

overwhelmed

31 Stories
from M.O.M.



The M.O.M. Initiative

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Introduction

Overwhelmed. It's where most moms live. Somewhere between the mounting piles of laundry, the overflowing kitchen sink, doctor's appointments, soccer practice and the pot of spaghetti boiling over on the stove, there is a mom who is at her wit's end.

Perhaps that's you, sweet mom. Wishing your load was lighter, yet knowing you wouldn't change it for the world. Feeling like you can't do the 'mom' thing for another second and wishing someone would shoulder the load for just a few short hours. Long enough to get your sleep-deprived self a much needed, uninterrupted nap...long enough to come up for air and catch your breath.

That's what ***Overwhelmed ~ 31 Stories from M.O.M.*** is all about. It's for you, the momma who knows that life is hard and being a mom isn't easy.

Overwhelmed is our gift to you who are in the trenches of motherhood and find yourself feeling weary, worn out and overwhelmed. Each story has been shared to help you find comfort in the fact that you are not alone-to help you discover the courage to press on when you feel like you can't take another step-and to offer perspective and wisdom that can help you find joy in the journey-to see hope beyond *overwhelmed*.

Overwhelmed as a personal resource: *Overwhelmed ~ 31 Stories from M.O.M.* was written by real moms who have walked in the shoes of the overwhelmed mom and found hope, healing and victory through trusting God and applying biblical truths to everyday life. They share their stories to leave an imprint of faith on your heart.

This is for you, precious mom. We know it isn't easy. But we are here for you and we share our stories so you know the road you are on has been traveled by moms before you...moms who have learned that at the end of *Overwhelmed*, there is comfort, courage, hope and healing.

Overwhelmed as a mentoring resource: *Overwhelmed ~ 31 Stories from M.O.M.* provides a six week experience with five stories for each week. Each story is from real moms and includes reflective questions specifically designed to serve as conversation prompts and to help foster the mentor/mentee relationship as you navigate the life of an overwhelmed mom together. ***The M.O.M. Initiative*** gives churches, ministries and mentors the resources and support they need to confidently take Titus 2 to the streets.

Begin a *M.O.M. Initiative Mentor Group*: IF YOU, YOUR CHURCH OR YOUR MINISTRY are ready to start or expand your mentoring ministry, we would like to help. **SIGN UP** to receive **OVERWHELMED** and we will list your church or organization on our **online directory**, making it easy for moms who are looking for mentors to locate a ***M.O.M. Initiative Mentor Group*** in their area. (Or sign up by visiting our website at www.themominitiative.com)

Here's a brief look at what a mentoring ministry might look like for you:

- Schedule a time and place to meet weekly for six weeks.
- You and the mentee will read through 5 stories each week. This will help you be prepared when you meet together each week.
- As a mentor, you can rest in knowing, this biblically-based resource includes questions at the end of each story that are specifically designed to be a catalyst for conversation. This will give you, as a mentor, the confidence to know you won't have to worry about that awkward silence that would normally leave you scrambling for something to say.
- The questions are also written to help you, as a mentor, reflect on your own story and share your failures as well as your successes with the kind of sincere transparency that will assure your mentee that she is not alone, and that her mentor isn't Pinterest perfect either.
- Your time together reading through ***Overwhelmed*** is a tool to nurture a relationship that will hopefully last long past the book.

Here are some ideas as to where you can become intentionally missional about mentoring:

Churches, para-ministries, MOPS groups, MOMS Club International and individuals can use ***Overwhelmed*** as a mentoring tool, not only to mentor moms within the church, but to go beyond her four walls and minister to moms in low income apartment complexes, neighborhoods, crisis pregnancy centers, homeless shelters, juvenile shelters and wherever moms can be found.

Chapter 1

How Are You, Really?

By: Heather Riggleman

*“Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation.
I will be honored throughout the world.”
(Isaiah 46:10 NLT)*

I'm tired and don't want to talk to anyone. Yet, my daily routine of shuffling kids and women's ministry forces me to interact. So, I smile and say, *"I'm fine, thank you. How are you?"*

The truth is, there are very few women I'm willing to open myself up to, and so begins the manners of being polite and asking, *"How are you?"* As they tell me about their burdens, I struggle to be present and not check out. I find myself retreating to the inner depths of my soul, discovering that I am already over capacity. I am overwhelmed.

