



Soul-Care *staycation*





WHY SOUL CARE?

JANEL BREITENSTEIN & GARRICK CONNER

I wish burnout and I weren't on such snuggly terms.

But burnout and I are unfortunate buddies because overcommitment and I are good friends. Funny thing is, I'm burned out for all the right reasons.

I'm seeking to be a nurturing, all-in, all-there mom and wife. I try to be a robust, dependable freelancer and author. I aim to be an available, listening friend. I'm active in church and with their homeless ministry.

Those are great reasons to be completely depleted and resentful ... right?

Let me put it another way: Was Jesus always walking around burned out?

WHEN THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TO DO

"There is always more we can do in ministry," Christopher Ash writes in *Zeal Without Burnout: Seven Keys to a Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice*.

"But God is not asking 'Can you do more?' He is asking 'Do you love Me?' Some of those extras are not always as vital as we think them to be."

Sometimes I don't view tasks as extras. As a missionary and mother of four, I know well there's always another basket of laundry to fold, another hand to hold.

But Ash quotes a fellow pastor and volunteer firefighter:

It's foolishness to ignore your limitations, try to be the hero, and cramp up, pass out, or have a heart attack while in a burning structure because you're beyond the limits of what God has supplied you with the capability of doing. It's a form of heroic suicide that is counterproductive because you're now no longer effective in fighting fire and the resources that were dedicated to fighting the fire are now dedicated to saving you.

Yet it's more than practicality that drives me.

I want to know the other half of the "chief end of man": not only to glorify God, but to enjoy Him. I want to drink deeply of the existence of which Shauna Niequist speaks in her book *Present Over Perfect*:

... a life marked more by presence and connection and less by exhaustion and competition...

Present over perfect living is real over image, connecting over comparing, meaning over mania, depth over artifice.

I've invited Garrick Conner, a licensed professional counselor, pastor, and marriage and family therapist, to help us explore some of the questions we sort through as devoted, exhausted followers of Jesus.

WHY DO YOU THINK SO MANY CHRISTIANS SUFFER FROM BURNOUT?

Garrick: I believe for many, burnout is yoked to approval. And the church, possibly more than any other organization, is often complicit in driving its most generous volunteers to burnout.

Many Christians work in jobs (or at home) where they are unhappy, unappreciated, and even emotionally and verbally abused. These individuals find safety and belonging in the church and its ministries.

But left unchecked, unmet needs can pave the way for an addiction to approval. Churches run on volunteers, and their high needs can intersect with unmet emotional needs in ways that can become outwardly productive but inwardly toxic.

AS CHRISTIANS, WE TEND TO ASSOCIATE "SELF-CARE" WITH SELFISHNESS.

How does caring for ourselves—and these souls attached to our bodies—fit with Jesus’ command to deny ourselves (Luke 9:23)? Or what about, “in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3)?

Garrick: I think we do ourselves a profound disservice when we take certain verses and apply them liberally and universally.

The Apostle Paul also wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24, “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.”

Now to be clear, Paul is addressing the believer’s freedom when it comes to eating and drinking, faith and conscience. But in the context of self-care, sometimes the good of our neighbor is best served when we take care of ourselves first.

So many times as a pastor, I watch people burn out because they haven’t found a way, amidst rigorous demand, to take care of themselves. But those who don’t tend to their own basic needs for rest, nutrition, exercise, and spiritual renewal are more easily agitated, frustrated, and defeated.

Sadly but surely, it’s *the people they’re caring for* who catch the brunt of those negative emotions.

DOESN’T THIS MEAN SELF-CARE OR SOUL CARE ARE OPTIONAL?

Shouldn’t we be following the “Jesus first, others next, yourself last” mantra?

So many of us have been told that if there’s an opportunity in front of us to help, this should take precedence.

Garrick: Our opportunities to serve will almost always be greater than our capacity.

There are so many considerations that must be weighed in about available opportunities. These include an accurate assessment of our current commitments, many of which are not official or exciting. Menial tasks such as grocery shopping, housecleaning, and transporting kids to activities must not be overlooked, because they all take time and energy.

It’s also important to have a healthy understanding of your own giftedness and passion for the opportunity in view. It’s far better to take on one or two commitments that we’re uniquely equipped to do with enthusiasm than to take on four or five commitments for which we are ill-equipped and disinterested.

Remember:

1. Churches are notorious for filling ministry opportunities with warm bodies.
2. All of us are far less likely to do with excellence those tasks and responsibilities for which we are only marginally equipped and interested.

WHAT'S THE PLACE OF EMOTION AND SPARE TIME FOR A HEALTHY CHRISTIAN?

Garrick: It's extremely important to listen to our bodies. Unfortunately, that's a learned skill that doesn't receive much priority in today's culture where busyness and overscheduling have become idols.

I think we owe much of the blame to modern technology and our seeming inability to leverage it for good while simultaneously limiting its control over us.

When we stop and look at the pattern God established, it's clear that even He rested. And He commanded we rest, too, on the seventh day of each week.

His instruction wasn't about control or even a felt need to rest; it was about loving care. He knows what is best for us and that we can't be in 'go mode' all the time and still function effectively.

For most people in modern-day America, solitude and contemplation are abstract concepts rather than concrete practices. It's like everything we do is in fast-forward, because we're just in such a rush all the time.

