

# Sacred Self-Care

Daily Practices for  
Nurturing Our Whole Selves

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# Acknowledgments

This book has been twenty years in the making. When I taught my first self-care class to the women’s ministry at Compassion Ministries of Durham, I started a new folder on my computer entitled “Untitled Self-Care Manuscript.” I thought it would be my first and only book. But then life happened. I heard my call to ministry (in the middle of one of those women’s ministry sessions), went to seminary, became a seminary professor, and wrote a few other books. Along the way, people kept asking when I was going to write a book about self-care. I wish I had kept track of all of them, because I would thank them here. This will have to do: to all of you who kept encouraging me when I wasn’t sure I had enough wisdom to write on this topic, thank you.

I am deeply grateful to the people who followed the Resurrecting Self-Care Lent challenge, first on Instagram in 2021 and then on Facebook in 2022. Special thanks go to my friends Mayra Macedo-Nolan and Kathryn Broyles, both of whom texted me in the middle of the challenge in 2021 and said, “You know this is a book, right?”

Over the years, I have had the chance to test this material with multiple groups, including the students in my mindfulness and self-care class at Columbia Theological Seminary and the Faith in Action Black Women’s Caucus. Thanks also to my research assistant at Columbia, Tsharre Sanders, who helped me think through the hymns and biblical references for this book.

I am extremely proud that this book is the first represented by my agent, Rachelle Gardner of Gardner Literary. Thank you for believing in me and in this project. And I cannot extend enough appreciation to Kathryn “Katy” Hamilton, Chantal Tom, and the entire HarperOne team for shepherding this book so skillfully. All of you have helped this academic pursue the type of writing that I’m most passionate about.

This book and my life would be incomplete without Delwin and Micah. Their imprint is on everything I do. I hope I make them proud.

Above all, I want to thank God, who never lets me write anything without living it first. I pray that I’ve been faithful in my witness.

# Sacred Self-Care Inventory

This worksheet is designed to help you assess and reflect upon your current self-care behaviors. The list is not exhaustive but is a starting point for assessing your self-care practices. There is no scoring and no expectation that you should be doing all of these. When you are done, pay attention without judgment to the patterns in your responses. What areas are you doing well in? Where could you use improvement?

Use the scale below to rate each item.

3	I do this consistently or on a regular basis.
2	I do this sometimes.
1	I rarely do this.
0	I never do this.

Spiritual Self-Care	3 Consistently	2 Sometimes	1 Rarely	0 Never
Devote time to prayer and scripture reading				
Practice meditation or centering prayer				
Participate in corporate worship or scripture study				
Set aside a day for reflection and renewal				
Take time to experience the beauty of God in nature				
Participate in a spiritual community or peer group that challenges and supports me				
Seek spiritual direction				
Express gratitude for my blessings				
Intentionally cultivate a forgiving disposition				
Participate in a multiday retreat				

<b>Physical Self-Care</b>	<b>3</b> Consistently	<b>2</b> Sometimes	<b>1</b> Rarely	<b>0</b> Never
Drink at least 64oz of water daily				
Take time for meals each day				
Eat in ways that are healthy for my body				
Get at least 7 hours of sleep each night				
Get 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise each week				
Maintain a good balance of activity and rest				
Notice and respond to my body's signals (e.g., pain, fatigue, discomfort)				
Have a good medical support team				
Follow up with medical care				
Properly manage any physical health conditions, illnesses, or disabilities				
Try to accept and love my body				

<b>Emotional Self-Care</b>	<b>3</b> Consistently	<b>2</b> Sometimes	<b>1</b> Rarely	<b>0</b> Never
Laugh and have fun often				
Find time to do things I enjoy				
Engage in play and creativity				
Participate in therapy				
Journal				
Practice positive self-talk				
Say no and assert boundaries				
Work at a reasonable pace				
Refrain from overcommitting				
Limit social media consumption				
Acknowledge and accept positive and negative emotions				
Appropriately manage mental health conditions, illnesses, or disabilities				
Recognize when I am stressed and respond to it				



Mental Self-Care	3 Consistently	2 Sometimes	1 Rarely	0 Never
Practice mindfulness meditation				
Read books, magazines, or newspapers				
Do puzzles				
Learn or practice a new skill				
Take a class				
Watch documentaries or films that expose me to different cultures				
Learn a language				
Play word games or strategy games				
Attend plays, museums, or cultural performances				
Intentionally expose myself to different viewpoints				
Take time for mental rest				

