

Supporting Students through Weekly Self-Guided Care Practices on Canvas  
Dr. Lisa Raser, Fall 2021

	<p>In times of increased stress or uncertainty, we have to be even more intentional about the ways that we care for our mind, body, &amp; spirit.</p> <p>Each week I will offer one care practice with a corresponding theme to find more connection with God, and peace for your mind and heart.</p>
<p><b>Week 1: Welcome</b></p>	<p>Welcome to Care Practice! We will start next week with the theme of, "Breathe." <b>Each week, see if you can find a few minutes to give the tangible care practice a try.</b> I am looking forward to practicing along with you!</p> <p>"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him." - Lamentations 3:22-24</p>
<p><b>Week 2: Breathe</b></p>	<p>When I feel overwhelmed, it helps me to pause and pay attention to my breath, even for just a few seconds. Doing this keeps me grounded in the present moment and turns my focus away from anxious thoughts. This is a very simple practice that you always carry with you.</p> <p>"I bless God every chance I get; my lungs expand with his praise. I live and breathe God." - Psalm 34:1-2a</p> <p>You might also consider trying a Breath Prayer - short, simple words often taken from scripture that correspond with your inhale and exhale. I love these <i>Breath Prayers for Anxious Times</i> by author Sarah Bessey: (<a href="https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/breath-prayers-for-anxious-times">https://sarahbessey.substack.com/p/breath-prayers-for-anxious-times</a>)</p> <p><b>This week, can you find 1 minute to pause and breathe?</b></p> <p>Try this short Youtube video titled, "Triangle Breathing, 1 minute."</p>

<p><b>Week 3: Gratitude</b></p>	<p>This summer, I tried writing down a few things that I was grateful for that day (a walk outside, time with my family, a positive doctor's appointment for my daughter...) as well as some prayers that were on my heart. While I didn't do this every day, the time I did spend recognizing the things I was grateful for (big or small) helped me to stay focused on my values and stave off worry.</p> <p><i>"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thess. 5:16-18</i></p> <p>There is a great body of research (<a href="https://greatergood.berkeley.edu">https://greatergood.berkeley.edu</a>) that links the positive effects of a gratitude practice (<a href="http://www.npr.org">www.npr.org</a>) on your physical health and mental well-being.</p> <p><b>This week, can you find a few minutes to write down (or think about) 3 things that you are grateful for? I will join you! Do you sense a shift in your mind or heart? How might you continue this practice?</b></p>
<p><b>Week 4: Trust</b></p>	<p>As disciples of Christ, we are called to put our TRUST in Him. If I am honest, I will have days, weeks, or months where this message does not come easily or naturally. When I encounter busyness or overwhelm, my tendency is to move toward more self-reliance rather than resting and trusting in God, my provider.</p> <p>This month, my sister sent me a devotional by Sara Young about God's strength and provision when our fuel is low. It was such an encouragement to me and I wanted to share it with you here, in hopes that it might also serve you well:</p> <p><i>"I am the One who keeps your lamp burning. I turn your darkness into Light. Sometimes, when you are weary or burdened, you may feel as if your lamp is about to go out. It seems to be flickering and sputtering - on the verge of running out of fuel. Whenever this happens, call out to me for help. Take some deep breaths in my Presence, and remember that I am the One who fuels your lamp. I am your Strength!"</i></p> <p><i>You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.</i> - Psalm 18:28</p> <p><b>This week, my simple practice is to think or whisper or shout the words, "You are my strength!" when I sense that I am trying to do too much on my own. Will you join me?</b></p>

## Week 5: Grace

One of the many things that my daughter Grace has taught me is that you do not have to be perfect to be loved! Her body is both perfect and imperfect, and her medical complexities only make my love and protection for her grow stronger. Knowing and loving Grace has allowed me to more fully understand God's love for me ... that He loves and accepts me AND all of my imperfections.

"Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me." - 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT)

I find that I am most stressed and anxious in seasons when I am trying to push and prove toward unrealistic standards of perfection. Can you relate? I want to give myself more grace. **This week, my simple care practice is to think or whisper or shout the words, "I am doing the best I can with what I have."**

Image below by Tori Press (@revelatori):



## Week 6: Take a Break

My inspiration for this week comes from the work of psychologist Karen Horneffer-Ginter, who created the visual inspiration below titled "50 Ways to Take a Break." In her article in the Huffington Post she writes:

"I used to think there'd come a moment when my to do list would get done and *then* I could take a break. Of course, in time, I came to see that this open space seldom arrives on its own -- that life has a way of continually filling up unless I do something to make it otherwise."

