

## Who is Responsible to be the Steward of “Self-Care?”

Dr. Paul McAlister—Pioneer Bible Translators

Member Care and Training

Who is responsible for caring for the missionary? It may be helpful to immediately explore the theme of “Stewardship” as a fitting context in which to talk about “self-Care.” It is hoped that our **discussion** will lead us to greater perception of the need to focus upon missionary self-care and, also, to implement stewardship responsibilities in our on-going support of missionaries.

To begin, let us note the significance of stewardship as it applies to our missionary support. I suggest the importance of the nature of stewardship as it applies to missionary care can be seen in the comments made by Christopher J. H. Wright in his book [The Mission of God’s People](#) (Zondervan, 2010), p219.

Wright uses III John 6 as his point of reference. “You will send them on their way in a manner worthy of God”. The phrase to “send them on their way” is derived from the Greek word “propempeo”. This word is used for making all the necessary arrangements and provisions for the journey. Note: Acts 15:3; 21:5; Romans 15:24. Such things as food, money for accommodations and fares, maybe letters of recommendation as well could be included.

Beside the extensive preparations and provisions, Wright also points highlights the words: “in a manner worthy of God”. That could have reference to God’s approval of our caring, or, that it would be as though we were providing care as if it were to our Lord Himself! What difference would such a view have for the way we care for our missionaries? There is a further comment from Wright: “Third John 6 should be written as a motto on the walls, desk calendars, or computer screens of all those with responsibility for the sending of people in mission, in churches or mission agencies, or in training institutions”.

The above comments are sufficient to give the sense of sacred stewardship to our support of missionaries. We are aware of some of the incredible needs that are the burden of many of our missionaries.

Often we are not aware of the needs of missionaries in the areas of physical needs or emotional and mental health needs. Struggles with depression, stress, frustration and loneliness are common. Many times we hear when there is an urgent prayer request, but the ongoing struggles faced by those we support are not always brought to our attention. If they are, we, for many and varied reasons, are not sure about what our response should be, or who should respond. **Indeed there are things that only the missionary can do for themselves.** What about missionary self-care? Is it proper to see self-care as stewardship too? It is reported that every year 8000 missionaries leave the field prematurely. Further, 71% of those departures are preventable! With the complex range of missionary needs there is the reality of a mandate for self-care. **Resources for missionaries' care are vital, but so is the resolve of the missionary to seek and utilize the help.** It takes resources and missionary resolve to provide resilience. There are things that missionaries can do to deal with many issues before they reach a crisis state. A helpful, and easily accessible, resource can be found at [MissionaryCare.com](http://MissionaryCare.com), Ron Koteskey and Mary Seitz. Their article, aligned with our topic in this workshop, "Stewardship of Self for Christian Workers," is a good place to start. Their article includes a biblical foundation for self-care. The article begins by the audacious claim, as some would see it, that we are to love ourselves! If we do not love ourselves, we will have difficulty loving others. Also, we are commanded to take a **Sabbath rest**. The Sabbath is for us not the other way around. The Sabbath reminds us that He is God and we are not. This issue of self-care is difficult in light of the Biblical recognition of suffering in the Christian life. **Where is the line between self-sacrifice and the lack of faith and humility in admitting that we are not sufficient to meet every need?** A further level of the discussion of self-care is that Scripture views us as the temple of God (John 14-17; I Peter: 2:5; I John

3:24, and others). God dwells in us. Our bodies are the places where God dwells. Beyond these considerations we have the example of Jesus who, at times, choose to withdraw from the crowds (difficult in time-oriented cultures as opposed to event cultures) because of being tired and He acknowledged hunger for Himself and others. Time management is tough.

**What areas of care can rightly be seen as proper for self-care?** Consider the following:

Time devoted to rest and restoration, sleep, exercise, eating behaviors, monitoring health and seeking medical or emotional help, healthy relationships with friends. These may sound easy or difficult given different environments, though difficult we need to provide for our own restoring and refreshment.

What things revive us and refresh us most? The categories, not specifically the way they are addressed, are vital. Are these things that we should bring to the attention of the missionaries with a view toward holding them responsible for managing them?

**What might get in the way of carrying out these goals?**

Consider cross-cultural obstacles. From Kay Bruner ([alifeoverseas.com/ask-a-counselor-how-in-the-world-can-we-do-self-care-when](http://alifeoverseas.com/ask-a-counselor-how-in-the-world-can-we-do-self-care-when))

Note her list of roadblocks:

There is a failure to prioritize self-care

We think God will magically protect us

We never had to think about self-care before

We may be workaholics

There may be an element of pride

Maybe we want to be seen as competent and in control, we shouldn't have needs

Maybe we think we will not be good enough for God

Do we believe that we are so important that God cannot allow us a break to take care of ourselves

## **Do supporters have the right to hold missionaries responsible for a plan and faithfulness to that plan?**

Self-care plans need to embrace both the field and home assignment/furlough. There are numerous resources able to provide help for both field and home. Again, [missionary.com/links](http://missionary.com/links) can be a helpful beginning point.

Note the simple tool that can be used (from Koteskey) which might be used to help supporters assess where the missionary is with self-care. This may be something the sender can ask the missionary to respond to on a regular basis. The questions can be modified to suit the situation.

### **Evaluation of your Stewardship.**

Take some time to evaluate yourself on how well you are keeping each of these. Use the following scale to rate some of the things discussed.

4=excellent (Always)

3=good (frequently)

3=fair (sometimes)

1=poor (seldom)

0=never)

1. Do I keep an effective Sabbath for myself each week?  
4 3 2 1 0
  
2. Do I get enough sleep so that I am not sleepy the next day?  
4 3 2 1 0
  
3. Do I exercise to the point of perspiration 20-30 minutes 3-5 times a week?  
4 3 2 1 0
  
4. Do I eat moderate portions of healthy food 3-5 times a day?  
4 3 2 1 0
  
5. Do I monitor my health and seek appropriate medical help promptly?  
4 3 2 1 0

6. Do I have enough consistent nurturing relationships with other people?  
4 3 2 1 0

**Begin a plan to respond to these item.**

**Any number from 3 or below can probably be improved upon.**

Given that we are to love God with all that we are, it seems that self-care is not negotiable.

Questions remain.

Is self-care something the sender should hold the missionary accountable for?

How could this be done?

Should reports on how they are doing and what they are doing for self-care be requested from missionaries by the sender(s)?

What about circumstances where people are supported by multiple churches or senders?

Should it be an agency, or, should the church be the one(s) to follow this. How would this be facilitated?

What are ways that the senders can help missionaries with self-care?

Does missionary self-care seem as though it should be considered a matter of stewardship?

What do you do or should you do about monitoring and encouraging (sensitively) the missionary to make this a part of daily faithfulness?

Is the missionary a steward of his/her own care? How can the sender help encourage accountability to this stewardship? If you are a sender, what are you doing to help the missionaries help themselves. Remember there are some things they have to do for themselves. How can we encourage that?