

SHARPENING YOUR SAW: WHAT IS YOUR SELF CARE PLAN?

By Anne Coffman

In the past few weeks a ministry leader I know had to be hospitalized with complications resulting from exhaustion, and another quit the ministry after less than two years. Obviously, they, their families, and their churches are suffering.

Leading a vital ministry is a marathon—it's important that church leaders stay strong and vital for the duration. So how do we put together a self-care plan that will allow us to finish this marathon?

The answer is in the words of Jesus found in Mark 12:30-31 (NIV): "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ... Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Jesus is asking us to love ourselves enough to understand our own unique needs. A responsible self-care plan for me would not be effective for you. And what works at one lifestage is inappropriate for another—a church leader with young children cannot have the same self-care plan as an unmarried leader. But every plan should include the basics outlined by Jesus.

Strength: Food, sleep, and exercise—are you balanced in these areas? Experts tell us that most North Americans eat too much and sleep

and exercise too little. If you are like me, it will be difficult to make changes overnight. But you *can* make a plan that will take steps in a healthy direction. If you never eat vegetables, it's unrealistic to think that starting tomorrow, you will get all five servings in every day. But you can promise that, starting tomorrow, you will eat at least one more serving.

Mind: Books, ideas and colleagues. What are you reading? Who are you talking with? Who are you listening to? It's important that we expose ourselves to different ideas and approaches. Blogs and listservs are great places to hear about new books and new ideas. If you can't find what you need, start your own!

Heart: Family and friends. How are your relationships? Is your marriage strong? Do you have friends apart from your church where you can talk about your hurts and hopes? Church leadership isn't for the faint-hearted, we need all the loving support we can get. Make sure your circle is wide enough so that you aren't dependent on just a few to meet your heart needs. Don't back off from seeing a therapist if you sense that your emotional life needs more than your friends can give.

Soul: Prayer and scripture. Do you spend time with each? Do you understand how you experience the presence of God? Some of us journal, others spend time outdoors, still others listen to music. Make regular times to be in the presence of God and find soul friends that can share your spiritual battles and triumphs.

These are the basics of self-care. Make a plan for yourself—you will know it's working if you feel balanced and able to meet the challenges of your ministry and your life with joy and gratitude.



After eight years on the staff of a rapidly growing church, Coffman served for ten years as an interim minister where she worked with pastors and churches in transition and crisis. She is now church consultant and the pastor of Olivet Congregational Church in Bridgeport, Connecticut.