



DENISE J. HUGHES

sanctuary

**CULTIVATING A QUIET HEART
IN A NOISY AND DEMANDING WORLD**

A 31-DAY DEVOTIONAL

“Who doesn’t yearn for a true sanctuary from all the noise and expectations? In a culture that tells us to seek rest anywhere else but in Christ, *Sanctuary* is a helpful guide for the restless heart.”

Kristen Wetherell, Author, *Humble Moms* and *Fight Your Fears*; Co-author, *Hope When It Hurts*

“This book is right on time! We are in desperate need of sanctuary. Denise invites us into a deeply restful rhythm of grace—that we might re-emerge with peace and purpose as lights for Christ.”

Wendy Speake, Author, *The 40-Day Sugar Fast* and *The 40-Day Feast*

“*Sanctuary* offers us an opportunity to spend 31 days reflecting deeply on our relationships with the digital world, our physical community, and our heavenly Father. Denise takes an honest and gracious devotional look at topics including identity, choice, competition, simplicity, silence, purpose, and more.”

Michelle Van Loon, Author, *Translating Your Past*

“We live in unprecedented times of innovation. Yet, in this hyper-connected world, our souls are often torn between the good that technology provides and the ever-growing call to do and be more. In *Sanctuary*, Denise provides biblical perspective for how to live the abundant, peace-filled life God promises.”

Katie Orr, Bible teacher; Author, *FOCUSed 15 Bible Studies* and *Secrets of the Happy Soul*

“Powerfully yet gently, Denise exposes the noise that fills our lives and leads us on a journey towards the peace that God alone gives. This book will do your heart good.”

Linda Allcock, Author, *Head, Heart, Hands and Deeper Still*

“*Sanctuary* brings an important challenge: to be countercultural, resting in the identity that God, not society, gives us. Denise wisely and winsomely encourages her readers to find their ultimate sanctuary in God’s presence through his word. I can think of no better way to start each day.”

Shelly Wildman, Speaker; Author, *First Ask Why*

“Denise reminds us of our deep need for quiet and tranquility in this noisy, overwhelming world. With biblically solid words filled with wisdom, let her walk you through a 31-day journey of hope, with wise strategies to help you unplug and dive deep into the rest and stillness found only in Christ.”

Kate Battistelli, Author, *The God Dare* and *Growing Great Kids*

“All devotionals are not created equal, and *Sanctuary* is one of those that will linger with you long after you’ve put it down, in all the ways that make a difference, now and forever. No box-checking here: simply a lovely guide to help you silence the clamor of a noisy world.”

Robin Dance, Life Plan Advisor; Speaker; Author, *For All Who Wander* and *For All Who Wander The Journey Guide*

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Published by:

The Good Book Company



thegoodbook.com | thegoodbook.co.uk

thegoodbook.com.au | thegoodbook.co.nz | thegoodbook.co.in

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ISBN: 9781784988180 | Printed in Turkey

Cover design by Jennifer Phelps | Art Direction and design by André Parker

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Introduction

SEARCHING FOR SANCTUARY

*“But we encourage you, brothers and sisters
... to seek to lead a quiet life.”*

1 Thessalonians 4:10-11

My phone chimed with an all-too-familiar tune. Another message awaited me. I reached for it, but before I could listen, another one came in. That made 18 so far that day, and it was only 10:45 in the morning. Begrudgingly, I listened to the voice-recorded messages, which were part of a larger group chat.

“Check it, girls. These fab magnetic eyelashes are ON SALE!”

“Oh, I love those!”

The messages continued to roll in as a slow sigh escaped my lips. I didn't have time for silly convos about fake eyelashes. I had a deadline to meet before picking up my kids from school and starting my afternoon job as their chauffeur. How did I even get added to this group chat in the first place? Oh, yeah. It had started as a work-related thread. We all worked remotely for the same company, and rather than typing out whole words in emails, several of the staff thought voice messages via this new app would be faster and easier. Soon, the convenience of

leaving voice messages morphed into sending funny jokes or helpful tips about the latest online sales. If someone's favorite leggings or magnetic eyelashes were on sale, they figured the rest of us were dying to know about it.

I enjoyed my work and my colleagues, and I appreciated the technological advances that made remote work possible. But it came with a downside, too. The noise had become a constant backdrop because everyone preferred a different mode of communication. While some preferred voice messages through an app, others preferred texts, or emails, or one of the hundred-plus channels in Slack.

