

Soul Care for Caregivers:

Learning the unforced rhythms of grace.

By Leta VanMeter

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. On vacation with me, 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.”

— Matt 11:28–29,
The Message

These potent words were not spoken to an unreachable people group. Rather, Jesus targeted these penetrating questions and compassionate invitation to the men and women who followed him and worked with him. When Jesus spoke of “gaining the whole world but losing your

own soul” (Matt. 16:26), he again was speaking directly to his apprentices, the disciples—the ones who would be doing ministry. (1)

I am one who has cared for and about people my entire adult life. For the past 20 years that care has focused more and more on those involved in cross cultural ministry along with those who provide care for them: caring caregivers. I have experienced the consequences of soul neglect which tends to abound in the milieu of busyness, albeit good activities. The meaning of the Chinese word “busyness” is comprised of two characters. One means “heart” and the other means “annihilation.”

Well meaning, but busy caregivers who do not integrate the unforced rhythms of grace into their own lives inadvertently do exactly what Jesus warned us about—annihilating and losing our own souls. The Dutch theologian Thomas a Kempis in his classic *The Imitation of Christ* warns against losing

balance in our service to God: “Better to lie still in one’s cubicle and worry about one’s spiritual welfare. Worse, to roam the streets a wonder-worker for others to the neglect of one’s own spiritual life.” (2)

Likewise, I have experienced the unquantifiable shalom of a soul in sync with God’s unforced rhythms of grace. The greater the public ministry, exemplified in the life and ministry of the prophet Elijah, the greater the need for silence and solitude. God instructs us, as he did Elijah, “Go and hide yourself by the stream.” In quietness and stillness he is there to give us food and drink and rest. He will guide us into His unforced rhythms of grace.

(1) “Soul Care for Those Who Care,” unpublished paper by Stephen W. Smith, Co-Founder of Potter’s Inn, 2007.

(2) *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*, I Kings 17.

