IN ALL SEASONS- EPISODE 5- Self Care in a Context of Faith

Welcome to **IN ALL SEASONS**. I am Beverly Flanagan, your host on this podcast, for women like me, in the second half of life.

In this episode, we return to our perpetual question: How does **LIVING WISELY**, **AGING WELL** relate to our purpose in life? As women? As Christian women?

Today, we are talking about **SELF CARE IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**. What is self-care? Why is it important? Do we honor our need for self-care? Did Jesus Himself give us any examples? How about His friends, such as Martha & Mary? How do we strike a balance between all that pulls on us, our active serving- which is necessary & good-- and our contemplation--- prayer, sitting at the feet of Jesus, spending time with Him?

Last episode we talked about **CAREGIVING AS A SPIRITUAL PATH**. Though that is not the focus of today's episode, we will build on it. As women, and especially as Christian women, we spend ourselves giving to others - to our families, our homes, our jobs, our churches, our communities - and sometimes with very little expressed appreciation. We are not always respected for what we do, and sometimes we do not respect ourselves properly.

So, what is Self-Care? **Self-care** is any activity that we do deliberately in order to take **care** of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Although it's a simple concept in theory, it's something we very often overlook. Good **self-care** is key to improved mood and reduced anxiety.

It is really just ***taking care of yourself*** — which is vital for health and well-being. More specifically, self-care means identifying and meeting your needs, something women often struggle with. We tend to put others first – children, spouse, parents, friends, even pets. We feel obligated to be the caretakers. Shifting the balance from everyone-else-care to myself-care is uncharted territory for many women and can feel uncomfortable at first. However, it is important to do so. If we don't properly care for ourselves, our bodies will let us know, as will our minds& spirits.

What isn't self-care?

Knowing what self-care is not might be even more important. It is not something that we force ourselves to do, or something we don't enjoy doing. Self-care isn't a selfish act either. It is not only about considering our needs; it is rather about knowing what we need to do in order to take care of ourselves, being subsequently, able to take care of others as well. That is, if I don't take enough care of myself, I won't be in the place to give to my loved ones either.

IN A FEW WORDS, SELF-CARE IS THE KEY TO LIVING A BALANCED LIFE

Where do you start? Well, there are three golden rules:

- Stick to the basics. Over time you will find your own rhythm and routine. You will be able to implement more and identify more particular forms of self-care that work for you.
- Self-care needs to be something you actively plan, rather than something that just happens. It is an active choice and you must treat it as such. Add certain activities to your calendar, announce your plans to others in order to increase your commitment, and actively look for opportunities to practice self-care.
- What I often emphasize to people I work with, whether clients or colleagues or friends, is that keeping a conscious mind is what counts. In other words if you don't see something as self-care or don't do something in order to take care of yourself, it won't work as such. Be aware of what you do, why you do it, how it feels, and what the outcomes are.

Although self-care means different things to different people, there's a basic checklist that can be followed by most of us:

- Create a "no" list, with things you know you don't like or you no longer want to do. Examples might include: Not checking emails at night, not attending gatherings you don't like, not answering your phone during lunch/dinner.
- Promote a nutritious, healthy diet.
- Get enough sleep. Adults usually need 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
- Exercise. In contrast to what many people think, exercise is as good for our emotional health as it is for our physical health. It increases serotonin levels, leading to improved mood and energy. In line with the self-care conditions, what's important is that you choose a form of exercise that you like!

- Follow-up with medical care. It is not unusual to put off checkups or visits to the doctor.
- Use relaxation exercises and/or practice meditation. You can do these exercises at any time of the day.
- Spend enough time with your loved ones.
- Do at least one relaxing activity every day, whether it's taking a walk or spending 30 minutes unwinding.
- Do at least one pleasurable activity every day; from going to the cinema, to cooking or meeting with friends, whatever you define as pleasurable. It does not have to cost money or involve leaving the house, though it might.
- Look for opportunities to laugh!

All this sounds rather like common sense, does it not? But we, as women, and as Christian women, frequently lose our focus on caring for ourselves, as well as others. Two things come to mind-- one is the talk that airline personnel give to passengers, that if the flight goes badly, remember to put the oxygen mask on ourselves first, and that way we can help others. And another is what Jesus said is the Great Commandment, paraphrasing from the Torah, Deuteronomy & Leviticus: ***"You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, & strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself".*** Important enough that it is in the Three Synoptic Gospels- Matthew 22:35-40, Mark 12: 38-41, & Luke 10:25-28.

What does the Bible say about self-care?

While the Bible doesn't directly address the idea of self-care, it does offer guidance for understanding the role of our physical and mental health.
Since the time of Moses in the Old Testament, God has provided instruction for the care of our bodies and minds**. God values and commands rest (Ex. 34:21; Heb. 4:3-4) and care for our physical bodies (Ex. 22:26-27**). Jesus himself prioritized rest. When faced with great crowds, Jesus ***"often withdrew to lonely places and prayed"*** (Luke 5:16). He cared that his disciples ***"had no leisure even to eat"*** and instructed them to ***"rest a while"*** (Mark 6:31).
We can also learn from Jesus' instruction to his disciples, recognizing that we cannot live self-sufficiently and must intentionally care for our physical and mental health.

