



A SELF-CARE PLAN FOR
GLOBAL WORKERS

LEARN TO PREVENT BURNOUT

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A Self-Care Plan for Global Workers / by Sarita Hartz

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*This book is dedicated to all the unsung heroes—
those of you tired at the end of the day because you are laying your lives down for a
beautiful and worthy cause, those of you making sacrifices so others can be free. I
know it's not easy to stop when so many people need you. I wrote this book for you,
because I believe you are just as worthy of love as the women you are rescuing out of
sex trafficking, as the kids you are fostering, as the orphans you are building a home
for, as the refugees you are protecting and providing jobs for, as the child soldiers you
are putting into schools.*

*You are doing an incredible job. And out of all the people you take care of day in and
day out, someone should be taking care of you. I see you. And I see your sacrifice.
And I hope you can take a breath and rest because the world needs you to do that too,
because the world needs your best you.*

Introduction

One of the most difficult things about being a missionary, global worker, or humanitarian, is we often stop taking care of ourselves.

Self-care is a very important aspect of stress management, and yet when there are so many responsibilities and other people to help, we can let our own care fall by the way side. In fact, some of us hold the erroneous belief that to care for ourselves when other people are suffering would be selfish.

We begin to believe that emergency mode and martyrdom are the only ways to live and serve overseas. The tendency is to find more and more meaning in our job, rather than nurturing our identity apart from it.

I myself felt this way. After six years of living full time in a post conflict zone of Uganda, running a nonprofit to rehabilitate child soldiers and women involved in sex trafficking, I was struggling with [burnout](#), [compassion fatigue](#), and [adrenal fatigue](#). But I didn't know it. All I wanted in my heart was to be like Heidi Baker and “stop for the one.” I didn't understand stopping for the one, included myself.

I didn't have words for what I was experiencing then. I just felt shame and guilt at my exhaustion and lessening enthusiasm for the work. But now I do have words, and having healed myself, I work now as a healer to others so they can thrive on and off the field.

It was a long journey, but one of the key factors in my recovery was discovering that **I needed to have a holistic self-care plan** and I needed to write it out and hold myself to it.

By self-care I mean **purposely and actively taking time for yourself to do what rejuvenates and energizes you.** Healing and caring for ourselves allows more resiliency and resources to give out. Self-care is the first step in creating the life you want and preventing burnout.

The problem was, everywhere I looked for a self-care plan that could be adaptable for overseas work, understanding the limitations and unique challenges of serving in undeveloped countries, I couldn't find anything to fit the mold. I had to get really creative to think of things I could actually implement in my environment.

So I decided to create my own. My hope is this can help you prevent burnout and lead you into a healthy, empowered life, even as you serve.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

–Ghandi

Why Self-Care?

Like many of you, I didn't understand why I needed a self-care plan.

I thought if I just gave out everything I had, until my body broke down, that God would be more pleased with me because of my sacrifice. I thought total self sacrifice was just part of the gig and God would just magically fill me up on His own because I had given out. Thinking about myself seemed “selfish” and well, bad.

I didn't understand that **I was responsible for my own self-care** and to be an active participant in my own health and well-being. I didn't realize that self-love was a big part of my ability to love others or that God has made me a steward to care for my own body and soul.

I knew that I needed help when I started developing unhealthy coping strategies like anger and numbing, to deal with the fact that my life had become unmanageable.

The reality of cross cultural work is that the stressful, demanding work of listening to the stories of personal suffering, seeing poverty, dealing with the after effects of war and injustice, rub our souls raw. Yes, we surrender, yes we lay our lives down for our call, yes that involves sacrifice. But we also have a responsibility to loving ourselves, so that we may love others or we will end up burdening others with our issues.

Aid workers tend to suffer higher-than-normal rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, burnout and anxiety.

We need nurturing and nourishing to continue to face darkness with love, peace, and joy.

Self-care is an act of self-compassion that says we are worthy and deserving of love.

“Love your neighbor as you love yourselves.” The idea is that loving ourselves would come first, and out of that flows love for our neighbor. When you feel good, everyone around you benefits.

Self-care is crucial to preventing burnout and maintaining long term sustainability on the field.

It can also increase passion and joy in life and work.

Jesus gave us a perfect template of self-care. Even though he was fully God and fully man, he still needed rest, sleep, food, time with community, time with His Father to unburden His heart. He had needs. He had limits. This is important for us perfectionists to remember.

