

An Unhurried Leader: The Lasting Fruit of Daily Influence

Spiritual leadership is leadership rooted in the deepest reality there is: living in vital relationship with God through Jesus, and then bearing the good fruit of that communion. With statements like that filling the pages, author and consultant Alan Fadling in his book *An Unhurried Leader: The Lasting Fruit of Daily Influence*, makes a sizeable contribution to the kind of leadership to which we are called as followers of Christ. In short, the author re-centers our focus to serve out of “overflow leadership.” As a tested leader, Fadling’s reflections are equally insightful and convicting.

Take a look at these Book Notes to get a sense of the wisdom that awaits those who are desperate to lead more like Jesus.

Title: *An Unhurried Leader: The Lasting Fruit of Daily Influence*

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Book Description:

What does grace-paced leadership look like? Spiritual mentor. Pastor. Executive director. Parent. Professor. Spouse. We have many roles and relationships. And in the midst of all we do, we’re tempted to frantically take control of situations in hopes of making good things happen. Alan Fadling, author of *An Unhurried Life*, writes: “That kind of unholy hurry may make me look busy, but too often it keeps me from actually being fruitful in the ways Jesus wants me to be. Jesus modeled grace-paced leadership. To learn that we begin not with leading, but with following.” In these pages Alan Fadling unfolds what it means for leaders to let Jesus set the pace. Through biblical illustrations, personal examples, and on-the-ground leadership wisdom, this book will guide you into a new view of kingdom leadership. Along the way you just might find that the whole of your life has been transformed into a more livable and more fruitful pace.

Book Quotes:

Jesus modeled grace-paced leadership. To learn from him, we begin not with leading but with following.

LOCATION: 43

In these pages I hope to offer an inspiring vision of leadership that is less hurried and more fruitful, less hectic and more joyful. **LOCATION:** 47

Jesus sets the pace of my following, and I’m not trying to be super spiritual here. This is just basic kingdom reality: I cannot lead for the good or the honor of God’s kingdom if I am not seeking his kingdom first and foremost in my life and my work. Otherwise, I end up promoting my own little kingdom agendas, all the while

assuming I am doing so in the name of Jesus. It happens all the time. It's happened far too frequently in my own leadership. LOCATION: 51

Unhurried leadership operates from a peaceful confidence that God has made me, that God is remaking me, and that God has invited me to live a life of influence from that very place and as that very person. LOCATION: 90

Spiritual leadership is leadership rooted in the deepest reality there is: living in vital relationship with God through Jesus, and then bearing the good fruit of that communion. LOCATION: 96

Furthermore, the term spiritual leadership can help us remember that while what leaders do matters immensely, who leaders are matters even more. LOCATION: 97

When I seek God's kingdom first, I find that my vision of leadership is rooted in the abundance of God's presence; no longer am I adrift in experiences of apparent scarcity. Leading from a place of perceived scarcity can make me resentful, fearful, anxious, and controlling. Leading from a place of real abundance enables me to do so from a place of joy, peace, and security. I begin to find myself in trouble when my leadership becomes an attempt to find satisfaction for an empty soul rather than being a place where I can serve from a God-filled soul. LOCATION: 167

When I serve and lead from a place of being relaxed instead of anxious, I serve with far more creativity, compassion, and confidence. LOCATION: 177

So unhurried leadership is overflow leadership—a term that always feels so pregnant and powerful. LOCATION: 184

As a leader, rather than acting like a needy person trying to get something from those I lead, I am invited to work like a generous and gracious servant. Rather than trying to prove something about myself, I can lead as an expression of something already God-established. Rather than leading in order to compensate for some sense of personal deficiency, I lead to communicate and share a fullness I already have. LOCATION: 189

Instead of bringing my thirst for security to my work, I bring this thirst to Jesus. I can then find in him the security I long for, and I can minister from security rather than for security. LOCATION: 199

Bernard of Clairvaux, a twelfth-century reformer in the Benedictine order of monks, offered this insight into life and leadership as overflow: The [one] who is wise, therefore, will see [their] life as more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then [offers] the overflow without loss to itself. . . . Today there are many in the Church who act like canals; the reservoirs are far too rare. . . . They want to pour [this stream] forth before they have been filled; they are more ready to speak than to listen, impatient to teach what they have not grasped, and full of presumption to govern others while they know not how to govern themselves. LOCATION: 333

Hurried leaders are quick to do and slow to be; quick to speak but slow to listen; quick to teach and slow to learn; quick to lead others but slow to let God lead them beside his still waters. LOCATION: 346

Ministry is sharing the fruit of God's transforming work in our own lives. My most fruitful ministry occurs when I am able to share the growing reality of God's presence within me for the benefit of another. LOCATION: 409

