An Unhurried Life: Being With Jesus Before Doing for Jesus

Alan Fadling on Following Jesus' Rhythm of Work and Rest

Alan Fadling | Tuesday, October 20, 2026 | Host: Mark Burns

Program Summary

In this special archive presentation originally recorded in June 2013, Mark Burns welcomes Alan Fadling, author of An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest. Alan calls himself a 'recovering speed addict' and describes discovering that even good ministry activity can crowd out abiding in God's presence. A remark from Dallas Willard describing Jesus as 'relaxed' prompted Alan to reread the Gospels and notice Jesus' unhurried attentiveness. He reflects on the danger of separating prayer from leadership, the formative power of solitude and silence, a significant quiet moment at Urbana 1990, and his mentor's advice to let God season him before rushing to fulfill a sense of calling. Alan explains spiritual direction and his practice of setting aside monthly time simply to be with God. The interview ends by contrasting identity based on achievement, approval, and possessions with the Father's declaration of love for Jesus before His public ministry began. Part Two continues the discussion of work, rest, and attentiveness.

Key Takeaways

• Hurry can become an inner habit even when my schedule is filled with good and meaningful responsibilities.

• Jesus modeled an attentive, unhurried way of living while faithfully doing the Father's work.

• Much activity for God is not the same as abiding in God's presence.

• Prayer and leadership belong together; spiritual practices should shape the way we lead, not be confined to private life.

• Silence, solitude, Scripture meditation, and community are learned by practicing them, not only reading about them.

• A sense of calling may require patient spiritual formation before visible action.

• Time alone with God can be valuable even when it produces no measurable result.

• The temptation to define myself by productivity, approval, and possessions can make rest feel threatening.

• The Father's love is not a reward for completed work; Jesus was called beloved before His public ministry.

• An unhurried life is not laziness; it is learning to work and rest from a secure relationship with God.

Scripture References

• Psalm 62:1–2

• Mark 1:35

• Luke 5:15–16

• John 15:4–5

• Matthew 11:28–30

• Luke 10:38–42

• Mark 1:9–11

• Psalm 46:10

• Isaiah 40:31

Quote of the Day

“I was so busy with the work of God, I didn’t have very much time for the face of God.” — Alan Fadling

Broadcast Notes

Mark introduces this as a two-day archive conversation from June 2013, with updated transcripts and ministry resources available online. Alan describes the opening of his book, 'A Frantic Life,' and how a Dallas Willard comment about Jesus being 'relaxed' changed his reading of the Gospels. Mark enthusiastically describes marking up the book and asks about Alan's work with the Leadership Institute. Alan corrects Mark's introduction: his Fuller Seminary degree was a master's degree, not a doctorate. He explains that an early study of pastors revealed a disconnect between prayer and perceived leadership effectiveness. Their training therefore incorporated the actual practice of silence, solitude, Scripture meditation, and community. Alan recalls a moment of quiet prayer at Urbana 1990 that prompted a sense of calling; his mentor Chuck Miller urged him to let God 'season' him rather than rush into activity. Mark highlights 'much activity without much abiding.' Alan speaks warmly of his wife Gem and their three sons, describes spiritual direction as helping leaders deepen their conversational relationship with God, and explains his monthly practice of setting aside time simply to be in God's presence. The closing insight is that achievement, others' opinions, and possessions are insecure foundations for identity; the Father's love for Jesus at His baptism came before His public ministry. Biographical and organizational details mentioned in the original interview describe 2013, not necessarily current roles or family ages.

❤■ Practical Applications

• Before beginning work, spend five quiet minutes in God's presence without a task list.

• Ask whether my pace is driven by love and calling or by anxiety and a need to prove myself.

• Read a Gospel passage and notice how Jesus responds to people and interruptions.

• Put a short period of silence or solitude on my calendar and protect it like an important appointment.

• Before making a ministry or work decision, pray rather than relying only on planning skills.

• When a new opportunity arises, ask whether God is inviting preparation before immediate action.

• Identify one place where productivity has displaced attention to my spouse, family, or neighbor.

• Reflect on whether my identity is resting on what I do, what others say, or what I possess.

• Remember the Father's declaration of love for Jesus before His public work began.

• Choose one ordinary interaction today in which I will be fully present rather than rushed.