"The sorts of break activities that work best are usually those that feel like the opposite of what we've been doing too much of: If we've been sitting inside at a computer, we need to get moving outside; if we've been doing physical labor, we need rest; and if we feel inundated with mundane details or the heaviness of life's suffering, we need to take in something inspiring and fresh."

Let's each choose an idea from the visual below (or create your own) and give it a try! (URL: <https://www.raftcares.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/50-ways-poster-no-border.pdf>)

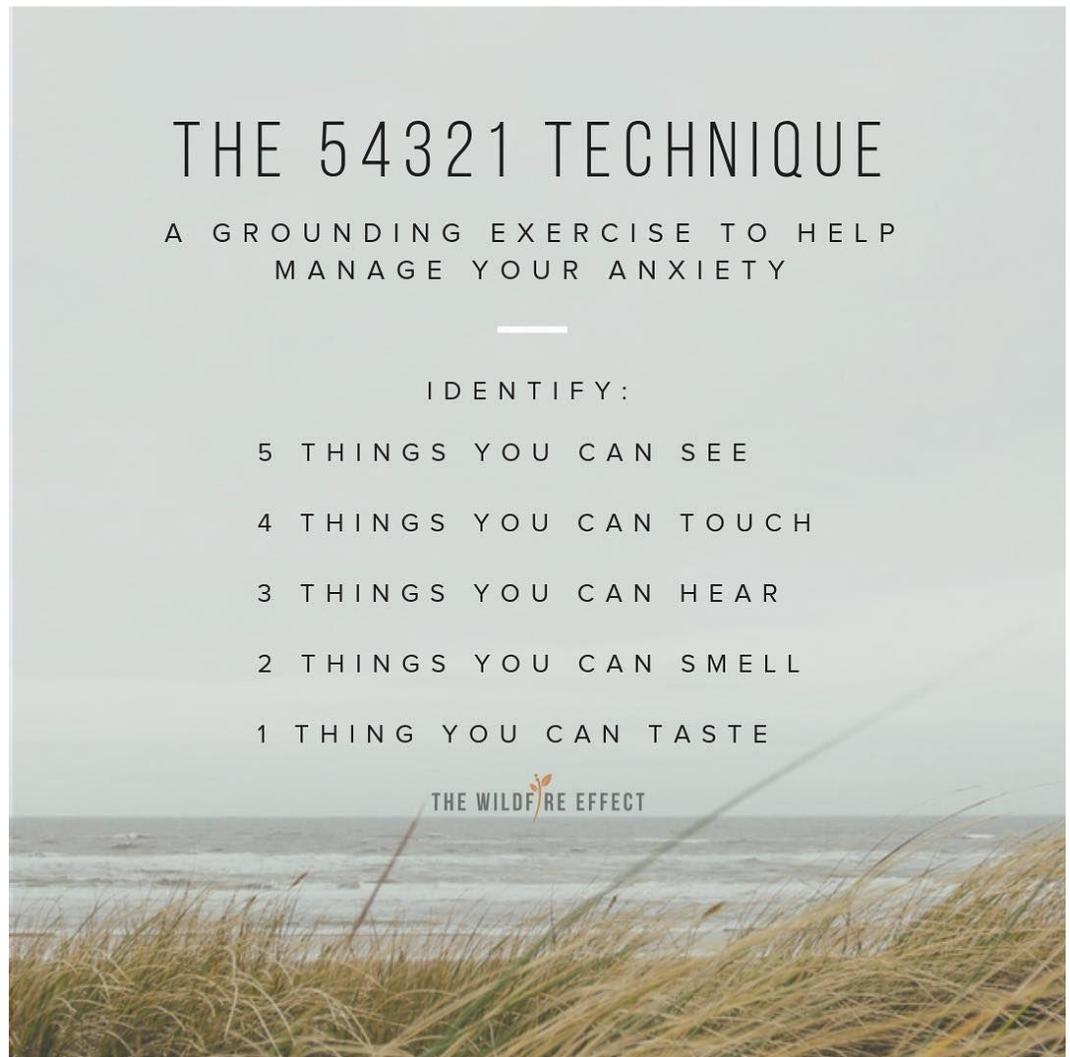


## Week 7: Observe

Our care practice for this week is a simple exercise called 5-4-3-2-1 (see image below), a guide for staying present through stressful/anxious moments. The idea is that you draw your senses back to the present moment when caught in a spiral of negative thought or worry by identifying things around you. I learned about this exercise last year from a clinical psychologist and I've used it many times . . . even while driving! It is also easily adaptable if you want to incorporate elements of faith or gratitude into the practice.

