

Self-Care

Taking care of yourself is not selfish!

By Jon Byler

About the Author

Jon Byler has a passion to serve the body of Christ by using his gifts of teaching, writing and encouragement. He especially enjoys serving the leaders who build the church. He lives with his wife, Nyambura, in East Petersburg, PA. Together they pastor an emerging church and are the parents of three adult children.

Jon served in Kenya for 13 years and in different capacities in the church including pastoral ministry and leadership development, then another 15 years of international training with church leaders and 5 years of training within business organization. He has authored several books including *7 Keys to Financial Freedom*, *The Heart of Christian Leadership*, *The Art of Christian Leadership*, and *Signposts for the Journey, Vol. 1, II, and III* and several booklets on other topics. He writes a bi-weekly e-Zine *Reflections for Serving Leaders* which is distributed by email in English and Spanish. (Sign up to receive a free copy on his website.)

Jon is available for speaking and consulting especially in the areas of leadership, church growth, and missions. For more information see his website, www.LeadersServe.com.



The following is a compilation of a biweekly email newsletter series about self-care. These “Reflections for Serving Leaders” were written for serving leaders around the world to learn what it means to lead like Jesus. The issue number and date used are the dates for the original publication.

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Self-Care: Take Care of Yourself

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Much of serving leadership is about others. It's about meeting their needs, serving them, developing them, equipping them, encouraging them. But before leaders can take care of others, they must take care of themselves! In this series we'll reflect on the advice Paul gave to Timothy about the need to take care of himself.

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16, NIV).

Paul challenges Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely. It is a call to pay close attention to himself. Self-care is not selfish! Selfishness makes the leader's needs the goal; self-care attends to the needs of the leader so they can fulfill their calling. What does self-care have to do with our leadership?

Taking care of yourself is an initial act of leadership.

Long before airplanes instructed passengers to put on their own oxygen mask before assisting others Paul told Timothy to "watch your life..." Before watching others, leaders need to watch themselves. Before caring for others, leaders need to take care of themselves. Before teaching others, they need to take a close look at their own doctrine. This is not a selfish act; it is a necessary part of ensuring that we are ready and able to help others.

Some leaders feel guilty when they focus on themselves or take time to attend to their own needs. But serving leaders recognize that the first act of service is being ready and able to serve. They take care of themselves first.

Taking care of yourself is an intentional act of leadership.

Both "watch" and "closely" imply focused intentionality. Perhaps Paul recognized that the demands of leadership could quickly become the focus of Timothy's actions and he warned him to be intentional about caring for himself. This act of leadership will not happen by accident. The needs of others are often more apparent to us than our own needs.

Some leaders become so engrossed in calling for action, producing outcomes, and reaching goals that they fail to stop and look at how they are doing. But serving leaders intentionally make sure they take good care of themselves so that they are able to care for others.

Taking care of yourself is an impactful act of leadership.

Paul concludes this exhortation by observing that if Timothy will take care of himself, it would "save both yourself and your hearers." His point goes beyond what we are calling self-care, but the principle is clear: how leaders care for their own lives impacts those they lead. The attention to caring for self would impact Timothy and those he was leading. Effective self-care is impactful leadership. Leaders who are action-oriented and focused on a mission can easily assume that some shortcuts here and there on how they care for themselves won't impact their leadership effectiveness. They neglect their own physical, emotional and spiritual needs. And for a time, they may appear to succeed. But in the long term, they—and those who follow—will pay for their neglect.

Some leaders assume that they can care for others even when there are gaps in how they care for themselves. But serving leaders recognize that the best gift they can give those they

serve is a strong, healthy leader. They recognize that they cannot continue drawing from an empty well. They are better leaders because they care for themselves.

For further reflection and discussion:

As I focus on the needs of others, how well do I pay attention to my own needs? How does this impact my leadership?

In what way(s) am I intentional about ensuring that I am taking care of myself? What am I doing about my physical condition? My emotional health? My spiritual depth? My own growth?

Are there ways that I have been neglecting self-care, believing that it would not impact those who follow me? What steps do I need to take to change?

What additional insights about the need for self-care do I gain from the following passages?

1 Samuel 30:6, Matthew 7:3-5, Luke 5:15-16, Acts 20:28, Galatians 6:1

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at the need to care for our soul.

Self-Care: Take Care of Your Soul

Issue #430, August 26, 2026

Self-care is not selfish, it's essential for healthy leadership. But what does it look like in practice? We'll examine three specific areas in which we need to care for ourselves: our souls, our bodies and our gift. First, in this issue, how we take care of our inner life, our relationship with Jesus—the matters of our soul. Consider Paul's instruction to Timothy:

⁷Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:7–8, NIV).