No one has to squeeze water out of leaders who truly seek God first. They come with their own internal water source. Something within them is so alive and holy that they can't contain it. Living water flows out to bless and benefit people around them. That's leadership from divine overflow rather than leadership from managed

meagerness. And I envision divine overflow as key to unhurried leadership. LOCATION: 453

Jesus invites us to come to him and follow him, but sometimes I am more focused only on where I am going. We travel here, have an appointment there, and attend a meeting after that. Going here and going there. We are always going! And of course leaders go. Leaders take initiative. Leaders act. And quite understandably our first thought as leaders is often what we are going to do. This action orientation is a valuable gift. But we are not to lead alone, in our own power, according to our best thoughts, so we cannot fixate on this gift of doing; we need to also open those gifts that bring us into deeper communion with the one who is the great leader, the one who longs to lead with us. We will lead better when we lead in the presence of our King. LOCATION: 569

We forget that in God's economy who we are nearly always trumps the influence of what we do. In *A Testament to Devotion*, Quaker professor Thomas Kelly put it this way: We Western peoples are apt to think our great problems are external, environmental. We are not skilled in the inner life, where the real roots of our problem lie. For I would suggest that the true explanation of the complexity of our program is an inner one, not an outer one. The outer distractions of our interests reflect an inner lack of integration of our own lives. We are trying to be several selves at once, without all our selves being organized by a single, mastering Life within us. Each of us tends to be, not a whole self, but a whole committee of selves. LOCATION: 790

In light of my ongoing recovery from sinful habits, I am so grateful for the life-giving liturgy of confession we often say together in our Anglican church: "Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen." As I pray this prayer in community week by week, I am praying to the One who has chosen the role of my defender—and my God is the best defender around. No prosecuting attorney stands a chance against him in my case. LOCATION: 1098

By God's grace there is indeed something redemptive and curative in the hard paths we travel. I think it is the consecration of our suffering that does it. Suffering alone is just pain. Suffering in the presence of a loving and faithful God, however, can drive our roots deeper into our knowledge and love for him than we imagined ever going. LOCATION: 1150

When I plan great events, produce amazing programs, and build impressive structures, I feel a sense of control over the variables that come into play. I can also feel a sense of accomplishment. But when I work specifically for people—serving them as they travel their unique and often bumpy journeys toward holiness and fruitfulness—I feel much less in control because I have less control, and the fruit of my efforts is far harder to assess by any short-term measurement. If my "fruit that will last" is only measured in terms of weeks, months, or quarterlies, I might not be contributing to kingdom longevity the way I could or should be. LOCATION: 1211

My friend Chuck Miller shared a simple illustration that always helps me with this. The image involves a pitcher, a cup, a saucer, and a plate. Picture the cup on the saucer and both sitting on the plate. In the pitcher is all that God is and wants to pour into the cup, which represents my life. As God pours into me until I am full, the overflow spills out onto the saucer that supports me: the saucer represents all the relationships in my life. As God's people in my community receive all that God pours into our shared life, that overflow spills onto the plate, which represents the work of God we share. LOCATION: 1267

Unhurried leadership gives sufficient attention to the process whereby God fills me to overflowing; it is the fruit of overflow rather than pouring out the last few drops of whatever we have on our own to give. When we are unhurried leaders abiding in the true vine, we lead from divine fullness in order to bless the emptiness around us rather than leading from emptiness as we look for fullness somewhere other than in the One who is life.

LOCATION: 1271

Twenty-five years ago I began a journey of integrating spiritual formation and leadership development. At the time my vision of spiritual formation was thin, if not completely nonexistent, and my vision of leadership development was a strange brew of selfish ambition, anxiety, control, and hyperactivity. Even though I was a pastor, I seemed to leave behind whatever good there was in my communion with Jesus when it came time to engage in what I saw as the activities of leadership. It was as though I wore one suit of clothes when I was alone with God, praying, reading the Scriptures, or somehow engaging personally with him. Then I put on a completely different set of clothes—work clothes, if you will—when it came time to plan and implement programs, prepare and present messages, meet with and counsel people, and so on. My communion with Jesus and my acts of service were like two unrelated islands in my life. LOCATION: 1359

I have also realized that my human strengths can sometimes be a hindrance to kingdom progress. And I sometimes imagine Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:10 rewritten as "When I am strong, he is strong." Don't we sometimes interpret our apparent strength as a leader as evidence of God's strong presence within us? Of course God has given us strengths. He blesses our strengths and uses our strengths. But we get attached to our strengths and they become idols: our strengths become God replacements and, as such, can become lord instead of Jesus. We can easily start to rely on our strengths and depend on them in a way that is opposed to wise counsel like "Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure everything out on your own. Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track" (Prov 3:5-6 The Message). I don't want my strengths to distance me from God or turn me away from him. Instead, I want my wise and loving God to use my strengths to move me along his way for me. LOCATION: 1447