Today's Challenge

For seven days, set aside ten unhurried minutes each day. Begin by reading Psalm 62:1–2 or a short Gospel passage. Sit quietly before God, without checking a phone or making a list. Ask: 'Am I doing so much for You that I am neglecting time with You?' At the end of the week, schedule a longer period of solitude, and write down what you noticed about your pace, identity, and attentiveness.

Closing Prayer

Father, my soul finds rest in You alone. Forgive me for the times I have become so busy doing good things that I have neglected being with You. Show me where hurry, achievement, approval, or the need to feel important has begun to shape my identity. Teach me to follow the unhurried way of Jesus—to listen, to notice people, to pray, and to obey Your timing. Give me courage to set aside time for silence and solitude even when I cannot measure what it accomplishes. Help me bring prayer into my leadership, my work, and my decisions. Remind me that Your love is not something I earn by completing more tasks. Let my service grow out of abiding in You. Teach me to work faithfully and rest trustingly, knowing that You are my rock and salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Alan Fadling is a Christian author, spiritual director, and leadership formation guide known for An Unhurried Life: Following Jesus' Rhythms of Work and Rest. In this June 2013 interview, he discusses his work with the Leadership Institute, helping pastors and Christian leaders integrate spiritual formation, prayer, and practical leadership. His ministry encourages believers to move from frantic activity toward a deeper, attentive relationship with Jesus. Details about his roles and family in the archived conversation reflect that period.

About Today's Host

Mark Burns is General Manager of the WLUJ Family of Stations and Great News Radio Network and host of Mark & Friends. With decades of Christian radio and ministry experience, he welcomes teachers, pastors, authors, and everyday believers to share Scripture, testimony, and encouragement that help listeners grow in their walk with Jesus.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

We're glad you're here. We're glad you're here. Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.

It's so good to see you. We hope that it's clear. Everyone loves you.

We're glad you're here. Reading from Psalm 62, verses 1 and 2. My soul finds rest in God alone. My salvation comes from Him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress. I will never be shaken.

That was Psalm 62, verses 1 and 2. O magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt His name together. It's Tuesday, October 20th, 2026, and welcome to Mark & Friends. Today and tomorrow we're reaching back into our broadcast archives to June of 2013 for a special conversation with author Alan Fadling and his book, An Unhurried Life, Following Jesus' Rhythm of Work and Rest.

Now, I don't know about you, but sometimes I find myself so busy doing things, even good things, that I can neglect simply being with Jesus. Alan describes himself as a recovering speed addict, and he challenges us to consider whether our hurry is keeping us from enjoying the presence of God and recognizing the opportunities he's placing right in front of us. And another benefit of revisiting these older programs is that today we can provide not only the original audio, but also transcripts, scriptures, key takeaways, practical applications, and additional ministry resources.

You'll find them under the Mark & Friends tab at greatnewsradio.org or wluj.org. Now let's travel back to 2013 for my conversation with Alan Fadling. I can't wait for our listeners over the next few days to get introduced to you and this book and all the material that I am learning and gleaning from it. But before I get into introducing you, I want to read something in the very first chapter, your very first paragraph, and then I want you to comment to a very important question I have for you.

So welcome to Mark & Friends. Thanks, Mark. I'm looking forward to some unhurried moments together.

Yes, this book, the first chapter is called A Frantic Life, and it begins with, I'm a recovering speed addict. And I don't mean the drug. I'm talking about the inner pace of my life.

I always seem to be in a hurry. I was the guy who looked for the fastest moving lane on the freeway, the shortest checkout line at the grocery store, and the quickest way to finish a job. It's probably pathological.

But like you, I also live in a hurried culture. I'm not the only one trying to get there more quickly and do things faster. In fact, there is little incentive out there to slow down, and the pace in the church doesn't seem all that different from the pace in the world around us.

Well, Alan, the question that I have for you, when did God tell you to write this book for me? Well, that's a great question. Oh, gosh. Well, you know, some have asked, you know, the story of the book.

And in some ways, it's a 20-year story, beginning with the paragraph you just read and just some awakenings that I had as a 20-something pastor. And then more recently, because so much of my work is with Christian leaders in churches and parachurch organizations, mission organizations, a lot of organizations, my conviction about this need grew and grew. And then finally, about three years ago, I sat down and I decided, instead of being the guy who said, you know, someday I should write a book, I just made a decision that this was the time I felt it was an invitation from Jesus.

