



SELF TENDING

A RESOURCE
ABOUT SELF-CARE
FOR PEOPLE IN
MINISTRY



Kyle Hastelow, Susan Wardell, Terin Hastelow

FOREWORD

Greetings dear siblings-in-Christ.

Looking after yourself in today's world can be challenging. We can find ourselves exhausted and maxed out. People in ministry can especially be pulled in many different directions, trying to meet many needs. We can get into unhealthy and unsustainable patterns of living and working, where our own needs are set aside. But God cares about us, as well as those we minister to; about our wellbeing, and our flourishing. That is what this resource is about.

We have chosen the title 'self-tending' because this sums up a lot of what our approach hopes to offer: a gentle, flexible, contextually-aware approach to the tricky topic of self-care. This framework has emerged from our own personal experiences of life, health, and ministry; from insights in research and study we have done; and through discussion and feedback with others.

Although we write primarily from experience working with youth leaders and ministers, this is a topic of wide relevance, and so we have framed the resource for people in any sort of ministry role. We are also aware that we write from our own cultural lens, as tangata tiriti, but with the intention to acknowledge and incorporate the rich insights to wellbeing that te ao Māori provides; developing our 'tending' model with this in mind.

You might be passionate, committed, and also very, very tired. You might be just starting out, feeling fresh, but knowing you want to be in it for the long haul. We hope this resource has something for you, either way.

With enormous aroha,

Kyle Hastelow, Susan Wardell, and Terin Hastelow

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kyle Hastelow is the Associate Youth Enabler for Presbytery Central he has been working with youth in various different roles for over two decades. He is passionate about supporting people in ministry towards more holistic and sustainable practices of wellbeing. He also lives with chronic pain, and because of this has invested time into learning how to tend to oneself.

Susan Wardell is an academic (at the University of Otago) where a lot of her research focuses on wellbeing, care work, health, and disability. She is Pākehā, and was born in Ōtepoti Dunedin. Susan has previously been a volunteer youth worker at her church. From 2012-2015 she worked on a PhD about Christian youth workers and burnout. Susan has her own lived experiences of mental health challenges. She lives at the moment with chronic health conditions, and is also neurodivergent.

Terin Hastelow is a writer, artist, and maker, with a focus on wellbeing and spirituality. They have degrees and research experience in Psychology, as well as experience in ministry work and small group leadership. Terin's ongoing experiences with chronic physical and mental illnesses give them a deep understanding of the holistic nature of wellbeing.

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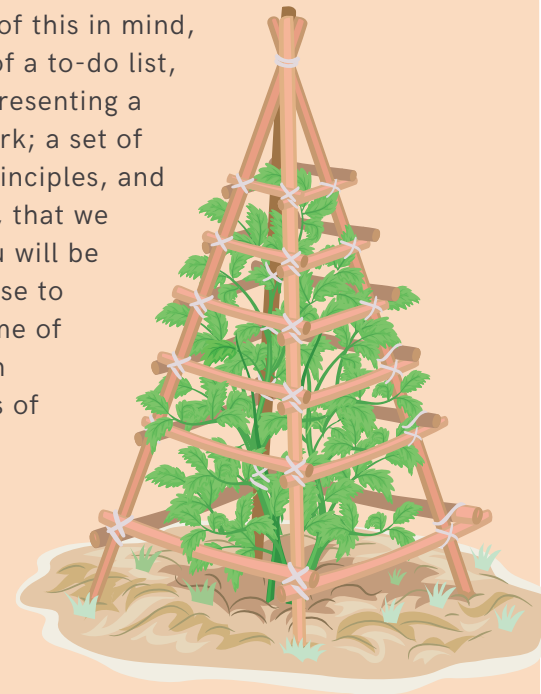
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ABOUT THE RESOURCE

The purpose of this resource is to start you thinking about what self-care means, and how you might go about doing it, by deconstructing some unhelpful stereotypes and introducing our own model. But this isn't really a 'how to' guide.

Why not? Well, firstly, because a set of 'one-size-fits-all' instructions is unlikely to be able to help everyone, considering just how different our circumstances can be. And secondly, because self-care is often full of 'shoulds' that pin it all on the individual, and can make you feel worse if you can't complete the instructions.

With all of this in mind, instead of a to-do list, we are presenting a framework; a set of ideas, principles, and prompts, that we hope you will be able to use to grow some of your own practices of self-care around.



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Throughout the resource, we include **reflection prompts** for you to consider how the ideas might apply to your own practices. You can do them by yourself, or with a group or team; in written form or through verbal discussion. It's up to you!

While there is some benefit to working through the resource in order, you can also skip to bits you are most interested in, using the links in the content list (left).

WHY SELF-CARE?

YOU ARE WORTHY

A lot of people in ministry feel they have to justify any time or energy they spend on themselves, based on it's benefit for others. "I have to look after myself so I can keep ministering effectively", "I practice self-care, so I can better care for others", is thinking that we hear a lot.

This might be true in a practical sense... but what you are also saying, is that you feel like your only value is in your work, your service, or what you give out.

Here is an important reminder:

You are worthy of love and self-care! Just you, for your own sake; quite separate to any work or ministry that you do or don't do.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1a

When you opened up this resource, what was your motivation?

When you do something for your own wellbeing, how do you explain or justify it to others?

YOU ARE NOT AN EXCEPTION

When you are thinking about those you minister to, and how to support their wellbeing and growth, do you ever stop to weigh up whether they have earned it? Probably not! You care for them, just because they are a human being, created by God, and worthy of love.

What messages have you been sharing with those you minister to, that you might also need to hear?

If you aren't able to care for yourself 'just because', you are making yourself an exception to everything you teach other people: that they are loved, and worthy of care and a good life.

All of the things you teach the people you minister to, they also apply to you.

ARE WE SUPPOSED TO SUFFER, IN MINISTRY?

The Bible teaches us to 'give of ourselves'. Some people think this means that compromising our own health and wellbeing, to serve others, is normal or noble. Sometimes we even treat exhaustion as a marker of a 'good' leader, who is serving others with all they have.

But we don't have to be Jesus, giving of ourselves unto death. That work is already done (as Jesus said himself, "it is finished"). Instead, we are invited to be like Jesus, and to be with Jesus. This verse helps unpack that:

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.

Matthew 11: 28-30

In Jesus' time, there was a lot of religious legalism, where leaders put a lot of pressure on people to live perfect lives. In this verse, Jesus invites us into a very different form of discipleship... one that doesn't put it all on us.

What might not be obvious in this verse, is what the word 'yoke' means. A yoke is a wooden beam that connects two oxen who are pulling a load together. It is a symbol of partnership. By inviting us to take his 'yoke', Jesus is inviting us to learn how to work alongside him. He is emphasizing that we aren't supposed to find this an impossible task, with crushing expectations. Walking with Jesus doesn't need to feel like hard work. There may be periods where painful or hard work is involved, but not always, and not to our detriment long-term.