My own cup is already full of burdens; stresses of finances, weary of my so-called *God's Call to Write*, concerned with what our future holds, worried about behaviors my son is presenting, and pushing myself to be ever present for my oldest child in her turbulent teens, combined with Aspergers; but I choose not to talk about it. Very few friends really want to listen and even then, their own circumstances weigh heavily on their minds. It's not that they aren't good listeners, it's because I know they don't have what I need. Weary laden, I drive home, already mentally checking out.

In the quiet of my home, I hear Him speak to me, those three same words, we use out of politeness; so I respond knowing that God isn't overly burdened or weighed down.

"How are you?"

"I'm lonely, God."

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b NIV).

"I'm weary, God."

"Your soul will find rest in Me alone. I am your salvation. I am your Rock, your fortress, you will not be shaken." (Psalm 62:1-2. paraphrased, NIV).

As I pour out, He pours in. I realize that being quiet in His presence is almost a lost art that needs a revival. When we quiet ourselves before Him, He is able to completely fill us in exchange for what is weighing us down. He uses His presence and His Word to breathe life into us, and we need that so very much more than we realize.

Being a mother and woman of God can sometimes weigh us down so deeply with concerns, crises, worries, needs of our children, and demands from others. Without quieting ourselves before God, we become so full, and yet, so very empty.

Our souls were created for the ebb and flow of pouring ourselves out before Him, as He pours life back into us. He touches our hearts, just enough for each day.

Just enough that we long to come back to Him for more.

Just enough to recreate a bond that can overcome any feeling, any burden.

Just enough to teach us the depth of friendship with Him.

Just enough to create a vibration in our spirits.

We become filled with His truth and peace and we can begin the ripple effect of giving His friendship to others when we truly ask, *"How are you?"*

In the depths of being a woman and mother, this is truly the hardest question. We think we are supposed to have it together all the time. As I sat basking in God's presence, I heard Him laugh at me and say, *"Nowhere in My Word have I ever said that you need to have it together."*

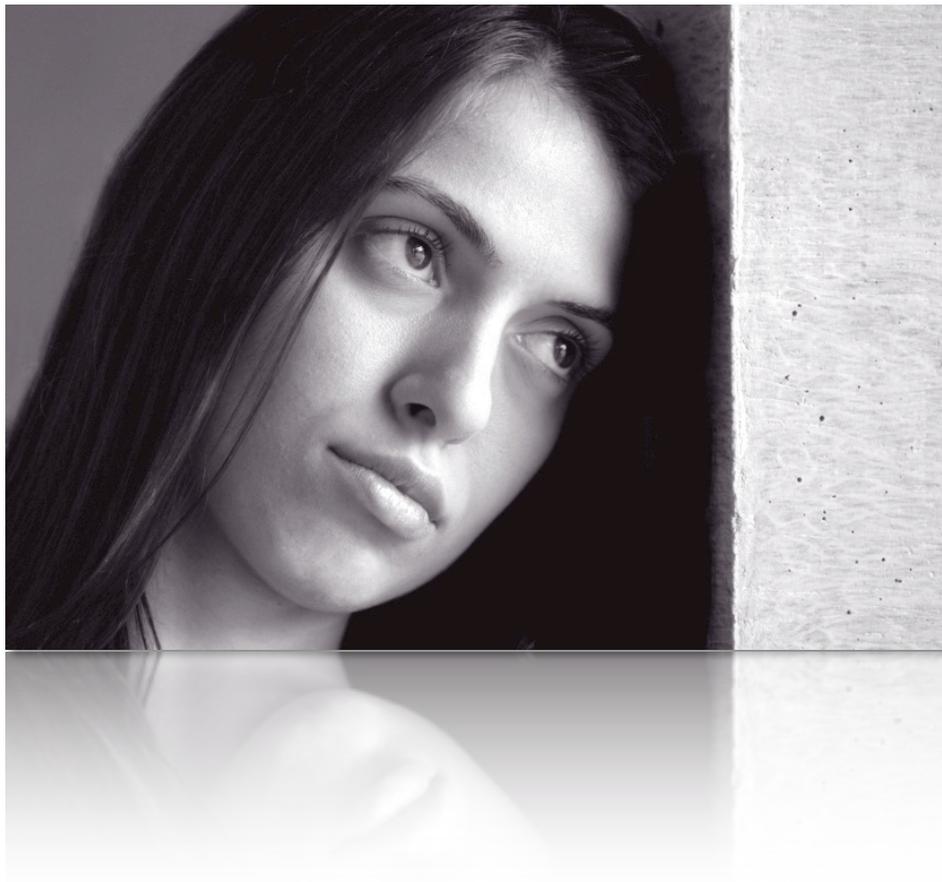
Slight pause before I hear more, *“Who says you have to do it all? And why do you have to do it alone?”*