And really, a couple things provoked that decision especially. I heard Dallas Willard say that if he had one word to describe Jesus, the word he'd choose, and a lot went through my mind, any went through my mind, but the word he'd choose was relaxed. And I remember hearing that word and thinking, really? Relaxed? You got one word and that's the one you're going to use? And I realized that that word exposed an inner drivenness and hurry that I began to realize was so unlike Jesus.

And so it was that idea that became one of the seeds for a number of days retreat where I simply read the Gospels with that question in mind. Is Jesus really relaxed? As I wrestled with that question and read the Gospels over and over and over, I began to come to the conclusion that he was indeed relaxed. And then this idea of unhurried began to come into focus for me.

Yeah, as I read that in your opening comments in this book, I'm like, hmm, I've never thought of Jesus in those terms, but it's so true and indicative of his life. He was never in a hurry. He always did things at a pace that was caring and sensitive and compassionate and loving.

And he had his priorities always in line. He followed Father God's will at all times. And I really started, as I was gleaning truths out of this book and relaxing, I'm thinking, I love this author.

I got to get him on the phone. In fact, I'm only halfway through the book, but I didn't want to miss the opportunity to get you. And so I'm looking forward to finishing this.

But if you looked at my copy right now, you would see post-it notes on a number of pages. You would see underlines. You would see asterisks to the side.

Sometimes I do like a asterisk rating system, one, two or three. Three means, oh, it's perfect. A bunch of threes that maybe we'll talk about today and tomorrow.

But I want to share a little of some of your background story and some of the work you're doing, as you're mentioning, with The Journey and with leaders. You got your doctor of divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary, and you're currently the executive director of The Journey, a ministry of the Leadership Institute in Orange County, California, training Christian leaders to integrate spiritual formation and leadership development. So that's what you're talking about.

Is there a website or how would that apply to some of our listeners? Would that be something they would sign up for or find out more about or have you come in and do a training at their church? So what does this institute do? Yeah, well, thank you for asking. Well, one, my degree at Fuller was a master's degree, and the Leadership Institute really was birthed about the same time I was finishing that degree at Fuller Seminary. And it was formed originally out of some research that was done among pastors, really mostly college ministry pastors in Southern California.

And the research was about what did these pastors feel contributed the most to their leadership influence, impact, fruitfulness, that sort of thing. And so one of the questions asked was if you were to rank these factors as to which contributes most to your fruitfulness, your influence, your impact as a leader, what's the most impactful? And then go from there. And in the list were things like your education, your personality, your communication abilities, your organizational abilities, your

position in an organization, all these different sorts of factors.

And then somewhere on the list was simply prayer, your life of prayer. And they were to rank them, you know, one, two, three, four, et cetera. And what was striking in the research was that no one listed prayer up in the top two or three.

And to be fair, I don't think you'd say that this was a group of college pastors who never prayed. It's just that what we began to realize is that, at least in this particular group, they didn't see a connection between praying and leading. We came to find that praying was something that they did as a person, that many of them were deepening their relationship with God, but that when it came to step into the places of leadership, you sort of put on a different set of skills and a different way of thinking.

And so the very first thing the Leadership Institute did was produce a seminary course on college ministry that put about a third of the hours into actually engaging in spiritual practices like solitude and silence, like reflecting on and meditating on Scripture, like being in community. Not talking about it, reading about it, lecturing about it, writing papers about it, taking tests on it, but simply doing it. And that's been an insight that's been very, very valuable to us over the last 25 years.

So often we teach people to do things, even spiritual practices, and then we hope they'll figure out how to do it when they get home. We've just found building in space right in the midst to try these things on has been a very impactful practice. And I think when you were in our neck of the woods for an Urbana conference, I think during Urbana 87 and Urbana 90, there was a speaker that talked about prayer, and that was kind of a springboard into some of your learning and growth with your walk with the Lord, wasn't it? Yeah, it was.

In fact, you know, what's interesting is, though I know there were some really good speakers at 90 in particular, the moment that I mentioned in the book is actually one of those little transitional moments where someone up front was leading perhaps a five- or ten-minute moment of prayer. It wasn't even a major element of that particular session. And what we were given was simply about five or maybe ten minutes to be quiet.

