

RESTORING THE SOUL

*"All spirituality is about what we do
with the unrest in our soul."*

Ronald Rollheiser

Proverbs 4:23 - "Guard your heart...."

Prison guard holding in bad guy or castle filled with precious treasure?

Proverbs 22:5 - "In the paths of the wicked are thorns and snares, but the one who guards his soul stays far from them."

What does it mean to guard your soul?

I created the acronym ICARE to give us concrete actions to practice soul care and "guard your soul." Each of the letters in the acronym below has a specific action to do. By way of review ICARE stands for:

- I** = Inside
- C** = Center
- A** = Attend
- R** = Regulate
- E** = Examen

INSIDE

The simple acknowledgement that this practice is about turning our attention and awareness inward. Suggested opening prayer (from Ephesians 1:18, 2 Cor. 2:13 and Psalm 86:11). If it feels comfortable you may want to close your eyes. Repeat the prayer slowly two or more times, pausing between each phrase.

Action: Pray

"Abba Father...Open the eyes of my heart... still my heart... (take two deep slow breaths while maintaining an inner focus). Reveal your Indwelling Presence... awaken my heart... give me my whole heart back.....(take 2 slow deep breaths)." Repeat.

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CENTER

Your center (noun) is the physical, emotional, and spiritual reference point within. Centering (verb) is the simple act of slowing down our breathing and finding our “physical, emotional, and spiritual center.” We center ourselves and become grounded in our body. We center ourselves and ground ourselves emotionally. We center ourselves and become aware of our spiritual center.

Action: Locate your center

Slow down your breathing by taking two or three long, slow deep breaths. Try to turn down the volume on mental chatter or preoccupations. As you exhale, try imagining your breath descending from the top of your head down to the middle of your chest—this is your center. Simply let yourself be present in this place for several moments.

ATTEND

Also in ICARE videos. This involves paying attention and developing awareness of sensations, perceptions, or feelings in your body. Soma = Latin word for body. Thus attending and being aware in this way is known as “somatic awareness.”

Action: Body scan

In your mind’s eye slowly scan from the top of your head down to your toes. What do you notice? What are you aware of? For example, is there tension in your shoulders? A stiffness in your neck? A knot in your chest? A feeling of butterflies in your stomach? A twitching muscle or tapping foot? As you become aware of any sensation name it and accept it non-judgmentally.

Use the regulation practices below to bring calm and soothing to the parts of your body that need attention, calm, or soothing.

REGULATE (see ICARE Videos for detailed instructions)

Action: Choose and practice one of the regulating techniques below

- Breathing
- Tapping (knees and butterfly on biceps)
- Prayer Breathing
- Figure 8’s

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EXAMEN - Summary

1. Invite Presence
2. Practice thankfulness
3. Reflect Back
4. Look Ahead
5. Talk Openly
6. Be Still

* Although not required I encourage using a journal for the examen. Record your thoughts and experience.

Action: Practice the Examen

1. Sit quietly and ask God to make His presence known (because he is already present). As a posture and symbol of your openness place your hands in an open and upright position.
2. Ask God to show you the gifts and blessings (big and small) you've been given today. Then thank God for each of these gifts.
3. Reflect back on your day hour by hour.

- a. What were the most difficult moments or most unfree of your day? What are the moments you were carried away by fears and anxieties, resentments, cravings, deception, shame, negativity, or anger? *This point here is not to beat yourself up but to develop awareness and practice being known. Try to sense God's healing mercy surround you or hold you.

Imagine you and Abba side by side watching this moment. What do you sense God is saying to you? Speak to God about it and listen to him. Ask for what you need or share your heart with him.

- b. What are the best or most spiritually free moments of your day? Where were you free from fears and anxiety, resentments, cravings, deception, shame, negativity, or anger? Where did you feel most alive and connected with God?

Imagine you and Abba side by side watching this moment. What do you sense God is saying to you? Speak to God about it and listen to him. Celebrate.

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4. Bring to mind an awareness of tomorrow.
 - a. What do you anticipate will bring stress or struggle?
 - b. What do you hope for tomorrow?
 - c. Ask God to show you who he is calling you to be.
 - d. Express to God the desire of your heart to be that person and ask him to help you live in the grace he has already given you.
5. Breathe deeply at least three times.
6. You have just completed the ICARE Practice.