



According to Google Trends, the number of searches for “self-care” has nearly quadrupled since 2018.¹ It’s a huge buzzword. Everybody is talking about “living their best life”. It’s common to encourage people with the phrase “you do you”. People are constantly talking and posting about their self care. From the pancakes they made on their own and ate in bed, to the marathons they’re running, to the documentaries they’re watching while eating popcorn with family, much of what we do to unwind, cope, and deal with life can be traced back to self care.

So what should Christ followers do in response to the self care movement that we’re in? Should we embrace it fully? Should we reject it? Should we engage in aspects of it while rejecting other aspects of it?

If we’re all honest, we all engage in self care. We all do things we enjoy (hopefully), in order to get the most out of life. And even Moira Lawler’s article “What Is Self-Care, and Why Is It So Important for Your Health?”, featured on everydayhealth.com, states that;

*Self-care is not synonymous with self-indulgence or being selfish. Self-care means taking care of yourself so that you can be healthy, you can be well, you can do your job, you can help and care for others, and you can do all the things you need to and want to accomplish in a day.*²

¹ <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/>

² <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/>

Wouldn't Solomon himself agree? He wrote, "There is nothing better for a person than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work. I have seen that even this is from God's hand." He also wrote, "It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts." "Here is what I have seen to be good: It is appropriate to eat, drink, and experience good in all the labor one does under the sun during the few days of his life God has given him, because that is his reward." "So I commended enjoyment because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat, drink, and enjoy himself, for this will accompany him in his labor during the days of his life that God gives him under the sun." and "Go, eat your bread with pleasure, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart, for God has already accepted your works." (Eccl. 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7)

God certainly wants us to take care of ourselves. He gave us physical bodies. He gave us things to enjoy- great food, sex, endorphins from exercise, sleep, naps, great books, films, coffee, sunsets, vacations, dates, walks, the beauty of nature, road trips, sports teams, racquetball, alcohol (must be in definite moderation), music, clothing, blankets, hugs, and even tobacco (must be in moderation).

Paula Gill Lopez, PhD, an associate professor in the department of psychological and educational consultation at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut, says the need for self-care is obvious. "We have an epidemic of anxiety and depression," she says. "Everybody feels it."

Self-care is part of the answer to how we can all better cope with daily stressors, explains Kelsey Patel, a Los Angeles-based wellness expert. It's work stress. It's the stress of trying to keep up with the pace of daily life, which technology has hastened more than ever (just think how many emails come flooding into your inbox each day). "People are feeling lonelier and less able to unwind and slow down, which makes them feel more anxious and overwhelmed by even the simplest tasks," Patel says.³

Is self care the sole solution for all the anxiety and depression that we experience? Can the worries of our lives be solved by going for a walk? Can they be solved by having sex? Can they be solved by getting good sleep? Can they be solved with Door Dash delivered Chipotle and a Netflix binge? These things surely might **feel** good. They might help in **some** aspects.

³ <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/>

But what did Jesus have to say about the anxiety and depression we all face? This is what He said in the sermon on the mount, his most quintessential teaching on these subjects;

25 “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? 27 Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying? 28 And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. 30 If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith? 31 So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. 34 Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt. 6:25-34)

Our culture and the world tells us to solve all our anxiety and depression by making ourselves feel better. Jesus, on the other hand, commands us not to worry. He says not to worry about our life- not to worry about dying, sickness, trouble, persecution, or even dying for our faith.

Jesus tells us not to worry about what we’ll eat and drink. Jesus tells us not to worry about what clothes we’re going to have on our backs. He says that life is more than food and our God breathed bodies are more than the clothing we put on them. He says that God takes care of the birds of the sky and feeds them, and we’re worth more than they are. He said we can’t add one moment to our life span by worrying. He said that God decorates the fields with beautiful wildflowers, and will take care of what we need to wear. He said we shouldn’t worry about all this stuff, constantly saying “what will we eat”?, “what will we drink”?, and “what will we wear”? Because people of the world that are outside of the people of faith (the Gentiles), seek after these things. And God knows that we need them. God knows we need food to enjoy and nourish us. We need fluids to survive, and can enjoy those also, and we need clothes on our backs, roofs on our heads, and financial provision to be able to live. God knows we need all that stuff!