We are hurried souls.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE UNSEEN DANGERS OF OVERCOMMITMENT? WHAT DYSFUNCTION CAN LIE BENEATH?

Garrick: I believe we all worship someone or something. Certainly God has created us for relationship with Himself and with others, but our culture has glorified busyness.

Our culture, in its own strange way, rewards us for busyness and overcommitment, conflating them with importance. Hence, if I'm not busy, then I must not be important or valued.

Something always has to suffer when we pile too much on our plates or bite off more than we can chew. The struggle is real.

So is the fallout. It shows up in physical problems like hypertension, lack of sexual intimacy, migraine headaches, and digestive issues—all exacerbated by stress. It also shows up in emotional problems like anxiety and depression.

From a purely spiritual perspective, busyness can point to a flawed theology that says “The more I work, the more worthy I am of salvation, forgiveness, and grace.”

Such a works-based approach can set us up for a lifetime of chasing something that was never meant to be attained through our own efforts and pursuits, no matter how seemingly altruistic.

WHAT COULD EFFECTIVE SOUL CARE LOOK LIKE—IN BOTH DEEP TREATMENTS AND MORE SUSTAINABLE ADJUSTMENTS TO LIFE RHYTHMS?

Garrick: Effective soul care is one of those things that doesn’t just happen. It requires regular attention and willful intentionality.

It’s found in:

- a growing ability to identify those things that are life-giving versus those that are draining.
- establishing a regular pattern of connecting with God and with the most important people in your life—namely your family and closest friends.
- setting healthy boundaries with people who require more energy and availability than you realistically have to offer.
- setting limits on 24/7 technology that competes for your time and attention. As *Life’s Little Instruction Book* counsels, “Don’t allow the phone to interrupt important moments. It’s there for your convenience, not the caller’s.”

For me, soul care also involves giving myself the freedom to have some regular times each day that are unstructured—and guilt-free.

Yes, there’s always something that needs to be done—laundry to be folded, lunches to be made, bills to be paid, emails to be sent, paperwork to be completed. But sometimes good, and even necessary, things have to wait because the better thing is to take care of myself.

One of the things I know for sure is that those who are looking to us for spiritual sustenance need us first and foremost to be spiritual seekers ourselves...

Then, rather than offering the cold stone of past devotionals, regurgitated apologetics, or someone else's musing about the spiritual life, we will have bread to offer that is warm from the oven of our intimacy with God.

– RUTH HALEY BARTON , *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*

HOW TO MAKE A SOUL-CARE STAYCATION A REALITY—EVEN WITH KIDS

JANEL BREITENSTEIN

Summer break. Some parents welcome it with open arms. Others feel like it's more bricks, less straw.

Chances are, this school year you've been plugging along at a good clip. The kids are ready to do something fun, regaling you with friends' scheduled trips toward Disney or skiing.

But maybe this exemplifies the split down your middle. *I want to have fun with the kids! Let's make memories!* And on the other side? *I'm not sure I have a drop of fun—or*

another car trip—left in me.

Time and space for soul care sometimes feels impossible for parents. But what if you could have your “break-cake” and eat it too?

1. STEP BACK AND ASSESS

We've created a Soul-Care Assessment (page 23) for you to complete long before summer break. Take stock of what's going right and what you're longing for—of the gaps you feel most acutely.



Rather than working around your most deeply-felt needs, take them into account. Could your limitations be something to celebrate and treat with sacred humility, rather than constantly shove further?

Pray about them, asking God to meet them. You might reflect on Him as Shepherd in Psalm 23, asking Him to lead you beside “green pastures” and “still waters.”

Keep in mind the old joke of the man stranded at sea. When a boat comes to his rescue, he refuses: “God will deliver me!” He answers the same to a helicopter sent for him: “God will deliver me!”

When the man dies of starvation, he asks in heaven, “Why didn’t God deliver me?”

A voice answers, “He sent a boat and a helicopter.”

In what ways might God be presenting your relief?

2. ACKNOWLEDGE THE PRESSURES YOU FEEL.

Is there an urge to keep up with the Joneses and their energetic, wow-that-sounds-exhausting, quality-time-filled camping? Or their family cruise? Is a friend treating her kids to a new surprise each day? Are you a single dad who feels the need to compensate for the demands on his schedule ... though man, it’d be nice to have a day to yourself?

God asks us to consider ourselves with sober judgement (Romans 12:3). For example, what do I really have the resources to do? He also asks us to not

compare ourselves with other families (2 Corinthians 10:12). Jesus also modeled taking time for prayer and solitude, so His work and ministry could proceed from wholeness in His relationship with God.

For our kids, can we set rhythms of making spiritual space?

Recall, too, that parents around the world are struggling to feed their children on breaks from school. These families aren’t child-centered. You don’t need to feed a cultural sense of entitlement in order to make downtime meaningful.

We have an opportunity to teach kids about healthy rest, living within means (in terms of energy, too), and finding meaningful happiness right where we are (a.k.a. contentment).

3. PLAN COLLECTIVELY, WISELY, AND WITH MARGIN TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF YOUR FAMILY.

It’s hard to accommodate your youngest’s fixation on the arcade, your teenager begging to sleep in, and the animal magnetism of the novel that’s been calling your name, personally and with feeling.

But it’s easier if, as a family, you have key discussions ahead of time.

