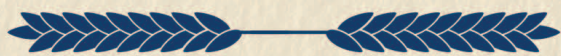


The background of the entire cover is a repeating pattern of stylized yellow leaves and branches, resembling laurel or olive branches, set against a light cream-colored background.

JENNIFER
DUKES LEE

GROWING SLOW



LESSONS ON UN-HURRYING
YOUR HEART FROM AN
ACCIDENTAL FARM GIRL



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Growing Slow

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READY, SET, SLOW: AN INTRODUCTION

Some stories arrive in this world because their authors scribbled them onto a running list of ideas they keep hidden in a desk drawer. Other stories—maybe the best ones of all—simply insist to be written. This story, *Growing Slow*, is one of these.

It's a story about why we are all in a hurry yet afraid to slow the pace. It's a story about our desire for a simpler life—and our persistent refusal to take hold of it. It's a story about the nagging sense of dissatisfaction with what we're growing in our lives. We wonder if we're really doing enough with these numbered days we've been given.

Ultimately, it's a story about why we are all in the chase in the first place. It boils down to this: we want love, connection, fruitful lives, and meaningful growth.

We tend to believe that to get what we want, we have to pick up the pace. But as it turns out, the truth is counterintuitive. We have to be willing to do something dramatic—radical, even. It will go against the grain of everything we've been taught.

We have to be willing to slow the pace. The good life we're after cannot be secured by running hard, *but by growing slow*.

This awareness shifted something in me in the middle of a very hard year on our fifth-generation family farm in a quiet corner of Iowa. Unrelenting rains kept us out of the fields at harvest, and then the rain returned to torment us when we tried to plant those same





fields in the spring. Clouds stacked up on one another like gigantic, thundering anvils. Every morning, I would stand at the kitchen window, overlooking the “back 80”—the 80 acres that roll out like a black carpet from the backyard. Raindrops struck the house with such force, it sounded as if we lived in a tin can. I could barely see through a shower of a trillion watery bullets, whizzing with dead aim on our fields.

Our hearts and hopes and hands were calloused. We needed reassurance that good things would grow once more in these fields. Hard as it was, we knew we needed to wait on God, the very same God who has stood sovereign over this land since he first spoke it into being.

At supper, our family of four would bow our heads over plates of steaming pork roast and root vegetables. We prayed for our land and for the rains to stop. We scribbled furiously in our prayer journals. At our little country church with the white steeple pointing to heaven, our church family held hands across the aisles and sealed our eyes shut tight while we prayed for all the farmers who were at the ends of their ropes, calling into the farm crisis hotlines. Our souls begged the Lord to grant us peace in the midst of the panic.

Deep down, we truly did believe that the Lord would come through—maybe not in our timing, nor with the yields we would want. It would be a growing-slow kind of year—slow into the fields, slow out of them—but these fields *would* be planted. We rehearsed God’s ancient promises and his pattern of provision in the created world. We reminded ourselves what Jesus said about how plants grow, which is simply this: “They do not labor or spin.”¹ Sure enough, in all my years as a farmer’s wife, I’ve never once seen a corn plant freaking out.

We needed to find the courage to be still, to give everything a little bit of time, to let it all grow slow.

In the middle of that hard year, it dawned on me: what I

believed to be true for the *land*, I didn't completely believe for me, in my grow-fast life.

What if, in a growing-slow year, I deliberately embraced a Growing Slow life? What if I set aside all I'd been taught about achievement and ambition and goals? What if I stopped treating all of life like an emergency? It seemed audacious.

What would I stand to gain? And what would I stand to lose?

Because the truth of the matter was, I had always been in a hurry. And honestly? That had worked out pretty well if you looked at my resume.

I set out on my life's journey with bright-eyed enthusiasm and energy, with the hopes of building a wonderful life. And I do have a life that I love, with a husband I love, two beautiful daughters whom I love, and work that I love as an author and book editor. We live on land that has been loved well by five generations of my husband's family, along with the wives before me who stood at their kitchen windows overlooking the Lee land: Joyce, Eunice, Emma, Maria. I thank the Lord that I found faith after nearly giving in to an ambiguous, nagging agnosticism in my twenties. And despite the million ways that I ran after wrong things, I hope I'm making a positive mark on the world with integrity, kindness, and generosity.