As I sat pondering these questions, I was reminded of story after story in the Word of God where it was clear that we were meant to be in relationship with God—we were meant to be in deep fellowship with each other. So go on, what are you waiting for? Tell God what’s on your heart and truly ask your Friend, *“How are you?”*

* *Right now...How are you, really?*

* *Do you struggle with trying to be polite when you feel you are overwhelmed with your own circumstances?*

* *When is the last time you were still enough to talk to God and then hear Him speak peace to your heart?*



Chapter 2

I Am Not Enough

By: Angela Mackey

*“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you,
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”
(Isaiah 41:10 NKJV)*

Tears streamed from my eyes. I felt it all; the heaviness and weight of what it meant to be a mom laden on my shoulders. I examined my words, my mannerisms, and my nutritional choices.

What am I doing wrong? I wondered. *Nothing is easy. My daughter seems so angry.* I read books about anger, molding a child's heart, but still her attitudes and choices broke my heart. My confidence as a parent dwindled as I realized I was in over my head.

"I can't do it!" I finally confessed to God. "I'm messing her up!"

My tears fell in torrents and, in broken words, I confessed all the ways I failed as a mom. I confessed my angry outbursts, frustrated tones, and all the times I treated my daughter in ways I would never want to be treated.

Still the daunting task of mothering lay ahead of me—this broken stumbling woman desperately in need of a Savior. My heart felt the burden of thousands of inadequacies and doubts. Guilt added to the burden and I knew I could not keep my head above the waves of life. ***I was not enough.*** *I would never be enough.* I could not do it.

There, in that moment of honesty, God whispered to my raw soul. *I never wanted you to mother alone. I wanted you to mother with Me. Remember, apart from Me you can do nothing.* (John 15:5)

Like the rising of the sun, the truth slowly dawned in my heart. I cannot be a good mother by myself. I will fail and fail often. Yet with God, I can do all things because He is at work inside me. That truth refreshed my battered heart and lightened my load.

And suddenly, the waves of life became a wonderful and wild ride that God and I could navigate together. Mothering is hard work, but when I remember I am not alone, I do not feel overwhelmed.

- * *Have you ever felt like you just couldn't mother your children on your own?*
- * *How do you handle it when you mess up as a mom?*
- * *How does knowing that God is with you in your journey as a mother help you?*



Chapter 3

Losing My Way

By: Stephanie Shott

“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”
(Matthew 10:39 NKJV)

I'm not sure how, but I lost my way.

As far back as I can remember, I had always wanted to be a wife and mother. But a wife and a mother wasn't ALL I wanted to be.

I had dreams of being a nurse, a teacher, or even an archeologist. But life doesn't always turn out like you plan.

The choices we make often derail dreams and leave us wondering what coulda, woulda and shoulda have been.

Becoming pregnant in high school has a way of putting a kink in even the best of plans. And that's exactly where I found myself. Pregnant at 17. Married. And then divorced by 19.

When you're a single mom trying to *do* all and *be* all, it's pretty tough to think beyond the diapers and the unpaid bills. Surviving each week with food on the table and a roof over your head is your new idea of success-not being a nurse, a teacher or an archeologist.