But hold your horses. First, chat with your spouse about each of your needs, hopes, and limitations.

Are you wanting connection time with the kids? A date night with each other? A morning to sleep in, or a day to work in the shop? Get on the same page.

Planning a recent family getaway, my husband and I were both surprised at what activities flew or flopped in the family vote. Without that discussion, we could've spent a chunk o' change on some of the flops. And as a group, we shared more common goals than you'd think (e.g., vegging out).

Then, help set kids' expectations:

- Dad and I are feeling the burn of the schedule right now. And we're seeing that you guys could use some down time, too.
- So we're trying to juggle what would be fun and make some cool memories and still create some time when we can lay low.
- That means we're not going to have a non-stop summer break of tons of activities.
- Instead, we want to focus on the stuff that matters to each of us and work

together to make happen what we can.

- If you're excited about an activity, you could help plan, or propose a way to make it happen—like looking for Groupons, or researching how much it would cost, or giving us a list of what you'd need from the store.

You could ask questions like these:

- What would a great summer break look like for you? Do you need rest? Are you hoping for fun? Are you wanting family time? One-on-one time with one of your parents? Friend time? (**Scheduling tip:** You could schedule one day for time with friends, so everyone's occupied at the same time.)
- What's one reasonable, staying-here idea that (if it happened) would make your week?

TIP

Your kids need help to see beyond the desires of their pre-developed frontal lobes and to have valuable talks to evaluate what they really need. Maybe that kid struggling with anxiety could use a week to sleep in and not see friends. Maybe your child bouncing off the wall needs some strategic releases of energy each day so he doesn't send the rest of you to the funny farm.

Set aside the “big rocks” each of you wants to accomplish, while acknowledging everyone may not get their hearts’ warmest, squishiest desires.

Think about the best ways to aim not just for quantity, but quality.

- You might try to have an **individual “date” with each child.**
- **Give priority to scheduling time for spiritual rest, prayer, stillness, and listening.** This means actually putting it on the calendar.
- **One or two “wow” activities for the week** can often grant a lasting impression of a fun, off-the-beaten-path week. Ideas? Family laser tag. Using one of the much-easier-now squeeze-bottle kits of tie-dye. Going to a meteor shower. Hanging up a sheet in the yard and borrowing someone’s movie projector for movies on the terrace (at home), complete with family members’ favorite snacks. Family-made fondue for dinner one evening.
- If a schedule helps you plan, consider scheduling **one activity “slot” per day or every other day**—low-prep, no-prep, or kid-prep being key. I like this plan. Once I’ve set aside that time and agreed on that expectation with my kids, I’ve accomplished my top goal of connecting with my kids and making a memorable break where they felt special. The remainder of the time, I can relax with more ease. I can model rest and rejuvenation for them.
- **See how much white space you can still leave in your schedule.** This is time set aside for nothing.



- **A day with childcare or relatives is A-OK.** One of my goals on kids’ breaks is to simply be present with them: to generally be around, not just for quantity, but for quality. If I’m there for quality moments, it’s just fine if I take a day to sit at a coffee shop and journal, go on a hike, or do something I love.

Someday, my daughter or son may be exhausted from parenthood. And in the recesses of memory, I’d like them to remember I took non-kid-centric time to listen to God—to enjoy Him and explore His world.

Even if they don’t remember that, maybe they won’t remember the stressed, snippy version of me. Maybe rather than an irritable mom running on fumes, they’ll see Jesus more in me as I operate out of His fullness and a satisfied soul.

STAYCATION IDEA CARDS

These low-key, low-prep staycation idea cards allow you minimal effort (or kid-directed effort!) with maximum togetherness. Maybe you'll pick one activity per day, and for the rest of the day, lay low.

So take a deep breath and create some memories to last way beyond your staycation.



Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Have a picnic at the park (Give kids part of the responsibility of choosing items to pack)

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Go swimming

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Have a cooking competition

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Have kids create a stop-motion Lego/doll video

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Visit one attraction in your community you've always put off: that museum, the paint-your-own-pottery place, the local train

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Have a photo shoot in the backyard

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Give kids a weekend project to pick up and set down at will: creating a scrapbook, online painting or cooking lessons, outfitting a tree house

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Allow kids to find a craft idea and plan for it

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Visit the local hobby store for a new project kids can work on all week. (Don't be discouraged if enthusiasm ebbs and flows throughout the week.)

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

“Kids cook dinner”
night

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Ice-cream sundae
night

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Make fun food like fondue,
sushi, or a taco or baked-
potato bar

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Let the kids put on a play
(video optional). They can
write their own, or base it
on a book or a show. Don't
forget costumes!

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Build a fort. Let the kids
sleep in it, and/or have
a popcorn & movie night
inside

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Create indoor sets for role-
playing. Line up chairs to
look like an airplane or a
canoe. Or get creative with
cardboard boxes on hand.

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Have a progressive dinner
at restaurants in your
neighborhood

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Make cookies or muffins
(bonus: with handmade
cards) for someone

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Wear pajamas all day

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Let kids look up
and plan for an
easy science
experiment

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Let kids “paint” with
shaving cream in the
bathtub (just don’t
get it in your eyes!)

Staycation
IDEA CARDS

Bonus idea:
Family Nerf war



RHYTHMS TO BE AN EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADER

JANEL BREITENSTEIN

A friend of mine regularly pays money to run 26.2 miles. For fun.