Yet God has bigger purposes for our strengths and especially for our weaknesses. We are tempted to think that our greatest resource for life's demands is our strengths, but when it comes to following Jesus, it might be that our weakness is our greatest resource. That's because our weaknesses can prompt us to turn to him and rely on his guidance and power for whatever he has called us to do. LOCATION: 1455

During those times when we serve only out of our strengths, God will often teach us that we are not to depend on our strengths, but on the God who gives us those strengths. In God's leadership design, his cause is best served not when we are strong, but when his power fills us in our weakness. After all, when we feel weak, we usually feel dependent. And that is a very good place for learning to abide in God more completely and rely on his strength more fully. LOCATION: 1462

Paul goes on to say that "in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me" (2 Cor 12:7). Paul admits that his remarkable visions and experiences of God tempted him to think more highly of himself than he should. Understandably! This place of strength must have felt quite heady and invigorating. Paul faced a temptation that many leaders do, namely, assuming that a dramatic experience of God's presence or a profound perception of God's voice is evidence of special worthiness on his part. I'm sometimes tempted to take credit for what is actually an undeserved gift. I take pride in my confident faith, leadership success, or the assumption that I'm making better spiritual progress than others around me. I may be tempted to believe that this favored experience of God is because of something special about me rather than evidence of God's kindness, goodness, and his reaching out to me. LOCATION: 1500

Nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon understood: Should you be favored with visions and revelations of the Lord, caught up to the third heaven, admitted into Paradise, and privileged to hear things which it was not lawful for a man to utter, conclude not that you have escaped the rod; rather expect that such high privilege will need heavy afflictions to balance it. If God has given you the great sail and the prosperous wind, he will also give you the heavy ballast to keep your keel deep in the stream. LOCATION: 1519

I have learned that it is far more fruitful and life giving to first seek God's person, his guiding presence, rather than resolution, healing, or situational improvement. And learning that lesson has usually involved a thorn.

LOCATION: 1555

When I pay attention to the immediate thought before me, it no longer seems part of the swarm. One by one, my thoughts feel less overwhelming. Theologian and professor Martin Laird suggests that "the key is to move from being a victim of thoughts (the commenting, chattering mind) to being their witness (the heart's stillness). Thoughts and feelings remain, but this move from victim to witness transforms our relationship with affliction."

The role of witness enables me to look at my thoughts as separate from me, which, after all, they are. LOCATION: 1769

Noticing, discerning, responding—these three steps help me in a number of practical ways. Fairly regularly, for instance, they serve as a kind of mental hygiene at the beginning of my workday. At other times, if I feel inwardly stuck in the middle of my day, this three-part tool often helps me uncover the negative thinking behind that feeling. I also use this tool when I'm feeling overwhelmed by thoughts that seem in conflict with one another. Finally, walking through the noticing, discerning, responding steps has proven a useful problem-solving and decision-making tool for me. LOCATION: 1927

Prayer isn't an activity apart from the work of ministry; prayer is a primary element of the actual work of ministry. And the only thing that can really get in the way of my engaging in this ministry is . . . me. LOCATION: 1966

Prayer really is someone we are with more than something we do. Prayer—being with Jesus—is a leader's greatest source of influence. Therefore, prayer must never be a merely peripheral activity for leaders.

LOCATION: 1985

Also not surprising is that, rather than drawing energy away from and weakening my effectiveness, leadership rooted in prayer increases it. Put differently, as a Christian leader, I do not need to choose between living either a contemplative life or an active life. Author and pastor Eugene Peterson said it like this: "The contemplative life generates and releases an enormous amount of energy into the world—the enlivening energy of God's grace rather than the enervating frenzy of our pride." In its truest form, the contemplative life is not an escape from ministry but the living heart of it. LOCATION: 2036

The contemplative life and the active life are complementary, not either-or. True contemplatives are vibrantly active in the work of the One they contemplate. And those who are truly active in kingdom work live in profound communion with the One with whom they do this work. Contemplation is the root to the tree of holy activity. Contemplation is the inhale to the exhale of godly ministry. Contemplation is the heart of holy leadership, and holy leadership is a fruit of deep-rooted contemplation. If we attempt to make contemplation and action a matter of mutually exclusive choice, our leadership will not be healthy or effective. LOCATION: 2041

I've sometimes called the sort of prayer I'm talking about here "leadership prayer." How might I distinguish this from other types of prayer? Well, when someone has asked you to pray for them, what kinds of requests have they made? For what did they want you to pray? People ask me to pray for healing, financial concerns, and much-needed jobs. Usually, people hope to see a specific situation changed. How does this compare to how Paul prayed for the churches to whom he wrote? Let's look at his prayer for his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica: "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith" (1 Thess 3:10). Paul's prayer focused more on the people's inner life than on their outer life. His was more soul prayer than situation prayer. I like to think that this is how leaders pray for those they serve.