But my body, this scaffolding that carries me along life's journey, began to destabilize. I became fearful that my ready-set-go pace would kill me—maybe not physically, but emotionally, mentally, and, perhaps, spiritually. I have always cared a little too much about productivity, but I could tell that my warp-speed pace meant that I was doing C-minus work on the things I cared about most. I simply couldn't carry it all as I ran around like a crazy person trying to make some kind of difference in the world. Worst of all, I knew that I wasn't fully present for the best moments unfolding around me. I wasn't sure I even liked the person I had become.

That Growing Slow year on the farm gave me time and space





to ponder life's meaning. Here's what I learned: in the scramble to grow a purposeful life, we accidentally forfeit too much—a settledness with what we already have, a sense of peace with what already is, and a connectedness with the people right here with us.

You can get so rushed chasing a certain kind of remarkable life that you miss the fact that you're already standing inside the one God gave you.

The Diagnosis

I've always been a high-capacity person who can handle a lot at once. Until I couldn't. My body was betraying me. (Or maybe I was betraying my body by pushing it so hard.) I was well into my forties, and had the ambition of my twenty-three-year-old self, but something was off. I was tired, had an aching gut, was sleeping horribly, and felt on edge and jittery.

I wondered if something more sinister was having its way with my body, some strange disease.

And then there was unexplained memory loss. I forgot to show up for lunch with a friend, forgot to feed the barn cats, forgot to pay a bill, forgot to pick up my daughter from school for a dentist appointment. Small lapses, perhaps, but obligations I never would have missed before. I couldn't find the right words for simple objects—I told my husband I had put the pots and pans in the washing machine; I had meant to say, "the bedsheets." I honestly wondered if it was early onset dementia, which sounds so dramatic, but the forgetfulness shook me.

Emotionally, I didn't recognize myself. I laughed less and cried more, but not at the sappy romantic comedy. Tears sprang mostly when I got angry, irritated, or overwhelmed.

One afternoon, I found myself in the office of a functional medicine doctor. He's the type of doctor who thoroughly audits your

whole self—body, mind, spirit, soul—rather than merely scribbling off a prescription and sending you to the pharmacy to fix whatever is broken.

I ended up in his office as a last resort after many appointments during which several vials of blood were given, urine cups peed in, heartbeats monitored, organs scanned. No tests showed anything wrong.

Could this doctor just tell me what was wrong, give it a name, and fix it so I could be all that the world needed me to be? And could he do it *fast*?

Sitting in the chair next to his desk, I tilted my chin toward the ceiling, counted tiles, and hoped my posture could somehow keep my tears locked in. Being emotionally naked and raw like that made me uncomfortable.

But tears ran down my cheeks and under my collar, leaving me hot and blotchy.

“Jennifer,” the doctor said, “this is a severe case of stress. All the signs are there: low energy, insomnia, anxiety, overwhelm, an overloaded mind.”

Friend, let me be honest with you: this didn’t make sense to me. I knew hurried, stressed-out people. I wasn’t one of them. Was I?

At the time, I was sure I wasn’t. I thrive on deadlines. Hard work doesn’t intimidate me; in fact, it invigorates me. Besides, I had built margin into my life, heavily pruning my schedule years before that moment with the doctor. Furthermore, I had been teaching and writing for several years on finding peace, even in the midst of a busy life.

I told him all that, and he listened. Then he paused, crossed his arms over his chest, and said, “I believe you. But this isn’t about your schedule or calendar. This is about your heart and your soul.”

There was no pill to fix this. No surgery. No trip to the pharmacy.

The “cure” would have to be an inside job. Something needed





to change. I needed to let go of the belief that I was behind or that I should have been further along by then.

I had a hurried heart. And I had to do something to un-hurry it.

I needed to learn how to grow slow.

An Invitation

That's where you find me now—on a life-changing journey to un-hurry my heart and entrust my endeavors to Jesus.

This book is my messy account of moving from a place of depleting hurry to a place of sustaining trust and rest.

I need to be frank with you. I didn't write this book because I knew everything. I wrote it because I needed to relearn everything all over again, like a kindergartener being told by her teacher to stop running in the hallways.

I wrote this book because I didn't want to get to the end of my life, look back, and regret who I'd become. That I'd mistaken success for meaning. That life was a blur. That I ran so hard, I forgot how to walk with God.