Years ago, she trained for the Pikes Peak Ascent—a half marathon up the 14,115-foot mountain. (That’s over 2.5 miles above sea level. Trees stop growing around 11,500 feet, people.)

She described to me the need to scrupulously regulate nutrition and rest even for practice. Otherwise, she’d hit “the bonk” that made it nearly impossible for her to finish. Her body’s glycogen stores had been ravaged. She could barely rise off a couch, let alone finish a half-marathon at altitude.

Her body required equal compensation for expended energy. From the angle of emotionally healthy leadership, I get this on a very real level.

During my family’s work in Africa, the treadmill of daily life and ministry was naturally positioned higher, perhaps more so by efforts to fight poverty and suffering around us. Then there were additional traumas: the time we were robbed. The time my husband got malaria. The time my son was hit by a motorcycle taxi on his bike. The time I was in an accident causing a fatality.

My soul felt like it was living in dog years—seven years for every single year lived on the field.

Maybe your ministry demands, like my family's loss of power or water, deluge of mosquito bites, or nerve-singeing traffic don't always feel heroic. But somehow, they demand more than your available emotional or physical or spiritual "glycogen" stores.

And tanking may feel like a near-constant threat.

EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY LEADERSHIP: SOUL REST, THIS WAY

Like me, maybe you've wondered, *How would I even add new rhythms? Have you seen my life?!*

But God's unique plan for your soul restoration is more than recommended. It's a calling.

"It is absolutely vital to remember that a pastor's [or layperson's] ministry is never just shaped by his knowledge, experience, and skill. It is always also shaped by the true condition of his heart," Paul David Tripp cautions in *Dangerous Calling*.

Ministry amplifies our relationship with God: the wholehearted, beautiful parts, or hollow service from a withered soul.

For a lifetime of robust, genuine ministry from the inside out, it's critical you find your unique "rest DNA." Swap rhythms of burnout with rhythms of healing and wholeness—so you can love sincerely (Romans 12:9) ... and receive love from God, where God asks us to remain ([see John 15:9](#)).

Restorative rhythms often involve steps like exercise, healthy sleep, nurturing time with your family, and maybe seeing a counselor.

But don't miss these, too.

LIVING IN AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

Mutual community can be tough in leadership. Maybe what you're processing inside is confidential. Or you long for a level of understanding your friends can't offer.

But as Tripp continues, anyone in ministry is “a member of the body of Christ who himself desperately needs the ministry of the very body he has been called to train and lead.”

First Corinthians 12:21 reminds us we vitally need community for our humility, transformation, and display of the whole person of Jesus: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’”

Emotionally healthy leadership means choosing authenticity.

Ruth Barton notes in *Life Together in Christ*,

[The men on the road to Emmaus] were not having a formal quiet time. They were discussing the stuff of their lives—all the things that had happened that were having such an impact on them spiritually and every other way—and something about the nature and quality of their conversation opened up space for Jesus to draw near. And the encounter that took place among them was completely reorienting and life changing ... it becomes a transforming community.

With whom can you regularly, completely unmask emotionally and spiritually? Be known, loved, and mutually nurtured?

SOLITUDE, SILENCE, STILLNESS

But there’s more knowing to be had. What God says to some laboring for him, driving out demons: “Away from me. I never knew you” ([Matthew 7:21-23](#)).

I’m not relating solitude to salvation. But those who are God’s have something in common: He knows them, and “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27).

Hearing that still, small voice takes time. Space. Quiet.

Solitude also provides room for discernment, rather than fearful reactions or auto-pilot decision making. (Think of the Gibeonite deception in [Joshua 9](#), which kept Israel from taking the whole Promised Land.)

Being alone with God pulls us from attempts to define our identity by what we do, others’ opinions, or what we possess (be it reputation, control, popularity, or relationships).

It’s a fierce temptation: Work or sacrifices or success become gods themselves. Tripp affirms, “If you are not attaching your identity to the unshakable love of your Savior, you will ask the things in your life to become your savior, and it will never happen.”

Personally, burnout bears down when activity for God surpasses my presence with Him: “As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me ... Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

Jesus didn’t model burnout. But He did model turning away from ministry to pray.