With so many messages coming at me day and night, it felt impossible to concentrate on the actual work in front of me. Perhaps the quirky GIFs and memes were meant to lighten the mood, but when your workload is already too heavy, the extra messages become too much. I wanted to run away from the noise. I wanted a place of quiet where I could focus and do my work—a place where I could hear myself think.

But noise is everywhere. When reading an online article, advertisements pop up, telling us how our lives will be so much better if we purchase their magical product for \$19.99. When trying to read the news, we're bombarded with outrage. And when we log off of our computers, the noise follows us: The too-loud music in the grocery store. The turned-up television in the doctor's waiting room. And the talk-to-you pumps at the gas station, where a video starts the moment we begin filling our cars with fuel.

Silencing the Noise

The world continues to grow louder every day. This is happening so incrementally that we may not notice it, or if we do, we may shrug it off as no big deal. But somewhere

along the way, it has begun to affect us. For some, the added stimulation might be energizing, but for others, the noise takes a toll. At first, it was hard to describe, but slowly, many of us noticed the way noise impacts us. When we're surrounded by noise, it's as if our souls have a slow leak and we can feel our energy ebbing away.

Do you feel tired, and you can't quite pinpoint the source of your exhaustion? Has your social-media feed sometimes felt anything but social? Are you weary from all the conflict and outrage that pervades Twitter threads and other online formats? Do you ever experience a sense of restlessness deep within you? Do you sometimes wish you could log off forever?

A few years ago, I would have answered, "Yes, to all of the above!" In many ways, though, it was part of my job to be online, but it left me just plain tired. Like so many of the women I talked to, I wanted something more than Facebook likes or Instagram hearts. I was ready for something deeper than an online high-five or another blue thumbs-up. I was eager to eliminate the noise from my life, but it had become so ubiquitous that I hardly knew how to escape it.

For a while I dreamed of escaping to a little cabin on a lake in Minnesota. A cabin without internet access. Where there's only earth and sky, water and trees. Where the air is clear and you can actually hear the rustling of leaves. But I don't have an internet-free cabin close to the Canadian border. For the past two-and-a-half decades, I have lived 20 miles from downtown Los Angeles, planted amid the massive urban-to-suburban sprawl. This meant I needed to be intentional about creating spaces of quiet—not only in my physical environment but in my heart as well—because it's really the heart that drives us.

And that's the thing I've noticed most: as much as I want to point to the noise around me, the real noise is inside of me, like a restlessness I can't shake or a gnawing feeling that won't go away. And since it's impossible to run away from myself, the amped-up noise around me serves as a digital distraction, a temporary salve. But in my most honest moments, I long for sanctuary.

Finding Sanctuary

In the classic story, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, the gypsy Esmeralda runs into a cathedral to escape the dark clutches of those chasing her, and she cries, "Sanctuary!" While this story is the stuff of fiction, the need to find sanctuary has historical precedent. In Old Testament times, God arranged for designated cities in the promised land to be "sanctuary cities": places of refuge, where an accused person could flee for safety until a fair trial could be held (Numbers 35:9-34). This same idea has lived on in various forms throughout the centuries, as with modern-day embassies around the world. And even though the New Testament never equates the church with a physical building, in many churches, the word *sanctuary* is still used to describe the main room where people gather.

For too long I felt a little like Esmeralda, wanting to cry, "Sanctuary!" in response to the noise around me. But running away to a cathedral in France wasn't a realistic option, so I had to learn how to cultivate a quiet sanctuary of the heart while living in one of the largest—and loudest—metropolitan areas in the world.

Given the noise that has become so prevalent in our cultural climate, many of us are longing for a simpler and more peaceful way to live. We need a vision for cultivating a quiet sanctuary of the heart, and Paul encapsulates this vision succinctly when

he says, “Seek to lead a quiet life” (1 Thessalonians 4:11). As we delve more into the context, we’ll discover that a quiet life doesn’t mean a life of silence; it means...

- a life free from constant noise and hustle.
- a life defined by purpose rather than ambition.
- a life of “minding your own business,” (v 11) and free from comparison.
- a life of focus, “working with our own hands,” (v 11) instead of distraction.
- a life characterized by a quiet confidence and a steady peace.
- a life of loving others (v 10) and winning their respect (v 12).

Paul’s admonition to lead a quiet life was not only countercultural then; it’s still countercultural today. His instructions to believers, both then and now, have never been more needed. In the coming pages we’ll learn how, as we embrace a quiet life, something shifts as noise and hurry no longer define us. We are freed to love God and others more fully and more deeply.

Cultivating a quiet life isn’t a trend or a brand; it’s a way of life that emanates from a soul committed to becoming more like Christ. That’s what this book is about: identifying both the external and internal noise that is, in fact, draining us and then reimagining a different way to engage with the world with God’s love without wanting to flee to a remote island.