The years passed and marriage once again loomed largely over my life. I entered my new role with great anticipation. Excited about the future with my family intact and a new baby on the way, I was becoming what I always wanted to be, a wife and a mother.

But was that all there was? Did the words, *wife* and *mother* completely define my existence? *And what about the future? When my children grow up and my days are no longer filled with dirty diapers, field trips and homeschool, what will I do with my time?*

I had always believed that being a mother was the greatest calling on the planet. As women, it is our opportunity to mold the heart of the next generation and leave a legacy of faith.

But I knew the day was coming when my home would no longer be filled with a flurry of teenagers traipsing in and out of the house. I realized the day was fast approaching when those sweet, nighttime prayers by the bedside and those daily doses of butterfly kisses would end.

What then? Had I completely lost who I was supposed to be by becoming who I was?

I was clueless about the road ahead, but God's Word has a way of shining just the right amount of light so we can see what step we need to take next.

Proverbs 16:9 (KNJV) says,

“A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.”

And in Psalms 37:23 (NKJV), we find,

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way.”

My heart's desire to become a wife and a mother was fulfilled. I wasn't a Christian when I had my children but God graciously made all things work together for good according to His promise in Romans 8:28-even that which happened before I knew Him.

He also placed a desire in my heart to minister to moms. All moms.

To minister to women in whatever season they may find themselves. To encourage broken lives and hurting hearts with the unchanging, life-changing Word of God.

I never lost myself when I became a wife and a mother. I just stepped into who He created me to be. I may have taken some detours and wandered off the beaten path, but the Lord has used each step of the way to help me become who I was created to be.

Through the years, I've had to release a few dreams along the way, but when I look back in the rearview mirror of my life, I can see that if those dreams had ever come true, my life would not be what it is and those dreams may have turned out to be nightmares instead.

Who we are today may not look anything like what we thought it would when we were young and our life seemed so much simpler. But if we surrender our lives to Christ and seek to do His will, He will direct our steps and define our lives so much better than our teen dreams could possibly do.

He, alone, can even make beauty out of the ashes of our past and bring healing and hope to our hurting hearts. He, alone, knows what our next step should be.

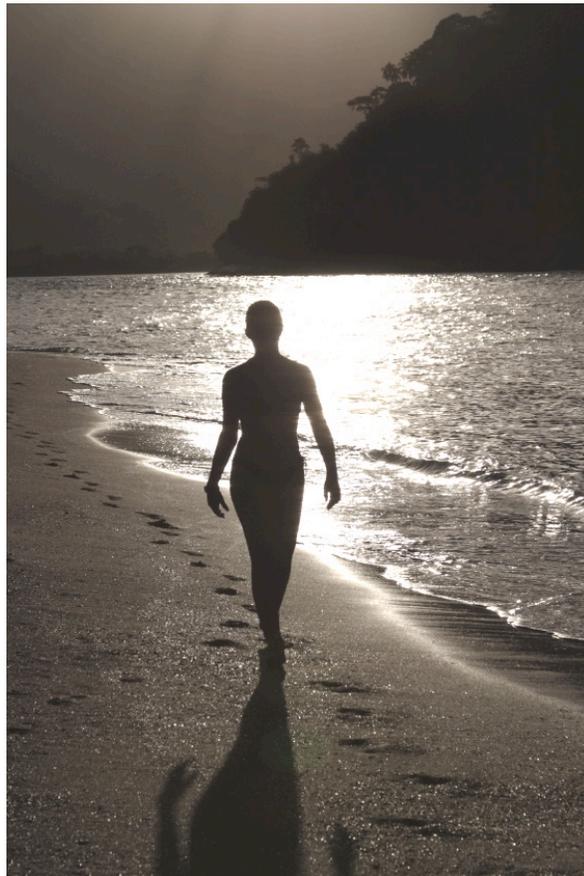
And when we follow Him, we won't lose ourselves...we will find ourselves.

Oh...and my biggest blessings in life are the ones that call me wife, mom, and abuella (grandma)!