REST AND SABBATH

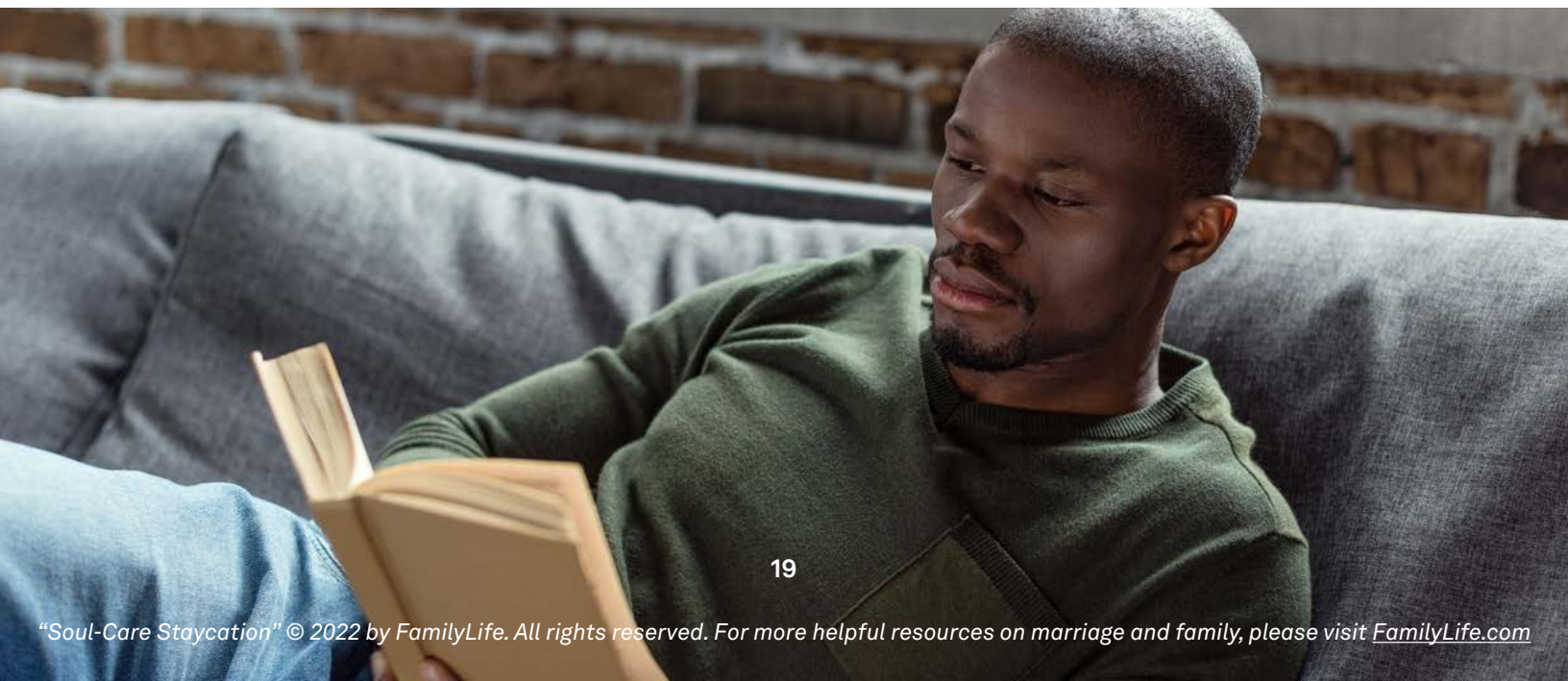
As a young mom, I dreaded Sundays. While everyone rested, I was changing diapers, doling out Goldfish, emptying the dishwasher. I was fried. (And man, was I irritable.)

But in my scrape-me-off-the-floor fatigue, God gently pointed out I needed rhythms, too. I needed to depend on others, asking for help and care. I needed boundaries, saying “no” to the dishwasher even if it meant Mt. Washmore on Monday.

There was a way to settle into His green pastures and still waters. And it wasn’t to mow the grass and swim laps. My insistence on muscling through was a form of rebellion. Self-sustenance. Defiance.

God associates rhythms of restoration and Sabbath with freedom from slavery to work (and other substitutes for identity and worship): “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

We require rest for more reasons than avoiding physical “bonk.” As Mark Buchanan writes in *The Holy Wild: Trusting in the Character of God*, “Most of the things we need to be most fully alive never come in busyness. They grow in rest. Mindset of the man too busy: I am too busy being God to become like God.”



WHAT COULD RHYTHMS OF REST LOOK LIKE?

For Sabbath:

- Prepare the day before, prepping food or a takeout plan. Complete tasks that will drive you crazy if you're trying to rest.
- Rest from hosting unless it's life-giving.
- Consider refraining from shopping, social media, kids' activities, and checking email. Weigh well what's replenishing, addressing your soul—and what's just mind-numbing.
- Look forward to an activity you love.
- Church not life-giving or mutual? Carve out time for personal worship and fulfilling time with God.

Every day:

- Mentally set a time to stop working and do something replenishing.
- Reserve 5-10 minutes of space throughout your day to take a breather and reorient to wholeheartedness.

THE RHYTHM OF “NO”

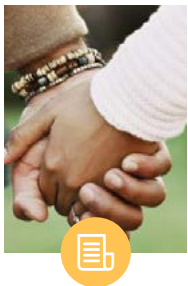
Overseas, needs seemed to hemorrhage from everywhere—our reason for being there. But my opportunity, a friend pointed out, wasn't necessarily my call. Meeting even the most dire needs would be physically impossible.

So I clung to verses like “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” (1 Peter 5:2). My “flock” being the needs God placed in my path, like the Good Samaritan.

Eugene Peterson wrote, “Busyness is an illness of the spirit,” creating leaders “blasphemously,” chronically busy. The reasons? “I am vain. I want to appear important. Significant.” Or, “I am lazy. I indolently let other people decide what I will do.”

In *The Contemplative Pastor*, Peterson declares relentless busyness is “the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal. It is not devotion but defection ... a blasphemous anxiety to do God's work for Him.”

In my own overcommitment, I shun the humility of God-given physical, emotional, social, and spiritual limitations; of seeing myself with sober judgment ([Romans 12:3](#)).



**Don't miss
"A Ministry
Marriage:
Perks
to Love,
Dangers
to Fight"**

But surely it's just me who pays the price when I run too hard. Right?