I wrote this book because I got tired of living as if I'm afraid of being late to my own funeral.²

In the midst of this wild experiment of embracing slowness, Jesus has been smashing my long-cherished ideas of "growth" into a million pieces. The world rewards fast growth over slow growth. It rewards overnight sensations, the first, the best, and the fastest. *And who doesn't like rewards?*

But there is a richer reward waiting for us when we embrace slowness and stop idolizing speed. A Growing Slow life gives you what your heart really longs for: permission to take a beat and to take a breath; grace to try again; courage to walk instead of run; and space to live in the astonishing and wild love of Christ.

Will you come with me? I suspect that you need to un-hurry

your heart, too. You need the courage to slow down. You want to stop being afraid of what you'll miss when you make the choice to grow slow.

Come with me, friend. Come to my farm, and stand barefooted with me at the edge of our fields, under this expansive sky. Cup the soil in your hands, and let it fall through your fingers, slowly. Stay here a while, and tip your face toward heaven. Above us, the geese will V north, across the striking blue, cloudless sky of the day. Pheasants—thick-throated in their crowing—will dart through the evergreens. Let's stay here, long enough for day's last light to fade to charcoal. Overhead, Orion's belt will slide across the sky.

Let's consider the things we are growing and ponder the depth of their roots. Let's ease our way back toward an un-hurried life where seasons are embraced as sacred and holy. Let's call out the value in the small, good things we are growing. These are things that matter deeply.

Now, let's talk.

Let's really talk about why we aren't slowing it down, even though we know we should.

Let's talk about how we've heard this invitation before—to stop hurrying—but we ignore it. Our hearts are still hurried. Why?

Let's talk.

The truth that we are fully known and fully loved by God beckons us. So let's talk about how we try to make it more than that. How we distort God's love, making it about earning and consuming and growing a bunch of stuff that looks and feels like God's love.

The better halves of our hearts push against the temptation to constantly keep everything moving forward. Deep down, we long for little more than living like we really believe that what God says about us is true.

That small things matter.

That the tiny seeds we are planting will grow into something meaningful.



That we haven't disappointed God.

I'll bet you a side of bacon and a wagonload of harvested corn that you want the same things I do. You want to stop running around in search of love and meaning. You want something better than burnout.

This doesn't mean you'll stop growing good things. On the contrary. You will get your hands dirty in these fields.

Together, we will press seeds deep down, knowing that new life starts in dark, unseen places. That's where the story gets good—in the moment before the miracle ruptures the earth. That's the moment of breakthrough. Oh, it might take time for that breakthrough. There are moments when you will stand before your field of dreams, with calloused hands shoved into pockets, while not a single shoot bursts forth with life.

Despite your best efforts.

Despite your earnest prayers.

Despite the exasperating impression that every other field around yours is abloom, alive.

And yours? It looks . . . dead.

It's time to embrace a different story about everything you're growing. It's time to have faith to believe what your eyes cannot see. The most beautiful things in this grand old world began as seeds that waited in the dark.

Every oak was first a buried acorn.

Every corn plant on our farm was first a dormant, hard-coated seed, waiting for permission to crack open—a tedious and glorious breaking—before pushing against the earth with striking force, then creeping skyward one steady micron at a time.

Your seeds aren't dead. They are waiting. The darkness under the soil isn't a graveyard. Your seeds are very much alive, gaining the strength necessary to push into the light—and thrive.

Together we will grow things slowly, and together, we ourselves will grow slow.

How to Use This Book to Un-Hurry Your Heart

Every scratched-out word of this story is how God un-hurried the heart of this accidental farm girl. My prayer is that he will use each one of those words to un-hurry *yours* as well.

This book is not about giving you a bunch of new things to do. Instead, it's a book that will ask you to adopt a new mindset—a Growing Slow mindset.

In order to live with a Growing Slow mindset, you will let go of the popular idea that purposeful living is synonymous with hurry.

I suspect that some of you are thinking, *I know I should slow down, but I also believe I should have achieved more by now so I've got to hustle to make up for lost opportunities*. Maybe you believe you've let God down by not making a bigger impact.

If you're looking for a book that helps you dream bigger dreams, this is not the book for you. This isn't a book that will move you upward, but one that will move you inward, to the heart of things.

Growing Slow is not a girl-boss message to motivate you to take charge or do more. There's a place for those books, and because of the way I'm wired, I could have totally written a real kick-in-the-pants book called *Growing Fast*—complete with actionable steps and motivational tips to help you do a bunch more stuff.

But this is not that book, and that is not the way I want to live my life anymore. Maybe we all need permission to dial it back, instead of instruction on how to rev it all up.

