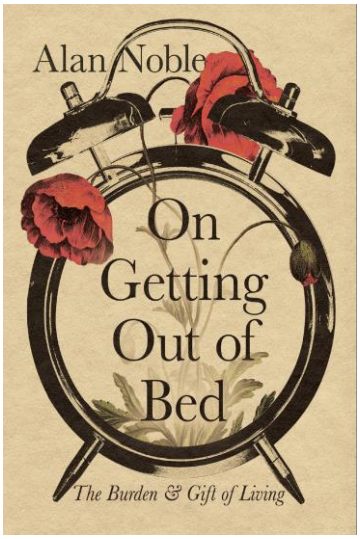

EXCERPT

On Getting Out of Bed
The Burden and Gift of Living

April 18, 2023 | $20, 120 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-**0443**-2

For most people, sorrow, anxiety, and mental illness are everyday experiences. The burden of living comes down to mundane choices that we each must make—like the daily choice to get out of bed. In this deeply personal essay, Alan Noble considers how carrying on amid great suffering is a powerful witness to the goodness of life, and of God.

Life Includes a Great Deal of Suffering

Get to know someone really well, and almost without fail, you will discover a person who routinely struggles to get out of bed in the morning. And not just because they're tired. They can't get out of bed because once they step foot on the floor, they will be launched into a day that is uncertain and lifeless and in some ways impossible.

Here are some things you will see if you get to know people: you'll discover someone who suffers panic attacks every time there's another mass shooting, someone who cannot stop obsessing over how they may have failed as a parent, someone who cannot eat or who cannot stop eating because of the guilt they feel from being sexually assaulted, someone with a nearly debilitating mental disorder that only manifested after they were married and had kids and now their spouse seriously considers divorce on an almost monthly basis, or someone who is stuck in the habit of living even though they feel terribly alone and bored. None of these scenarios are unusual.

Think about someone you know who is living the good life: someone well dressed, confident, smiling, high achieving, maybe even attractive and intelligent and funny. Nine times out of ten, they are carrying around something unspeakably painful. And often, when you learn what that pain is, it'll be something completely unexpected. You weren't even aware that people could suffer like that. Maybe you didn't know how helpless it can feel to have an adult sibling addicted to meth. Or to carry the guilt of learning that your child was abused at a sleepover. There are diseases and disorders and burdens you have never imagined, carried like boulders on the backs of the same people who smile and tell you that they are doing "good." Every time you ask them, "How's it going?" they'll say, "Good! I'm doing good. How about you?" Maybe they don't trust you, or they are terrified to vocalize their trauma. But maybe they just don't know how to say how bad they feel. So why should they even try?

Most of these people will show no obvious signs of the despair that follows them around, or at least those signs will be subtle and veiled. They might surface in a prayer request ("Can I just ask you guys to pray for a stressful situation at work?"), sudden moodiness, or distracting addictions like social media or porn or work. But mostly these people are high-functioning adults.

A lot of us have high-functioning disorders. We may go through periods where we break down and stare blankly at our email inbox, or debate whether to get out of bed, or feel we can't physically move, but for the most part, we function. We get up. We eat. We work. We buy things. We are entertained. We are stimulated. We sleep. But the darkness is always there, waiting for the right moment to reassert itself. And it does. Unbidden and unwanted and too often unavoidable.

You may never experience long-term, intense depression or anxiety, but there will very likely be a period of your life when you feel something similar, as if you are a ghost haunting your own life.

Living in a society governed by technique conditions us to believe that in every way life is easier than it ever has been. Technique is the use of rational methods to maximize efficiency, and we see it everywhere: time-saving technology, apps

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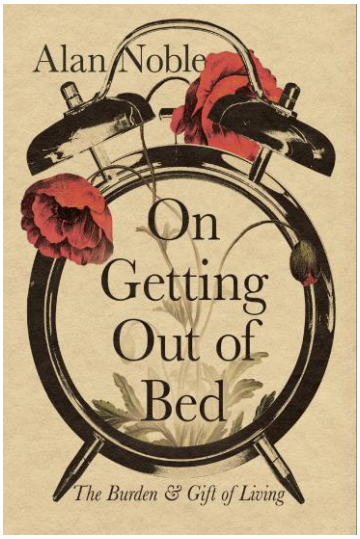

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that maximize our workouts, drugs that drown out our anxiety, ubiquitous entertainment in our pockets, and scientifically proven methods for parenting, working, eating, shopping, budgeting, folding clothes, sleeping, sex, dating, and buying a car.