In the reverse, this life with Jesus isn't all ease and rest, either - a yoke is a tool of work after all. We need tasks with purpose to give us fulfillment in life, but not ones which crush us.

Today we still often place heavy burdens on both followers and ministers, with imbalanced ideas of self-sacrifice and service, that lead to burnout, poor wellbeing, and suffering.

Jesus' invitation to "come unto me" is an invitation into partnership, where there is purposeful work, with room for rest and gentleness. It remains very good news.



'A FULL LIFE' VERSUS 'A LIFE IN FULLNESS'?

The Bible indicates that God wants us to have a whole, healthy, rich, flourishing life, as exemplified in this verse:

The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows].

John 10:10

Some versions translate it as "life to the full". The problem is, the word 'full' is often more negatively associated today, with lives that are frantically busy. But that doesn't sync up with the rest of this verse. Take another look. This verse also states that Jesus came so that we might "enjoy life"... and how can we enjoy a life so full and busy that we have no time to pause and appreciate it? Another translation is "life in abundance". A life full of goodness and richness, one in which we can flourish, is quite a different picture than one that is simply 'full'. Quality over quantity.

What other clues does the Bible give us about what this type of life might involve?

- ...Sitting deeply in rest? (Psalm 23:1-2)
- ...Investing in deep and meaningful relationships? (Proverbs 27:9)
- ...Dancing with abandon, like David? (2 Samuel 6:14)
- ...Expressing yourself, being creative? (Exodus 35:35)

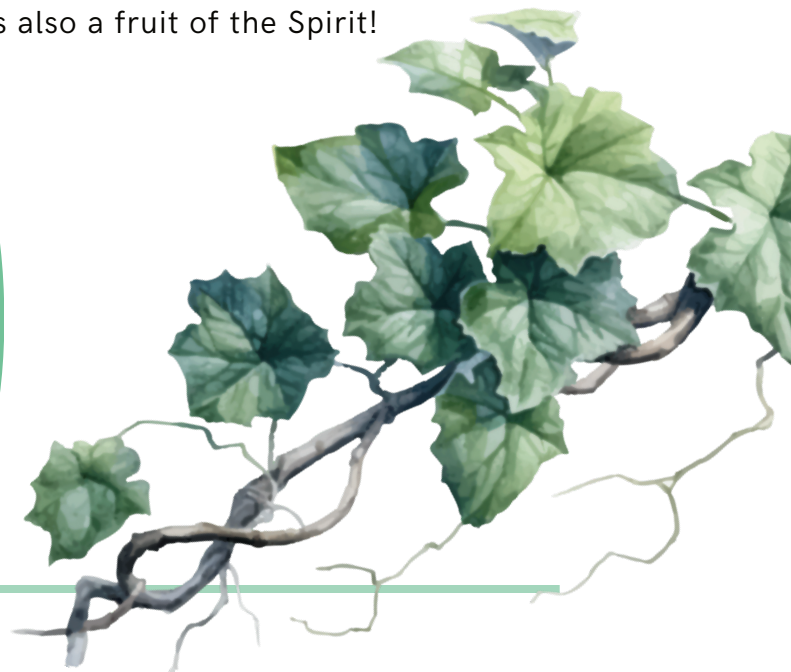
This stuff is important too, even for those called to ministry - perhaps especially those called to ministry - because when we ask those people to 'model' a Biblical life, it means more than just self-sacrifice, or self-discipline...

... joy is also a fruit of the Spirit!

What would it mean to you, to live a life in fullness, one that you can take joy in?

What might a life of 'flourishing' look like to you? What might that feel like?

How is it different to the life you are living now?



DISCLAIMERS ABOUT FLOURISHING

The ability to live a flourishing life goes beyond just individual choices, mindsets, or actions. A lot of it is out of our control, and this is important to acknowledge.

Although we know God wants good things for us, we are still living in a human world, and many of us will face difficult things (with our own health and wellbeing, and beyond) even as we practice faith, and even when we practice self care.

IT'S ABOUT YOU...

An individual's baseline of wellbeing can vary widely. There is no 'standard' version. Nor does any one person's baseline of health stay the same all throughout their life, and we are living in a world where we will face difficult things. Individual disabilities, differences of body and mind, and differences of life circumstance, can vary hugely between individuals.

Thus your version of a 'flourishing' life, with all factors considered, might be different to someone else's.



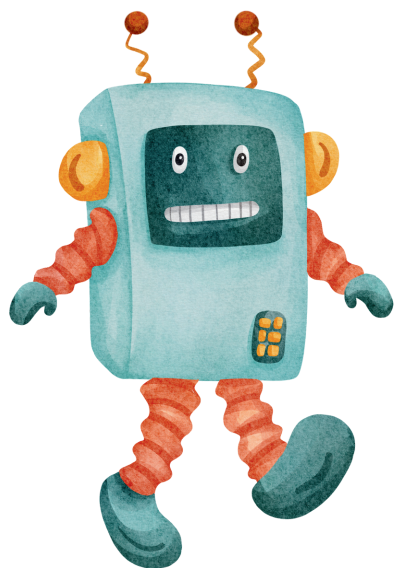
What factors are you contending with, in your life, that effect your wellbeing and flourishing?

...BUT IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU

The quality of life we have access to can depend on social and economic systems, organisational structures, and more (as we discuss on pages 29-30).

Overall, the society we are in is often not well set-up for individual flourishing. So it is essential to remember that if we aren't flourishing - when things are strained or hard, or when we do break down or become unwell - that is NOT simply a personal failing. Blaming ourselves for poor wellbeing is unrealistic and unhelpful.

But that's one reason we are using plant metaphors: because slowly growing or tending to our lives, even in small bits and pieces, as we can - and acknowledging it won't always 'flourish' in the same way in every time or season - amidst a society that doesn't always let us sow into wellbeing in this way, this is a beautifully radical thing.



CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK

Our thinking is shaped by the language and the metaphors we use in the day-to-day.

Sometimes we can (individually, or as a society) get stuck on certain types of metaphors, without realising they might have unhelpful consequences. Currently, our society's language about work and wellbeing is often very focused on mechanical metaphors. Even when we are at our lowest and describe it as a 'breakdown' - as if we were a car or a lawnmower. But constantly comparing ourselves to machines is unrealistic and unhelpful.

PLANTS NOT MACHINES

Humans are organic beings.

We experience cycles, seasons, and fluctuations: with our physical selves (*e.g. growing and ageing, hormone cycles, sleeping and waking, working and resting, sickness and health*) and with our mental, emotional, and spiritual selves (*e.g. grief and celebration, faith and doubt, progress and frustration*).

