

Hope...for the uprooted woman

Learning the Unforced Rhythms of Grace by Ann Kelley



Most of my adult life I've been addicted to efficiency. Give me a list of to-dos and I tackle it with systematic gusto. There's nothing wrong with efficiency, but too often I allow my list of tasks to be a priority over people, over rest, over slowing down, over knowing my limits. More often than not I work myself to the point of exhaustion — just for the satisfaction of being able to cross another task off my list.

In recent years I've become addicted to podcasts. Driving, walking, and working around the house are prime opportunities to insert my ear buds to get caught up on the latest news, opinions, information, and spiritual encouragement. I love learning from those I trust who are informed in areas of health, faith, and current events.

It is so easy to fill my days with activity and information. But when I reflect on my day, I realize that I created no space for silence, solitude, or rest. How was I supposed to hear from God if I was never listening for His voice? How could I be sensitive to the needs of my family and friends if I allowed my long list of tasks to dominate my attention and energy? What did it say about me that my rest and relaxation occurred only in front of a TV?

Evidently some things haven't changed since Jesus spoke these words . . .

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. (Matthew 11:28-30, The Message)

I long to live by *unforced rhythms of grace*. So, with the help of scripture and scholars who have written about this, I have begun to make space for silence, solitude, and rest.

I'm choosing to leave my ear buds at home when I go for a walk in the park or a hike in the desert. This choice is doubly hard for me because walking while listening to a podcast is so efficient! But I've discovered that, without the talking heads in my ears, I'm alive to the world around me: the busy chatter of a covey of quail or the sound of the wind rustling the dry grass on the side of a mountain. These have become moments of joy and connection with the Creator.

The practice of quiet and solitude seems to be helping me notice and respond to the needs of my husband, family, and friends. I know that I'll never do this perfectly, but it's getting easier to rest in the assurance that God knows my heart's desire to prioritize people over tasks. In receptive moments, I'm beginning to recognize the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit to put down what I am doing and give my full attention to the person in front of me or to send the text or make the phone call to someone who is on my mind.

Needless to say, there are many days that, instead of practicing *unforced rhythms of grace* I still practice *self-focused rhythms of exhaustion*. I'm a work in progress. But aren't we all?

Are you longing to *learn the unforced rhythms of grace*? This issue of *Bloom* offers encouragement and ideas for slowing down and creating space for silence, solitude, and rest as a way to renew, refresh, and open your heart to hear from God.

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Bloom provides inspiration as you seek to grow and thrive during times of life change.

Ann Kelley, editor



Jesus' Invitation to Live Freely and Lightly



In 2018 writer Katelyn Dixon found herself in a several-year period of waiting after leaving her counseling job. As time dragged on, Katelyn felt purposeless and directionless and wondered if God had forgotten her.

Finally, after attending a retreat, Katelyn came away with a deep connection to God, others, and the world and a new perspective on waiting.

In her article *Living at the Speed of Jesus* she writes:

“What if the whole time I thought I was learning to wait, I was actually learning to *live* — slowly, intentionally, creatively — at the pace God created me to live?”

I wonder if instead of me waiting for God’s divine pre-packaged life plan to arrive on my doorstep, God was actually waiting for *me* to learn that life with Him is simultaneously much simpler and much richer than I could have imagined. Maybe God was inviting me to catch up to his pace — which means slowing down.

After all, how fast did Jesus move while he lived among us?

He moved at the speed of walking.

When Jesus walked upon the earth, he *saw* people. Jesus noticed the hurting, the broken, and the outcast as he walked from place to place, and his unhurried pace meant he had time to stop and talk with them. To love them. To heal them. Two thousand years later, Jesus’ pace hasn’t changed. But ours has. We’ve become a society that prioritizes productivity over relationship, materialism over simplicity, and hurry over intentionality. Jesus waited upon the Spirit to determine his every move.

As we try to pattern our lives after Jesus in our hectic culture, can we say the same?

In order to learn to walk with Jesus, we first have to unlearn the frantic pace we’ve embraced as a Western society.

As I have learned over the past few years, embracing a “walking” lifestyle can feel excruciating. It can feel like you’re going absolutely nowhere. It can often seem more like “waiting to live” than “living to wait upon the Spirit.”

But today, I can see so clearly what I couldn’t see for years in my long season of waiting: slowing down with Jesus, learning to walk as he walks and see as he sees, is the only way to *truly live* as we were meant to live. As I learn to take Jesus at his word and dance to the unforced rhythms of grace, I am discovering what it means to live freely and lightly.

Am I ridiculously happy and peaceful all the time?

No. But the invitation of Jesus to live freely and lightly serves as a lighthouse in the storm — an anchor point for me to return to over and over, each time my pace feels more like whiplash than living.

Is it possible to live slowly 100% of the time in a society that seems hellbent on fast-paced living?

Probably not. We live far from Eden, and sometimes our lives just get busy. There is nothing wrong with a full life, though when we equate fullness with busyness we tend to run into trouble. I wonder how many of the things we believe we *have* to get done in a certain time frame are more dictated by a recklessly rushed society than the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Friends, what if the life we’ve been waiting for has been here the whole time, buried underneath the smothering weight of demanding expectations, of who we think we should be to appear successful, tangled up in false visions of the good life?

