overall spiritual and emotional well-being. We might still have spa days or do Whole30s, but only in the

REIMAGINING SELF-CARE

context of more consistent internal work. This internal work sets us up to live the way we want to in the world for the long haul: more like Jesus and less like our typical, modern-day, stressed-out selves.

What is the difference between typical, one-dimensional self-care and life-sustaining self-care?

Here are just a few examples of how the difference may look or be experienced.

ONE-DIMENSIONAL SELF-CARE	LIFE-SUSTAINING SELF-CARE
taking a vacation after a busy season at work to recover from burnout	knowing how to manage the internal challenges of each day during a busy season and then experiencing your vacation as true replenishment, not just recovery
scrolling through your phone for a quick break and suddenly realizing that forty-five minutes (that you can't spare) have passed	understanding the pull of the phone and staying aware of your time on it; having several ways to spend replenishing breaks
feeling desperate to have a couple of drinks to unwind	knowing how to manage emotions and having several ways to self-soothe; you can enjoy a drink or not
taking a day off due to feeling overwhelmed	knowing how to handle the range of human emotions and saving your day off for something enjoyable
distracting yourself with a movie to stop your mind from churning	dealing well with intrusive thoughts without needing to distract your mind; watching movies because you like them, not because you need an escape from your thoughts

Self-care that restores the soul involves a commitment to caring well for our inner worlds. We learn to tend to our emotions,

thoughts, pacing, and moods. In doing so, we address self-care at its roots and set the tone for personal thriving.

When we practice life-sustaining self-care, we feel capable of moving fast and slow. We know how to rest and how to press hard. We've learned what adjustments we need to make to move through seasons of intensity, struggle, and ease. We know how to develop rhythms in our days, weeks, months, and years. We can experience the range of emotions without becoming overwhelmed, and we know how to address unhelpful thought patterns. Ultimately, when we know how to deal with ourselves well hour by hour and day by day, we are far less likely to struggle week to week and month to month.



Self-care that restores the soul involves a commitment to caring well for our inner worlds.

A Sustainable Life

Graves is one of my clients who recently sharpened my thinking on living well with emotions. Since George Floyd's death at the hands of a police officer in 2020, Graves has been organizing, advocating, writing, speaking, and posting.

"I have to stay angry. Those who let up on their anger become complacent, and we can't do that again."

"So how does that work? How do you stay angry?"

"I stay on the chats with others who have been hurt by police. We have to pump each other up. I can't let down, not now."

"There's a difference between staying committed to the principles of justice and actually *feeling* angry in an ongoing way . . . Which do you mean?"

"I mean feeling angry. We have to stay connected to it, or we might lose momentum. I've seen it too many times."

As Graves shares, I feel viscerally challenged about how to proceed. He has numerous health issues, and I know statistics on the prevalence of early deaths due to said health issues in black men. The stress of racial injustice—in all its forms—is an underlying condition that wreaks havoc on the bodies of people of color, and Graves’s ongoing weathering is taking a toll. I fear that sustaining anger for the length of time it will take for change to happen is downright dangerous for him. But he has named his dilemma: He doesn’t know how his own efforts, or an overall movement, can keep momentum without anger.

“Graves, there has to be another way.”

“Oh yeah? Tell me—what’s the other way?”

His tone is challenging and skeptical. His response raises my fear that my own naïveté as a white woman makes even the idea of life without anger a posture of privilege in this country. I proceed tentatively.

“The world needs you for the long haul, Graves. Can we talk about you living your life, and therefore your emotions, in a way that enables you to keep going for the next twenty-five years? I don’t want your body giving out. You’re too important.”

From there, we talked about important soul-restoring concepts: experiencing emotions, self-soothing, and refining values. Each of these concepts will be filled out in the following chapters and make up part of a critical whole. It’s taking time, but Graves and I are partnering to reimagine a life in which he handles his anger well so that he will flourish rather than wear himself to exhaustion and perpetuate a system that has already cost him—and his body—so, so much.

A New Landscape

Graves is not unusual. We are more stressed, more depressed, and less steady as a people than we have ever been. Everyone is trying to

do life with a backdrop of unspeakable stress and uncertainty in the world—economically, politically, systemically, and environmentally. And we’re facing a huge challenge: The role of the news cycle has taken on a whole new form, rising from unsettling to utterly destabilizing. In the face of such pressure, having the skills to manage our inner experiences has never been more critical.

“So, this was how long?” I ask my client, Yu-Shin, who is debriefing a day in her COVID life.

“I worked out for forty-five minutes. By the time I checked my phone, I had over one hundred texts from my mom friends. One of them shared an article about how bad virtual learning would be for social development or something. It started this whole wave of moms rethinking decisions, calling private schools, re-researching community centers that are hoping to have on-site experiences for children . . . I feel like if I don’t freak out with them, I’m going to miss something critical for my own kids! I don’t know how to stop jumping in.”