This world is in such a rush that psychologists now say people suffer from “hurry sickness,” defined as the “constant need to do more, faster, even when there's no objective reason to be in such a rush.”³

We need a way to recover from hurry sickness. Healing will come from the inside out, in our hearts, where Jesus dwells and where the wild things grow. This Jesus actually sees us as we grow good things in our families, friendships, and faith journeys.





Growing Slow is a collection of personal stories and biblical insights I've gleaned during my life on the farm. But this book is much more than my story. It will become yours, as you walk hand in hand with God through your own fields and gardens. At the end of each chapter, you will have space to personally remember, reflect, and return to the land.

I wrote this book over the course of a year, through an entire 365-day growing season. Every word was written with the land outside my kitchen window in view. Through the window, I was a quiet witness to each changing season: spring planting, summer growth, autumn harvest, and winter rest, as we await another year of slow and meaningful growth.

It was a beautiful year, and it was a hard year. Maybe a bit like yours?

Together, we'll learn lessons as the earth is turned, then planted, then greened up and up and up, until the rows touch and roots deepen. One cool morning, we'll look out the window and see the first signs of a gentle yellowing, and then, days later, a crisping of every leaf. Some afternoon, we'll watch as farmers reenter the fields and, like barbers, slowly clip it away until nothing is left but empty, quiet fields, soon to be buried in snow. All good things come to a close, a necessary ending: winter.

It's been right here all along—the land teaching us how to unhurry our hurry-sick hearts. Land speaks stunning truths through Scripture.

The Hebrew word for land is *eretz*. It is the fifth most frequently used noun in the Hebrew Bible, after the Hebrew words for LORD, son, God, and king.⁴ The land is more than a backdrop for the stories told in the Bible. Rather, the land is a leading character in the magnificent biblical narrative, from the very beginning when God made life in a garden.

The lessons Jesus drew from the land were clear to first-century agrarian culture, and we don't want to miss them in this modern age—the vineyards, wheat, threshing floors, gleaning, fields for grazing. Rain signaled God's provision. Literal droughts tested the faith of the people. Jesus was known not only as the true vine, but the good shepherd, who minds both the land and its creatures.

The land, with its seasons and complexity, is central to God's promise to his people, not only to the nomadic Israelites in search of a place to call home, but to each one of us, in our everyday lives at Target, Starbucks, the chemo infusion center, the nursing home, the altar, and the laundry room.

When I began to write this book, a verse guided me at every turn:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.⁵

A complex set of verses follows that opening line in Ecclesiastes 3, revealing that all of life is a seasonal paradox—a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to uproot, a time to dance, and even a time to mourn.

In a world obsessed with “instant,” these verses reveal that there is a time for everything, and everything in its time.

That's the simple, complicated truth about life and the land—marked alternately by healing and death and joy and pain and sorrow and celebration. We are tempted to live only in the good of Ecclesiastes 3. We want the joy and the dancing. We are desperate for comfort, growth, and progress.

However, there are times for *all* things, even the devastating things and the slow, boring things. Let's take our time and explore the complexity of each season, wrestling if we must. For it's here in the dirt of these fields that God teaches us about ourselves and, more importantly, about himself.





Long ago, at the beginning of time, God created the first human, and he did it in an incredibly intimate way.

He started with soil.

He knelt down, cupped dirt in his hands, breathed life into it.

God gave this first human a name: Adam. In Hebrew, Adam is *adamah*. It's a word that means land, ground, or soil. Our story began with a fistful of soil and the breath of God.

That's how this story begins as well. With you. With me. With soil.

With God.

Let's go nice and easy.

Ready, set, slow.

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REMEMBER

The tiny seeds I am planting into
dark, unseen places will grow
into something meaningful.

REFLECT

As we begin, take a few moments to reflect on the things
you are growing. List them here.

.....

.....

.....

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.....

In what ways do you feel pressure to do more, be more in
a “grow fast” culture?

.....

.....

.....

Do you think it’s practically possible to “grow slow” with
the demands upon you?

.....

.....

.....



At the end of each chapter, we will return to the soil, where our stories began in the very first farm on earth—the Garden of Eden. Here, we will recall how God cupped humanity in his hands and breathed life into us all. God cups *you* in his hands. He breathes new life into you.