This book is for those who...

- long for quieter spaces that allow for thoughtful reflections and honest conversations.
- desire a deeper quality of life beyond the online culture of noise, outrage, and self-promotion.

- recognize the importance of investing in physical places and nondigital activities.
- want to glean the best the internet has to offer while staying rooted in real-life relationships.
- hope to write a different script for their future by looking to Christ as their sanctuary.

In short, this book is for anyone who is tired of all the noise in our world.

It's possible to live in a digitally driven world without it driving us crazy. It's possible to work in an overconnected environment without it leaving us depleted and exhausted. It's possible to embrace the positives of modern technology without it overrunning our lives. It's possible to find peace and hope and laughter and rest in a world that thrives on conflict and outrage. It's possible to flourish in an urban or suburban context while cultivating a sanctuary of quiet in both your heart and your home. It's possible to live in such a way that others take notice of the difference they see in you and then want what you have found.

That's what I'm inviting you to do with me now.

Together, we are about to embark on a 31-day journey to discover what it means—and what it looks like in very practical ways—to cultivate a quiet life while also engaging with the world around us. Together, we will become women with vision, women with passion, and women who have a heart for championing other women.

Are you ready for something deeper than digital connection?
Something real, something lasting?

Are you ready to move through your days with a quiet sense of purpose, rather than following the cultural rigmarole that comes with the status quo?



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it's a way of life that
emanates from a soul
committed to becoming
more like Christ.



This book doesn't promise a secret ingredient or a radical innovation. Instead, these pages explore the ordinary ways that faithful believers have been growing in quiet grace for millennia.

The life of peace and purpose you long for really is possible. Not because I have made it so but because God has made it so, and he is always faithful.

TUNING IN TO QUIET

When I was a kid, every radio had a large dial. To find the music station you wanted to listen to, you would turn the dial. When the radio wasn't tuned in to a specific station, you'd hear a loud static noise, but as you kept turning the dial, you'd eventually come across music. You would then slow the dial to find the perfect spot where the music came in the most clearly. This was called "tuning the radio." With this in mind, we will begin to "tune our hearts" to a much quieter "station"—a "sanctuary" if you will.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find a section called "Tuning in to Quiet," which will contain two parts. In "Contemplate," you'll find two or three reflection questions to consider. In "Cultivate," you'll learn about a practical way in which you can begin to tune your heart to a place of quiet solace. Lastly, but most importantly, you'll read a prayer that helps to bring each daily message home to your heart.

Contemplate

1. Do you feel unusually tired? Are you weary from online noise? Do you sense an inner restlessness, and you can't quite pinpoint the cause? Do you sometimes wish you could run away to a cabin in the woods or a remote island? If your answer is yes

to any of these questions, what do you think the source of your exhaustion might be? Write down whatever comes to mind.

2. How would you describe a quiet life to someone? What characteristics are common to people who are leading a quiet life?
3. What misconceptions might some people have about leading a quiet life?

Cultivate

Write down what you hope to gain throughout this 31-day journey. You can do this in a journal or a simple notebook, or you can download a free 31-Day Journal as a PDF at denisejhughes.com/31days. Even if you don't consider yourself an avid journal-keeper, begin to make it a regular practice to write a few words each day that capture your thoughts about your journey. The prompts on the free PDF will guide you!

Pray

Thank you, Lord, for consistently calling us to a quiet place with you: a place where the noise ceases and a new stillness in our souls can grow. Help us to recognize anew the many ways in which the world beckons us to conform to a pattern of ultra-performance and uber-productivity. Help us to find in you the sanctuary our hearts desperately need. We are so grateful for the peace you give. In your peace-filled name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.



Day 1

WHERE STRENGTH IS FOUND

“You will be delivered by returning and resting; your strength will lie in quiet confidence.”

Isaiah 30:15

I went quiet.

I didn't announce my plan for a social-media sabbatical with a lengthy post on Instagram or Facebook, and I didn't preschedule any posts to go live during my absence. I just went quiet. I stopped posting, checking, and scrolling. I even deleted the social-media apps on my phone.

At first I noticed the way my right hand would instinctively reach for my phone. It surprised me how habitual the thumb-swiping had become, not to mention how mind-numbing the scrolling had been. It took a little while, but eventually my hand stopped reaching for my phone. In its place, I set some books and a Bible nearby. As I turned to other sources, and especially as I turned to *the Source*, I could feel my heart lighten. Freed from the tyranny of needing to see what everyone else was doing, I let quiet truth and beauty fill me.