Our capacity for work and ministry can change, day by day, week by week, and year by year, based on both internal and external factors.

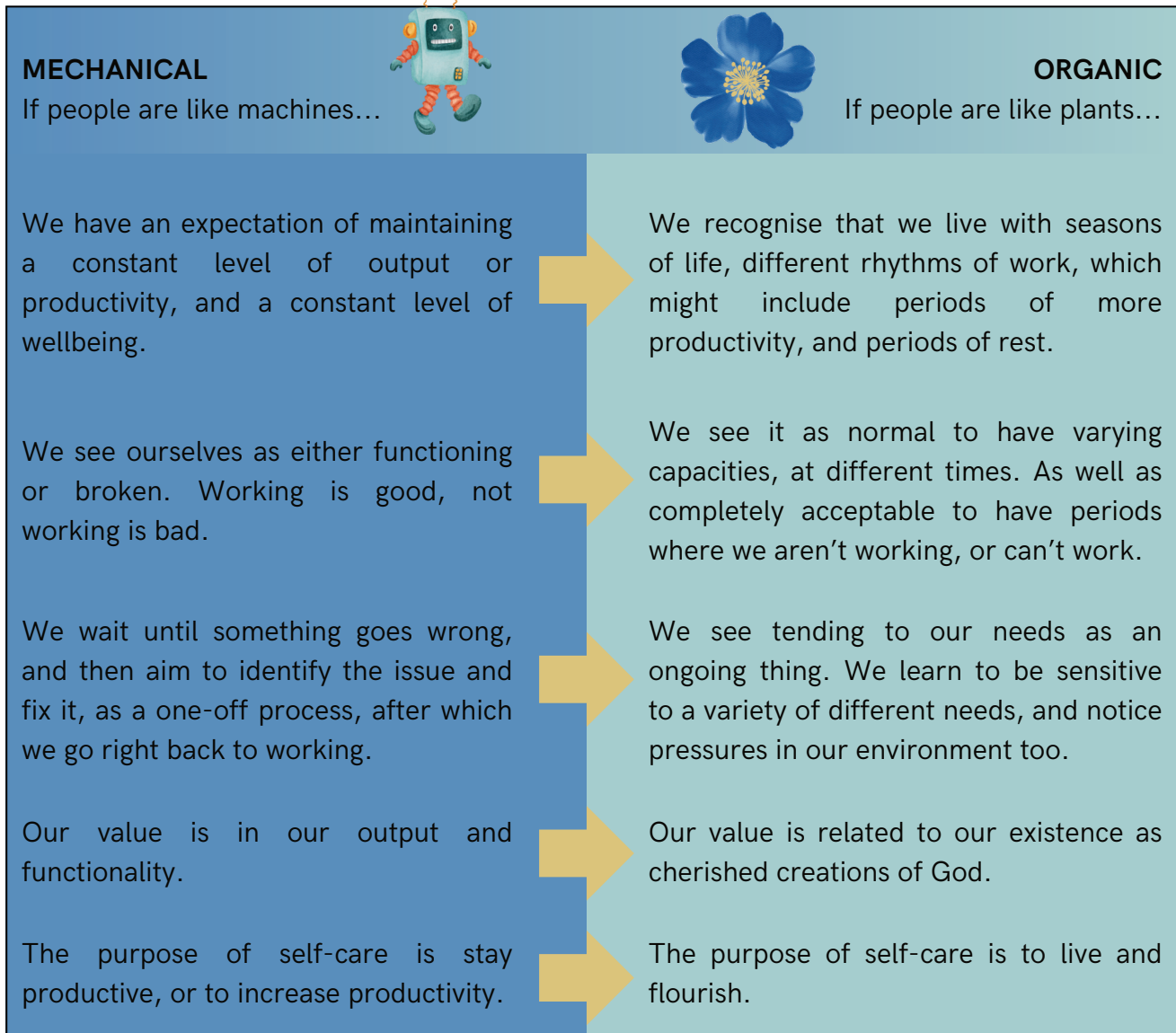
Because of this, it can be helpful to take our lessons from living things, instead of machines.

The Bible models this for us by using a lot of plant, tree, and nature metaphors throughout.



WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Here are some examples of how our expectations around wellbeing might shift, if we change our language; and how this, in turn, can change how we approach self-care.



A NECESSITY, NOT A LUXURY

We don't water plants just as an occasional treat. Or intentionally reserve water for when a plant is nearly dead, just to bring it back from the brink. Or distribute water only to the plants making the most fruit or flowers. No, water is simply a necessity for a plant. That's just how plants work.

In the same way, humans have all sorts of physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, just because we are humans.

We can't care for those needs just occasionally, as a treat. Or as a reward for producing lots. Or only when we get to the point where we will die without it.

Care is the most basic necessity.

Even for those of us who are used to being the ones giving the care... because we are still humans too!



Don't forget
to drink water
and get some sun.
You're basically
a houseplant
with more
complicated emotions.

What sorts of things might you be approaching as a luxury, or a treat, that are actually just a necessity for living well? (remember that what is a treat for someone else might be essential for you, and vice versa)

GOD GET'S IT

Sometimes, ideas about how to keep going through the demands of ministry tend to focus on the 'super spiritual': *Prayer. Worship. Engaging with the word.* These things are wonderful, but we aren't purely spiritual beings.

In the following story from 1 Kings, Elijah had just done some impressive ministry on Mt Carmel - he called down fire, and proved God's awesomeness. Afterwards, when he had to run for his life, he was understandably exhausted and depressed.

When Elijah lay down in the desert at Horeb, he prayed to die, and then fell asleep. He woke to an angel that God had sent to give him bread, and water. Twice.



Suddenly an angel touched him. The angel said, "Get up and eat." Elijah looked around. Near his head he saw some bread. It had been baked over hot coals. A jar of water was also there. So Elijah ate and drank. Then he lay down again. The angel of the Lord came to him a second time. He touched him and said, "Get up and eat. Your journey will be long and hard." So he got up. He ate and drank. The food gave him new strength.

1 Kings 19: 5-8

The verse from Matthew, on page 6, focuses on 'rest for your soul'. This shows God meeting our spiritual needs. But this shouldn't be used as an excuse for unsustainable practices in ministry - i.e. running our bodies and minds ragged - with the excuse we are still being spiritually fed.

Like Elijah, we may have a "long and hard" journey (of life and ministry) ahead. It's ok to focus on the care we need, in any given moment, whether that is the most basic physical care, or more complex needs.

God made us, and hasn't forgotten the basics of how humans work. Eat, drink, rest. Work out how to set up a life that meets your basic needs for housing, resources, and physical health, longer term. It's ok. In fact, it's essential.



WHAT CAN SELF-CARE LOOK LIKE?