She looks up into her camera at me through our screens and says, “And something like this happens almost every day! I feel like my blood pressure must be through the roof half the time. I hate reading all the texts and clips and articles, but I seriously cannot stop.”

I shake my head sympathetically and wonder where to go next with our session. Yu-Shin’s constant connection with these friends is at once her lifeline of support and the thing that escalates her stress. She is a follower of Jesus, but her steadiness moment to moment depends largely on what she sees on her phone. If good news is reflected there, she feels good. If the news is bad, she feels bad. We have worked on this with varying success over time, but the ever-changing news that so affects her day-to-day life has her more tethered to her phone than ever before.

Jesus as Our Example

How would Jesus have handled stressors like this? In Mark 4, Jesus is taking a nap when a big stressor hits the disciples. Seriously, Jesus? The disciples are rattled and afraid as a sudden storm threatens to sink their boat. Jesus is able to sleep through the noise and seems unalarmed when very scared and resentful disciples wake him up. “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?” the disciples ask (verse 38). Jesus amazes them by calming the sea. Underneath the working of this miracle is a decision *not* to react to everything that happens *when it happens*. How did Jesus do this, and what can we learn from his example?

Sometimes Jesus stayed focused in spite of circumstances, and sometimes he allowed himself to be interrupted. In the story of the bleeding woman in Mark 5, Jesus is headed to heal Jairus’s daughter, who is near death. Yet when the woman touches him, he stops and listens to her story of twelve years of suffering. In some such instances, Jesus allowed the interruption and shifted his attention; other times, he didn’t. How did he decide what to do? We don’t know Jesus’ thoughts on either of these occasions, but we have much to learn from the fact that he didn’t always snap into action in response to new information. Jesus was *holding on* to his attention and energy—something that we rarely consider but that has the potential to transform our lives.

A soul-restoring model of self-care moves us toward a sustainable life rhythm. Jesus modeled a life of being very busy at times, guarding time for prayer at others, and having the energy and reserve to be interrupted and redirected on many occasions. I believe that his flexibility came from an overall well-being, which we should seek and emulate. Jesus’ life and ministry show us that

RESTORE MY SOUL

a well-managed life doesn't necessarily look predictable or overly rigid. He had long days of nonstop ministry and an intense travel schedule at times. But we also see him enjoying long meals, a slow pace, and special time with his closest followers. How did he do this? I believe Jesus knew something about life-sustaining self-care, and he did it well. Just consider what we *don't* see recorded in the Gospels. Jesus never

falls apart emotionally,
burns out,
stays in bed all day,
acts distracted and distant,
becomes volatile, or
succumbs to moodiness.

Impressive, isn't it? Jesus remained steady and openhearted at times most of us would shut down. Jesus responded to things with emotion and force, but he didn't lose control like we often do, with unreasonable ranting and yelling, collapsing into unexplainable tears, or shutting down. In his life on earth, Jesus showed himself to be a grounded and healthy person. We may be tempted to write him off as "too divine" to hold as a role model, but we are called to do just that. He lived a rich and satisfying life, and he wants that for us, too! We are to be inspired by his model of a sustainable life, just like we are to count him as a model for how to be loving and how to sacrifice. All aspects of his life merit close examination. As followers of Jesus, it makes sense for us to ask . . .

- What did Jesus say about thoughts and emotions?
- How did Jesus handle unwelcome thoughts?

REIMAGINING SELF-CARE

- How did Jesus deal with intense emotions?
- What can we learn from Jesus about pacing ourselves with life rhythms?
- How can we live the fulfilling life that Jesus wants for us?

This is exactly what this book will do. We will learn from Jesus' life all that we can about living life with restored souls, and I'll share anecdotes and wisdom from my experiences as a trainer, psychotherapist, and spiritual director. Clients and directees have been my most profound teachers along the way. They've shown me the most incredible best practices and shared with me their stuck places and their failures. And I have fifty-plus years of life experience to add to the mix as well—the good, the bad, and the ugly. I am no stranger to emotional meltdowns or sleepless nights. I have slimed my family with unreasonable and semimanipulative whining more times than I can count. The concepts in this book have the power to help all of us understand how to avoid burnout and more deeply enjoy our self-care attempts, rest, and vacations. Sharpening the skills introduced here has the potential to make us all more productive, less reactive, and more grounded—in other words, more like Jesus.

If growing in your capacity to handle hard life seasons is important to you, then learning how to manage your inner world hour to hour and day to day is what you need. This framework will set you on a course to restore your soul and be better equipped for whatever may come. You have everything to gain and very little to lose.

Let's do this.