Miserably, I do not preach the gospel to myself, nor do others see it through me (and my snarling). I convey God loves worn-to-the-bone Christians best. That He doesn't really care about our well-being, our shalom.

If my restorative rhythms are sprint ... sprint ... collapse, I might be attempting more than the good works God prepared for me to do (Ephesians 2:10). That is, I have a discernment problem. Can my over-functioning, my constant "yes," be unbelief or idolatry?

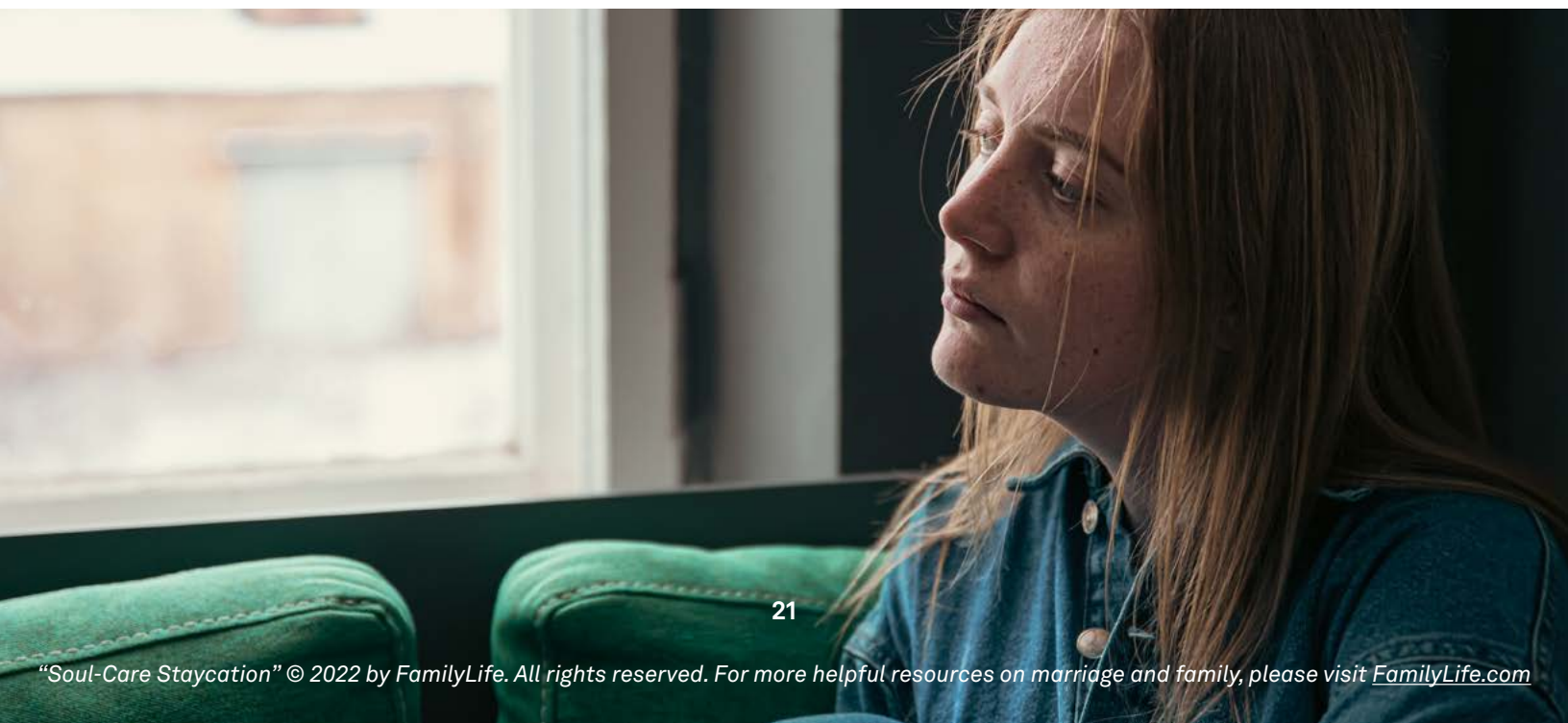
Emotionally healthy leadership means leaving space—a *Selah* of sorts—for paying attention to the God around me. To be present with and enjoy Him. To say the right noes for the sake of the right yeses.

RHYTHMS OF GRIEF AND JOY

I recently asked a counselor-acquaintance of mine about what she does for self-care. Her answer: "I take time every day to mourn."

God calls mourning with Him blessed ([Matthew 5:4](#)). To sit with Him, acknowledging what's broken about this world, and pour out my emotion (Psalm 62:8), even if I can't change something.

My husband, who cares for missionaries as part of his profession, suggests coupling this with rhythms of gratitude and joy. [The Prayer of Examen](#) helps me to experience God in both, reflecting on each day in light of God's presence.





HONORING THE IMAGE OF GOD IN YOU

Remember Eric Liddell’s (overquoted) character in *Chariots of Fire*? “God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.”

How does your heart naturally swell to (unproductive, unseen) worship?

As a parent, maybe you’ve sensed this from God’s perspective—when you smile as your kids draw for hours or strum the guitar. How does God take pleasure in how he made you? How will you honor and pry open space for His image in you?

Emotionally healthy leadership doesn’t need to be stuffed to be abundant. To tip our faces toward God. What if happy worship of God defined your ministry?

