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6/01/2018 | Monthly Topic, Self care

The revolutionary act of self-care

by Rozella Haydée White

I've come to believe that the most revolutionary relationship I have—not counting my relationship with God—is my relationship with myself.

I believe that we are called to love ourselves so that we can love our neighbor. I believe that loving God leads to loving self. When we love self, we practice how we are called to love others. Then when we love others, we love the incarnate God. And this cycle continues, leading us deeper into love with the One who is love.

Not only is my relationship with myself the most revolutionary, but it's also the most important. For some of you, this may be a hard concept to embrace. I believe that our relationship with ourselves comes before any and every relationship that we have with other people—with our spouses, our children, our family, friends and strangers. I use Jesus' teaching on the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:36-39 as precedent.

As I've experienced more of life, I've also come to recognize that the quality of our relationship with self can reveal a lot about the quality of our relationships with others. There are a couple of ways this can play out. When I am gracious to myself, I can be gracious to others. I've also found the opposite to be true – when I am judgmental or impatient with myself, I have the tendency to be the same with others.

Or maybe your love for others outweighs your love for yourself. This looks like you giving your all to another but not taking the time to care for your own needs. You run from place to place, or relationship to relationship, giving without limits until you find yourself dry and exhausted. Maybe resentment starts to creep in when you consider all that you are doing for others, and yet, there is no

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one doing for you.

What if God has been inviting you not just to rest but to remember that you are first called to love God and love yourself? What if living out the commandments in that order gives you boundless energy to love others in ways that God is asking you to? What if stopping and caring for yourself is the missing link for you to live a full life?

Many of us were taught not to think too highly of ourselves. We were taught to be self-deprecating or we were shown that our place is to be a giver—even to a fault.

I can think of the myriad ways that faith and religion have been used to silence, oppress, and belittle women who think too highly of themselves.

In my journey to healing, restoration, and wholeness, I call foul on these ways of formation. I do not believe that God intends for God's creation, for the ones God has gifted to be co-creators in various ways, to play it small. If I believe that I am made in the Divine image and that God lives in me (and in others), then I am called to love all of me. Deeply. Passionately. Fiercely.

This is how I understand self-care, not as something we pay money to do or as mere pampering. I understand self-care as recognizing that I am indeed holy and a dwelling place for my God, and this means that I am to care for my whole self – for my mind, my body, my soul and my heart. Self-care means attending to each piece of my being in ways that bring life to the center. If something is life-draining, it has to go. If there isn't time to give birth to the creativity within, then something has to shift. If someone doesn't respect my boundaries, then I have to create distance. Self-care is truly a revolutionary act. It is one that unapologetically demonstrates that I am worthy of all the love and joy and fulfillment that God has to offer.

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There are two Bible texts that I go to when I think about self-care. The first is Matthew 11:28-30:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

When we lean into the Greatest Commandment, to love God with our whole self, we understand that this means God is calling us back to center, to the One who sees us and knows us and loves us without condition. When we trust this truth, we are able to cast any and all burdens onto God – and in doing so, we practice the ultimate self-care. We are set free and God renews us. This is an invitation to practice love of self as we practice loving God.

The second Bible text that I think of when it comes to the revolutionary act of loving self is Psalm 139:13-18:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand – when I awake, I am still with you.

This text reminds me that anything that God has created is worthy of love and care. Not to love or care for myself would be an affront to the very God I say that I love, and I am not willing to offend my God. How about you?

Discussion questions:

1. What does it look like to practice revolutionary self-care?
2. What gets in the way of loving yourself first?
3. How has God loved you and invited you to remember that you are worthy and enough?

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Closing prayer:

God, thank you for the gift of love. Now, help us to love ourselves so that we might better love each other and ultimately, better love you. Amen.

Rozella Haydée White is a spiritual life and leadership coach, consultant and creator, restoring hearts to wholeness while helping people live their most meaningful life. She is the owner of RHW Consulting and is desperately seeking justice, mercy, humility and love. Connect with her at www.rozellahwhite.com.

This article first appeared in the June 2018 issue of Café (boldcafe.org). <https://www.boldcafe.org/lives-of-wholeness/>

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06/01/2018 | Faith Reflections, Monthly Topic, Self care

Lives of wholeness

by Rozella Haydée White

Isaiah 58 provides an alternative view of something that the people of Israel thought they were good at—worship. It becomes clear that their understanding (read: our understanding) of what true and authentic worship was (read: is) did not line up with God's desire. It uses the practice of fasting as the example by which the people of Israel could understand what God was after. It is text that many within social justice movements use as they lift up the biblical mandate for worship being a lifestyle, one that is focused on justice, advocacy and care for others.

The text begins with the prophet Isaiah sharing a clear picture of what worship was not and moves to imagery that embodies what worship is truly about. It's about caring for the neighbor. And in true radical reversal form, it moves to a place where the reader sees that caring for the other is really about caring for oneself.

“The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” (Isaiah 58:11)

For a variety of reasons, it makes people uncomfortable to talk about their needs and desires. This text invites us to consider another reality. What if God wants us to be clear about our needs so that we can live lives of wholeness and be available to meet others' needs?

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Isaiah 58 is all about the importance of needs being met—God's needs, our neighbors needs, our needs. However, unlike cultural norms that would talk about needs being met in material ways, the needs in the text are met in ways that deal in the realm of emotion and connectedness. I can't meet someone's need if I don't know it. I don't know it if I don't know them. I become aware of another's needs when I enter into relationship with them.