Our practice of self-care draws on understandings shaped by stereotypes in media and advertising, by what we have seen others model to us, and by what has previously been possible or realistic in our own settings.

When or where have you most often heard the term 'self-care'?

What did self-care look like or involve, in those contexts?

Self-care is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Everyone has different needs, preferences, and circumstances, so what works for one person might not work for another. The key is to listen to ourselves, identify what promotes wellbeing for us in any given moment, and create self-care practices that are both flexible to circumstances, and tailored to us. By recognizing and respecting these unique journeys, we can all embark on a more authentic and sustainable path to flourishing lives.

BRAINSTORM

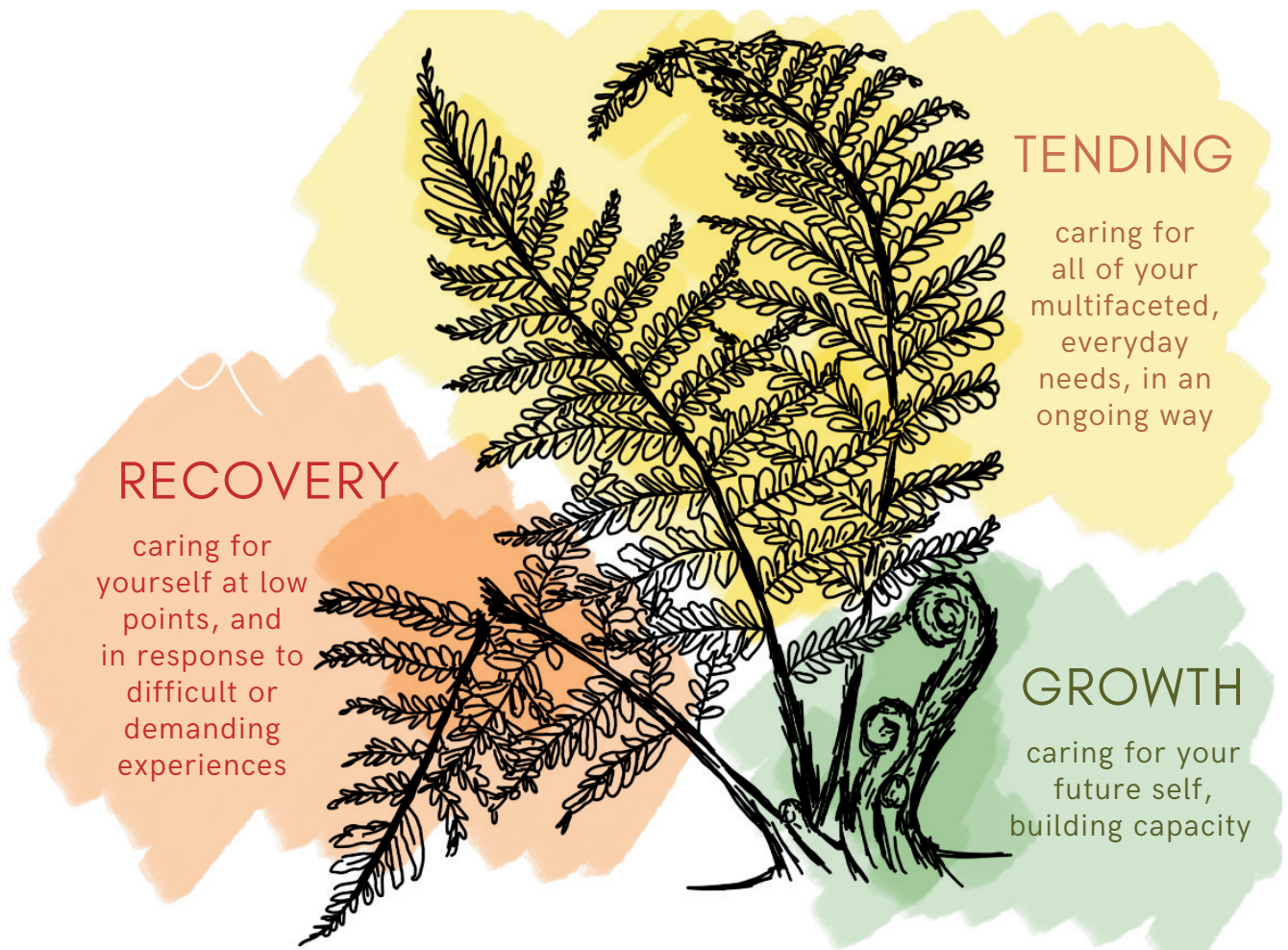
Try and write a list of all the things you currently do, that you consider self-care.

They can be any sort of thing; and they might be regular or very occasional activities.

You can use this as a basis for reflecting further on the next few pages.

THE TENDING MODEL

We suggest that self-care has various types, and can occur with different focuses, namely: recovery, tending, and growth.



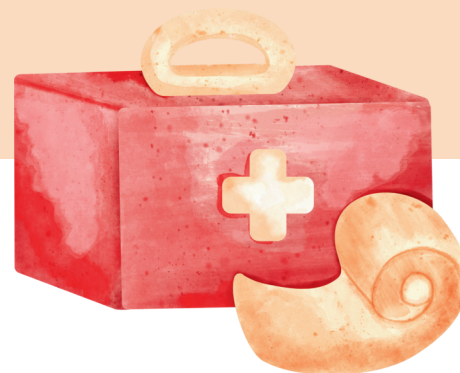
We cover more detail on each of these, over the next few pages.

The important thing to remember is that each of these are part of a healthy system of self-care. It's not about moving from one into another, or replacing one with another, but rather **each is valuable and has its purpose and place**. Ideally we can cycle between them, or do some of each, weekly or monthly, as needed.

When you look at your list of current self-care activities, from the previous page, where are you mostly focusing?

Do you have any area which doesn't have many activities?

MORE ABOUT RECOVERY



Self care in recovery mode is a bit like first aid.

ASSESS THE DAMAGE

When someone is injured, your care for them is **urgent and reactive**; narrowly focused on responding to what has just happened. You assess what has happened and what state they are now in, and you use whatever is on hand to help them - to reduce the pain, to stop the injury getting worse, or keep them going until a professional can step in.

If you have had some kind of shake-up or challenging time in your life or ministry, and find yourself struggling, shutting down, or distressed, you might need to do something similar: to honestly recognise what state you are in, and then draw on whatever tools or strategies you have on hand, to help yourself feel a bit better, or keep yourself going until you can sort out some longer-term forms of care, including drawing on help from others.

WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?

Self-care, in recovery mode, is usually about **simple and tangible actions**, with an immediate payoff. It might be about comfort, grounding, venting, or distraction. It is often focused at the level of the body, through both movement and rest.