PART 1

SPRING PLANTING

For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over
and gone. The flowers appear on the earth,
the time of singing has come, and the voice
of the turtledove is heard in our land.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:11–12 ESV



CHAPTER 1

PERMISSION TO BE UN-SPECTACULAR

I am an accidental farm girl. I never intended to live in a place where pigs outnumber people by a significant margin, stray cows trample your rosebushes, and the school hosts a “Drive Your Tractor to School Day” every spring. In fact, my intention as a child growing up in Iowa was to escape it!

I was raised in a small town, nestled down by the North Raccoon River. It was a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it kind of town. The closest McDonald’s or JCPenney was a half hour away. I wanted skyscrapers, streetlights, subways, and swarms of people on humming sidewalks. When I was eighteen, those dreams seemed within reach—with enough hustle, of course. My acceptance to university felt like a ticket to freedom.

It was the first day of college orientation at Iowa State University in Ames. Hundreds of us sat in fold-down auditorium chairs with padded seats while a motivational speaker paced in front of us, her high heels clicking with each step. “What do you want to be famous for?” she asked.

Her question hung in the air. She paused long enough for us



to fantasize about our answers. Visions of who we would be at age twenty-five, thirty-five, forty-five materialized. Although fame had never been a goal I'd articulated, the question awakened something in me, perhaps in all of us.

She had just delivered a sparkling invitation to be spectacular.

For a girl who grew up in obscurity—with a cornfield in her backyard and silos in her skyline—the idea was incredibly appealing. Who doesn't long to be known?

In that moment, I began to dream about my future self as an award-winning journalist, perhaps on Capitol Hill. The daydream offered the promise of a Pulitzer, and I believed in its possibility. I would make a mark on the world. People wearing neckties would answer my calls and care about my opinion. Of course, my life would also be characterized by charity and decency. Some future husband and I would create extraordinarily bright and well-behaved children who would eat all their vegetables. And if I got my spiritual act together, I would finally take hold of the faith that my Sunday School teachers had tried to instill in me.

And then, in the years stacked on top of years, I ran fast and furious toward the making of a spectacular life.

Back in the college auditorium, my barely-adult self didn't really want fame. I simply wanted a life of meaning—a noble aim planted within each of us by God himself.

We all crave a meaningful life. This is good and holy. But in the quest for meaning, we get mixed up, turned around, and accidentally end up constantly in a hurry. We rush to grow successful businesses, a more potent faith, robust bank accounts, and, if we are parents, spiritually-grounded children. We climb proverbial mountains and dream bigger dreams. Any obstacles can be obliterated swiftly by the right amount of self-help dynamite.

That sort of existence may, indeed, lead us somewhere

spectacular. But the costs are high: we end up feeling rushed, often anxious and out of sorts, fearful that we are falling behind.

Here, the hurried heart is born and then nurtured in a million ways by a culture that idolizes bigger, harder, faster. This was the life I accidentally chose—a life of running hard, scaling fast, and chasing results.

Do you know the bruising, try-hard way of the hurried heart?

A hurried heart manifests itself in both big and little ways—from the way you feel about your life's worth to the way you respond to being stuck in a long line at Starbucks. It's the way you react when you hop on Instagram, see everybody winning, and conclude that your contributions seem meaningless.

Take a moment to reflect on your life and consider whether you show signs of a hurried heart:

You feel like you are working harder than ever but can never get ahead.

Periods of slowness make you feel uneasy, like you should be doing something productive.

You check your phone immediately upon waking up.

You get frustrated in traffic or in long lines at grocery stores.

You rarely make time for play.

You feel a sense of urgency to get things done; sometimes this keeps you up at night.

You can't remember the last time you felt bored.

You think if a person is bored, she might be a little lazy.

You pride yourself on your ability to multitask.

You never feel you've done enough.

Delays or unexpected obstacles upset or irritate you.

You've asked yourself questions like, "Does anything I do even matter?" or "What do I have to show for my life?"



Not all of these will resonate, but even if a few do, you probably have a hurried heart. Let's be honest: almost all of us do, but we don't know how to tap the brakes.

We want to believe a slower life is possible but fear we will miss out if we don't keep the pace. So we bend to the pressure to go big and get public, and that's exactly the moment when we miss the gift of slowness, even the gift of obscurity. We chase after something that keeps slipping through our fingers. This grasp at an elusive state of spectacular-ness never ends, for it always seems just out of reach. Which means everybody keeps moving a little faster to touch a moving target.

Adult Jennifer understands what College Jennifer didn't yet know in that auditorium. We don't need permission to be spectacular.

We need permission to be *un-spectacular*.