How can Christians develop a biblical practice of care?

1. Recognize your limitations, and practice good stewardship of your body and mind.

When we recognize our physical limitations, we acknowledge the supremacy of God and our dependence on him. Caring for our bodies and minds should not come from a pursuit of our own comfort and pleasure, but from an act of worship and submission to God. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 that our bodies are not our own; they were bought with a price to be temples of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that we ***"present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice"*** (Rom. 12:1).

When we exercise and eat healthily, we act as good stewards of the gifts God has given us—our bodies and minds***, "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works"*** (Eph. 2:10).

2. Go to the source.

The self-care movement is grounded in the assumption that the power for healing and rest lies within, that we have the power to care for ourselves. The Gospel counters that true power can only come from Christ. It offers a profound and eternal care that addresses even our deepest needs.

"***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"*** (Matt. 11:28-30).

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

All of the problems that the self-care movement attempts to address—unfulfillment, exhaustion from caring for others, lack of connection and purpose—are ultimately answered in the Gospel. Jesus' death and resurrection won the victory over sin and death, so that we can experience his eternal life and peace. If we want true rest and energy, we must turn to the source of all peace and joy: Jesus Christ.

3. Turn to the gospel as a better, more sustainable motivation for life and work.

Part of the underlying cause of burnout is a misunderstanding of the purpose of work. If our goal and hope is simply to acquire wealth or "make a difference," we will be easily discouraged, unfulfilled, and exhausted.

The Gospel frees us from the burden of living and working for our own wealth, accomplishment, and reputation by declaring that our life and favor with God comes not from our own work but from God's saving grace through Jesus Christ. With this understanding, we can view life and work as a blessing instead of a curse (Eccl. 3:12-13, 5:19-20).

The Bible tells us that we were ***"created in Christ Jesus to good works"*** (Eph. 2:10). As the character and nature of God are revealed by his work (Psa. 8:3, 19:1-4), we reflect his character and nature by investing in our work. We live and work in response to God's grace, calling, and design for our lives, for his glory and the good of those around us (Eph. 4:28, 1 Cor. 10:31).

With this understanding, we can live and work wholeheartedly but with hope and confidence, trusting that "***it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure"*** (Phil. 2:13; Psa. 127:1-2).

Helpful habits

What about investing in hobbies? Spending time with friends and family? Meditation and relaxation techniques?

In light of the aforementioned principles, we can view these habits and practices as helpful but not ultimate. They can help us find joy and peace as long as they bring us to the source of all joy and peace, to God. We exercise, eat healthy food, and sleep well as an act of worship and stewardship of our God-given bodies and minds. We spend time with loved ones because God has called us to and blessed us with fellowship and community. We play music to turn our hearts toward the Creator of all things good and beautiful. And we meditate, not on ourselves and on our own ability to overcome our circumstances, but on God's works and promises.

Sitting at his feet

Ultimately, the self-care movement makes helpful suggestions but empty promises. We may change our personal habits, but we cannot always change our circumstances. **I repeat: We may change our personal habits, but we cannot always change our circumstances**. What's more, the Gospel submits that the biggest problem lies not even with our circumstances but within ourselves. What we need is a deeper and greater source of life, joy, and peace, one that exists outside of ourselves. We find this in Jesus Christ alone.

We often relate to Martha as described Luke 10: ***"distracted with much serving," "anxious and troubled about many things,"*** and wondering why everyone else ***"has left [us] to serve alone"*** (Luke 10:40). Our culture might offer a myriad of suggestions for Martha's self-care regimen, telling her to care for herself before caring for others. But Jesus' response was different and surprising. Rather than telling Martha to take care of herself or even commanding Mary to help, he simply stated***, "few things are needed – or indeed only one."*** What was this one thing that was better, that would ***"not be taken away?"*** (Luke 10:42): To adopt the posture of Mary, who ***"sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching"*** (Luke 10:39).
Perhaps before we turn to new diets, gym memberships, and spa days, we should remember the one thing that is needed above anything else—to simply sit at the feet of Jesus and enjoy all that he is for us!

When we begin being intentional about the wonderful creation that is *us*, the need for self-care becomes apparent. Taking care of ourselves isn't selfish; it's at the service of providing others only the best of who God created us to be. Even God Incarnate knew He needed moments of restoration. We are wise to follow Him.

In the next episode of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we are going to talk about some of the reasons we need to practice Self-Care. We have talked about Caregiving, and we have alluded to the calling of our lives as women to care for others. In addition to these, we may ourselves be ill, whether with chronic conditions or have a more serious diagnosis. **How do we remain well, when we are ill?**

This is Beverly Flanagan, signing off for today, and thank you for joining me on **IN ALL SEASONS,** for women like me, in the second half of life!

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