The specific things that might work will vary between people and is helped by knowing yourself and your (sensory, physical, relational) needs well.

From your list
of current self-care
activities, which fill this
recovery role?

Which do you use the
most? Why?

COMMODYING SELF-CARE

A lot of our stereotypes of self-care are simplified and commercialised ideas, based on companies trying to sell us stuff - candles, bubble bath, beauty products, and more.

While there is nothing wrong with investing money in ourselves when we can or when we need to, **these sorts of things are only one small part of self-care**, and we want to encourage you to think bigger, and more creatively, about what self-care could mean for you, and for the world (as the final part of this resource also focuses on).



WHAT WE CAN MANAGE... FOR NOW

Sometimes, when we are really struggling, the simple, tangible, recovery-type self-care is the only type we can manage. Life is always going to throw things at us, and so **there will always be a place for this type of care**, it is valid and necessary.

However, it's good to recognise that some of the things it involves - that we might think of as 'coping strategies' - are not necessarily good for us as an ongoing thing. Nor can we rely on this type of care as our *total* approach to wellbeing.

If we only think about this sort of self-care, it can be fairly easy to get stuck in a cycle of recovery, constantly reacting to events, with no time and energy to develop your capacity and wellbeing any further. That's why the next two focuses (on tending and growth) are also important.

MORE ABOUT TENDING



Self-care in tending mode is about noticing our multiple and varying needs as a human being, in an ongoing way.

ROUTINE AND RESPONSIVE

Tending is about **healthfully maintaining our needs, longer term**. This can be about setting up habits, routines, and patterns of living; with practices that might become automatic, and therefore support our state of being without requiring too much energy to keep up. But it can also have a responsive element, i.e. noticing when things are going a bit askew, and adjusting according, *before* things become problematic.

Tending activities can range widely, from things that tend to our bodies, our minds, and our homes, to activities that help us switch off for a little while or ones that strengthen connections with others. They might be simple or complex; they don't focus on an immediate pay-off, but nor is it too delayed. Tending might include regular appointments with professionals, such as counselling, spiritual direction, mentoring, or supervision.

From your list of current self-care activities, which fall into 'tending'?

What is a 'bare minimum' that is maintainable for you, but that actively tends you?

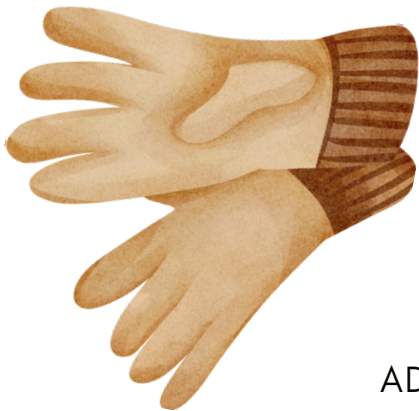
MORE THAN ONE THING

Tending is **holistic**, including all parts of our lives. Just as plants flourish (or not) based on multiple factors - water, sunlight, shelter, soil, nutrients, and more - the same is true in our lives. We have emotional, spiritual, relational, physical needs, and more (see also page 21-23). Unlike recovery, which focuses on the one area needing urgent attention, tending suggests that we keep an eye across all areas.

CHECKING IN WITH OURSELVES

While some patterns of living we set up deliberately, many we just fall into over time. It is easy for tending activities to blur into the background of daily life. Ideally we occasionally have time and energy to reassess how our patterns are working for us, and if they need to shift.

It is not uncommon to suddenly realise that the way we have been doing something for years is no longer the most healthful way of functioning for us, or that the sum total of our life no longer feels sustainable.



What rhythms are currently present in your life?

How intentional/aware are you about these?

Where are your patterns tending you well, where do you need more support?

ADAPTING TO SEASONS

Reflecting regularly about your patterns of living is especially important when we recognise that our needs aren't always constant, but shift depending on circumstances, and different seasons of our life.

Just like plants need different types of tending at different times of the year and different stages of their life cycle, we might also need to shift and adapt our practices, as we enter different stages or seasons.

Sometimes tending will be about maintaining a 'bare minimum' to be well... at other times life may feel rich and abundant, and we can tend ourselves towards great joy. It is not about maintaining constant productivity (or happiness) levels, like a machine, but rather doing self-care in a way that is intentional, but also fluctuating, adapting, and seasonal - responsive to us and our lives.

What type of season do you currently find yourself in?

How are your needs different to a few years ago?

MORE ABOUT GROWTH



Self-care in growth mode is oriented to the future; proactively caring for our future selves.

WHICH DIRECTION TO GROW?

In contrast to recovery and tending which, respectively, focus on the past and present, growth focuses on **future and longer-term thinking**; on building capacity and strength in new ways, or in new directions towards goals, improving our lives to make them healthier and full of things that give joy and connection.

This might look like picking a singular area for expansion or improvement, or it might look more holistic, with attention to multiple factors of your life, which strengthen each other in a unifying direction.

CARING FOR YOUR FUTURE SELF

Self-care in growth mode might be about thinking, dreaming, setting goals, allowing yourself to desire something different. It is about **building a life you don't need to escape from**. It might also then be about planning and preparing, setting up systems, gathering resources, finding support and accountability. Many of these things don't fit the common stereotype of 'self-care', but we encourage you to think about it as caring for your future self.

What do you want/need more or less of?

What are you trying to grow towards?

Where do you find joy in your life?

INVISIBLE AND UNDERGROUND

The type of self-care activities that help with growth might be complex, taking time and effort to enact. Like a plant putting out new roots or shoots underground, these activities don't have any immediate pay-off, and they aren't necessarily highly visible to others either, but **they can work to gradually shift one's health, lifestyle, or direction, towards more desirable ends**.

HOW TO GROW WHEN YOU ARE LOW

Rather than immediately topping up your energy resources, **growth work often takes energy, time, and effort.** This means is hard to do if your wellbeing is already low.

Growth activities often happen with any leftover energy or resources *after* recovery and tending work has been done. But if we can actively allocate some of our resources towards growth, they can also help build our stability, resilience, or capacity to dealing with difficulties... making it easier to enact recovery care effectively, when we have to, *and* to keep up with our tending in an effective way

On the other hand, sometimes we might have to be careful we aren't focused solely on growth activities (for example, a particular big dream or goal) at the expense of the recovery or tending activities that help keep us balanced in the meantime.

A lot of this is seasonal. We can go through certain periods in our lives when we are largely focused on growth (such as full-time study or preparing for a new career), while other periods are more about just getting through, or maintaining a steady norm for a while.



PRUNING

It is also important to note that that growth isn't always about adding things. Pruning is also an important part - recognising where we need to reduce or remove certain things from our lives, so that we have open space and free energy/resources with which to grow.

If you had to pick one longer term thing to focus on, that you knew would really make a difference for you, what would it be?