* *Have you ever feared losing yourself as a wife and mom?*

* *What are some ways you can pursue your God-given dreams while still making your family and your home your main ministry?*

* *What are some of the many blessings that come with being a mother?*



Chapter 4

What's Overwhelming Me Isn't What's Really Overwhelming Me

By: Cheri Gregory

*“Lord, hear my prayer! Listen to my plea! Don't turn away from me in my time of distress.
Bend down to listen, and answer me quickly when I call to you.”
(Psalm 102:1-2 NLT)*

What's Overwhelming Me...

“I don't know what to do!”

It's 3:30 AM in the emergency animal hospital, and I'm sobbing, “I don't have \$5,000. And even if I did, I've got a kid in college!”

\$5,000 for *exploratory* surgery! Or put my dog down.

Overwhelmed by exhaustion, I leave Shatzi—who has been medicated so she's no longer moaning in pain—and head home to catch some sleep.

As I drive, random memories and thoughts cascade through my brain:

Nikki

I think of Nikki, the big white Samoyed dog I grew up with.

He used to curl up outside my bedroom window and whine encouragement to me. When I heard him there, I could finally fall sleep. Until the day I left the backyard gate open. He dashed up the road, ignoring my call, “Nikki, come back!” and flashed me his “catch me if you can” smile.

I searched for him until dark but came home with an empty leash. He wasn't at my window that night, so I couldn't sleep. I was awake at midnight and heard the screech of tires and the yelp of pain.

In the hours of silence that followed, I pleaded “*Please* make him okay. I'm sorry I forgot. Let him come back.”

But it was too late.

The next morning, Mother wrote a note to my teacher that said: “Cheri may not be her usual happy self today.”

Mother

I think of Mother and how the entire family has finally come to terms with what I was the first to discover several years ago.

It was April, and as was normal for Mother in April, she called me to talk about our Thanksgiving and Christmas menus. We'd already had this discussion three times -- in January, February, and March. And we'd have it again monthly May through October, and then daily in November and December.

All that was normal for Mother.

But during what I knew to be our fourth call, I heard Mother muttering, “How did that get on my calendar?” and “When did I write that there?” And as the conversation continued, it hit me: *for Mother, this is the first time we are having this conversation.*

I tried to tell others in the family, but they said I was imagining things. So month in, month out, we had *the call*. A repeat for me. The first time for her.

Annemarie

I think of my own daughter, my strongest connection to Mother, who has doted on Annemarie from the moment she was born. For so many years, I felt like my little girl was the one thing I had finally done right and earned me the approval of my mother.

Until last week, when I learned that Annemarie had lost all her college scholarships. I don't understand. I *loved* college! They were the happiest years of my life!

But I'm just finding out that Annemarie's first year has been a nightmare of ditched classes, bombed tests, social media overload, anxiety attacks, and depression.

What did I do wrong this time? And more importantly, how can I help?

I don't know what to do!

...Isn't What's 'Really' Overwhelming Me

I arrive home, head to bed, and catch a few hours of desperately-needed sleep.

When I wake up, I realize that as much as I cannot justify spending thousands of dollars on a pet, I also cannot put her down.

I drive back to the emergency vet, pick up Shatzi, and take her to our regular vet who kindly offers low-cost options to *medically support* her.

Such a relief!

And during the ensuing weeks—as Shatzi gets worse, then slightly better, and finally makes a complete recovery—I realize that I was not really overwhelmed by the money as I sobbed at 3:30 AM in the emergency animal hospital.

I was burdened by my feelings of the responsibility for Nikki's death, anxiety-ridden by Mother's decline into Alzheimer's Disease, and blind-sided by worry over Annemarie's struggles.