And so we're in this assembly hall, and there are 18,000 people being quiet. I'll tell you, that makes an impression on you. And in that quiet moment, my wife and I both had what we would now call a vision.

And the funny thing is our theological orientation sort of was such that we didn't think such things happened to people. So it came as quite a shock when it happened to us. And it was really a vision of expanded influence.

And being a late 20s, you know, mover, shaker, leader, at least that's how I saw myself, my immediate response was to say, great, okay, how are we going to make this vision happen? I remember talking to a mentor of mine, Chuck Miller, and Chuck said, that's very exciting, but you might want to let God season you a bit. I was in such a hurry to make this thing happen. I didn't realize that maybe this vision was going to be more about who God was making me first before it became something that I was actually involved in as a ministry.

Yeah, I wrote down a quote from your book that I so love, much activity without much abiding. And that's kind of what you're saying. Sometimes we want to rush along or move forward or get impulsive on something that we feel is of God and would be God honoring, but we're not abiding in Him, resting in Him, waiting on Him.

Yeah, that's well said. And I just found that at least at that time when I came across these men, in this case it was four men who founded our ministry, the Leadership Institute, I realized I was so busy with the work of God, I didn't have very much time for the face of God, for the presence of God. That was not good, and I was really beginning to burn out, even in my late 20s.

Well, you mentioned Jem at this Urbana conference in the past. How long have you been married, and does she live out her name as being your Jem? You know what, yeah. Well, we've been married this last month.

We've celebrated 28 years, and I've often said that her name is her personality and her character. She really is a Jem. In the sense that the book starts, I am a recovering speed addict.

I don't think that's a confession she would need to make. I've probably learned at least as much about living a less hurried life from her as I have from anyone. She's naturally, or at least God-given character.

Her character is to be unhurried with people and to be attentive to God's voice. Yeah, we've shared this journey together all along the way, which has been a great gift. I see you have three sons, and what are their ages? Our three guys are 15, 17,

and 20.

We just stepped out of the three teenagers' neighborhood a little while back. I also see that you're a certified spiritual director. What does that entail? Well, it sounds pretty impressive.

Really, the spiritual director role, at least as I practice it, is that I'll meet with, in my case, mostly pastors and Christian leaders, maybe an hour a month just to sit together and talk about our relationship with God. I'll listen to what's happening in their relationship with God. Where are they sensing God's grace? I'm meeting them.

Where are they finding it's a struggle to respond to God's grace? It's really a relationship whose sole focus is to help a person, help another person deepen their conversational relationship with God. Unlike counseling, which is often focused on something that needs to be resolved, perhaps, or healed, or solved, spiritual direction relationship is really more trying to focus on spiritual health and deepening of relationship with God. Now, how does someone get in touch with you for the Leadership Institute, or maybe they want to talk through some spiritual things, or I don't know if you do a lot of your work over the phone or you come and do visits, but how do they get in touch with the Leadership Institute? Is there a website or phone number or in touch with you? Yeah, thanks.

Well, probably the easiest way to get a hold of us here at the Leadership Institute would be our website, which would be spiritualleadership.com. That's the easiest one we find to remember, and we have a team of people who serve in a lot of different ways to help leaders both in their life with God, but also in how to lead from that place so that instead of being the person who may or may not have a warm and rich personal relationship with God, but that that would also become the soil out of which they live as a pastor or as a missionary or just as a person in business wanting to do that business more Christianly. I see you also teach courses at Hope International University. You're currently a part of a planning team for a new church called The Following in Orange County, California.

So what do you do in your spare time? Well, I try to live unhurried. You know, the ironies just pile up when you write a book on an unhurried life and, of course, trying to be in recovery from that. As far as just spare time, I'm a voracious reader.

I love reading books that are old, that have been around a while, that maybe have stood the test of time. I love getting out on my bicycle. I live here in Orange County, and most of the year it's a nice place to ride around.

We've got beaches nearby I love to visit those as well. In case you just tuned in, I have Alan Fadling on the phone with me. He's the author of An Unhurried Life, Following Jesus' Rhythm of Work and Rest.

It's by IVP, and you can purchase multiple copies for your friends, family, small group, your church at ivpress.com. I'm about three quarters, halfway through this book. I absolutely highly recommend it. I think every Christian should be reading it this summer.