What do you need to actually get the ball rolling for this?

SAME ACTIVITY, DIFFERENT MODES

When it comes to self-care, it's important to remember that it's a deeply personal journey. It isn't as simple as saying a certain type of activity always counts as a certain mode of self-care. People will do different activities to meet the purposes of each of the different modes. Some activities will have a varying purpose depending on the person, or on *how* it is used.

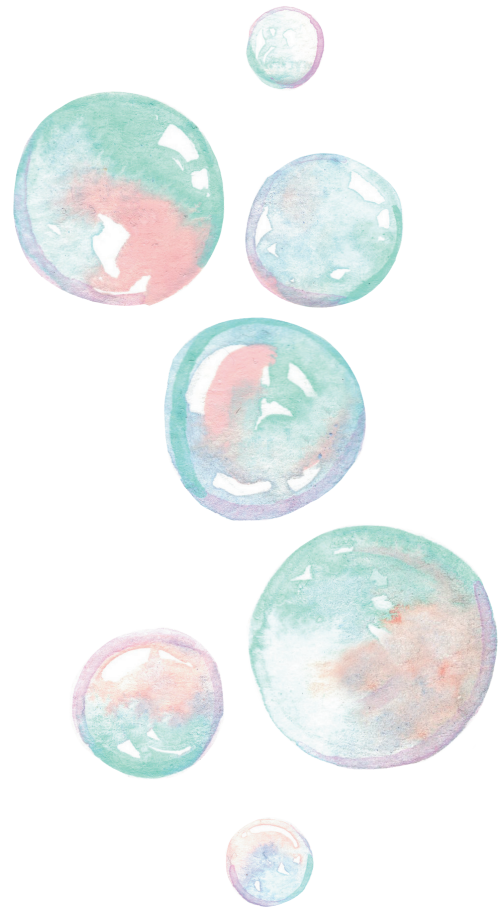
Here's an example: **taking a bath** (which is a stereotypical self-care practice, so a good one to unpack).

At times, jumping in a hot bath could be a **recovery** activity, to do spontaneously, perhaps at the end of a really hard day.

A bath could also be used as a **tending** activity, if you make it a regular practice, in order to tend to your physical body, or to create some valuable alone-time.

While probably not a **growth** activity in itself, a bath *could* also be a space for dreaming, and planning for your future.

Someone might take a bath to meet the different purposes, at different times. The same could be said for cooking a favourite meal, or going for a walk in nature, or meeting up with a friend... which is helpful, as it gives us even more flexibility as to how we use the tools and strategies we already have, to meet our needs more wholly.



Do you have any recovery activities that you could do more intentionally, or more often, and develop into a tending practice?

What growth practices could you turn into a regular rhythm in your life?

There are many models of health and wellbeing that help us to understand all the different factors that are part of it or supportive of it.

What different models of wellbeing have you been taught?

Which ones/parts have you found useful?

CULTURAL MODELS

Health models are based in particular cultures and/or worldviews. These might be particularly useful to help people grounded in the same culture to think through the topic, but we can also learn a lot from exploring models that set out different ways of thinking, to our own norms.

“What Covid-19 has taught us is that there is much more to being well than just avoiding a sickness.”

Sir Mason Durie



For example, while a lot of western health systems and practices have focused on physical health, or health as an individual matter, some other cultural models can be rich models, for all of us, to think more holistically about health. This includes moving away from thinking of someone as either 'healthy' or 'sick'. There is much more to health than simply the absence of illness or infirmity, and the presence of disability does not mean that health is not co-existent. So again, we aim for models that help us recognise that wellbeing is multifaceted.

The Bible speaks of *shalom*, the peace and well-being that comes from **wholeness and connection** - with others and with God. This understanding of health does not see illness as lack or brokenness, but as a facet of human experience. As people with disabilities and chronic illness are part of the collective whole, their inclusion is therefore a vital part of community wellness.



TE WHARE TAPA WHĀ

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori model of 'Te Whare Tapa Whā', the house with four walls, is taught widely. Lots of people, of all cultural backgrounds, find this a really useful way to think about wellbeing.

Created by Sir Mason Durie in 1984, Te Whare Tapa Whā highlights the need to tend wellbeing in multiple different areas, or aspects, of our lives. If we spend more time on one of our wharenuī walls than the others, or neglect one wall altogether, it will affect our overall wellbeing. Here are some prompts for each of these walls...

Taha Tinana (Physical Health)

Taking care of our body's needs supports our ability to focus, connect, and feel good. We don't all have the same level of physical wellbeing; some of us live with chronic health conditions or disabilities. Doing what we can to tend our bodies, not just to avoid illness, is important.

What helps you feel connected to your body?

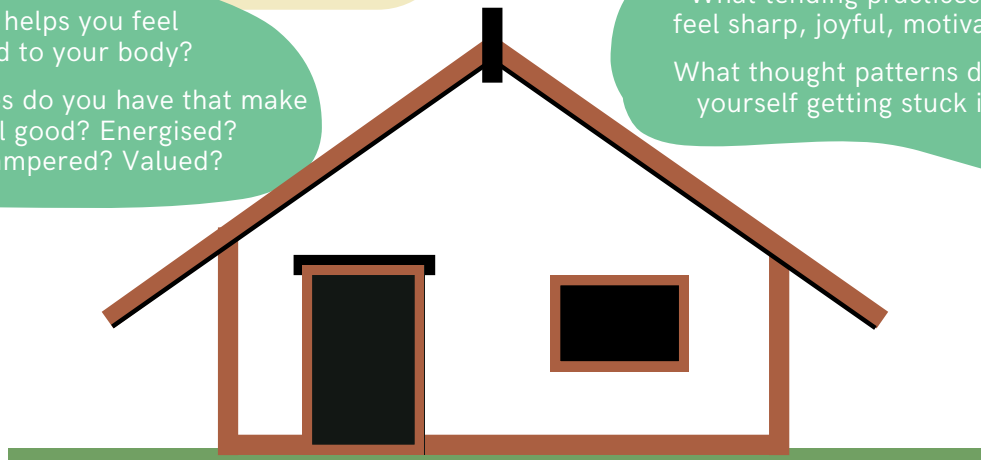
What practices do you have that make your body feel good? Energised? Rested? Pampered? Valued?

Taha Hinengaro (Mental & Emotional Health)

Our thoughts and feelings, as well as our conscience, shape our lives from within. Emotional self-awareness and regulation, as well as being able to communicate what is going on inside us, can help reduce stress and improve mental health.

What tending practices help you feel sharp, joyful, motivated, hopeful?

What thought patterns do you find yourself getting stuck in?



Taha Wairua (Spiritual Health)

Discussions of spiritual practices are often excluded from discussions of health, but we all have a connection to something greater than ourselves, whether it be through religion, nature, cultural heritage, or other means. This aspect shapes our values and traditions, which in turn shape our lives.