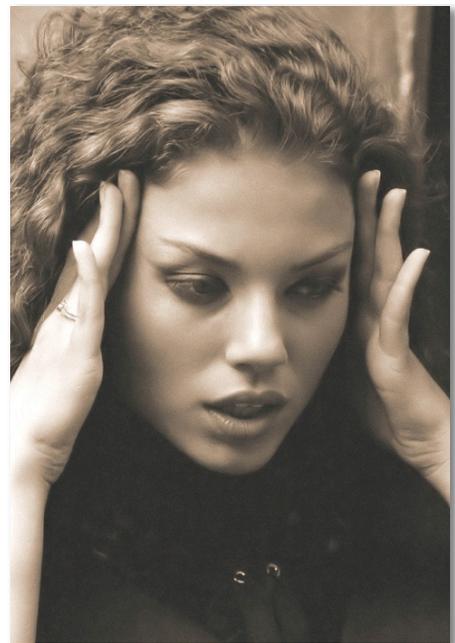
I was overwhelmed by so many losses converging all at once.

By clinging to Shatzi, I was attempting to atone for Nikki, save Mother, and rescue Annemarie.

None of which I could do.

I could, and did, return to Psalm 18:1-19 (NIV), my life verses, which felt more relevant than ever:

*I love you, Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I called to the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
and I have been saved from my enemies.
The cords of death entangled me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.
The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me.
In my distress I called to the Lord;
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.
He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.
He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes, who were too strong for me.
They confronted me in the day of my disaster;
but the Lord was my support.
He brought me out into a spacious place;
He rescued me because he delighted in me.*



- * Do you ever feel like everything is caving in at once and you just can't take it any more?
- * Cheri went to the sanctuary of the Word of God to find help. How could those verses help her?
- * Where do you typically go to find help?
- * What verses could minister to you when you are feeling overwhelmed?

Chapter 5

Lessons from the Rock Wall

By: Genny Heikka

*“From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”
(Psalm 61:2 NKJV)*

I sat at the gym, watching my kids climb the rock wall. I smiled at the way they fearlessly scaled the two-story tower. Even my daughter, who tends to be a little more cautious, descended upside-down, laughing.

They raced each other to the top, over and over, not worrying about falling and never looking down. Each time they got to the bottom, they only lingered for a second before they grabbed onto the wall and started climbing again.

Better than me, I thought at first. If I were the one climbing, I'd be worrying if the harness was secure or thinking about how far I'd fall if I lost my footing.

And as I watched my kids, I wondered if being a parent does this to us--takes away our sense of adventure.

After all, we are the ones who have to keep our kids safe. We keep everything in order. We try to keep them from getting hurt-and make sure they don't talk to strangers-and teach them to look both ways before crossing the street.

My poor son can't even hold his pocket knife without me standing guard over him. And every time my daughter roller blades down the driveway, I have to bite my lip just to keep myself from telling her for the umpteenth time, “Be careful!”

Sometimes, in the stress of motherhood, it can be easy to become discouraged. Sometimes we become too serious and lose our enthusiasm. We let stress and busyness overpower the joy that comes so easily with being a mom.

But how much more joy-filled would motherhood be if we looked at it with the same enthusiasm with which my kids climbed that wall?

I want to face the opportunities and challenges of being a mom with fearlessness and faith, sure of the harness holding me. I don't want to waste time looking down or worrying about falling. And if I do fall, I want to remember to rest at the bottom for only a minute until I get back up and start climbing again.

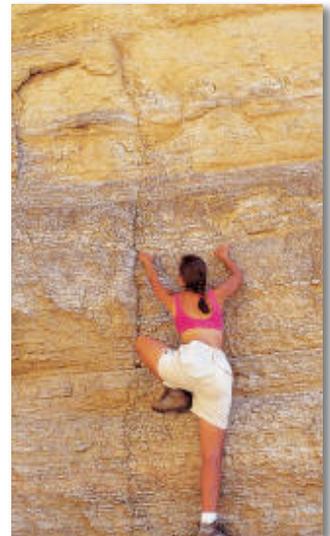
That perspective is not only possible, it's true. God *is* our harness, and we *are* secure, even in the ups and downs. We don't have to worry about falling, because if we do, He promises He will provide us with what we need to get right back up and start climbing again.

Being a parent doesn't mean we have to lose our sense of adventure or let stress overtake us in the journey. And when we focus on God, we are free to climb so we won't miss the view from the top of the rock wall.

“See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.” (Isaiah 49:16, NIV)

Let the knowledge that God is your harness give you a sense of peace and rest today, and let it fuel you to climb freely and with a smile!