God made us heart, mind, body, soul, and spirit and made all these interconnected. He made us stewards over our environment and over ourselves. Resting is also an act of faith because it is saying we can't do it, but God can.

God loves you just as much as the people you serve. You are His child. He doesn't want to sacrifice you for the mission. He doesn't need you to work for Him, but He loves to co-create with you.

“We make exhaustion, burnout, busyness, and grit into status symbols. We measure how cool we are by how much we can endure.”

–Alessandra Pigni

Do you Lack Self-Care?

Our body, mind, and emotions keep us informed as to whether they are being taken care of the way they need to be.

Pain is an indicator, like a warning light on the dashboard of our car, signaling something is wrong.

Warning Signs

- Fatigue; exhaustion, low energy
- Repeated illnesses or injuries
- Feeling stressed all the time; overwhelmed
- Feeling angry, irritated, or frustrated much of the time
- Lacking zest or passion for life and work
- Lacking joy
- Lacking motivation; procrastination
- Feeling emotional (crying easily, being short-tempered)
- Being highly critical of self, family, and those you serve
- Feeling cynical; lacking vision for the ministry

“If we can share our story with someone who responds with empathy and understanding, shame cannot survive.”

–Brené Brown

Self-Care Overseas

Self-care in the developing world isn't easy, I get it.

Gyms, and good nutrition, safety, or the comfort of your own language, are often not accessible for you. This can make us want to give up. But I've found that once you commit to the idea of self-care, there are plenty of ways you can get creative to nourish yourself.

Self-care is not a one time thing; it is a routine. Try and check at least one thing off in each category every day. Keep trying. You're going to fail and it's ok. This isn't about perfection, this is about learning you are valuable enough to take care of. You deserve it!

I know there are busier seasons of life and there can be times where we need to give ourselves grace. But when something harmful to ourselves becomes a lifestyle, that requires pausing for reflection. These are just some ideas to get you started. If you have more things to add to the list [please email me](#). Try and find 1 person you can share your plan with to help hold you accountable. Enjoy the journey!

Physical

This area is often the first to go in our work on the field. When our bodies are not taken care of, our minds and souls suffer. Diet and exercise have huge benefits including the reduction and stress and boosting mood.

We are stewards of our body and have a mandate to take care of them including what we eat and how often we exercise. Your body needs time every day to rest and heal otherwise it can lead to recurrent illness.

“How to” Overseas

- Get at least 8 hours of sleep (Use melatonin or calm, magnesium; go to bed earlier, at same time- have a sleep ritual (reading) between 9PM-12 are best hrs for sleeping)
- Turn your phone into airplane mode while you sleep
- Hydrate! (bring a reusable water bottle to office, coconut water)
- Go for an evening walk at sunset with your headphones tuned to worship or your favorite music
- BREATHE! (Draw in a long breath for 4 counts, hold it then release it for 4 counts- it's crazy how often we forget to breathe!)
- Take a 30 minute bath/shower (for bucket showers, boil some hot water and soak- use Epsom salt)

- Exercise- this is essential for detoxing stress, endorphins, and grounding yourself in your body (getting out of head)
- Bring seeds from the US and plant a garden for healthy foods like spinach and vegetables (I did this and it was awesome- lettuce for salads!)
- Plan out your weekly meals to make healthier food choices to avoid the carbs! (avocados, tomatoes, mango, banana, green pepper, greens, onions)
- Bring vitamins from the US if you can't find locally (Vitamins B6, B12, Vitamin C & D, Fish oil, CoQ10, Adrenal rebuilder, Greens formula)
- Get your hair done

- Take your probiotics! (Strong antibiotics for bacterial stomach issues can wipe out your good flora - gut health is linked to reduced illness and emotional health)
- Have a friend bring over healthy food (quinoa, brown rice pasta, gluten-free options, almond butter)
- Get a pedicure
- Take a nap (*Geniuses like Charles Darwin and others used to do this daily*)
- Spend time in nature (I love going for hikes in the mountains)
- Go for a run with headphones in
- Buy a stationary bike and sweat it out (I brought one over with me from the US)
- Keep your blood sugar up with snacks (almonds, yogurt, lara bars)

- Do a workout DVD at home (Beachbody or Jillian Michaels)
- Buy a Christian yoga DVD to do at home
- Stretch every morning on a yoga mat
- Get a massage
- Buy a generator so you can have light when you need it
- Give a long hug to a partner or friend
- Get regular physical check-ups and blood work done- Find a doctor in a capital city you can trust
- De-worm and de-parasite regularly