What practices help you feel connected to something greater than yourself?

Where have these practices come from?

Taha Whānau (Family and Relationships)

It is important to include social connections in our patterns of self-tending. When we feel connected to others, with flows of support back and forth, our stress is reduced and our wellbeing is improved. It helps us maintain a sense of belonging.

Who supports you? Who do you support?

Who makes you feel seen?

What are your preferred ways of spending time with others?

CONNECTING TO WHENUA

More recently, Te Whare Tapa Whā was expanded to include a fifth aspect: **whenua**. This suggests that connection to land, to nature, and to place, also shape our wellbeing.

What tending practices help you feel grounded, rooted, or connected in to the geographic place and natural environment that you live in?

To where, and to who, do you belong?

In te reo Māori, whenua means 'land'. It can also mean 'country' or refer literally to the ground. On top of this, it is the word for placenta. This isn't accidental, but is a clue to an understanding of the connection between people and the earth (Papatūānuku), as a source of nourishment and support.

ORIENTING IN PLACE

In the Māori worldview, our connection to place is central to who we are. That's why a mihi often starts with naming the different geographic features (mountains, rivers, etc) you are connected back to, ancestrally.

As tangata whenua (people of the land; the indigenous people), Māori have a unique connection to the whenua in Aotearoa. But those of us who have settler or migrant heritage, also have a connection to this place, as tangata tiriti (people of the Treaty). This is what gives us a place to stand here, and when we honour the Treaty, we uphold the valid place of both Māori and Pākehā in Aotearoa, present and future.

Connection to land and place, and a sense of belonging, can be significant for the wellbeing of all people.

"Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua, ko au" - "I am the land and the land is me"

Māori whakataukī (saying)

How might your self-care practices, to do with the land or environment, include reflections on your personal and family histories: including movement and journeys, ideas of ownership, whanaungatanga (connection), kaitiakitangi (guardianship, responsibility, and care)?

AN ECO-SYSTEM OF CARE

NOURISHMENT AND ROOTS

Jesus gave us two commandments: to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39). We can see here the importance of connecting in three directions: with God, with others, and with ourselves.

Like a plant connected into its ecosystem, drawing water and nourishments through its roots, we can connect outward and inward, in a variety of ways.

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:8

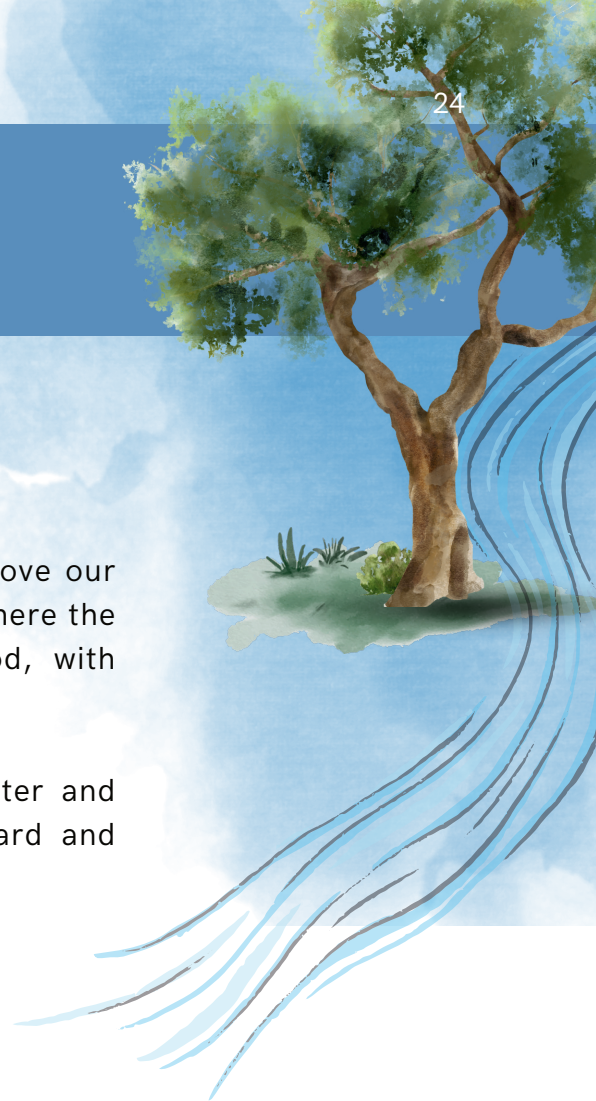
Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

John 7:37-39

CONNECTION WITH GOD

Verses in the Old Testament present the metaphor of a tree by a river, teaching us that being connected to God nourishes us, keeps us alive through hard times. The New Testament affirms that Jesus is that living water. So self-care involves connecting to God intentionally.

This can sometimes include retreating by ourselves, when we need to, it might be to pray, meditate or reflect, read or listen to podcasts, paint or do whatever helps us be present with God, and listen in. It can also be done in collective contexts where we learn, pray, worship, fellowship, and connect to God together.



CONNECTION WITH OTHERS CONNECTION WITH SELF

There are different ways that people make space to connect, put out our roots, and draw nourishment.

Jesus, in his own life and ministry, showed us examples of going away to rest by himself, but also going away and resting with those closest to him.

You might feel that you more naturally gravitate towards drawing refreshment and building energy from time alone or through social activity. We have a lot of labels, like 'introvert' and 'extrovert', that can oversimplify this sort of thing. And the reality is that, although the balance might differ, as Jesus showed, we all need a bit of both.

TIME ALONE

When you spend time alone, do whatever it is that restores and nourishes you. Spend some of this alone time being deliberate about being receptive to God.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Mark 1:35

TIME WITH OTHERS

Fellowship means that connecting to others can also be a way of connecting to God. Make sure the people you choose to rest with are people you find uplifting, encouraging, and life-giving.

And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.

Mark 6:31-32



WE ARE AN ECOSYSTEM

We started with the image of a pot-plant... but would now like to suggest you rethink about yourself as an outdoor plant, in a forest.

We are all connected to each other. Other people affect us, and we affect them. We are an ecosystem; all connected in invisible ways.

The Bible supports and encourages us to think of ourselves this way, especially in the church, using its own metaphor of the body.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:25-27



In the short-term, it is easy to see self-care as selfish. And it might literally be true; to do certain self-care activities you have to set up boundaries, or they take time and energy you could potentially have spent on others.

But there is a bigger picture here. Spending time and energy in caring for ourselves isn't taking away from others' wellbeing. Because we are all connected, it is contributing to the wellbeing of the whole. Not just because you can then 'keep working', or 'work harder' (see page 4), but because your genuine flourishing will spill out to those around you, in subtle but real ways, that will also make a difference to your community.