Sink into a true Gospel: God doesn’t love us for what we produce. Seek out critical restorative rhythms for the sake of emotionally healthy leadership and your own soul.

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Janel Breitenstein is an author, freelance writer, speaker, and frequent contributor for FamilyLife, including Passport2Identity®, Art of Parenting®, and regular articles. After five and a half years in East Africa, her family of six has returned to Colorado, where they continue to work on behalf of the poor with Engineering Ministries International. Her book, *Permanent Markers: Spiritual Life Skills to Write on Your Kids’ Hearts* (Harvest House), empowers parents to creatively engage kids in vibrant spirituality. You can find her—“The Awkward Mom”—having uncomfortable, important conversations at JanelBreitenstein.com, and on Instagram @janelbreit.

SOUL-CARE ASSESSMENT

0 = not me 1 = pretty much me 2 = definitely me (If a question doesn't apply, leave blank).

Take an overview of your answers.

- Place a star by any 2s—these are the areas you're winning.
- Circle your 0s—where you're likely in dire need of some soul care.
- Take note: What area has the most low numbers, indicating your greatest need for care?
- Pray and reflect. How do you think God might respond in these areas of pain, exhaustion, or neglect? (How might you respond to a friend worn-out in these areas?)
- Prayerfully consider three or more action points to address your areas of need.

A. My Body

1. I regularly receive a full night's sleep (7 + hours). _____
2. I eat regular meals. _____
3. I eat healthy. _____
4. I exercise regularly. _____
5. I enjoy regular sex with my spouse. _____
6. I reject pornography. _____
7. I do not regularly eat or sleep in excess. _____
8. I regularly seek preventative medical and dental care for myself. _____
9. I regularly seek medical care when something's wrong. _____
10. I spend time outdoors. _____
11. In my work, overtime is not a regular habit. _____
12. I don't work after dinner/early morning without allowing for other compensating times of relaxation. _____
13. I generally possess margin so that pieces of my life can shift when things go wrong or unexpectedly arise. _____
14. I don't feel like I am "always running." My schedule feels manageable, doable. _____
15. I have taken more than three days leisure time off work this past year for something I personally enjoyed. _____
16. I take a weekly Sabbath/day of worship and vocational rest. _____
17. If I have an ongoing medical condition, I do what I need to ensure long- and short-term health. _____
18. None of my relationships are physically abusive. _____
19. When I'm tired, I try to find a way to rest, even for a moment. _____
20. I am not addicted to any substance. _____
21. I accept the body God has given me. _____
22. I have healthy work/life balance (with "work" including "ministry"). _____

What , if any, physical signs of stress am I experiencing?

What’s one area where my spouse would want me to improve physically? My kids?

What’s one area I feel most convicted God would want me to better care for the body He’s given?

B. My Emotions

1. I usually know in advance whether an activity will be enjoyable/relaxing or draining. I make wise choices with my energy. _____
2. I continue to thoroughly, thoughtfully, and prayerfully explore difficulties from my past. _____
3. I don't feel a need to control my circumstances. _____
4. I have healthy ways of coping with anxiety. My anxiety doesn't usually feel overwhelming. _____
5. I have recently done something that feels brave. _____
6. I have someone in my life who I could call in a crisis, even in the middle of the night. _____
7. I frequently feel hopeful. _____
8. I'm not frequently angry. But when I am, I can respond with self-control and honesty about my contributions—and without punishing others or myself. _____
9. I can pace myself and my schedule well. _____
10. I frequently feel happiness. _____
11. When I feel stressed, I take time to discern whether I should push through or step back. _____
12. I frequently apologize and ask forgiveness when I hurt or offend others and God. (Confused how this is “soul care”? Apologizing and embracing our weaknesses requires humility and acceptance of ourselves as God's children. They cleanse our souls and release us from the chains of our own sin.) _____
13. When I feel sadness, I take time to acknowledge the value of what I've lost. _____
14. No emotions are “off limits” to me. _____
15. I have moments of stillness and/or solitude built into my day or week. _____
16. I regularly make time for a life-giving hobby that makes me happy. _____
17. I embrace my limitations. _____
18. I take time to learn something that makes me curious. _____

What's one area where my spouse would want me to grow emotionally? My kids?

What's one area I feel most convicted God would want me to better acknowledge and care for the emotions He's given?

C. My Relationships

- 1. I have a valuable, mutually fulfilling friendship with someone of the same gender. _____
- 2. I confide in my spouse. _____
- 3. I maintain healthy boundaries in my relationships. _____
- 4. I don't feel a need to please others in order to be loved. _____
- 5. My closest relationships love me for who I am, not what I do. _____
- 6. I feel emotionally safe and known in my marriage. _____
- 7. I am emotionally open with at least one trustworthy person. _____
- 8. I don't feel a need to control others. _____
- 9. I have friendships in which I feel known and emotionally safe. _____
- 10. I have friendships in which I can effectively and meaningfully care for others. _____
- 11. I feel comfortable asking for what I need. _____
- 12. I'm discerning, well aware of which people are trustworthy. I'm wise with whom I share my heart. _____
- 13. I speak up respectfully when I disagree or sense I may be taken advantage of. _____
- 14. I feel comfortable talking openly about my weaknesses and struggles in my close relationships. _____

- 15. In activities with friends or my spouse, we sometimes do what I would enjoy. _____
- 16. When I'm with people, I'm "present": fully engaged, undistracted. _____
- 17. I generally enjoy social activities. _____
- 18. I'm generally the same version of "myself" in varied social situations. _____
- 19. I make time for life-giving relationships. _____
- 20. My spouse and I make time for each other. _____
- 21. I take time to connect with my kids in effective ways. _____
- 22. I am not minimizing or ignoring conflict in my life. _____
- 23. With those in authority over me, I can still respectfully voice my opinion. _____
- 24. My relationships generally involve a healthy level of giving and receiving. _____
- 25. I don't have anything to prove. _____
- 26. I take time away from my phone. _____

What's one area where my spouse would want me to alter the way I engage socially? My kids?