- Go to a local pool for a swim or bring a baby pool over with you to soak up the Vitamin D from the sun
- Buy a small AC unit for the relief of cool air if you live in hot climate
- Drink green tea or decaffeinated tea instead of coffee (yerba mate, matcha) - you already have too much adrenaline in your system to use stimulants
- Reduce your sugar intake (supplement with fruit)
- Reduce your alcohol intake (*it's easy to let our drinking creep out of control when overwhelmed or stressed- trade out with water with crystal light packets or flavored water*)

- Diffuse essential oils for calm (lavender, wild orange, etc)
- Wrap yourself in a cozy blanket and sip hot tea
- Create a local job: hire someone to help you with chores (laundry, cooking, cleaning)
- Throw papers away; declutter your office
- Go shopping or have a new dress made

Mental & Emotional

This includes the way you feel about yourself and your ability to manage your feelings and deal with difficulties. This means you have tools for coping with difficult situations and maintaining a positive outlook.

Being emotionally healthy means having a sense of contentment, good self-esteem, zest for living and the ability to adapt to change and have fun. It is often our negative beliefs that keep unhealthy patterns in place.

“How to” Overseas

- Have a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly call with a counselor/life coach to process life on a regular basis
- Commit to not working 2 days out of the week- protect your Sabbath
- Don't let negative thoughts spiral around in your head (get them out - write them out; verbally process; cry - don't let them stay in inside)
- Keep a gratitude journal (I love the *5 minute journal*)
- Learn to say no when you need to say no
- Have a home transitional ritual
- Write a blog and process life as it happens
- Do photography or art that taps into your creative energies

- Experiment with cooking a local, cultural food (or just make pizza :)
- Listen to your gut and your inner truth- listen to what your body is telling you it needs
- Stand up for yourself and set boundaries
- Talk to your Board, supporters about having a budget for self-care
- Have a technology fast- *(days of week you don't open computer or go on social media; set rules for times of day you close your computer and phone-nothing after 9pm etc)*
- Get an animal and pet it
- Buy a punching bag and hit it when stressed or frustrated
- Yell into a pillow to release anger

- Have a good, long, body shaking cry
- Light a candle and read a good book
- Take a mental health day - ask yourself what does your soul/body need and do only those things that day
- Hang up some Christmas lights in your room
- Buy yourself some flowers or a piece of art you like from the local market
- Decorate your room or organize it
- Get away to a Safari lodge or to an Airbnb or a jaunt in the capital city
- Go to the movies
- Buy an adult coloring book and color (it's therapeutic, not lame I promise!)

- Work from home 1 day a week
- Learn to delegate, then switch your phone into airplane mode for a few hours
- Listen to an audio guided meditation for 20 minutes and meditate or soak to worship music (*Calm, or Muse for meditation; Alberto and Kimberly Rivera are great for soaking*)
- Watch a comedy show and laugh (Parks and Rec, Crazy Ex-girlfriend, The Mindy Project, Family Guy)
- Watch a sad show and cry (This Is Us- tissue box please, The Sopranos- we used to love to make some kind of pasta dish while doing this:)
- Binge watch Netflix (or pirated DVD's anyone?)
- Do a family staycation with your favorite movies, foods, and board games- lock yourself away from the world!
- Go on vacation (*I recommend trying to do a 3 day mini-once a month- going to a different part of the country that feels restful; longer one every 3 months; 1-2 week trip every 6 months*)

- Create a vision board with scraps of magazines and pictures
- Set aside 30 minutes at the beginning of the week to write out what you hope to accomplish - (celebrate if you're able to mark even half of those off your to do list)
- Tell yourself you're doing a great job
- Don't just talk about work with your partner or colleagues
- If you've witnessed intense suffering call your counselor or talk to a friend to grieve and process- don't stuff or numb the emotions
- Clean the house or work on a project you've been meaning to, to feel accomplished
- Do one task at a time- be fully present while you are doing so instead of multi-tasking

- Give yourself permission to rest
- Take your lunch away from your work desk
- Make a schedule/routine for yourself- have boundaries with your time and with interruptions
- Understand what your triggers are and come up with coping strategies (grounding- hold ice in your hand, smell a particular pleasant smell, put something cold on your forehead for 30 seconds)
- Write out 30 things you love about yourself
- Cook something fun to your favorite music (I personally like making tortillas to Spanish flamenco music :)

