

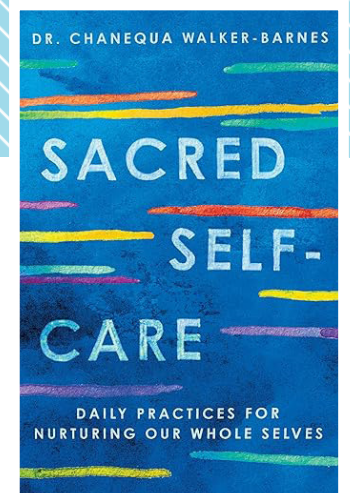


CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Meg Rooney

Sacred Self-Care: Daily Practices for Nurturing our Whole Selves

By Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes



About the Author

Scholar, womanist theologian and clinical psychologist, Dr. Chanequa Walker-Barnes is a professor of practical theology and pastoral care at Columbia Theological Seminary. She is the author of *Sacred Self-Care*, *I Bring the Voices of My People*, and *Too Heavy a Yoke* and focuses on healing the legacies of racial and gender oppression.

Dr. Walker-Barnes has earned degrees from Emory University (B.A., Psychology and African-American/African Studies), the University of Miami (M.S. and Ph.D., Clinical Child/Family Psychology) and Duke University (M.Div.). Through her rich, diverse education and background, she aims to bridge psychology and theology with a holistic perspective on social change, mental health, resilience and justice within marginalized communities.

About the Book

In *Sacred Self-Care*, Dr. Walker-Barnes draws upon her extensive research on mental health, activism and theology to create a seven-week-guide to cultivate self-care as a sacred act. This guide includes gathering activities, habits, disciplines and practices that promote spiritual, physical, emotional, mental and relational wholeness. This daily devotional includes a story alongside scripture passages and prompts to encourage sustainable growth and habits. Dr. Walker-Barnes walks readers through several areas: understanding self-care, mastering the self-care fundamentals, practicing self-compassion, setting healthy boundaries, caring for our emotional selves, caring for our minds and practicing self-care as a way of life.

Dr. Walker-Barnes has also included inventories to help readers identify areas to work on and a “Rule of Life” guide to help readers direct their self-care practice throughout the year. *Sacred Self-Care* is not only life-giving, encouraging and inspiring, but practical and sustainable for all looking for a more intentional self-care practice.



Questions for Conversation

INTRODUCTION

1. Dr. Walker-Barnes writes about the lifegiving effects of approaching Lent prayerfully and thoughtfully. She says Lent is “an invitation to develop and strengthen practices that enhance the depth of our discipleship and our ministry in the world” (2). Do you have similar experiences of Lent? Or are there other spiritual seasons that have meaning for you? How do you connect with God during these seasons?
2. “We are not spirits that are simply housed in bodies. We are our bodies. There can be no spiritual life that does not engage the body” (7). How has Christianity portrayed the division between spirit and body? What does it mean to recognize that we are our bodies and that we must care for them?
3. What are your hopes for engaging in sacred self-care? Where do you want to be after completing this book?

WEEK 1: UNDERSTANDING SACRED SELF-CARE

1. “The idea that self-care is dependent upon a product – or even upon money – is a misperception, and a dangerous one at that. Developing sustainable self-care practices require knowing what self-care is and how it connects to Christian discipleship.”
 - a. How have you experienced or witnessed self-care being commodified? What are some criticisms towards self-care?
 - b. As of now, what does self-care look like to you? How do you already care for yourself?
2. On Day 1, Dr. Walker-Barnes reminds us that we are God’s perfect gift and we can respond to that gift with gratitude. Other than the affirmation that Dr. Walker-Barnes supplies as the day’s practice, how can you respond with gratitude knowing that you are God’s perfect gift?
3. Look at the Sacred Self-Care inventory you completed on Day 4. What self-care practices are you already doing? Where do you think you could improve? Are there practices to care for yourself that you could do alongside others?
4. Look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 7. What are your responses to the questions Dr. Walker-Barnes poses?

WEEK 2: MASTERING THE SELF-CARE FUNDAMENTALS

1. How are you feeling after completing Week 1? What are your expectations for Week 2 and its aims to focus on how one nourishes, hydrates, rests and exerts their body? Or how we honor our relationships and emotions and nurture our relationship with God? (38).
2. Which practices from Week 2 did you find the hardest to complete? Why?
3. Which practices did you most enjoy adding to your daily schedule? Which practices seem the most sustainable for you?
4. Look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 14. What are your responses to the questions Dr. Walker-Barnes poses?

WEEK 3: PRACTICING SELF-COMPASSION

1. “Even when we know we need care, we struggle to practice it consistently. It is not that we think self-care is unimportant; rather, we think it is not as important as other activities, especially those that directly benefit the people in our lives or the institutions we are a part of” (63).
 - a. When have you sacrificed consistent self-care for other people or institutions? What was the result?
2. On Day 15, Dr. Walker-Barnes asks us to engage in one meaningful expression of self-compassion. Which expression did you choose? How did it feel? Would you do it again?
3. On Day 20, Dr. Walker-Barnes encourages us to be a “self-care ambassador.” How did you encourage another person to practice self-compassion? How did they respond? What was the impact on your relationship?
4. Look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 21. What are your responses to Dr. Walker-Barnes’s questions?