But what are we to do instead of worry? *We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. (v.33)* So we’re not to

be focused on the things of the world, but focused on the things of God. Yes, that's right, even in America, where the things of the world are constantly stuffed in our faces!

So Jesus is saying, though a lot of self care and soul care practices intertwine and overlap, ultimately, soul care, if not **just** as important, is actually **more** important than self care! This is exactly what Paul was talking about when he wrote to his protegee Timothy;

8 For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (1 Tim. 4:8)

So how do we go about "seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness"?

Acts 2:42-47 shows the practices of the early disciples of Jesus in the early Church, and covers a lot! It's the scriptures that we, at Streetlight Community Church, pull our vision from and highlight on our [website](#). Let's go through it bit by bit and see how these early disciples practiced soul care and self care. First we'll look at it as a whole, and then we'll highlight certain parts of it. We're gonna do this color coded to highlight three aspects of these practices which actually tie into our vision of inviting everyone into a lifelong relationship with Jesus;

42 (The early disciples) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

First, we'll look at the section highlighted in blue that focuses on the early Church's "in-reach" to one another as fellow disciples of Christ:

44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts. (Acts 2:44-45; 46b)

The early followers of Christ were together and held all things in common. They put their political, social, economic, racial, cultural, religious, and ethnic differences in a

secondary category in order to make their connection via Christ their ever-increasing primary focus! They were unlikely friends! Just think of it, when Jesus sent the apostles out in pairs of twos, He intentionally connected Simon the Zealot, a radical, violent revolutionary who was trying to overthrow Roman rule and set up Israelite control, with Matthew the tax collector, an Israelite who sold out to Rome and collected taxes from the Israelites for them, getting wealthy and benefiting from the exorbitant fees. These dudes would have hated each other like a radical leftist Marxist and a radical right White Nationalist would today. But in Christ, they were ever-increasingly **brothers!!!**

This didn't mean that the early believers denied their cultural, ethnic stories, or adopted a first century version of "nation-blindness" or "ethnicity-blindness". On the contrary, their stories were very much a part of who they were, and their stories were being redeemed by Jesus Christ bit by bit!

The early followers of Christ were wildly generous. They sold surplus things and real estate that they owned, they distributed them to the early Church leaders, and the early Church leaders were faithful to take care of the needs of the people.

In fact, Acts 2:45 was where early communists got their idea for government, but they left God out of it entirely so it became wildly corrupted. But the idea was that everyone would do their part, work hard to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind their own business, and to work with their own hands, as the early leaders commanded them, so that they may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone. (1 Thess. 4:11-12). And then with this strong collaborative work ethic in mind, they could be generous and take care of those who had less. This ethos of the early believers was an expectation, to the point where the apostle John could poignantly write: "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother or sister in need, yet closes his heart against them, how does God's love abide in that person?" (1 John 3:17)

This might be hard for individualistic capitalists to grapple with, because we're a culture and economy that depends so much on our own individual efforts and "manifest destiny". But we need to understand that the culture of the early Church was much more communal than ours, and we certainly could benefit from studying how they lived and operated!

This is why we as a community take love offerings to help people when they have needs, or hit a crisis, or just need a boost. We do it on Sundays and we utilize social media to raise funds where needed as a community. It's because we're imitating the early Church. We do this for Christ followers in our community whenever we're able to. We also do this for those outside the Church whenever we're able to, but more on that later (that'll give you a hint to why the blue and green color coding was a little mixed together in the full text of Acts 2:42-47! 😊)

The early Christ followers broke bread from house to house, and ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts. They did life together, because in this context, the reality of sharing a table and eating together meant *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*)- which is the word in Acts 2:42, and means fellowship, which connoted a close mutual association.⁴

When we say we want to have a close mutual association with one another as followers of Christ, that doesn't mean that we're talking about being codependent with one another, stalking one another, being up in each other's business in unhealthy ways, trying to get people to constantly bail us out, buy us meals, and talk each other's ears off while not contributing or giving back.