<b>Relational Self-Care</b>	<b>3</b> Consistently	<b>2</b> Sometimes	<b>1</b> Rarely	<b>0</b> Never
Spend quality time with people whom I care about and who care about me				
Have friendships based on mutual respect and reciprocity				
Express my gratitude to others				
Call, text, and contact friends and family				
Give and receive compliments				
Be capable of asking for and receiving help from others				
Minimize contact with energy vampires				
Have harmonious relationships with people I live and work with				
Do fun things with other people				

# Using This Book for Lent

DAY/WEEK	YEAR A	YEAR B	YEAR C
<b>Ash Wednesday*</b>	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12 Psalm 51:1-17 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12 Psalm 51:1-17 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21	Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12 Psalm 51:1-17 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

<b>1st Sunday in Lent</b>	Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7 Psalm 32 Romans 5:12–19 Matthew 4:1–11	Genesis 9:8–17 Psalm 25:1–10 1 Peter 3:18–22 Mark 1:9–15	Deuteronomy 26:1–11 Psalm 91:1–2, 9–16 Romans 10:8b–13 Luke 4:1–13
<b>2nd Sunday in Lent</b>	Genesis 12:1–4a Psalm 121 Romans 4:1–5, 13–17 John 3:1–17 or Matthew 17:1–9	Genesis 17:1–7, 15–16 Psalm 22:23–31 Romans 4:13–25 Mark 8:31–38 or Mark 9:2–9	Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18 Psalm 27 Philippians 3:17–4:1 Luke 13:31–35 or Luke 9:28–36
<b>3rd Sunday in Lent</b>	Exodus 17:1–7 Psalm 95 Romans 5:1–11 John 4:5–42	Exodus 20:1–17 Psalm 19 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 John 2:13–22	Isaiah 55:1–9 Psalm 63:1–8 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 Luke 13:1–9
<b>4th Sunday in Lent</b>	1 Samuel 16:1–13 Psalm 23 Ephesians 5:8–14 John 9:1–41	Numbers 21:4–9 Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22 Ephesians 2:1–10 John 3:14–21	Joshua 5:9–12 Psalm 32 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 Luke 15:1–3, 11b– 32
<b>5th Sunday in Lent</b>	Ezekiel 37:1–14 Psalm 130 Romans 8:6–11 John 11:1–45	Jeremiah 31:31–34 Psalm 51:1–12 or Psalm 119:9–16 Hebrews 5:5–10 John 12:20–33	Isaiah 43:16–21 Psalm 126 Philippians 3:4b– 14 John 12:1–8
<b>6th Sunday in Lent (Palm Sunday)</b>	Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29 Matthew 21:1–11	Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29 Mark 11:1–11 or John 12:12–16	Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29 Luke 19:28–40
<b>Monday of Holy Week*</b>	Isaiah 42:1–9 Psalm 36:5–11 Hebrews 9:11–15 John 12:1–11	Isaiah 42:1–9 Psalm 36:5–11 Hebrews 9:11–15 John 12:1–11	Isaiah 42:1–9 Psalm 36:5–11 Hebrews 9:11–15 John 12:1–11
<b>Tuesday of Holy Week*</b>	Isaiah 49:1–7 Psalm 71:1–14 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 John 12:20–36	Isaiah 49:1–7 Psalm 71:1–14 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 John 12:20–36	Isaiah 49:1–7 Psalm 71:1–14 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 John 12:20–36

<b>Wednesday of Holy Week*</b>	Isaiah 50:4–9a Psalm 70 Hebrews 12:1–3 John 13:21–32	Isaiah 50:4–9a Psalm 70 Hebrews 12:1–3 John 13:21–32	Isaiah 50:4–9a Psalm 70 Hebrews 12:1–3 John 13:21–32
<b>Thursday of Holy Week (Maundy Thursday)*</b>	Exodus 12:1–4, [5–10], 11–14 Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 John 13:1–17, 31b–35	Exodus 12:1–4, [5–10], 11–14 Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 John 13:1–17, 31b–35	Exodus 12:1–4, [5–10], 11–14 Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 John 13:1–17, 31b–35
<b>Friday of Holy Week (Good Friday)*</b>	Isaiah 52:13–53:12 Psalm 22 Hebrews 10:16–25 or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9 John 18:1–19:42	Isaiah 52:13–53:12 Psalm 22 Hebrews 10:16–25 or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9 John 18:1–19:42	Isaiah 52:13–53:12 Psalm 22 Hebrews 10:16–25 or Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9 John 18:1–19:42
<b>Saturday of Holy Week (Holy Saturday)*</b>	Job 14:1–14 or Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24 Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16 1 Peter 4:1–8 Matthew 27:57–66 or John 19:38–42	Job 14:1–14 or Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24 Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16 1 Peter 4:1–8 Matthew 27:57–66 or John 19:38–42	Job 14:1–14 or Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24 Psalm 31:1–4, 15–16 1 Peter 4:1–8 Matthew 27:57–66 or John 19:38–42
<b>Easter Sunday</b>	Acts 10:34–43 or Jeremiah 31:1–6 Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24 Colossians 3:1–4 or Acts 10:34–43 John 20:1–18 or Matthew 28:1–10	Acts 10:34–43 or Isaiah 25:6–9 Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 or Acts 10:34–43 John 20:1–18 or Mark 16:1–8	Acts 10:34–43 or Isaiah 65:17–25 Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24 1 Corinthians 15:19–26 or Acts 10:34–43 John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1–12

