

22nd November 2025

Self-care

**“Self-love, my liege, is not so vile a sin
As self-neglecting.”**

William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

“Self-care, and how important it is”, is an issue I come back to often. In all the caring professions, religious or not, this is the truth: if we don't care properly for ourselves, how can we be expected to care for others?

Some years ago, when I suffered from the self-inflicted tyranny of overwork, I worked with a Christian Counsellor to help to sort myself out, to identify, and try to deal with, the root causes of my drivenness. At one point, my Counsellor asked me who my heroes were, the people in Church circles I felt, consciously or subconsciously, I was trying to emulate. I rhymed off a short but important list. And the more names I voiced, the broader her smile became. “Why the grin?” I asked. “They're all dead!” she replied. “And, of the ones I know, most of them died of overwork.” It was the wake-up call I needed, and a moment I've never forgotten. “And anyway,” she concluded, “if you kill yourself with stress, will you not be depriving your Lord of many more years of productive service?”

I was sharing this issue in supervision through a charity I work with, and my supervisor said this: “I'm just back from a holiday in the sun, and we went through the usual pre-flight stuff with the cabin-crew. You know what I mean – lifejackets, emergency exits, and the like. He came to the bit about, ‘In the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will drop down.’ And then he said something that I'd heard dozens of times before, but it hasn't really registered. ‘Make sure you fit your own oxygen mask before you help someone with theirs.’ And there it was! Self-care! Not *selfish*-care, or self-centred-care, but *sensible*-care. Get yourself sorted, and *then* you'll have the capacity to help someone else get sorted too.”

I liked that! It's a metaphor I'll almost certainly use again. Fit your own oxygen mask before you help someone else with theirs. Care for yourself, and then you'll have the capacity to care for others – and to *keep* caring for yourself and for them, hopefully for years to come.

Wouldn't it be tragic if any one of us deprived our Lord of years of love and service because we were guilty of the sin of self-neglect?

A prayer for today

Love my neighbour as myself? Goodness! I need to start loving myself too!