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WEEK 4: SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

1. “We can be so other-focused that we never develop an authentic identity, or we struggle to maintain that identity in the face of life’s pressures” (87).
 - a. What does it mean to establish an authentic identity? What does it look like to maintain that identity?
 - b. Have you had trouble developing or maintaining an authentic identity? What have you learned from that experience?
2. Dr. Walker-Barnes says that “boundaries are the imaginary walls that define who we are and who we are not. They establish, define, and safeguard our personhood by delineating what we will and will not do, allow, practice, or accept” (90).
 - a. What is your response to Dr. Walker-Barnes’s definition of boundaries?
 - b. Do you have a definition of boundaries? How is it similar or different to Walker-Barnes?
 - c. Do you find establishing boundaries difficult? Why or why not?
3. On Day 26, Dr. Walker-Barnes speaks about “energy vampires” and their ability to “drain us of our energy to fulfill their own needs” (102).
 - a. Have you ever experienced an energy vampire in your life? What happened? How did you respond?
 - b. Have you ever been an energy vampire to someone else? What have you learned from that experience?
4. Look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 28. What are your responses to the questions Dr. Walker-Barnes poses?

WEEK 5: CARING FOR OUR EMOTIONAL SELVES

1. “Wholistic self-care, then, requires us to nurture emotional wellness, which includes recognizing and learning from negative emotions and cultivating positive emotions” (113).
 - a. Have you attempted to nurture emotional wellness in the past? What did that look like?
 - b. What does it mean to hold both negative and positive emotions in the same space? Is it uncomfortable? Why or why not?
2. On Day 31, Dr. Walker-Barnes writes about “owning your anger.” How has anger been portrayed to you? What resonated with you about her framing of anger? Feel free to also answer any or all the questions listed on page 123.
3. On Day 34, Dr. Walker-Barnes speaks to the importance of creativity and play. She writes: “Play and creativity, though, are vital parts of our lives and important antidotes to the impact of stress. Research indicates that play even improves our social relationships and our executive functioning, including our decision-making and emotional regulation skills” (131).
 - a. How did you practice creativity or play as Dr. Walker-Barnes suggested?
 - b. How did you feel before, during and after?
 - c. What creativity or play can you make sustainable in your daily or weekly life?
4. Take a look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 35. What are your responses to the questions Dr. Walker-Barnes poses?

WEEK 6: CARING FOR OUR MINDS

1. “As Christians, we are often told that our minds cannot be trusted, that they are the enemy of our hearts and the enemy of faith” (139).
 - a. Did you experience this traditional Christian belief that the mind is unreliable, not to be trusted?
 - b. Why do you think the mind is portrayed as the enemy of our heart and our faith?
 - c. How do you care for your mind? What kinds of practices do you think could benefit your mind?
2. “Another way to understand mindfulness is to think about its antithesis: mindlessness...we can spend a lot of life like that, on autopilot, lost in the reverie of thoughts and emotions, distracted from the present by our multitasking and excessive responsibility” (145).
 - a. How have you engaged in mindlessness?
 - b. How have you engaged in mindfulness?
 - c. How do you feel after one or the other? How do you become more mindful in moments that could lead to mindlessness?
3. On Day 39, Dr. Walker-Barnes introduces mindfulness’s impact on developing loving-kindness. Read the statement aloud listed on page 151:
May you be happy.
May you be healthy.
May you be safe and free from harm.
May you be at peace.
 - a. What is your response to reading this affirmation? How did it feel in your body?
 - b. What would it look like to repeat this affirmation to yourself every day?
4. Look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 42. What are your responses to the questions Dr. Walker-Barnes poses?

WEEK 7: PRACTICING SELF-CARE FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

1. “...we are unlikely to find supports for self-care built into our lives. If anything, modern living is designed to undermine our health and well-being at nearly every turn” (165).
 - a. How has modern living undermined your health and well-being in the past?
 - b. What obstacles have you faced in being intentional with your self-care?
 - c. What are you hoping to learn from this chapter?
2. Dr. Walker-Barnes writes on page 180, “when our self-care efforts face resistance from other people, it is often because those people need to learn to care for themselves. We can be a blessing to them by encouraging them to practice self-care, perhaps even along with us.”
 - a. When have you faced resistance about your self-care practices? How did you respond?
 - b. Who can you take alongside you on your journey to self-care? Is there an accountability partner you are thinking of?
3. Look at the “Silent Reflection” portion of Day 49. What are your responses to the questions Dr. Walker-Barnes poses?
4. After reading this book, do you feel that you understand sacred self-care more? How will you commit to implementing sacred self-care in your life?