Come on, team, let's get together and slow down our pace of life, the demands, and let's get in balance with Jesus' rhythm of work and rest. Alan, I wanted to go through some of your background just to inform our listeners of who you are and the work you're involved in because it's a real transition to start slowing down, especially when you've been addicted to being hurried, to being productive, to being, if you will, kind of doing a lot of things so people can say, Wow, look it, he must be being used of God. Look at all he's doing.

What were some of those lessons that you learned right away? Well, I'll tell you, one of the things that became an absolute lifeline and has continued to be for the last 20-some years is the practice of setting aside a day or a part of a day once a month just to step away from all of the work of my life and all the other engagements of my life just to be in God's presence for no other reason than to be in God's presence. You know, originally I was doing this because I was a part of a community who practiced this rhythm. And my experience over time has been that, you know, gratefully, there have been more and more books written on the Christian practice of solitude and silence, and more and more Christian leaders are seeing the value, at least affirming the value.

But what we came to find is that it's very hard to practice. It's easy to read about and to affirm, but boy, building that practice into life is a great challenge. And so, but thankfully I was a part of a community that helped me build that rhythm in.

And so, I've sought for the last 20-some years to set aside such a day. And one of the reasons I find it so hard, and I think perhaps others do as well, is that I have a tendency to measure my identity by the things I accomplish or by what others say about me or, you know, what I'm accumulating. These were sort of categories that, you know, Henri Nouwen mentioned as cultural ways in which we establish our identity.

But as long as my identity is rooted in all that what I do and what people say and what I possess, then if I stop doing, then my identity takes a hit. And so, I have to do more and I have to do more and I have to do more, even to establish and to hold my identity level. What I began to realize is there came a point where I couldn't do enough to keep feeling like I was valuable, important, wanted, whatever.

And it was in those places of quiet that I began to hear the voice of unconditional love, the voice of a father who would say to his son at the baptism, You are my beloved son. I'm so pleased with you. And would say it when Jesus had yet to do a thing, hadn't healed anyone to our knowledge, at least the Gospel story, hadn't preached a sermon yet, hadn't done much travel yet.

Before he begins his work, he's beloved. And that has been the voice I continue to hear and hear again through those practices of solitude and silence, simply to be in God's presence for no other reason than that. The book is called An Unhurried Life Following Jesus' Rhythm of Work and Rest.

It's published by InterVarsity Press. We have a lot of friends at InterVarsity Press, and you can purchase multiple copies of this book at ivpress.com, ivpress.com. And you can also find out more about the ministry work that Alan's involved in at spiritualleadership.com, spiritualleadership.com. Tomorrow we'll spend the whole broadcast talking about this great book that I highly recommend for everyone. Here's some of the chapters.

A Frantic Life, An Unhurried Apprentice, Productivity, Unhurried, Isn't Lazy, Temptation, Unhurried, Enough to Resist, Unhurried, Enough to Care, Unhurried, Enough to Pray. Gosh, I'm reading kind of quickly. I don't know if I'm very hurried right now.

I'm pretty excited about this book, and I want so many of our listeners to purchase a copy because I know how God is using it in my life. And so if you can stay with me, Alan, we're going to have you talk more about how God can use this book in all of our lives. And I hope that I can glean some more truths and points of application so that I can slow down, follow Jesus' rhythm and rest, and then work more effectively by abiding in him through those times of unhurriedness, through those times of quiet solitude.

So thank you, Alan, for being available on Mark & Friends. Absolutely. It's been a lot of fun.

Oh, listening friend, perhaps one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves today is this. Am I so busy doing things for God that I am neglecting time with God? Alan reminds us that our value isn't determined by how much we accomplish, how busy we appear, or how others view us. Our identity is found in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

And tomorrow we'll continue this conversation exploring how Jesus modeled an unhurried life, why rest is so important, and how slowing down can actually help us become more attentive to the people God places in our path. If you missed part of today's broadcast, want to hear it again, or explore our growing library of transcripts, scriptures, talking points, key takeaways, and practical applications, visit greatnewsradio.org or wluj.org and click on the Mark & Friends tab. Thanks for listening.

Thanks for being a part of our radio listening family. This is Mark Burns with the Ministry of Great News Media. God bless you and have a great day and night.