The same is true with us. God seeks to be in relationship with us, to know our heart and fill our lives so that every need, every desire that seeks life-giving connection and the care of another, is met. God invites us to journey into ourselves to experience the joy that is present when we recognize our giftedness and worth, which come first and foremost from the Creator.

Let us live into this alternative view of worship, of relationship, of needs being met.

Discussion questions:

1. What does it look like to trust in God's promise that your needs will be met?
2. How is God calling you to care for yourself in the same manner that you would a well-watered garden?
3. How does your ability to meet others' needs change when your needs are met?

Closing prayer:

Mother God, you desperately seek justice, love and compassion for your people. Make us agents of change. Embolden us to be in life-giving relationships and remind us constantly of your promises to never leave nor forsake us and to satisfy every need we may have. Amen.

Rozella Haydée White is a spiritual life and leadership coach, consultant and creator, restoring hearts to wholeness while helping people live their most meaningful life. She is the owner of RHW Consulting and is desperately seeking justice, mercy, humility and love. Connect with her at www.rozellawhite.com.

This article is adapted from "Faith Reflections: Satisfied Needs," by Rozella Haydée White that first appeared in the July 2014 issue. <https://www.boldcafe.org/lives-of-wholeness/>

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Jennifer Hall wrote about her feelings for us last year, before starting her freshman year of college. Now, with that first year of college completed, Jennifer shares what she has learned. Are you heading off to college for the first time in the fall? Perhaps keeping the faith can help you on your journey.

Building relationships at college

By Jennifer Hall

Before going away to school at Temple University, I was afraid of leaving home for an unknown city far away. As a small-framed black woman, I had a lot of fears about living in North Philadelphia. Before attending Temple, I lived in Chicago, another big city, but since I lived with my aunt and uncle it didn't seem so daunting. But living in a new city on my own was a completely new experience.

One way that I overcame my fears about this new challenge was building relationships with new people. After a couple of roommate changes (long story), I eventually found a roommate that I could get to know well. We ended up becoming great friends and even hung out together. The person you will be living with for the school year may be the first important relationship you have at school.

Another way to build relationships is connecting with other students through classes. Most of the time, if I started to make small talk with other students, I would get their Snapchat so we could talk about class work. This helped us both because sometimes we would remind each other of certain assignments. Sometimes we would have study dates to study for tests – or even meet outside of class! Making it a habit to talk to people around you about classes can benefit you and them. If they are doing well, they will be able to help you and if they are confused, being confused with someone else can also create a beautiful friendship. (Trust me.)

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Get involved in extracurricular activities too! I enjoyed playing the flute, and Temple had a community concert band called the Night Owls Band. I also love natural hair and joined a group called CampusCurlz. I encourage you to join groups that you have interest in or have hobbies that you want to continue throughout your college career.

Finally, the best way I was able to build great relationships was at church. I was blessed to be able to continue my faith journey at Mediator Lutheran with Pastor Regina Goodrich. I had told her that I loved to sing, and I wanted to join the choir. With that connection, I was able to get a ride from my choir director – and sing and worship the Lord on Sundays! I made very close relationships with some of the choir members and have grown to love going to Mediator.

Another thing that I learned is that it's okay to make mistakes. This may be your first time going off to live by yourself for a long period of time. Many people do not really understand this until they are in their dorm room looking around wondering, "now what?" But this is your time to learn about yourself without your parents being around you.

Now, I'm not saying that this is a great time to do something completely horrific that could be life threatening. What I'm saying is that as you are learning new things academically, you'll try new things throughout college that you may like and you may dislike. Don't be afraid to step outside of the box and get out of your comfort zone!

During my transition into my first year, I can honestly say that the power of prayer is amazing. You can either be the most stressed college student to the happiest, but always make time to thank God for where you are in life. First Chronicles 16:34 says, "Give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; God's love endures forever." Going to college is a privilege, and despite that, at times it will be difficult. Always remember that there are so many people who would love to be in the spot that you are in.

Overall, my first-year college experience was amazing. I was able to learn so many new things academically and new things about myself. I was able to meet and make new friends of different backgrounds who have already made an impact on my life. Not only this, but I was able to explore the city of Philadelphia! If you have the time, go out and explore your surroundings. God created a beautiful earth – go see the creations God has made.

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Discussion questions:

1. Reflect on where you were last year and think of where you are now. How have you changed over time?
2. Have you learned any life lessons from the mistakes that you've made this past year?
3. Where have you built new relationships? (i.e. church, clubs, organizations)

Closing prayer:

Dear God, thank you for giving me the strength and tools to finish my first year of college. So many people are not able to do this and I'm grateful for this opportunity. I pray that everyone can have a safe and fun summer as they prepare for their next steps in their college careers. I also pray for the new incoming freshman who are excited and may be afraid in this new experience as I was last year. Keep them lifted up in spirit and surround their loved ones with security, as they may feel anxious for them too. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Jennifer Hall graduated high school last year with a 4.0 GPA. She just completed her Freshman year at Temple University with a 3.5 GPA, studying Psychology. She will be continuing her education at Temple this Fall.

This article first appeared in the June 2018 issue of *Café* (boldcafe.org). <https://www.boldcafe.org/building-relationships-college/>