

EXCERPT



A Non-Anxious Life *Experiencing the Peace of God's Presence*

February 6, 2024 | \$24, 220 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0050-2

Anxious living is a distortion of good motives, blocking the clarity of stillness and rest. Alan Fadling once felt mastered by worry, too, and he brings counsel on how to learn a better way and who to look to for it: Jesus, “the ultimate non-anxious presence.” He constructs a posture from which we can rest more deeply, live more fully, and lead better. Fixing our minds on grace and eternity, we can begin to see the benefit of loosening our grip and operating from a sure foundation.

Learning to Live Like the Prince of Peace We Follow

We live in a world full of trouble. We need a peace that is more powerful than trouble. It is a mistake to promise people that if they follow Jesus, their lives will be trouble-free and full of outward blessings. The peace Jesus promises is better than that because it is durable. It is a peace found in him. It is union with Christ that produces settled peace in our hearts and minds. This peace stays when trouble comes. And this peace is something we can bring into the midst of trouble and conflict.

Jesus wants us to realize that it is no surprise when the world brings us trouble. We live in a world that is out of alignment with its divine purpose and origin. There is no peace in opposition to God; it is in God that we find peace. Peace like this is like the roots of a tree rather than like a morning mist that burns away when the heat of the day comes along.

But when trouble comes, I am often overwhelmed by it. I can agree with the truth of what Jesus says, but I may find I don't yet have the capacity to trust him as much as I wish. Why do I struggle like this? One reason is that I listen to the wrong voice. When I feel heavy, worried, or overwhelmed, I tend to give attention to the voices fostering these feelings. But these voices aren't usually seeking my good.

The voice of anxiety or overwhelm—when I trust its message—has a way of diminishing me, draining me, and distancing my mind and heart from God's real presence. What helps me is to practice contemplative attentiveness to the voice of God in my life.

God has never forsaken me when I feel forsaken. He has never abandoned me when I feel his apparent absence. God remains a God of peace in moments when anxiety threatens to overwhelm me. I've been learning to attend to God's gracious and peaceful voice in the face of the noisy voice of anxiety. God wants me to let his voice be louder in my heart and mind than the voice of anxiety. In this way, I become more securely connected to the true vine.

But I've sometimes had the habit of responding to unwelcome surprises and painful experiences with a non-abiding rather than an abiding posture. I attach myself to the vine of worry; it sucks life from me. I attach myself to the vine of spiritual apathy; it leads me to procrastinate and put off my life rather than living it. I attach myself to the vine of “what do others think,” and my sense of value rides the roller coaster of others' changing opinions. It's so much better when I learn to practice the habit of abiding in God when I feel uneasy or overwhelmed or frustrated.

Jesus is continually reminding me that he alone is the true vine and that I am a beloved branch. These have become familiar and calming words for me: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:7-8).

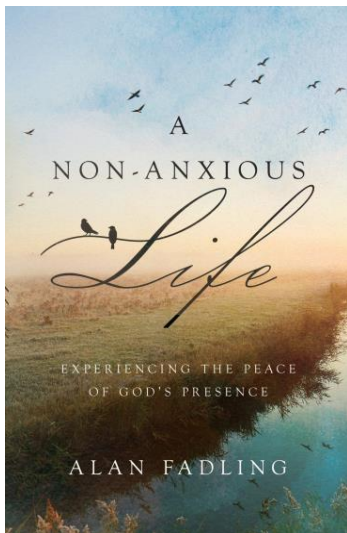


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Jesus isn't offering a tricky conditional arrangement here, as though he were saying, "If you abide in me, then I'll let you ask what you wish and I'll do it for you (though only because I'm forced by my own faithfulness to do so)." Jesus is making a simple statement of fact. "If you remain united with me—in communion with me—what you ask and what I want will overlap. The Father will be honored because you are reflecting his heart and mind more, and realizing that in your actual fruitful living."

Jesus invites us to make ourselves more and more at home with him. My anxiety harbors assumptions about Jesus that don't fit and don't work. When I let anxiety reign, I tend to assume that he has less patience with me than he actually does. Jesus wants us to let him be patient, kind, compassionate, and gentle with us. Jesus wants us to refurbish our vision of him with images that are rich with goodness, beauty, truth, and peace. That's a place to make myself at home.

There is nothing Jesus loves more in friendship with me than that connection. In that place of confident relationship, he is a master to whom I am an apprentice. I'm learning how to live like the Prince of Peace I follow. I'm learning to express his peace in the anxious, angry, and troubling environments in which I sometimes find myself. I need a potent peace to be able to live this way. Such peace overcomes trouble rather than being overwhelmed by it.

Learning to practice peace this way in my inner life involves noticing when unwelcome feelings arise: insecurity, anxiety, apathy, depression, weariness, or despair. I notice them. I acknowledge them. I don't fight with them, but rather I pivot my attention to God with me in that moment. I don't pretend I'm not feeling low, edgy, angry, or heart-weary.

I learn to turn my gaze toward God in the midst of these real emotions. When I find myself in the sphere of trouble, I remind myself that the sphere of God's gracious and peaceful presence is a far greater one. I am in the presence of one who protects me, secures me, encourages me, refreshes me, energizes me, stirs me. This reality may not immediately change my mood, but a refreshed perspective often enables me to step into whatever good lies before me and engage it with God.

Inner peace is not just a self-serving good. I can bring it into my encounters and interactions with others. Being a peaceful, non-anxious presence to others blesses them.

—adapted from chapter ten, "Peace in Troubling Times"



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Q & A



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Alan Fadling is president and founder of Unhurried Living in Mission Viejo, California, inspiring people to rest deeper, live fuller, and lead better. He speaks and consults internationally with organizations such as Saddleback Church, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Cru, Halftime Institute, Apprentice Institute, and Open Doors International.

The Most Common Form of Soul Hurry is Anxiety

What motivated you to write this book?

Alan Fadling: My lifelong journey with anxiety and my search for being at home in the peace of God were my motivations for writing this book. And the more I spoke to Christian leaders about my previous books *An Unhurried Life* and *An Unhurried Leader*, the more I realized that their most common form of soul hurry was anxiety.

In what ways does this book carry forward themes from your previous books?

Alan: In *An Unhurried Life*, I asked the question, "What difference would it make in our lives if we remembered more often that we follow an unhurried Savior?" In this book, an underlying question was, "What difference would it make in our lives if we learned to practice the presence of the Prince of Peace in our lives?" I sought to write a sort of "spirituality of anxiety and peace."

What are some of the main themes you share in this latest book?

Alan: The peace of Christ is the fruit of practicing God's presence rather than seeking the absence of unpleasant, worrisome circumstances. We can feel anxious and still find our way into a posture of peace. Anything that can be done energized by anxiety can be done better empowered by peace. There are friends of peace like grace, hope, joy, and humility that help us live in the neighborhood of peace more often.

What would you identify as some of your favorite quotes from *A Non-Anxious Life*?

Alan: Here are just a few of my favorite quotes:

- "If it can be done in anxiety, it can be done better in peace."
- "My anxious worry isn't so much breaking a rule as it is making a mistake about reality."
- "Learn to translate the energy of anxiety into the activity of prayer."
- "Jesus cares about our troubles, but they don't worry him."



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