It's also not talking about the opposite- which is so common in our culture- a culture of independence where no one leans on each other, everyone fend for themselves, everyone pulls themselves up by their bootstraps, and we stuff all our struggles and sins into inner compartments while getting together for an hour or two a week and being fake.

Koinonia fellowship is **healthy interdependence**. It's building up trust with trusted people. It's speaking the truth in love. It's appropriate sharing. It's asking for prayer when it's needed. It's admitting we're struggling when we are. It's encouraging one another, pouring into one another, and building one another up in Jesus.

And that's why [DNA Groups](#) are our first priority as a Church. They're one of three priorities alongside Sunday Gatherings and partnerships with Missional Allies to engage in Mission Work and equally important as those other two, but they're vital. They're groups of 3-5 people, because when a group has 6 people or more, often the introverts quiet down and defer while the extroverts dominate. They're usually (not always) gender specific, because though males and females struggle with many similar non-gender specific sins, they also struggle with some gender specific sins, and we want safe spaces for people to be real. They meet weekly. We're moving towards training disciple makers to lead the groups because we want each one to have a point person that facilitates and disciples the other people involved in them. We want to move them towards being multipliable, where the people being disciplined in a group will eventually start groups of their own filled with people who want to be disciplined by them. They're meant to be groups that dig into scripture together. They're groups where people pray together. They're groups where individuals in them dig into scripture on their own and text it to each other. They're groups where individuals send each other prayer requests via text during the week. They're groups where there is openness and vulnerability, and people talk about what is really going on in their lives.

⁴ Swanson, J. (1997). [Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek \(New Testament\)](#) (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

In the groups, [We utilize the discipleship tools of 3D Movements](#) to help people to walk out their faith in day to day life as well. These tools help us in the following ways through offering easily transferable visual aids, and they help us in the following ways:

1. We're pursuing lives of grace empowered, forgiveness fueled, perpetual repentance and growth. ([The Circle](#))
2. We're pursuing a balance of time alone with God, time with Christ followers, and time on mission. ([The Triangle](#))
3. We're pursuing a balance of working and resting well to the point where we are able to work from rest. ([The Semi-Circle](#))
4. We're staying aware of where other fellow disciples around us are at in their journey towards Christ and how to help them get to next stages of growth and ownership of their faith. ([The Square](#))
5. We're looking to find out the ways that the Lord has gifted us and lean into those gifts while also knowing our weaknesses and leaning into the strengths of others. ([The Pentagon](#))
6. We're looking to have lives of powerful prayer based around Christ's teaching on prayer. ([The Hexagon](#))
7. We're looking to have a full balance in all the aspects of our spiritual life. ([The Heptagon](#))
8. We're looking to speak the truth in love and know how we balance truth and love. ([Invitation and Challenge Matrix](#))
9. We're looking to be a witness for Jesus to the world in all the complex ways that Jesus taught us to witness! ([The Octagon](#))

Having a transferable language of discipleship isn't the centerpiece of our walk with Jesus, but is helpful! We hope to be a part of furthering a movement in Akron, Ohio of fully committed disciples who invite any and everyone into a lifelong relationship with Jesus!

Second, we'll look at the section of Acts 2:42-47 highlighted in red, which focuses on the "upward" worship of God that the early Church participated in together:

42 (The early disciples) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple. (Acts 2:42-43; 46a)

The early disciples of Jesus sought the kingdom of God and His righteousness by seeking the soul care that came from gathering together as one body, as often as they could. They encouraged one another constantly. They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles- those who had walked with Christ, and this obviously included

the Old Testament scriptures, all the principles within them and how some of them pointed to Christ. This also would gradually come to include the writings of the early Christ followers- gospels, letters & epistles that eventually made up the New Testament. The early apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers, deacons and elders co-labored together in the early Church (Eph. 4:13), to instruct, exhort, encourage, strengthen, build up, and challenge the early Christ followers. Miraculous things happened by the power of the Holy Spirit through the lives of committed disciples of Jesus to display His power and authority.