We need permission to stop trying to build something bigger, to have the right conversations with the right people. To stop sucking in our guts, to stop waiting for the kids' nap time so we can finally get to our important work. We need permission to stop idolizing brawn and might. We need permission to take our time, to marvel, to wonder and ponder and savor, and to move at the un-hurried pace of Christ. Time is not a commodity to be used but a gem to be treasured.

We need permission to grow slow.

Just a Small-Town Girl

Perhaps ironically, I grew up at the speed of slow in that tiny town near the trickling North Raccoon River. They say life is a marathon, not a sprint, and somehow the stars aligned so I could begin my life story in Marathon, Iowa. All the streets were named after Greek places like Attica and Sparta. And one cold February day,

my parents brought me home from the hospital to our century-old house on Athens Street. That house was my home until I left for college.

Life as a small-town girl felt exceptionally un-spectacular. The three words I uttered almost every day were, “Mom, I’m bored.” Yet amidst the boredom, there was a stability that I didn’t appreciate until later in life.

The people who held me at church as a baby bought my Girl Scout cookies and cheered me and my siblings on at basketball games. They attended our baptisms and our weddings. Later, we attended their fiftieth wedding anniversaries and their funerals.

Life was a series of church basement potlucks, long visits from the Avon lady, bike rides to the gravel pit, popping tar bubbles on the road with our bare toes, May Day baskets, and tree climbing. There were parades, Fourth of July picnics, ice cream socials, and Saturday night gatherings called the “Good Ol’ Days.” Every activity—a pancake feed at the American Legion hall, a community potluck at the park—was advertised by writing the Who, What, and Where in permanent marker on poster boards, duct-taping those boards to a barrel, and setting that barrel right out in the middle of Main Street.

No one was a stranger in Marathon. I knew everyone at the bank, the grain elevator, the hardware store. Local characters had nicknames like Spot, Brick, Tuck, Buck, and Mountain Man. Mom would get mail addressed simply to, “Mama D., Marathon, Iowa, 50565” because the postman knew the slot in which to slip the letter. When Mom was hospitalized with cancer, our hometown responded in ways that speak to the meaning and connection our small, slow life afforded us. In those two weeks, Mama D. received more than 500 cards and letters. People made the three-hour trip to sit with her while she recovered in the hospital. When she got home, Marathon women had left casseroles for her in the refrigerator.



We always left the door unlocked.

Looking back, I am overcome with nostalgic affection for those days. In this culture of speed, I grieve what's been lost.

I am certain my childhood sounds like a scene ripped from the Hallmark Channel—quaint, charming, peaceful.

Let's look closer. Over the years, the ethic of bigger/better/faster began to disintegrate the fabric of our little town. In the 1980s farm crisis, several of my schoolmates' parents lost their farms and were forced to move off their land. Bankruptcies and suicides shattered farmsteads and communities across America. One afternoon, I watched as four vacant buildings in our town were simultaneously demolished with dynamite. Those doomed storefronts had once held life. Inside those buildings, I sat for my first haircut and ordered my first chocolate malt. But the stores were shuttered when their owners could no longer compete with the bigger and "better" offerings in larger nearby towns, and so, to "clean up" the town, crews blew those buildings to smithereens.

Big and fast trampled over small and slow, leaving a footprint the approximate size of Walmart.

When I left that small, slow life in Marathon, I had no desire to return.

Years later, I wrote an essay for the *Des Moines Register* declaring that I'd never live in rural America again due to its decline and lack of career options.

To that, God seemed to say, "Ha!"

The life I declared all but dead is now the one I'm living, a mere hundred miles from the tiny town I first called home.

Sociologists call people like my husband and me "U-turn farmers," a term used to describe people who have been tugged away from the city to return to their rural roots.

In many ways, life in my current town is similar to the one I knew as a child. Everyone knows everyone, not only by their last

names but by their pickup trucks. I know my bank teller, not by the nameplate at her station but by her face in the gymnasium bleachers. I know our neighbors, not because they wave to me on the highway but because we show up for each other at baby showers and funerals and in the back pew with tears streaming. We don't have Good Ol' Days celebrations like we had in Marathon, but I do see my childhood community echoing forward to find me here—in another town, in another decade. Our little town here in Lyon County is famous for its annual Fourth of July celebration, complete with a pancake breakfast, a parade, a demolition derby, and a contest where greased pigs are set loose in a ring to be captured.

One of the most beautiful parts of small-town living is the way people take care of each other, in the same way I remember people taking care of our family when Mom got cancer.