\*The readings for Ash Wednesday and Holy Week (except for Easter Sunday) are the same in Years A, B, and C.

# NOTES

## **Introduction: Self-Care as a Way of Life**

1. Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 7.
2. *The African American Heritage Hymnal: 575 Hymns, Spirituals, and Gospel Songs* (Chicago: GIA, 2001) is the first ecumenical hymnal designed to capture the rich musical tradition of the African American Christian experience. One of its distinctions is that its musical notation follows the ways that African American congregations traditionally sing the hymns, which often differs from the notation in other hymnals.
3. The lectionary is a three-year cycle of biblical passages used in Sunday worship by many Protestant denominations and churches across the globe. It follows the liturgical calendar, with each year beginning in Advent.

## **DAY 5: Self-Care Is Subversive**

1. Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light and Other Essays* (Mineola, NY: Ixia Press, 1988), 130.

## **DAY 6: Self-Care Is Reparative**

1. Bessel A. van der Kolk provides an extensive review of this literature in his bestselling book, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014). For a summary of the development of research on the intergenerational transmission of trauma among Holocaust survivors, see Rachel Yehuda, “Trauma in the Family Tree,” *Scientific American* 327, no. 1 (July 2022): 50–55. Another great resource is the CDC-Kaiser Permanent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, which has significantly advanced our understanding of the impact of trauma by demonstrating that adverse and traumatic situations experienced during childhood have significant

impact upon our health as adults. For the original study, see Vincent J. Felitti et al., “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 14, no. 4 (May 1998): 245–258, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797\(98\)00017-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8).

### **DAY 8: Water to Live**

1. Lorenzo Cohen and Alison Jefferies, *Anticancer Living: Transform Your Life and Health with the Mix of Six* (New York: Viking, 2018), 259.

### **DAY 10: Rest for Your Soul**

1. Cohen and Jefferies, *Anticancer Living*, 176–177.

### **DAY 17: Befriend Your Inner Critic**

1. Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself* (New York: William Morrow, 2011), 34.

### **DAY 18: Affirm Your Enoughness**

1. I describe the myth of the StrongBlackWoman and its impact upon the health and well-being of Black women in *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

### **DAY 22: No Boundaries, No Self-Care**

1. Erikson described the eight stages of psychosocial development in his text *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950; repr., 1968, 1985). He further expounded upon the issue of adolescent identity development in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968). His theory is considered to be the most influential theory of lifespan psychosocial development. See Curtis S. Dunkel and Colin Harbke, “A Review of Measures of Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development: Evidence for a General Factor,” *Journal of Adult Development* 24, no. 1 (March 2017): 58–76, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-016-9247-4>.

## **DAY 26: Protect Your Energy**

1. Judith Orloff, *Positive Energy: 10 Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress, and Fear into Vibrance, Strength, and Love* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004).

## **DAY 33: Laughter Is Medicine**

1. Catherine M. MacDonald, “A Chuckle a Day Keeps the Doctor Away: Therapeutic Humor and Laughter,” *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services* 42, no. 3 (March 2004): 18–25, <https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20040315-05>.
2. Nilgün Kuru Alici and Ayse Arikan Dönmez, “A Systematic Review of the Effect of Laughter Yoga on Physical Function and Psychosocial Outcomes in Older Adults,” *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* 41 (November 2020): 101252, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2020.101252>; Maria Meier et al., “Laughter Yoga Reduces the Cortisol Response to Acute Stress in Healthy Individuals,” *Stress* 24, no. 1 (2021): 44–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10253890.2020.1766018>; Raquel Oliveira and Patrícia Arriaga, “A Systematic Review of the Effects of Laughter on Blood Pressure and Heart Rate Variability,” *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 35, no. 2 (2022): 135–167, <https://doi.org/10.1515/humor-2021-0111>.