And these kats met in the temple **every day**. They didn't just meet together on Sunday. They met together to worship, to hear from the Word, to be taught, to pray, and to break bread, which not only referred to the communion table and remembering the body and blood of Jesus, but also of eating meals together and digging deep into the lives of one another.

That's why Streetlight Community Church offers [Sunday Gatherings](#) once a week. We don't try and make people come and get together every day. I'm sure y'all would just love that! 😊 When we gather intentionally, regularly and consistently as a larger group to focus on Jesus, to worship Him, to pray, to learn from Him through the Word of God, to be together, encourage each other, forget our differences, and be one in Him, something powerful happens. And it especially happens amongst those who are seeking Him as fully committed disciples all throughout the week!

There's a powerful missional aspect to the larger gatherings of the Body of Christ as well. People in the neighborhood of Kenmore, many of whom are transient, constantly pop in and out of our gatherings, and as we seek the Lord and live for Him collectively together, people who don't know Him yet or are seeking Him get a taste of Him! That's another important aspect of our Sunday Gatherings that we can't forget about! And we do these gatherings inside at First Glance (943 Kenmore Blvd. Akron) from October-April to focus more on building one another up as disciples, and this is training for the time when we'll be outside across the street meeting out in the open on Kenmore Blvd. from May-September, to focus more on being a witness to folks in the neighborhood and people on the streets.

Lastly, we'll look at the section of Acts 2:42-47 that we highlighted in green, which focuses on the "outward" mission of the early Church:

45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:45; 47)

You'll notice I originally had verse 45 in blue, with the words "all" and "any" in green. That's because the early Church did sell their possessions and property, distributing proceeds to those who had need *in* the Church and among the people of God. But they didn't only do this for fellow disciples of Jesus. Following Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), they did it for **everyone that they could**, no matter what they believed, no matter what they lived like, and no matter how sinful their behavior was.

Years later, after this practice had continued for centuries, the last pagan emperor, Julian the Apostate, recognized that the Christian practice of compassion was one cause behind the transformation of the faith from a small movement on the edge of the empire, to cultural ascendancy. Writing to a pagan priest he said:

"When it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, then I think the impious Galilaeans [i.e., Christians] observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy." ***[They] support not only their poor, but ours as well***, and all men see that our people lack aid from us."

In fact, Julian proposed that pagan priests imitate the Christians' charity in order to bring about a revival of paganism in the empire.

Julian's program failed because, among other reasons, the polytheism of ancient Rome was unable to sustain the kind of self-sacrificial love and compassion that came from disciples of Jesus.⁵

Once we heard of a house fire that happened in our neighborhood. None of the people involved were people that were a part of Streetlight, but we took a love offering for them on Sunday to help them through. We heard of someone outside of the Church who tragically lost their little daughter and took a love offering for them. It's a small thing, and this has been a practice of Christ followers for millenia- to care not only for our own, but for those in need around us as we're able.

In the midst of praising God the early Church "enjoyed the favor of all the people, and every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved".

We as a Church body don't want to solely exist to disciple, build up, and strengthen existing Christ followers. We want to be on mission and reach out to those outside the Church with the love of Christ. So we intentionally team up with a number of [missional allies](#) who are doing good things for Christ as Kingdom Builders and people of peace in

⁵ <https://biblemesh.com/blog/the-compassion-of-early-christians>

our neighborhood and in the city of Akron as a whole. Here's our current missional allies:

1. We partner with First Glance Youth Center,
2. We partner with Better Kenmore CDC,
3. First Glance's Hip Hop Program and Akron Dream Center's Hip Hop Program,
4. Just a Dad from Akron,
5. Urban Vision in the North Hill Neighborhood
6. The And Campaign
7. Love Akron
8. Srina Tea House & Cafe
9. Ethicrace Clothing Co., and
10. JOBS (Jump On Board for Success)

We want to get into the mix with those outside the Church and be present, build relationships, discern what God is doing in the lives of people who don't know Him yet, build the Kingdom, be generous with people, share love and encouragement, share Jesus, pray for people, and seek the Holy Spirit for the miraculous in our interactions! So we mix it up with Urban youth. We hang out and participate in community events. We make music. We support some great t-shirt companies and a food service place that does good work in the community and creates "third spaces" for people to hang out and build relationships. We're looking to be a biblical witness in the city and in the political sphere. We're looking to collaborate with other ministries and Churches who love Jesus and build the Kingdom. We're looking to mentor young people and help them find their way through life, and more often than not the relationships are reciprocal!