**This week, find a moment to pause right where you are and observe. What are 5 things that you can see? 4 things that you can touch? 3 things you can hear? 2 things you can smell? 1 thing you can taste?**

May you each be held in God's grace and comfort this week.



<p><b>Week 8: Awe</b></p>	<p>I was recently reminded of this short poem by Mary Oliver and it inspired this week's Care Practice:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.</i></p> <p>Taking a few minutes to pause and pay close attention to something or someone in your immediate environment (the crunch of an apple, the movement of the clouds, the sun on your face) is an act of mindfulness that grounds you in the present moment. This practice also cultivates more awareness of God's activity in our world and His care for even the smallest of details...and us.</p> <p><b>Can you find awe in something ordinary this week?</b></p> <p>Attention, all! See the marvels of God! He plants flowers and trees all over the earth, Bans war from pole to pole, breaks all the weapons across his knee. “Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God, above politics, above everything.” - Psalm 46:8-10 (The Message)</p> <p>For more inspiration, you might enjoy this 2 minute video called "Finding Awe in the Ordinary" published by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aEeQPC7PIQ&amp;t=12s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aEeQPC7PIQ&amp;t=12s</a></p>
<p><b>Week 9: Sleep</b></p>	<p>The more I talk to people these days, the more I hear the words, "tired," "exhausted," or "worn out." Quality sleep is important for supporting our mental, physical and emotional health and many of us, myself included, are not getting us much as we might like.</p> <p>Did you know that there is something called "sleep hygiene"? Sleep hygiene refers to small changes that you can make to your daily habits or environment in order to optimize your potential for good sleep. This recent article (<a href="http://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene">www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene</a>) has lots of good tips on how to build healthy sleep hygiene.</p> <p><b>Getting more sleep is the perfect care practice for this season! Let's try to get one extra hour of sleep this week (perhaps winding down for bed a bit earlier, taking a nap, or prioritizing sleep over another activity.) Will you join me?</b></p> <p><i>“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”</i></p> <p>- Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)</p>

<p><b>Week 10: Create</b></p>	<p>A few weeks ago, my mom sent me a package of watercolor pencils in the most vibrant hues with names like, "Shamrock Green," "Honey," and "Pink Macaron."</p> <p>I couldn't remember the last time I <i>created something</i>, so I sat down for half an hour with my pencils and a jar of water and spread the colors across my paper. The time flew by and it was like I had taken a very mini vacation, all from my kitchen table.</p> <p>The act of creating can be <i>immersive</i>. Since it requires some focus, you can turn your attention away from your Canvas to-do list and other stressors for a short time and restore some of your mental and physical capacity. I now keep my watercolor pencils out on my counter, and pick them up occasionally for a few minutes after dinner or between meetings. It feels restorative for me.</p> <p><b>This week, let's <i>create</i> something. Anything! Even for just a few minutes. Try not to judge the end result but rather see if you can enjoy the process of simply creating.</b></p> <p><b>Here are a few ideas:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doodle, draw, paint, craft</li> <li>• cook a recipe or bake something delicious</li> <li>• take a photograph</li> <li>• sew, knit, embroider, crochet</li> <li>• plant some seeds</li> <li>• write a song, a poem, prose, journal</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 11: Connect</b></p>	<p>I recently had the opportunity to meet up with a friend who I hadn't seen in over eight months. While it felt like a juggle to make room in my full schedule of teaching and caregiving and adhere to Covid safety guidelines, the time that I spent with this friend felt <i>restorative</i>. As we sat on our respective picnic blankets under the trees and caught up on life and offered support to one another, the experience turned my perspective on my whole week around.</p> <p>There is a wealth of research data that links a positive correlation between social connection and physical/mental well-being. Dr. Vivek Murthy, the 19th Surgeon General of the United States, wrote a book called <i>Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World</i>. I recommend it! He writes about how it is the <i>quality</i> of the human connection, rather than the <i>quantity</i>, that matters:</p> <p>"Even if you spend less time with someone, making that time count is really important. Five minutes of conversation where we're open, listening deeply, and showing up fully is often more fulfilling than 30 minutes of distracted conversation."</p> <p><b>For our care practice this week, let's set aside 5 minutes for some quality connection with another human, even if it's through a screen.</b></p> <p>If you would like some inspiration, researchers have created 36 conversation prompts to help you feel closer to another person. One of my favorite simple ways to connect with friends is to text, "what have you read recently that you would recommend?" The results are often fascinating!</p>

## Week 12: Move

I have recently been learning more about how *stress lives in the body*. Previously, I thought about stress as something that lives in my mind (meaning: if I can just think differently about my stress or remove the stressor, the stress will disappear.) While our thoughts do influence the way that we feel, we also have to take *physical actions* to signal to our bodies that we are safe after a stressful event, conversation, meeting, etc. Otherwise, the activated stress from that particular stressor will continue to live in the body.