What's one area I feel God would want me to more wholeheartedly respond in the relationships He's given?

D. My Relationship with God

1. I feel connected with God. _____
2. I address past or present suffering when I feel pain, exploring my soul's questions with God. _____
3. I feel God hears me. _____
4. I feel accepted by God. _____
5. I don't feel the need to hide from God. _____
6. I feel God's compassion. _____
7. I can sense God is for me. _____
8. I am learning the ability to know how God may be directing me or "speaking" to my soul. _____
9. I frequently find encouragement in Scripture. _____
10. I feel God loves me for more than what I do for Him. I don't serve so He'll be more pleased with me. _____
11. When I repent, I know God's forgiveness. _____
12. When I sin again in the same way, I still know God hasn't rejected me. _____
13. I respect God's rhythms of rest in my life. I embrace His opportunities for refreshment and renewal. _____
14. At my core, I feel loved by God. _____
15. Even when I don't get God, I feel a deep level of trust. _____
16. Even when I'm hurting, I feel loved and cared for by God. _____
17. I have taken time recently to be alone with God for an extended amount of time. _____
18. I frequently take time to nurture my soul in God. _____
19. My schedule has margin for me to listen to God. _____
20. When I realize sin in my life, I don't feel condemned. _____
21. I see ways God advocates for me. _____
22. I am surrounded by and intentional in a Christian community. _____
23. I've found activities and/or disciplines that help me experience more joy in and communion with God. _____
24. I actively address my own "pet lies" with truth from God's Word. _____
25. I regularly create time to listen to and engage with God's Word. _____
26. Worship feels like a "get to" rather than a "have to." _____



25 TIPS FOR AVOIDING MOM BURNOUT

JANEL BREITENSTEIN

1. Sleep may be more important than you think it is. Remember, God made it. Get some.
2. Mentally set a time on the clock when you will stop working and do something that replenishes you. If you need accountability, tell someone in your household and ask them to hold you to it.
3. Pray about every activity to which you'd like to say "yes." Ask God to uncover your motivations for a "yes," and pray about whether He would have you say "yes," too. Make sure your husband is on the same page, and when appropriate, invite your children's input.
4. Make a goal to spend a certain amount of time playing, cuddling, and/or generally enjoying your kids every week or every day. Though there will be other times to pursue some of your activities, their childhood is only now.
5. Politely say no.
6. Take one day a month or a week to "fast" from technology. Ask yourself if you really need to be that accessible.
7. Talk with your husband about reasonable limits for your kids' activities and the effects your decisions will have short and long term. Seriously consider the cost-benefit ratio, and pray together with open hearts about your schedule(s).
8. Ask for help when you need it.
9. Swap babysitting with a friend for one day. Consider taking part of the day as a spiritual retreat and part to do something you thoroughly enjoy.
10. Set up a regular date night with your husband.
11. If the "good" is the enemy of the "best," decide what you'll set aside (for example, that basket of laundry) for something more important (that game of Chutes and Ladders your kids have been begging to play or calling a friend).
12. What projects on your back burner would make you feel the most relieved if they were tackled? What friend might be willing to lend (or swap) her expertise in organizing, artistic skill, or childcare to help you dig out?



13. Politely say no. (In case you didn't read it the first time.)
14. Take a bath, eat something you really like, or enjoy the equivalent that causes you to slow down, savor God's goodness in this moment, and remember His sufficiency to fulfill what is necessary.
15. Slowly read Ann Voskamp's book, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are*.
16. Examine whether you have enough relational breathing room in your schedule to enjoy friends, extended family, your kids, your marriage, and your walk with God.
17. Rest one day a week. If it helps, make a few guidelines for yourself about what you won't do on that day (empty the dishwasher, cook, answer email ...whatever works for you).
18. When you feel your stress levels rising because of your task list, take 5 to 10 minutes and "go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matthew 6:6).
19. Trust God to provide other people to do some of the things that need to be done.
20. Observe the immediate and distant effects of your schedule on your kids. When they look back at their childhood, what will they remember? What will they know was most valuable in your home?
21. Memorize and meditate on verses like Psalm 23, 127:2; Matthew 6:31-34; Ephesians 2:10; and James 3:13-18.
22. Think about the things that you do to relax ... and whether they actually relax you. Do you know what rejuvenates you?
23. Politely say no. (You get the point.)
24. Create pockets of silence and rest in your life. Turn off the TV, the music, the computer, your phone. Use the time to simply, quietly be with God instead.
25. Ask God to help you listen to Him. Then practice, practice, practice.