Are we willing to find out what Jesus means when he says, “**Get away with me and you’ll recover your life**”?

Or do we prefer the world’s version of happiness, which often leaves us emptier than it finds us?”

Spiritual Practices for Unhurrying by Alan Fadling

Jesus would sometimes invite his disciples away from the demands of ministry and take them with him to be alone and quiet in retreat. This invitation from Jesus appears in the gospel of Mark: "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (6:31).

We might resist such a rhythm out of fear that it would somehow reduce our productivity. We can, instead, see it as an opportunity to be refreshed and empowered by God for the good work he has given us to do. Then, renewed, revitalized and ready once again, we can return to the good work given to us.

So what can you do with a few hours alone and quiet in God's presence? Here are a few things that have helped me:

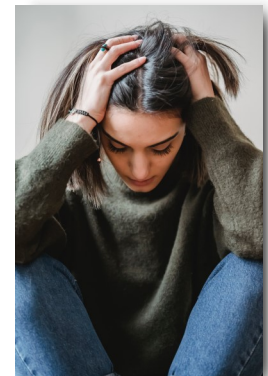
- Start with no agenda — or acknowledge whatever agenda you may have brought to the time. Whenever we go before God, it is helpful to acknowledge the unanswered questions or unclear direction we've brought to our time with him. ...We need to listen with an open mind to notice where he may be leading us.
- Take the first 20 or 30 minutes to do nothing more than listen. Be quiet. Sit still or take an unhurried stroll. Notice God in the beauty of what he has made.

- Give thanks. I have found that gratitude and thanksgiving are evidence of an unhurried life.
- I find it helpful to become as quiet on the outside as I am able. In that place of outward silence, I become aware of the noise of my driven soul. When we are patient enough to wait in silence for the inner noise to weary of its aim to keep us moving, thinking and doing, we can then remember that he really is God.
- When distractions come — and they will — you might choose to just let them float by rather than wrestling with them. Or you might find a way to include those distractions in your time with the Lord: give thanks for them, make a request regarding them or entrust them into God's hands.



I am hungry to be part of a community of men and women who are living more fully and deeply in unhurried communion with Jesus, who are walking with him, serving him and working with him. How rich such a life would be — not only for us but for the people around us.

From An Unhurried Life by Alan Fadling



For One Who Is Exhausted A blessing by John O'Donohue

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
Then all the unattended stress falls in
On the mind like an endless, increasing weight.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.

Be excessively gentle with yourself.
Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.

Learn to linger around someone of
ease who feels they have all the
time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself, having learned
a new respect for your heart and the joy that dwells
far within slow time.



From Burnout to Balance by Susan Miller

Several years ago I was preparing to speak at a conference in California. The audience in one of my sessions was pastors' wives and women in leadership. I wanted to address the burnout that is so often experienced by these women who pour out their lives for others.

As I outlined my talk and began to write about burnout, a jolt of reality hit me – **I was describing myself!**

My packed schedule had left me exhausted and overwhelmed. I was having trouble sleeping and had tearful outbursts. The realization of my own burnout hit was a shock; I was not taking care of myself and had lost all sense of balance in my life.

God had my full attention. How could I talk to these women with any credibility if I wasn't willing to own up to my own struggle with burn-out? Running on empty was beginning to affect my ability to pour out to others. It was time to take a realistic look at my spinning world and what it would take to restore, refresh, and renew my spirit, body, and mind.

The first thing I did was run to Jesus, confess my weariness, pray for His restoration, and turn to scripture. *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).*

Here are some things I did to restore, refresh, and renew my mind, body, and spirit.

- **I acknowledged that self-care is not selfish!** Self-care is vital to maintaining balance in your life.
- **I gave myself permission to do something I love.** I chose to be gentle with myself and allow myself to be human. I decided to *get off* the merry-go-round of busyness. By neglecting self-care, I *fell off* the merry-go-round! Now I stop to smell the flowers, read a good book, and ride my bike.
- **I began to eat better, prioritize sleep, and schedule downtime and exercise.** It's hard to do this with a full schedule and when I'm feeling overwhelmed. Yet they're essential for bringing balance to my out-of-control lifestyle.
- **I scheduled time for a mental health day on my calendar.** I needed to get away from the demands of my packed schedule.
- **I didn't get down on myself if my workout wasn't strenuous.** A simple walk around the block did wonders to revive my mental attitude. In addition to walking, I work out at the YMCA once a week.
- **I set healthy boundaries.** I can't be all things to all people all the time. I don't respond to texts and emails after 6:00pm unless it is an emergency. Otherwise, it can wait until tomorrow. Being in control rather than being controlled by my phone, my calendar, and my computer is a true measure of self-care. I needed to define my limits and what others could expect from me.
- **I reinvested in my friendships.** Having close friends doesn't just happen. To have a friend, you have to be a friend. Yes, growing a friendship takes time, commitment, and intentionality. The fruit of a friendship is having someone to share your joys and your struggles. Someone who is a trusted confidant, an encourager, and who is non-judgmental and will love you unconditionally.
I love to fertilize my friendships over a cup of coffee, or simply being together over a bag of popcorn and no agenda.

What is an area of your life that needs self-care? What will you choose to do for more balance in your life? Start with sitting at the feet of Jesus for His wisdom and guidance.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).