My friend Cat is a great example. I met her in 2018. She was an atheist at the time. She wanted nothing to do with Jesus or Church. She was a talented rapper and she connected with First Glance' hip hop program, which I pioneered and officially started running fully in 2019. Five years after I met her, after sharing plenty of meals in the program, hearing her rap skills, making beats for her, recording her original music, sharing some life, counseling her when she was going through stuff, telling her about Christ, and connecting her with other people who love Jesus who also poured into her, she is now a follower of Jesus who just visited Streetlight's Sunday Gathering for the first time this past Sunday. Mission work is a long marathon but it's worth it! Praise the Lord!

So let's compare all that we just discussed! To conclude, self care is good and needed.

Self-care includes everything related to staying physically healthy — including hygiene, nutrition, and seeking medical care when needed. It's all the steps an individual can take to manage stressors in his or her life and take care of his or her own health and well-being.

Self-care does not mean the same thing for everyone. Different people will adopt different self-care practices, and even your own definition might change over time. An article published in 2020 noted that longevity in the 21st century depends on abiding by healthy practices — such as exercising, avoiding toxic habits, and following a healthy diet — and also embracing a positive lifestyle all around. Paying attention to your well-being involves asking yourself big questions (such as “What brings me satisfaction?”) and then finding ways to get there.

Exercise, Sleep, Diet, and spending time outside in nature have been well-researched and linked to a longer life. Self-care routines like determining which activities bring us joy, replenish our energy, and restore our balance are important. Journaling, starting each day by slowing down for five minutes and setting intentions for our day, eating breakfast, reflecting on what we're grateful for each night, putting our phone on airplane mode for a half hour before bed each night to release ourselves from the flurry of notifications, calling a friend just to say hello, taking up a relaxing hobby, picking a bedtime, and sticking to it,⁶ These are all good things!

And to add to that, if we feel a sense of demoralization or sadness from the challenges of mounting or establishing self or soul-care practices, it's best to get help and support. There may be barriers to caring for ourselves from past trauma, mental health issues, or family situations that may be making it more challenging to get started. Seeking support from trusted counselors and behavioral health providers (like therapists), a trusted primary care doctor, or a close friend are things we should definitely do if we're able.⁷ If we're not able to afford help we should apply for financial help wherever we can. I couldn't recommend all these things more.

But I'll add that self care doesn't have to be selfish. For us as followers of Jesus, there should always be a flavor of His selflessness that seasons and infiltrates our self care! I feel like we're in an era where followers of Christ justify selfishness in the name of self care far too often. I think that often comes from a genuine place of burn out. It can come from a place of frying ourselves on technology and information overload. It can come from a place of being too busy. But we don't want our priorities out of whack as Christ followers. And we never want to forget where the source of our real life comes from-

⁶ <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/>

⁷ <https://www.everydayhealth.com/self-care/>

Christ Himself! Plus, Christ has provided a multitude of avenues for us to continue to get soul care and grow in Him! May we seek His Word, seek Him in prayer, seek the Spirit, seek the right Christ following friends to walk towards Him with, and seek the Church community that points us towards God, builds disciples, and is on mission to the neighborhood, town, and/or city that surrounds it!

One last thing- God cares more about you than you could ever care about yourself! So invite His soul care into all your self care, and let Him guide it and lead it! Let His word be infused into it! Let prayer to Him be soaked into it! Let the seeking of the Holy Spirit dominate it! Let your times of self care remain good for you while also becoming times of worship! Don't ever let yourself dominate your self care but invite the Lord into it to make it simultaneous self **and** soul care! That way the Lord will guide you! He'll help you to know what to cut out, what to moderate, what to enjoy, what to prioritize, and what to live for! He can guide us better than we could ever guide ourselves into Him!