Paul challenges Timothy to train himself to “be godly.” This training has great value both now and in the future. Physical training, which we will examine in the next issue, has value but is not as significant as issues of the soul. Paul's instruction provides several starting points for the kind of training that will help us care for our soul.

Taking care of your soul requires avoiding distractions.

Paul begins his exhortation to godliness by telling Timothy to avoid “godless myths and old wives' tales.” It is easy to dismiss Paul's instruction as advice for a different generation. He is specifically warning Timothy about spiritually unprofitable teaching, but the principle applies more broadly: some things consume our attention but do not nourish our souls. Perhaps if he were writing today he might say, “Have nothing to do with endless scrolling on social media, political debates on Facebook, and schedules packed with activity—but train yourself to be godly.” Soul care requires saying ‘no’ to some things that others may practice habitually. This kind of saying “no” is at the heart of the spiritual discipline of fasting which addresses our need to say ‘no’ to things we crave in order to focus more fully on the our soul's craving for God.

Some leaders measure their health by outputs: how much they produce and how full their schedule is. But serving leaders feed their souls by avoiding distractions.

Taking care of your soul requires intentionality.

Paul tells Timothy, “train yourself.” He calls Timothy to actively focus on the care of his soul. The care of our souls requires intentionality; it will not happen simply because we keep living and leading. For centuries, spiritual disciplines have helped leaders take the time and energy needed to care for their souls. Disciplines such as meditation, prayer, fasting, Bible reading and solitude are a part of the training needed for godliness. Intentionality may require a long walk, blocking out time to be alone for reflection and listening or simply slowing down.

Some leaders assume that if they are leading and goals are being met, all is well in their inner world. But serving leaders make their goal to walk with Jesus and cultivate a healthy soul. They intentionally structure their lives in ways that tend the garden of their heart.

Taking care of your soul requires consistency.

The training Paul instructed Timothy to do is not a one time event. Building a life of godliness is a long-term objective, not a short-term accomplishment. Paul tells Timothy that godliness impacts both “the present life and the life to come.” It requires consistency over a long period of time.

Some leaders are content to think of being godly in the future and neglect the daily habits that will take them there. They hope that an occasional seminar or book on prayer will take care of their soul and develop godliness. But serving leaders build regular rhythms of life that over time nourish and strengthen their souls. As they do, they become leaders better equipped to serve those they lead.

For further reflection and discussion:

What are things in my daily life that are distractions to my soul care? What is God inviting me to change so that I can avoid these distractions?

How well am I doing with these disciplines: fasting, Bible reading, meditation, prayer, solitude? What do I need to change?

What habits do I cultivate in my life that help me care for my soul? What are my daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms that help me keep my soul strong? Are there changes I need to make?

What additional insights about the need for soul care do I gain from the following passages? (1 Samuel 30:6; Matthew 14:13, 23; Mark 1:35-38, 4:19; Luke 5:15-16; John 15:1-5; Acts 13:2-3; 1 Timothy 4:12-16, 6:11-12, 20; 2 Timothy 2:15-16)

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll examine care of our bodies.

Self-Care: Take Care of Your Body

Issue #431, September 9, 2026

Leaders often focus on the task at hand and the mission they hope to accomplish, but pay little regard to their own bodies. Paul cautioned Timothy that his leadership was not only a matter of taking care of his soul but also taking care of his body. Consider these verses:

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8, NIV).

Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses (1 Timothy 5:23).

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Taken together, these verses remind us that our physical bodies matter to God and should not be neglected as we seek to lead well.

Taking care of your body is spiritual.

Paul calls Timothy to “Watch your life,” a broad call to pay attention to himself. Elsewhere, Paul makes it clear that this includes paying attention to the physical. We are each tempted to separate our lives into the physical realm and the spiritual realm with the spiritual being the most significant and worthy of all our focus. But Paul brings them together for Timothy and in his instructions to the church in Corinth. It is possible to “honor God” with our bodies!

Some leaders see their care of their bodies as unrelated to their spiritual pursuits. But serving leaders recognize that God cares about how they treat their bodies—so they also care!

Taking care of your body is valuable.