LOCATION: 2047

Leadership prayer is staying awake to God's presence as I seek to serve his kingdom purposes in the world around me. At times a leader's venue will be family—husband or wife, sons and daughters, father and mother. Too many times my closest relationships have been lived on unholy autopilot. She does this; you say that. You say that; he does this. We become unthinking, unreflective, unresponsive to one another; our hearts fall asleep. Likewise, my leadership can lag when my heart and mind are lulled to sleep by unreviewed habits. Praying for others keeps my heart awake and alert in my roles and relationships of influence. So leadership prayer is rooted in love, and love is fully awake. LOCATION: 2058

In this way, prayer is more relational than transactional. There have been times, though, when I assumed that the important thing when I prayed was getting something to happen in a person's life that might have little to do with that person's heart. We could envision intercession as an opportunity to commune and interact with God about people who matter to us, who bother us, who interest us. Intercession is a conversational relationship with God for the benefit of others in our life. LOCATION: 2072

And what a difference it makes in my heart and my leadership when my prayers are more soul-focused than situation-focused, more relationship-focused than transaction-focused, more people-focused than program-focused, and more God-focused than me-focused! LOCATION: 2088

Another aspect of this dying to self is to ask ourselves, "Who in me is praying at this exact moment?" So often, it hasn't really been the true me. God has made the person who is praying, but some mask or persona or voice I think God expects to hear from me is speaking to him. So many of our prayers—especially those we pray at the beginning of our spiritual journeys—are self-centered. We want things from God. We want to feel better, have more, see problems solved, be more important, and so on. As we awaken to God's presence with us, our focus during prayer might, thankfully, move from a crass seeking of outward pleasures to a God-honoring seeking after inward character. We taste delight in God's presence and realize we want more of that.

LOCATION: 2100

What has worked best for me is an orientation toward pray and lead. Consider these benefits: we learn to lead prayerfully, and we learn to pray with an eye for initiative and engagement. I'm suggesting a way of praying and leading in which these activities intersect and interplay rather than being separate and disconnected. We need not see prayer as falling in the "being close to God" category and leadership as falling under the "doing for God at a practical distance" category. Prayer is living in vital friendship with God. Leadership is working in vital friendship with God. LOCATION: 2217

Too often, when we begin to plan some future event or engagement, we start with the question "What are we going to do?" It's a reasonable question, but it's not the best first question. Perhaps James would have us first ask questions like "What might be on the heart and mind of God in this moment, in this setting, and for these people?" or "In what ways might this opportunity provide just what these people need at this time?" Questions like these, prayerfully asked, provide profound wisdom, rich creativity, and clearer focus as I make my plans.

LOCATION: 2246

So, working with God does not begin with the question, What are we going to do? but rather with questions like What is on God's heart? and What would best serve the people? The first question is unintentionally self-focused. The other two questions are more God-centered and people-focused, and that is what working with God looks like. A simple framework we could use to envision this working-with-God life involves four movements: contemplation, discernment, engagement, and reflection. LOCATION: 2305

Contemplation is a way of living and working in his presence. A contemplative life is an attentive life in a distracted world. It is a listening life in a wordy world. It is an abiding life in a detached world. It is an unhurried life in a frenetic world. LOCATION: 2314

The second element of this journey of working with God is discernment. In our metaphor of a journey, discernment is the lantern that lights the path just ahead. Discernment is the ability to recognize the light of God's presence shining on the path before me so I can make my way safely and fruitfully. If contemplation is a life in which the prayer of Jesus is answered—"I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity" (Jn 17:23)—then discernment is the insight, the wisdom, the ability to see my way forward that is a reflection of that increasingly intimate friendship. Discernment is learning to see God's guiding, even transforming presence in my thoughts, my desires, and my intentions. LOCATION: 2354

In our metaphor, engagement is simply walking the path of our life and our work. It is practicing the presence of God not just as a spiritual discipline but as a principle for doing the work he has given us to do. LOCATION: 2368

Finally, on this journey toward a life characterized by working with God, we come to reflection, that look back with God over the path we've traveled so far—today, this past week, this past month, however long we choose. Reflection is taking time to learn from the journey so far; it is the spiritual practice of *examen*. We learn to look back and notice the ways God's grace has attended our path. LOCATION: 2398