- Go to a bookstore and peruse the books
- Have a dance party in your kitchen (*head-bang to the Cranberries or drop it low to some 50 cent*)
- Go on an adventure! (Visit cool tourist or nature sites in your region and remember why you love the place, go camping, travel to a close-by country, etc)
- If you're depressed, try some medication, there is no shame in needing a little extra help- don't ignore trauma or secondary trauma- seek help!
- If you're triggered by anxiety grab as much chewing gum as you can and chew- it helps get you out of your "trauma brain"

Spiritual

We are spiritual beings who need a connection to our Creator in order to feel purposeful and alive. Your soul needs to be nurtured through quiet time, prayer, meditation and reflection.

We need connection to the Source beyond ourselves who can fill us with love and acceptance so we can be full to give out. This area leads to greater self-awareness and growth.

Resilience

Resilient people are characterized by an ability to experience both negative and positive emotions even in difficult or painful situations.

They mourn losses and endure frustrations, but they also find redeeming potential or value in most challenges.

Resilient people look at problems and ask, “What is this trying to teach me?” Resilience is essential for a life of service to others.

Spiritual/Resilience

- Spend alone time with Jesus - invite Him into your day- stop to listen to what He has to say
- Find a book of the Bible to study and use a concordance or other materials
- Write free form in a journal - vent
- Journal and ask God what He loves about you
- Find a safe place with Jesus (Beach, mountains, etc) and imagine yourself together in that place
- Imagine a large, big heart radiating love and compassion and peace towards you
- Try to forgive someone whose hurt you (write a letter you'll never send - ask God for His perspective of this person - let go of judgments)

- Watch Byron Katie's work and learn to do turnarounds
- Own your unconscious commitments that keep unhealthy patterns going in your life
- Build a prayer team of those covering you in prayer
- Grow in self-compassion – treat yourself like you would treat someone else-with kindness
- Read books for personal growth (*Loveability, Present Over Perfect, I Thought It Was Just Me, The Gifts of Imperfection, The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership, Carry On Warrior*)
- Laugh at yourself; be playful; tell jokes
- Ask yourself, “What is this crisis or problem teaching me?”
- Write out your mission statement for your life (The Path)

- Admit your frailties - tell someone when you are overwhelmed and need a break
- Where can you find joy in the middle of this suffering? What beauty do you see?
- Surrender - admit to yourself that it's not all up to you, that some things need to be left to God
- Imagine your worries as an object, and during meditation imagine you turning this burden over to Jesus because He can carry it for you
- Make sure you are doing things that align with your purpose and what creates meaning for you
- Find one positive or redemptive thing that has come out of a negative situation
- Write out positive statements or bible verses and put them all over your home as a reminder

Social

We are social beings created not to live in isolation but within community. If we live in remote areas, we have to be proactive about building connection.

We have legitimate needs for belonging, love, and affection. Maintaining close, personal relationships is vital to our physical and emotional health. Laughing with friends is a powerful stress reducer.

Social

- Start a weekly bible study or reading group with friends (Present over Perfect anyone?)
- Create a fun, weekly tradition (Taco night anyone?:)
- Play: basketball, volleyball, disc golf, ultimate frisbee - start a team
- Send out a newsletter with pictures, stories of your life to connect with people back home
- Make a video of your life and share it
- Take your partner or friend on a date; Take your kids out for a treat
- For the single ladies, organize a girl's night out where you dress up and put on makeup (sorry guys, this one's not for you)
- Start a small exercise group with friends where you work out together
- Read past emails/postcards/letters etc from friends and family reminding you of happier times

- Skype your family and/or friends
- Write a letter to someone you miss
- Make a new friend - reach out to someone you've been meaning to
- Attend a social event you've been wanting to
- Do something nice for one of your friends
- Invite people to come out and visit you
- Let your church and social community know of your need for volunteers/people to share life with
- Befriend some of your staff or beneficiaries and learn fun, local traditions
- Make a friend who is a national
- Learn how to bake something new with someone

- Ask someone to teach you how to make something
- If you're in an isolated area, commit to calling a close friend back home once every 2 weeks
- If you have kids, homeschool together
- Have someone teach you how to ride a motorbike
- Host a dance party and play your favorite old-school cheesy music (TLC:)
- Be vulnerable and tell your truth to someone
- Host a game or trivia night (We love small world, cards against humanity, code names)
- Have that hard conversation you've been meaning to have (brave, gentle, vulnerable communication- own your truth)
- Get a mediator or supervisor involved in team conflict (team conflict is one of the highest causes of burnout- so deal with it don't let it simmer)

“In my experience, burnout only really begins to heal when we learn how to grieve. Grieving is a way of self-care, the antidote to over-professionalism.”