## **DAY 34: The Power of Play and Creativity**

1. Aqila Liyana Abdul Rauf and Kamariah Abu Bakar, “Effects of Play on the Social Development of Preschool Children,” *Creative Education* 10, no. 12 (November 2019): 2640–2648; Melinda Wenner, “The Serious Need for Play,” *Scientific American Mind* 20, no. 1 (February/March 2009): 22–29.

## **DAY 37: Mindfulness Matters**

1. Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future,” *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2003): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>.



## **DAY 40: Wise Speech**

1. Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles, eds., introduction to *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2020), 5.

## **DAY 42: The Skilled Mind**

1. The Atlanta child murders were the killings of twenty-nine Black children between 1979 and 1981. Although the alleged killer, Wayne Williams, was arrested and convicted of two murders in 1982, the rest remain unsolved, and there is considerable debate about whether Williams was responsible for all of them. Audra D. S. Burch, “Who Killed Atlanta’s Children?,” *New York Times*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/us/atlanta-child-murders.html>; James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).
2. Tayari Jones’s novel *Leaving Atlanta* vividly depicts the impact of the murders upon Atlanta’s Black children and families (New York: Warner Books, 2002).

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

## For Further Reading

- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.
- Burkeman, Oliver. *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.
- Cohen, Lorenzo, and Alison Jefferies. *Anticancer Living: Transform Your Life and Health with the Mix of Six*. New York: Viking, 2018.
- Curtice, Kaitlin B. *Living Resistance: An Indigenous Vision for Seeking Wholeness Every Day*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2023.
- Hersey, Tricia. *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto*. New York: Little, Brown Spark, 2022.
- Jones, Kirk Byron. *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2021.
- Kinsey, Dalia. *Decolonizing Wellness: A QTBIPOC-Centered Guide to Escape the Diet Trap, Heal Your Self-Image, and Achieve Body Liberation*. Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2022.
- Neff, Kristin. *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*. New York: William Morrow, 2011.
- Oden, Amy G. *Right Here, Right Now: The Practice of Christian Mindfulness*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017.
- Ortiz, Naomi. *Sustaining Spirit: Self-Care for Social Justice*. Berkeley, CA: Reclamation Press, 2018.
- Owens, Lama Rod. *Love and Rage: The Path of Liberation Through Anger*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2020.
- Paintner, Christine Valters. *The Wisdom of the Body: A Contemplative Journey to Wholeness for Women*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2017.

- Paulsell, Stephanie. *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019.
- Proeschold-Bell, Rae Jean, and Jason Byassee. *Faithful and Fractured: Responding to the Clergy Health Crisis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.
- Raheem, Octavia F. *Pause, Rest, Be: Stillness Practices for Courage in Times of Change*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2022.
- Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature While Remaining Emotionally Immature*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.
- Stucky, Nathan T. *Wrestling with Rest: Inviting Youth to Discover the Gift of Sabbath*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2019.
- Swenson, Richard A. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004.
- Tawwab, Nedra Glover. *Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself*. New York: TarcherPerigee, 2021.
- Taylor, Barbara Brown. *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*. New York: HarperCollins, 2009.
- Taylor, Sonya Renee. *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018.
- Van der Kolk, Bessel A. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.
- Walker-Barnes, Chanequa. *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.
- Winner, Lauren F. *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2003.

## Mindfulness Meditation Classes and Apps

### UMass Center for Mindfulness

- Home of the original Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Offers online and in-person classes. Classes are nonsectarian and appropriate for all religious and spiritual backgrounds.

- <https://www.ummhealth.org/umass-memorial-medical-center/services-treatments/center-for-mindfulness>

### Mindfulness Center at Brown

- Offers online and in-person classes, including weekly meditations, MBSR, and MBSR teacher training. Classes are nonsectarian and appropriate for all religious and spiritual backgrounds.
- <https://www.brown.edu/public-health/mindfulness/home>

### Insight Meditation Society

- Offers online and in-person classes and retreats grounded in the Buddhist Vipassana (Insight) tradition. Classes are open to people of all religious and spiritual backgrounds.
- <https://www.dharma.org>

### Insight Timer Meditation App

- Free meditation app that includes more than 130,000 guided meditations from a wide variety of traditions, including Christian mindfulness, MBSR practices, and more.
- <https://insighttimer.com>