When someone gets a bad diagnosis here, someone else will invariably plan a “benefit dinner.” Just like in Marathon, someone will write the Who, What, and Where on a poster board and set a barrel smack-dab in the middle of Main Street to advertise it. Farmers will haul out a gigantic grill and make pork sandwiches. Local ladies will make pounds of potato salad, piled like cumulonimbus clouds in gallon pails. Everyone will show up.

If you spent a year here with me, you'd notice right away that the rhythms are slow and natural—enforced by the seasons and kept in motion by God, the keeper of the tempo.

The rhythms are so slow that “you can hear the sun set,” as Rob puts it. Rob and Michelle are dear friends who live a mile south of us, and Scott and I have spent many summer nights sitting with them under the roof of their screened-in porch, enjoying Pinot Noir poured into stemmed glasses, while the sun slips out of sight, turning the clouds into floating pink feathers. When the sun sets, the birds change their tune from bright singing to a distinctly different



sound. They call each other back to the roost. Soon, night noises emerge, a chorus of crickets, frogs, and locusts.

But between the two—the day sounds and the night sounds—there is a pause, an absolute silence that feels like both a benediction and a new beginning.

This is the sound of Growing Slow.

It sounds magical, yes?

Still, so many of us—even here in the peaceful countryside—fight against natural rhythms that are so blatantly obvious you can hear them in a nightly sunset lullaby. Don't let the romanticism fool you. We still succumb to enchantments of faster, bigger, stronger every single day.

Like hurried people everywhere, we dismiss the wonder of ordinary life. Despite our desires for sustainable growth, we can't quite shake the allure of "more" and "fast."

More growth.

More influence.

More money.

More knowledge.

More followers.

More approval.

More success.

More comfort.

More progress in our marriages.

More fruit in our parenting.

Like almost everyone I know, we live on the edge of exhaustion. There's always an itch to hurry, to check our phones, to monitor progress, to wonder why we aren't further along by now.

We are tempted to structure our lives around accomplishment and quantitative results. We suffer from distraction and impatience. The concept of Growing Slow in a culture of speed sounds nice but unrealistic. Won't we get behind? Won't people think we're lazy?

But deep down in our hearts, all of us—no matter where we live—are desperate to slow down. We want to know it's possible.

Is it?

What if we could reclaim the peace and connection of a slower way? What if we could live life more thoughtfully in the places where we have been planted? Or, what if we can't? If we dial it all back, will we be trampled underfoot, like those demolished buildings in Marathon, left as rubble in the race for spectacular? Have we reached the tipping point, and it's too far gone? Is the dream of a simpler life really nothing more than nostalgia?

I am convinced that we *can* have a simpler life by making deliberate and thoughtful choices.

With a Growing Slow mindset, we will harness the rhythm of our ordinary lives, making a choice to protest the accelerated pace that always demands more. This decision will ask a lot of us. We will need to change how we work, how we measure “success,” how we love, and how we live.

This is a complete revolution. A Growing Slow mindset will rescue us from the rim of exhausted living.

Come to the land, friend. Come to the fields of our farm. And come to the Holy Land of our spiritual ancestors, for it has much to teach us. I believe with all my heart that our spiritual ancestors would tell us this: *It's okay to grow slow, because when you grow slow, you grow deep.*

Early Christians from a place called Colossae would have understood the value of deep-rooted growth. The Colossians lived in a city surrounded by fields that yielded olives and figs. Farmers pastured sheep, which contributed to a thriving wool industry. In Latin, the dyed red wool was called colossinum, an indication of the city's namesake.¹

Deep roots mattered on those farms—and in the hearts of first-century believers. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he spoke



to them in terms they would have understood: farming terms. He wrote:

Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then, your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.²

This slow growth, *this* is what we were made for—with roots growing deep, growing strong in truth. This is the way to sustainable growth in our families, our friendships, and our faith journeys.

It is possible.

And it is the way of Christ.

The Slow Growth Movement

An entire international movement has emerged out of our innate desire for a decelerated life. In the same decade that those buildings were demolished on Marathon's main street, the Slow Movement was born on the other side of the world, in Italy.

It was 1986. Carlo Petrini protested the opening of a fast food restaurant in Piazza di Spagna, Rome, which spurred a global movement toward "slow food." Carlo better not get between me and my Taco John's Potato Olés with nacho cheese, but I do appreciate what emerged from his protest—a deeper appreciation of local food, traditional cooking, and artisan production. The idea: eating should be about quality and pleasure, not the swiftness of production.

