**Singles- why you need to self-care to finish your race by Vicki Legge**

Years after closing a single’s ministry due to ill health from burnout, I met up with a lady from the group whose life had spiralled away from the church which she partly attributed to the demise of the group. My burnout had consequences for others, not just me. Self-care allows you to fulfil your purpose and care for others, without burning out or wearing out.

**The image of the race**

If you are a Christian you may have heard a saying, ‘I’d rather burn out then rust out in service of the Lord’.1 This is used to inspire people to serve in a variety of ways, respond to needs, love and help others, and be busy. This will lead to overload, burnout and compassion fatigue.

Using the Biblical imagery of a race, it helps to see it as a marathon, not a sprint. You are required to pace yourself to reach the prize at the end. The Bible says:

* ‘…my only aim is to finish the race...” Acts 20:24 NIV
* ‘...And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us…’ Hebrews 12:1 NLT
* ‘...I press on to reach the end of the race…’Philippians 3:14 NLT

What’s your race?

**Singles who disqualify themselves from the race**

**Christine Caine, founder of A21, an organisation that is working towards the end of human trafficking, in her book *Unstoppable* uses the analogy of a race to run in life. She writes, ‘God has an external purpose for the whole body of Christ and a divinely chosen part for every single believer. He has uniquely designed and selected each and every believer to fulfil his or her purpose.’ 2**

**I don’t know about you but sometimes I doubt that this includes me as I see my brokenness and what is wrong with me. Christine confronted this with, ‘…when we give God our brokenness, it qualifies us to be used by God to carry a baton of hope, restoration and grace to others on the sidelines who are broken. What should have disqualified [Vicky] from the race was the very thing that qualifies her for it.’ p43 Insert your name in the brackets and reflect on your race.**

**Her words inspired my journey of reflection – I have underlines and notes scribbled all over the pages of the book and filled pages in my journal, prompted by encounters with her words and the Biblical basis she underpinned them with. I wrote that, ‘what should disqualify me from ministry, the many facets to my brokenness, is what qualifies me for ministry to people who experience the same. My facets include, as a single parent I am under-resourced in time and money and loving support. I have experienced the grief of divorce and battle ill-health, but with God have found new life and health. Each facet shows the restoration of God and offers hope to others.’ A pink sticky note on my computer reminds me: if you have hope to give, the world needs to hear it.**

**The world needs your hope as you run your race, and being single may be a facet of that.**

How can you ensure you can finish it? Self-care.

**Self-care is not selfish**.

You may buy into the unspoken principle of self-sacrifice and service, and the notion of putting value on yourself and energy into caring for yourself, clashes with this belief. The idea of taking care of yourself is counter-intuitive. But self-care is not selfish. Self-care allows you to run your race to the end. It refreshes you and enables giving of yourself from a full tank.

**Self-care is stewardship**.

Christians believe the body is created by God. Stewardship of your body is caring for it so you can do whatever it is you are called to do. The authors of the Daniel Plan Devotional raise the question, “If our bodies aren’t healthy enough, how can we serve Him?” They add, “We need our bodies to pray, proclaim the gospel, and help the needy.” 3

When I was in hospital with the illness the forced me to close the singles ministry, doctors intimated it could be stress/overwork related. I had a distinct impression from God that He was unimpressed about my lack of caring for the body He had created, and admonished me for my unavailability to answer His call because illness sidelined my work and ministry. Since then I have taken self-care so seriously that I have researched what stress does to our bodies, changed the way I care for myself (still a work in progress!) and started teaching people how to restore balance and avoid compassion fatigue.

**Self-care is loving yourself**.

Loving yourself may go against what you have been taught as a Christian. Jesus said, “Love others as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Commentaries on this verse say Jesus is not commanding arrogant self-love and conceit, but shows the assumption that His followers would love and care for themselves. Loving yourself is not egotistical or putting yourself above others. It’s knowing you have worth as you are created by God and you are loved by Him. In response to His love for you, you love others. 4,5,6

**Self-care for singles**

If you’re single, I don’t need to tell you the demands you face and the difficulty you may have finding time to self-care, especially if you are involved in ministry. The demands increase if you are caring for someone else such as parent or are a single parent. You are responsible to earn money, do all the housework and gardening, shop and cook, care for others, pursue your calling and look after yourself. I purposely put looking after yourself at the end of the list because that is how it is treated. Much of the time you don’t get to it, and when you do, it’s with the leftover available time and energy.

Remember self-care is not selfish, its stewardship and needs to be a priority.

**How to self-care**

Self-care will enable you to keep running your race without ‘burning out’, or ‘wearing out’.

Self-care includes:

* Rest
* Filling your tank
* Boundaries
* Managing stress
* Controlling your thought life
* Caring for your health
* Finding the balance between caring for you and caring for others
* Developing priorities
* Promoting healthy relationships
* Pursing your passions

**Putting legs on it**

Ask yourself some questions:

1. What is your race?
2. What is your attitude to self-care? Do you think it is selfish and goes against your belief that you should be self-sacrificing? How have your views changed in reading this article?
3. How are you stewarding your body? What’s one thing you can do to self-care?

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