Paul says “physical training is of some value...” Yes, godliness has more eternal implications than our physical health, but Paul concludes that both are valuable. He recognizes that Timothy’s “frequent illnesses” are worthy of attention as a leader. He urged Timothy to pay attention to his body! Years later, Robert Murray M’Cheyne, a Scottish minister, reportedly said, “God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and now I cannot deliver the message.” He died at 29.

Some leaders prioritize their leadership growth around books, seminars, podcasts, and mental training with little regard to their bodies. But serving leaders seek to balance their physical and intellectual growth.

Taking care of your body is practical.

Paul tells Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach. He is not here addressing the broader question of the ethical use of alcohol; he’s giving Timothy practical medical advice. He wants Timothy to pay attention to what he puts in his stomach! When a stomach is growling, upset, or bulging, leaders should take practical steps to make needed changes. For other leaders, it may not be a food issue, but one of getting enough rest or getting sufficient exercise.

Some leaders focus on their vision and mission and the practical steps they will take to accomplish them. But serving leaders also get practical about taking care of their bodies and implement practical steps toward maintaining physical health. They are better leaders because of it!

For further reflection and discussion:

Are there ways I have seen my physical health as somehow less important or less spiritual than the care of my soul? How has this impacted my leadership?

What priorities have I established—or will establish—in my own life in the following areas:

- Adequate rest
- Healthy diet
- Sufficient exercise
- Appropriate medical attention
- Establishing Sabbath rest in my rhythms

What additional insights about the need for care of my body do I gain from the following passages? (Exodus 20:8-11; 1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 127:2; Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 6:31; Luke 5:15-16; Ephesians 5:28-29; and Romans 12:1).

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll look at how we care for our own growth.

Self-Care: Take Care of Your Growth

Issue #432, September 23, 2026

Great leaders focus on the needs of others—but do not neglect caring for themselves. As we have already seen, they take care of their souls and their bodies. They also find ways to grow and develop their own gifts and calling. Paul calls Timothy to this aspect of self-care:

¹⁴Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress (1 Timothy 4:14-15, NIV).

⁶For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

In these verses, Paul calls Timothy to nurture and develop the gifts given to him by God. Timothy's growth would impact his leadership, just as our growth impacts ours, in several ways.

Taking care of your growth enlarges your capacity.

Paul tells Timothy to “fan into flame” the gift God has given to him. No leader begins with maturity; it requires growth and practice. Leaders need to invest time to grow and develop capacity. Paul was a great model for Timothy to follow but Timothy had to take care of his own growth and development. The Irish proverb reflects this truth: “You’ve got to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was.” When a leader grows, the people under them benefit. They will experience better leadership and be challenged to grow themselves. Some leaders are content to rely on their previous success and focus on maintaining their role. But serving leaders are passionate about growing themselves and developing their God-given gifts and roles. They invest time and money to enlarge their own capacity.

Taking care of your growth expands your impact.

Paul urges Timothy to grow his gift “so that everyone may see your progress.” He connects Timothy's development with a life characterized not by timidity but “power, love and self-discipline.” His growth would expand the impact he would have on the lives of others. As he developed greater leadership capacity, his impact would expand, enabling him to lead people more effectively and to serve more people. Investing time and resources in your own growth is not selfish—it prepares you to serve with greater impact.

Some leaders seek to grow only to benefit themselves and advance their own power and authority. But serving leaders want to bless others—so they grow themselves.

Taking care of your growth expresses appreciation to God.

Paul makes it clear to Timothy that the gift he has is not for himself; it is the “gift of God” which came through the “laying on of my hands.” He wants Timothy to be clear that he is a steward of his leadership capacity and that the best way he can express his appreciation to God is to fan the gift into flame! Gifts are not given to us as mature and fully developed; we are called to develop them. God provides the flicker, then invites us to fan it into a flame.

Some leaders grow themselves because they want to achieve greatness for themselves. But serving leaders grow themselves because they want God to be glorified in their

leadership. Their commitment to personal growth is an act of worship and it makes them better leaders.

For further reflection and discussion:

Do I see my leadership as a gift from God that He expects me to nurture and develop? How does this impact the way I invest in my own growth?

In what ways do I invest time and resources in my own growth as a leader? Are there changes I need to make in this area?

In what specific ways am I currently growing and developing my leadership gift? Are positive changes in my leadership evident to those around me? If not, what do I need to change?

What additional insights about the need for growing myself do I gain from the following passages? Matthew 25:14-30; Ephesians 4:15-16; Hebrews 5:12-14; Philippians 3:12-14; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Timothy 4:7-8.

Until next time, yours on the journey,

Jon Byler

In the next issue, we'll begin a new series.