The slow food philosophy took hold. Over the years, the concept expanded to slow education, slow fashion, slow travel, even slow sex. Whole cities have adopted the philosophy of being a slow city, or "Cittaslow." All of it is a revolt against accelerated living.³

The Slow Movement offers evidence that we really can deliberately slow down at our dinner tables, in our offices, on our roads,

and in our minds. We can regain the connection and meaning that our hearts long for.

But will we?

Some of us wonder: If I grow slow, will I lose my edge? Will I lose my job? Will I miss out if I stop long enough to catch my breath?

Take heart: Growing Slow will actually make you *better* at what you do, not worse. But your focus is no longer on the pace of your growth. Instead, it's on the depth of your roots. It's walking it all out at a gospel pace, one step at a time, one task at a time, one bite at a time, one touch at a time, one conversation at a time.

We don't need to complicate this. It's the simple things that will pull us out of the culture of hurry:

Refusing to multitask, instead focusing on the single task
before you.

Lighting candles at the dinner table, so you can linger with
your family.

Sitting down while you eat, so you can taste the food.

Resisting the urge to check your phone at the stoplight.

Looking in their eyes—really looking—when they tell you a
story.

Taking time to celebrate accomplishments, instead of flinging
yourself forward to the next thing.

There's a Middle English word that, centuries ago, emerged as a way to wish someone a blessing when they were about to embark on a journey. "I wish you Godspeed."

Literally, Godspeed means, "May God cause you to succeed."

What would it look like to walk at a Godspeed pace, toward God-defined success, on our Growing Slow journey?

Godspeed is the pace of Christ. When I think of a Godspeed



pace, I think of what Eugene Peterson described in his *Message* paraphrase as the “unforced rhythms of grace.”

A Godspeed pace looks like a slow walk with Jesus. Our Savior spent three years preparing his disciples for ministry; there were no life hacks for learning faster. A Godspeed pace looks like a decade or more before Paul experienced his first missionary journey. A Godspeed pace is Jesus walking, not running, along dusty roads. He passed by farm fields, taking time to draw lessons from them. He stopped at wells, paused to teach on hillsides, withdrew for long periods in the wilderness, and enjoyed long dinners with friends.

Read these verses, slowly. Let the invitation from Jesus fall gently on your weary heart.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”⁴

The invitation is before you and me. Let’s slow to the pace of Godspeed, matching step for step the unforced rhythms of days and seasons.

You don’t have to hurry anymore. Your pace is *your* pace, and it will get you to the place God has prepared for you. For now, perhaps, that place is right here in your ordinary life.

Grab hold of this truth, and hold it with all your might:

God is with you in the spectacular, and he’s with you in the regular. There is dignity in both places.

Your ordinary life matters. There is honor inherent in being faithful in the small things, even in the fields where the seed is just beginning to break open underground.

You don't have to be brilliant to be beautiful.

You don't have to be influential to be important.

You don't need be an authority in order to have agency over the square foot of land where our Good Lord has placed you.

He knows all about you, and he knows what's ahead. He has a plan that takes into account the mistakes you'll make, as well the little victories you ought to stop and celebrate.

God doesn't expect you to get it all right, right now.

You don't have to expect that, either.

It's time to un-hurry your heart. Growing Slow is overdue.

Some people won't like the slowed-down version of you. They'll want you to hurry up, get it right, stay the course, and keep saying yes. You'll confuse and frustrate them when you change your mind or when you don't "grow" fast enough. Some people won't understand you.

That's okay. They didn't plant the field that makes you, you. God did.





REMEMBER

It's okay to grow slow, because when
you grow slow, you grow deep.

REFLECT

On this freeway of life, in what areas do you worry you'll
lose your edge or "miss out" if you take the exit ramp and
head for the back roads of life?

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.....

.....

Where in your life do you feel the most pressure to be
spectacular?

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.....

Can you recall a time in your life when you wondered if
what you were doing truly mattered?

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.....

Which of the symptoms on page 3 do you most relate to?
Why?

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RETURN

At the end of each chapter,
we return to the soil.

Deep roots mattered on the farms around Colossae
and in the heart of those first-generation believers. In
what way do you desire deep roots in any/all of these
categories?

Family

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Home

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Career

.....

Faith

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Recreation

.....

Legacy

.....

Other

.....