The promise of technique is that we are collectively overcoming all the challenges to life through research, technology, and discipline. All you have to do is find the right self-help book or life hack or app or life coach or devotional.

But technique's promise that life is easier than ever turns out to be just another source of dread and shame: if life doesn't have to be this hard, if there are answers and methods and practices that can solve my problems, then it really is my fault that I'm overwhelmed or a failure. That's not to say that there aren't external forces that shape our lives: a corrupt political system can disadvantage us, we all have character flaws, and some people have a genetic advantage. But we have methods for overcoming these obstacles. There's always another technique I can use to fight a corrupt political system, improve my character, and compensate for my biology. So if I'm not living to my full potential, I'm to blame for not taking advantage of these methods.

This is one reason why we don't want to be honest when someone asks us how we are doing. Why admit to failure or weakness? If we tell the truth, they'll start offering advice, recommending some new method for "fixing" our problem, for overcoming anxiety or achieving our fullest potential or whatever. By the time they are done, we'll just feel the weight of a new obligation, another method to try, and another chance to fail. "Have you tried this diet?" "I heard regular exercise can improve your mental health. Maybe that's your problem." "Here's a book on prayer." "I heard this scientist on a podcast talk about how your mental disorder can actually be treated by drinking more water."

If you suffer from a chronic mental illness, these conversations can be particularly humiliating because they remind you of all the things that have already failed to cure you. And you just feel tired of the whole thing.

On top of the unmanageable burden technique places on our lives, our society is hypercompetitive. Everyone is vying for attention and validation. Publicly announcing your suffering, whether formally diagnosed or not, can be a real liability. While there is less stigma associated with things like mental illness than in the past, competing in the job market (or the marriage "market" or whatever) is hard enough without publicizing your weakness.

But what if our contemporary society is not actually built for us, for humans as God designed us? If that is the case, then sometimes anxiety and depression will be rational and moral responses to a fundamentally disordered environment. As I have argued in my book *You Are Not Your Own*, this is precisely the kind of society in which we find ourselves.

Understanding the source of our modern dis-ease can help us resist it and work for a more human society. If I didn't believe that, I wouldn't have written a book on the subject. But however you explain the difficulty of living in the modern world, whatever theory you accept, you're still stuck with the reality that a normal life includes a great deal of suffering. Ultimately, you must have some reason to put up with such a life, some reason for still getting out of bed even when you know it will mean pain. That's another thing I've discovered: getting out of bed in the morning can be incredibly hard.

—Adapted from chapter one

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Visit Alan's Website: https://www.oalannoble.com

Follow Alan on Twitter: @TheAlanNoble

Third Book from Award-Winning Author

"Alan Noble unveils the sheer paralyzing terror of a full-blown panic attack as well as just what chronic low-grade melancholy feels like inside. Some days it's all you can do just to get out of bed. Noble has no quick fixes to recommend. Rather, he points suffering Christians to the suffering Savior as the sole reason to keep on keeping on. In God's kingdom little things count: a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name, for instance. Alan Noble reminds us that simply doing the next thing can be a courageous act of faith—like getting out of bed when we'd rather not."

—**Harold L. Senkbeil**, author *of Christ and Calamity: Grace and Gratitude in the Darkest Valley* and executive director emeritus of Doxology: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel

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Alan Noble is associate professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University. He is cofounder and editor in chief of *Christ and Pop Culture*, and an advisor for the AND Campaign. His first book *Disruptive Witness* won the 2018 WORLD Magazine Book of the Year Award in the Accessible Theology category, and it also received a starred review in the highly respected book industry magazine *Publishers Weekly*. His second book *You Are Not Your Own* received Honorable Mention recognition in The Gospel Coalition 2021 Book Awards.

He has written for the *Atlantic*, *Vox*, *BuzzFeed*, the *Gospel Coalition*, *Christianity Today*, and *First Things*. He has been interviewed, quoted, or cited in a number of major publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, MTV News, MSNBC, the *Guardian*, *Buzzfeed*, *Politico*, *Village Voice*, *Yahoo! News*, ThinkProgress, the *Blaze*, *WORLD Magazine*, and *Slate*. And he has spoken at colleges, churches, and youth groups on a range of topics related to the church and culture.

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