In the book *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, Drs. (and twin sisters!) Emily and Amelia Nagoski discuss how we can help our physical bodies process life's stressors. Nagoski says that "bodies speak body language," which means that physical actions (such as movement, deep breathing, etc.) are the most effective strategies for completing an activated stress cycle. You can hear more about their book and research on Dr. Brene Brown's podcast. (<https://brenebrown.com/unlockingus/>)

**For our Care Practice, I encourage you to find some time to incorporate some intentional movement into your week. Let's complete the stress cycle and *move!*** This could be anything from surfing to taking a walk, to dancing in your living room, to just tensing all of your muscles tightly for 10 seconds and releasing them. You may want to try some movement after taking an exam, giving a presentation, or another experience that has heightened your stress response.

This infographic created by Health Perch, a digital health magazine, includes a variety of yoga poses for stress relief. I included one below, but you can find the complete infographic here: <https://www.northwestpharmacy.com/healthperch/yoga-for-stress-relief>

## Week 13: Unplug

One of my favorite authors, Anne Lamott, writes, "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes . . . including you."

**For our care practice this week, I encourage you to set a healthy boundary for yourself with digital media. This will probably look different for every person, but here are a few ideas:**

- "Unplug" with a digital sabbath from your phone - for an hour, a day, or maybe a weekend.
- Try leaving your phone in a different room.
- Hide or delete social media apps (I did this a few times recently and found it so useful for curbing the urge to scroll mindlessly -- and also when I found myself steeped in comparison over other people's curated lives.)
- Try turning your phone to grayscale and see if it helps!  
[www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/technology/grayscale-phone.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/12/technology/grayscale-phone.html)
- Declare a "no-phone zone" in a certain part of your home - at the dinner table, or your nightstand.
- Make a list of ways to take a break that do not involve digital media and give one a try. Remember Wk 6, Take a Break? 😊

As you consider what a healthy boundary for digital media might look like for you, consider what your goals are. More space for relationships, recreation, or rest? Less eye strain? Freedom from comparison traps? More awareness and intentionality about how you spend your time? Then, build your boundary around those goals. In making these choices, you are caring for yourself. <3

## Week 14: Play

Dr. Stuart Brown, M.D. is a play-researcher (how fun does that sound?) and has written the book, *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. He also founded The National Institute for Play, an organization that utilizes science-based research to uncover the transformative power of play throughout all stages of life. Play is a universal human need, yet we tend to reserve the experience for children and reflect on play as something "we used to do." As adults, we have to learn how to incorporate play into our lives again and identify which types of play feel restorative to us and those we love.

**Dr. Stuart Brown defines play as "time spent without purpose."** With this guiding definition, I invite you to consider what play might look like for you in this season of life.

### What's on your "play-list"?

- What activities make you lose track of time?
- What activities do you most *want* to do (not feel obligated to do)?
- What activities make you feel free, unfettered? What feels like an escape?

**For our care practice this week, try making a "play list" and keep it in a place where you will see it often. Try an activity this week that helps you lose track of time.**

## Week 15: Generosity

Our final care practice of the semester is to practice an act of generosity and give some kindness to someone else.

There is so much research supporting the idea that being generous with others not only improves our relationships, but enhances our own physical and mental health. For example: "An online national survey of 4,500 American adults (the 2010 United Healthcare/Volunteer Match Do Good Live Well Study) found that people who volunteer have less trouble sleeping, less anxiety, less helplessness and hopelessness, better friendships and social networks, and a sense of control over chronic conditions."

### What is one simple thing you can do this week to be generous with your words, time, or resources?

Some ideas of ways to share kindness this week:

- compliment someone with sincerity - try complimenting something about their character, rather than something they are wearing.
- write a handwritten note to a friend or family member.
- share your food with someone.
- do a nagging chore for a family member or roommate.
- ask someone what they could use prayer for and then commit to praying for them each day this week.
- donate to an organization or cause close to your heart.

**Whether you completed a few Care Practices this semester, or all 15, congratulations! I hope that you found some new inspiration to care for yourself and others.**

