



EXCERPT



Live Slowly
A Gentle Invitation to Exhale

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After assuming the rapid pace and stress of city living in the States, Jodi Grubbs realized God was bidding her to return to the “island time” of her childhood home. Evoking the gentle rhythms of Bonaire in the Caribbean, Jodi invites you to a life anchored by the forced pauses of spiritual practices and an openhandedness before God.

We All Need a Sanctuary

When I was a teenager, our house on the south end of the island was perched on a small cliff, overlooking the white sand and the turquoise waters. The sea was so clear that you could see the reef from the house. Often, when I wanted to be alone, I would throw on my floral swimsuit, walk through the dusty backyard, and head backward down the old rusty steel ladder anchored into the cliff.

As my feet hit the hot sand, little crabs would scurry, and my heart would swell with the knowledge that I would soon be transported to a different world. Never mind the fact that I was already on a desolate little island in the Caribbean.

I would swim out to a bright yellow circular raft that our neighbor Tex (from Las Vegas) had anchored in the sandy bottom outside of the reef. I would hoist myself up onto this raft—sometimes like a mermaid, but usually like a seal. Naturally, the rhythm of the lapping water and the sun-warmed plastic on my skin lulled me into a slower pace. Letting all the water droplets keep me cool, I would stretch out to relax on that yellow piece of plastic paradise, with my face toward the horizon.

As far as my eyes could take me, there was only the sea. We were fifty miles north of the Venezuelan coast. When the horizon goes on forever, you feel like a lonely little dot in the world. At least that’s what I would have been if I’d zoomed out on Google Maps.

Some days while reef lounging, I would just close my eyes and wonder what the rest of the world was up to . . . people in other countries, other communities, other islands. On other trips to the yellow raft, my eyes would follow the rainbow-colored parrot fish swimming underneath me. The coral shapes were intriguing. I would both taste and smell the salty air. I would hear the swishing of the lone palm tree or banana tree up in the yard above.

A Deeper Experience

I didn’t even realize that this time alone with my thoughts, and alone with God, was the beginning of my own journey of spiritual formation: practicing solitude, stillness, and listening. In fact, I didn’t even understand the words “spiritual formation” until a few years ago. But we have a steadfast God, who is gracious to pursue us our entire lives and to walk alongside us in this journey of learning what it’s like to be more like Christ.

Many of us don’t take advantage of the beauty of stillness in creation to ease anxiety, but desire for it is woven into the very fabric of our being. It’s tangible and meant for our enjoyment. It’s ours for the taking with our five senses. We are all looking for a deeper experience with God whether we know it or not.

And these experiences we have meeting with God in a quiet place are foundational and formational. They aren’t meant to be experienced only once. They help shape who we are, our attachment to God and how we share that experience with others in our life. Personally, I am so grateful to go back in time and pull a memory back out, just as I am also thankful to create a safe new memory in a new place.



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Jodi H. Grubbs is the podcast host of *Our Island in the City* and a slow-living advocate. She is the author of a children's book, *The Island Adventures of Lili and Oliver*, and coauthor of a Bible study called *The Friendship Café*.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to find your island in the city. This will be a tool that you can use practically anywhere and in any situation in which you need to calm your anxiety and feel more tethered to God. Your secret place of reef lounging, your oasis—whether it's in your mind or in a physical location. A lovely place where just you and God can meet in silence. A place to enjoy the unhurried pace of the moment for however long or short that may be. Let this place be special, safe, and cozy if that is what you need. We all need a sanctuary.

The word *sanctuary* came to us through French from Latin, and blends the meanings of a *safe* place and a *holy* place. What a beautiful way to think of God being with us in the stillness. Many women I talk with say that their sanctuary (or island in the city) is out on their front porch or in the old, comfy chair near the window in their bedroom. Where they hold their steaming mug of hot coffee mixed with their favorite creamer and savor the moment. Some people pray during this time. Some people settle their overwhelmed and anxious hearts here in their space of quiet and private serenity.

But no matter where you are physically, you can return in memory to a safe and holy location, either simple or exotic. If you crave extreme beauty out in nature as your place, take some time to recall a tropical vacation spot, a snow-covered mountain from a ski trip, or a waterfall in the rainforest. If you long for a quiet place of nostalgia, try the leather chair in your grandfather's library, where you linger in the scent of old books and the sweet aroma of his pipe. Maybe your aunt's farm, overflowing with bounty from the orchards, is your sanctuary to go back to.

Let this time and place be the remedy to your weariness in this hard season.

Being still, being out in nature, and being quiet are important ways we can take care of our soul and hear God speak to us. If you live in a busy city and walk to work, is there a little refuge that you might possibly pass by? Is there a quaint rose garden tucked onto a section of a street perhaps? Maybe an old bench is sitting nearby? If you sat there for a few minutes each day, what would that feel like? Seeing the beauty of the roses, smelling the floral goodness of life?

Your soul care sanctuary will most likely be an actual place, full of tangible things, like a blanket, a coffee cup, plants, and seashells. But sometimes we must return to places in our mind if we can't physically get there. On days where I need to breathe in deeply, I sometimes go back in my memory to that yellow raft. Our senses mixing with our memories are amazing. Being transported back to a beautiful place can calm the nervous system and help us appreciate our surroundings. This is also an arrow to contentment and gratitude if we'll follow it.

"Reef lounging" could be the phrase you use for this slow living method. Whatever fits best with your personality! Like slipping into a fresh pool of water, we can ease into a quiet space with God where we are still and where we can listen or where we can find refuge and receive his peace.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God." This is an invitation to pause, reflect, and quiet our hearts, knowing we have help. While we are alone in this moment, we are never truly alone in this life. Hurry rushes us through life hoping we will forget the very things that anchored us in the first place. Don't be afraid of the stillness you are craving. It will turn out to be life-giving in the most unexpected ways.

—adapted from chapter 9, "Where's Your Island in the City?"



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