–Rachel Remen

Step 1: Soul Search

1. Do you need rest? An adventure? Connection? Solitude?
2. Which areas are you the weakest right now?
3. What makes you laugh?
4. What makes you relax?
5. What gives you energy?
6. What stresses you out?
7. What hobbies do you wish to pick back up?
8. What can you look forward to with anticipation?
9. What will you do DAILY that refreshes you?
10. What will you do WEEKLY that recharges you?
11. What will you do QUARTERLY that renews you?
12. What will you do ANNUALLY that revives you?

Identify the beliefs that are holding you back from making a commitment towards self-care and debunk them so you can truly commit yourself to this process.

“The hero’s journey is one of acknowledging one’s shadow, limitations, needs, and capacities. Heroes are always flawed before they are invincible.”

–Alessandra Pigni

Step 2: Create Your Plan

- Try not to make this another to do list. This plan should feel nourishing to your soul, as though you are finally giving yourself permission to take care of yourself and take a break.
- Take baby steps. Don't overwhelm yourself with unattainable ideals. Start with 5 minutes of meditation vs. 30 minutes. Pick one thing off your plan and try to implement it that first week.
- Give yourself grace. You're going to fail and that's ok. You don't have to be perfect. This is about changing a way of life and habits and it will take time. Celebrate your small victories.

- Don't listen to your inner critic. Your inner critic will tell you that you can't change and you can't try anything new. In stillness, find the voice of God or your kinder self and listen to that voice. The most important thing is to be kind to you. You're strong, you can do this.
- Make it practical and personal to you. This isn't about comparison or what feels good for someone else, this is about finding things that you love or enjoy, or fills your tank and it's ok if that's different than what someone else does. Practically write it into your schedule so it doesn't get overtaken by other demands.

“Each of us has to carve out our own ‘rituals’ without turning self-care into another to do list. Making time every day for something that nourishes our body and soul is the equivalent of brushing your teeth every day.”

–Alessandra Pigni

Sample Self-Care Plan

Physical	Mental & Emotional	Spiritual & Resilience	Social
Buy a workout DVD and exercise 3 x per week	Have a convo with my boss about working more in the area that gives me the most meaning	Get up at 6am to spend an hour with Jesus every morning or plan to do it at 6pm every evening	Call my best friend once every 2 weeks
Make my lunch in the morning with greens from my garden and take it with me	Schedule a session with my counselor or life coach	Read 1 personal growth book per month	Plan a date night for my partner
Get some melatonin and go to bed by 10pm	Do the 5 minute journal every morning and evening	Listen to soaking music and imagine myself releasing my burdens to Jesus	Ask that cool girl to have coffee with me
Put out my vitamins the night before so I remember to take them	Shut off my work emails and computer at 6pm	When I'm worried, write down 1 positive thing I'm learning from the experience	Plan a mini-vacay with friends once a month to decompress from where I live
Take my water bottle with me to work	Download a guided meditation to do 3 x per week	Imagine myself in a safe place with Jesus receiving His love for me	Host a Taco night 1 x per week
At lunch sit in the sun and take 5 deep breaths	Hold an ice pack on my forehead when I have swirling thoughts	Play worship music and sing along	Join a book club (or start one)

My Self-Care Plan

Physical	Mental & Emotional	Spiritual & Resilience	Social

“One of the things I found was the importance of rest and play and the willingness to let go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as my measure of self-worth.”

-Brene Brown

I'm so proud of you for taking this first, courageous step to begin to care for yourself.

I promise that as you do so, you will gain renewed energy and purpose to fulfill the call on your life. Self-care plans are a wonderful tool to implement prior to burnout.

If you're already in burnout, more radical interventions might be needed. If you find yourself getting stuck in the process, or recognizing some negative beliefs or patterns you'd like to work through, or you just don't want to feel so alone, definitely [schedule a free 30 min session with me](#). Through life coaching, it is my great joy to see people receive healing and begin to transform their lives.

Remember, you are worth it! :)