It is good to give, and it is good to receive too.

As we think of ourselves as part of an ecosystem, we should remember that natural forests are not normally just one kind of tree, but many kinds of plants and trees. All living interconnected together.

It doesn't matter if your needs are different from others. They may be in a different season of life, or they may just be different (in body, mind, or personality) to you. The way they use self-care activities might differ too, perhaps using the same practices as you, but for different purposes.



WE ARE NOT ALL CACTI

Some plants need heaps of water, others can get through a drought without much struggle. Some are constant targets for grazing animals, others don't have that issue at all. Some have tough bark, others have easily broken branches.

People have a huge variety of different needs, for different types of self-care. Your needs are your needs. Fullstop.

What needs do you have, that might be different to some others around you?

How difficult or easy do you find it to voice/explain these, in public or in private?

DIFFERENT ROLES

The many varieties of plant and tree have different roles. The strong roots of one type of tree can hold a riverbank together. Others, when they flourish with thick leaves, provide shelter for smaller plants. Others produce flowers that pollinators can subsist on. Again, the verse about the body of Christ (from page 26) says the same thing about the varied but equally important role of different body parts, in the church and in humanity.

If we can lean into being an ecosystem, knowing that sometimes we are able to receive, and sometimes give, and sometimes both... also knowing that our way of doing so won't always look the same as those we see around us... self-care gets a little easier.

WE CARE FOR EACH OTHER

Stereotypical approaches to self-care focus on things that individuals can do, for themselves, and by themselves... and puts the responsibility on individuals to manage their own wellbeing.

But as we talk about connection, we want to spell out something important: your wellbeing won't (and can't, and shouldn't) depend just on what you can do, all alone, to tend to yourself. Rather, we should tend to each other, and let ourselves be tended to in return.

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.

John 13:14



Who cares for you? At home, behind the scenes, on the job?

How comfortable do you feel, asking or allowing others to do this?

RESPONSIVE AND PROACTIVE

It is great when our care for each other is responsive; when we see a need in front of us, reaching out as best we can, to show compassion and care.

But caring for each other can also be intentional, strategic, and proactive. We can establish patterns, routines, and structures in our families, ministries, organisations, and communities, that work well for everyone (and continually assessing the ones we already have, for how they are going).

CONNECTING TO STRUCTURES OF CARE

On the right are examples of some types of structures of care, that can help us to care for each other in intentional, deliberate, effective, and reliable ways (rather than just relying on individuals responding to what they happen to notice).

These relate to *self-care* in several ways

Firstly, because making it a priority to engage regularly with these structures of care, can be a valuable part of your **tending** practice.

Secondly, because if you don't already have these sort of connections, reaching out to get them started could be part of your **growth** practice.

Thirdly, because if these structures don't already exist in your area of ministry, asking or advocating for them, or even helping set them up, can be part of caring for your future self *and* for others who follow after.

What structures of care can you see in your place/s of work & ministry?

How well do they support you?

What structures would you like to have?

CHAINS OF CARE

e.g. supervision, mentoring. When there is someone behind each person who is doing ministry, leadership, or pastoral care, and someone is also behind them - back and back in an infinite chain. It may also be imagined as concentric rings of a circle.

NETWORKS OF CARE

e.g. leaders networks, professional associations. Connecting people in similar types of positions or roles, who may be spread out, to discuss common challenges, and share mutual support, information, and encouragement.

HUBS OF CARE

e.g. home groups, prayer circles. Smaller groups where people are in closer proximity and able to get to know each other more personally, follow along with each others lives, and offer support and care, as needed, sometimes involving both practical and emotional care.

CULTURES OF CARE

e.g. organisations, communities, or societies where wellbeing is valued and prioritised, not just a buzzword, but lived out intentionally, through both structures and policies, and interpersonal interactions.

WE ARE IMPACTED BY OUR ENVIRONMENT

The growth of a plant depends on more than just the plant itself. Environment plays a big role. In similar ways our ability to self-care, care for others, and build liveable lives, is shaped by the (social, cultural, and organisational) environment in which we live and work. Do they have cultures of care?

Here are some aspects of your ministry environment, you might like to think about:

- **The organizations or institutions we work for:**

How are they run, governed, or led? How many hours do you work? Are you paid fairly? Who do you report to? What are the daily/weekly/yearly rhythms? Are the expectations clear to you, and are they do-able? How are holidays and breaks built into policies? What are the standard policies for dealing with issues?

- **The (local, church, or cultural) communities we are a part of:**

Who is part of (or not part of) this community? Whose voices are loudest, or most respected? What kind of social relationships hold everything together? What do people value and prioritise, in their personal interactions? What are the unspoken norms of communication? What traumas from the community's past, are still present? How do you fit in here and who do you feel connected to?

- **The wider society we live and work within:**

Are there inequalities or tensions between different social groups? What changes are currently happening, that people are having to adapt to? What kind of life opportunities or restrictions, do people experience? What media or popular culture messages are there, about what defines 'success'? What do people believe about a 'good life' and how do they pursue it?

What factors in your environment, might be affecting your wellbeing?

Are there any that are not serving or nourishing you?
Or actively harming you, or others?



WE CAN IMPACT OUR ENVIRONMENT

Given that our wellbeing is related to all of these bigger factors, we suggest that 'self-care' can sometimes involve thinking about how we can change the world around us, to make it more life-giving.

This could be about starting conversations, writing letters, signing petitions, asking hard questions, organising meetings, or lots more options. It could be at the level of your church or organisation, or at the political level, of the local government, or nation.

Of course, this is often slow and long-term work. Which means it also lines up with the 'growth' mode of self-care, in that it is often about investing effort in something that won't have an immediate payoff, but might benefit your future self ... and those who come after you, too.

"To care for the world is to care for the self."

Andrea Gibson

What are the behind-the-scenes changes that could be made in your ministry context, or in wider society, to make it more possible to live a flourishing life?

Who is already doing this type of work, that you could lend your efforts to?

Who can you connect to or collaborate with, who might share that vision? Or how might you start that conversation?

THE BIG PICTURE

We know this is big picture stuff... and probably not what you were thinking of when you opened this resource! But we think it is all part of the same whole. Though we also want to remind you, that it isn't all on you. You may not always have the capacity for this type of work, and that is ok. Just be where you are. And you are not alone.

Ultimately, our hope is that using a 'tending' approach to self-care helps us see our own individual practices as related to others, related to our environments, and related to God's invitation into life, partnership, and flourishing. It is more than just bubble baths (although we love bubble baths); it is more than just getting through the week. It is vital, biblical, and beneficial to your community, to the world, and to you. And you are worthy of it.

We are all facing a lot today, in the world, and in our lives and ministry. We wish you all tenderness, and tending, in the arms of God.