During this process, I decided to do a study of the sanctuaries in the Bible. The first sanctuary, of course, was the Garden of Eden. It was a place of perfect tranquility, where

the first humans could walk with God and chat about their day as casually as friends strolling through a park. But because of their eventual disobedience, they were cast out of this perfect sanctuary and barred from entering God's presence thereafter. And yet, God showed them mercy by promising that a path back into his presence was forthcoming.

A Tabernacle of Quiet

True to his word, God later instructed Moses saying, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8). God even told Moses how to design this new sanctuary, for it was patterned after the sanctuary in heaven (Hebrews 8:5). This newly constructed tabernacle consisted of three sections: the outer courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place.

Upon entrance to this sanctuary, the priests would immediately experience a new kind of quiet as the heavy drapes of the tabernacle's walls kept out the noise of the world. This was even truer in that most inner place. Nineteenth-century English pastor Charles Spurgeon describes it, saying:

There was this peculiarity about [the Most Holy Place] . . . it was the shrine of unbroken quiet. Was ever a voice heard in it? Once in the year the high priest went in and filled it full of the smoke of incense as he waved his censer in the mystic presence, but otherwise it was a chamber in which there was no footfall of living thing, or voice of mortal man. Here was the home of absolute quiet and silence.¹

This was God's dwelling place—"the home of absolute quiet and silence." Back then, of course, only the high priest could enter that inner sanctum, and even then just once a year, but



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the quietness of this sanctuary reflected the reality that in God's presence our hearts are quieted.

There's something about stillness and a corresponding quietness of heart that is inviting, especially for those of us who live in a world full of hustle and never-ending noise. We long for a place where the chaos of our daily lives is supplanted with a peace that cannot be described. We long for sanctuary, and we're hardly the first people to desire it.

Too often, though, we try to create our own "gardens" of paradise. This could be anything that gives us a reprieve, and this is especially true of our phones. They allow us to shed the physical limitations of our locale so we can enter digital realms. There, we can meet more people, have more conversations, and learn more things. We can even take on new identities. If we happen to feel disenfranchised from the actual community we live in, we can easily escape to an online realm and reinvent ourselves. It's all very exciting, but the answer isn't found in a paradise of our own making. Nor is the answer found in a paradise of someone else's making.

Where the Answer Is Found

These days a social-media sabbatical is nothing new. Taking a break or fasting from social media is a growing trend and for good reason. We are changed for the better when we look to truth more than YouTube. But if we could fix the tiredness in our souls or the disinterest in our hearts with periodic breaks from social media, then that's all we would need to do—schedule ourselves some routine breaks. But we can't fix ourselves. Life doesn't work that way.

The answer isn't simply in taking a break from social media, although it's not a bad idea for a lot of reasons. The real answer is in the words of the ancient prophet Isaiah, who said,

“You will be delivered by returning and resting; your strength will lie in quiet confidence” (Isaiah 30:15). By “returning,” the prophet means repenting. When we repent from looking to earthly means to fill us and return to God as our sole life-sustaining source, we experience the genuine rest our hearts need.

Maybe you have struggled with the number of hours you spend each day on your phone. Or maybe social media hasn't had that much pull over you. Maybe your struggle is with something else. It will be different for each of us. But the starting point is the same for everyone. To experience a quiet heart that is truly at rest in Christ, we must first repent of looking to anything other than God to satisfy us. Finding sanctuary begins with repentance: with acknowledging that we can't fix the malaise that plagues our souls. But God can, and our confidence rests in him alone.

TUNING IN TO QUIET

Contemplate

1. Have you ever taken an extended sabbatical from social media? If so, what was it like? What, if anything, did you learn or gain from that experience? If not, what has held you back?
2. What are some ways in which people today try to create their own “gardens” of paradise? In other words, what kinds of things seem to offer people a chance to shed their limitations and perhaps find an earthly sanctuary or temporary reprieve?

Cultivate

Is there an area in your life about which you feel a deep sense of dread or unease at the thought of giving it up? Write down

any areas in your life that come to mind. Then consider whether or not these might be things or people you lean on more than God. If so, ask God for his forgiveness and bask in the knowledge that when “we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). In doing this, you are, in effect, “returning and resting,” just as Isaiah prescribed, and inviting God to take it from there.

Pray

Lord, thank you for the gift of your grace so we can live in your presence forever. Forgive us when we are tempted to look to anything or anyone other than you to sustain us. Help us to keep our eyes fixed firmly on you, for peace begins and ends with you. We love you. In your precious name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.