- * *What about you? Has becoming a parent made you more cautious or hesitant?*
- * *What causes you to feel weighed down or discouraged?*
- * *How can knowing God is your harness help you the next time you feel overwhelmed, frustrated or discouraged?*



Chapter 6

You Deserve a Break Today

By: Lori Wildenberg

*“The disciples went and woke him, saying,
‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’”
(Luke 8:24 NIV)*

Overwhelmed being a mama of little ones? You need two R's - *Rest* and *Rejuvenation*. Yah, Yah, Yah. You know it, you've heard it before. You are saying, *“That would be great but it's not in my reality!”*

I get it. At one point, I had four kids ages five and under. I fell into bed exhausted, praying for uninterrupted sleep. There were times my nights were as busy as my days! Can you relate?

Jesus can totally relate to a young mom's exhaustion caused by the constant needs of others. In Luke 8:22-25, He was so spent He even slept through a squall while crossing a lake in a boat. His motley crew was so terrified, they woke Him.

Even Jesus had His sleep interrupted - by twelve adult men.

When my precious bundles turned into little waddlers, I became the naked magnet. Whenever I was getting dressed or stepped out of the shower, I had company. I resorted to getting into the car *dressed*, (*I thought that detail needed clarifying*), securing the kids in their car seats, then I'd apply my make-up while parked in the garage. Everyone was safe and I became presentable to the general public.

Everyday wisdom would say, "Get up earlier!" but that never worked for me. I'm convinced kids have a sixth sense that tells them when Mom is up and at 'em.

So..where does rest fit into this picture? It takes a little planning. Have quiet time scheduled each day. Even if your preschoolers or toddlers have outgrown a nap, still carve out time for all to take a break...at the same time.

For my bunch, early afternoon worked best. Resist the urge to work while your young ones rest. Rest while they rest. Schedule naps and quiet time so they overlap.

And..somehow it helps to know Jesus understands my exhaustion.

* *What part of your day is the most draining?*

* *Where can you be proactive in squeezing in some quiet time?*

* *How does Jesus' example of 'taking a break' help you know you also need to do the same?*



Chapter 7

When Motherhood Delivers the Unexpected

By: Christen Price

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12b NIV)

I wasn't prepared to become a mother two years ago. My twin girls were three months premature and I felt like my time had been snatched away as they abruptly left my womb and entered the world weighing two pounds each.

They were transferred to incubators inside the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Walking into the NICU's sterile environment, I was overwhelmed by the frailty of my tiny twin girls as their little bodies lie totally dependent upon machines to keep them alive.

Our girls stayed in the NICU for 83 days. While my children battled infections, low birth weight, and other developmental delays, I was fighting my own battle of spiritual warfare. God was asking me to trust His love while the accuser whispered doubt and shame into my ear.

Through the angst that filled me heart, my God was fighting for me to believe in His sovereign way. On my 26th birthday, God graced me with His perfect timing when my husband and I brought our girls home from the hospital.

I thought the hard part of motherhood was over, but it was actually just beginning. Feeding, changing, and caring for twins is quite a juggling act, and some days the responsibility was suffocating. I felt guilty for my meltdowns and mood swings; especially since God had healed my girls from their prematurity. Was I being ungrateful by admitting motherhood was the hardest job I'd ever had?

Before becoming a mother, I was a classic Type-A young woman: overachiever, multitasker, organized, and responsible. I dreamed of being the soccer mom, the crafty mom, the organic mom-basically, the best mom God ever made.

I had no idea what God really had in store for me as a mom. In the midst of dirty diapers, mischief, and temper tantrums, I discovered that being a mother was not at all how I expected it to be. I had many meltdowns and my frustration often overtook any rational behavior I once exhibited. I was a mess of a mother and felt defeated.

In my dark moments as a mother, I've had no choice but turn towards the Light. John 1:4 (NASB) states, *“In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness.”* God – my Light – has shown me *it is okay to struggle as a mother* because my suffering brings me closer to Him. As I was overwhelmed by motherhood, God has taught me an invaluable lesson: I'm not perfect.

Admitting my imperfections has drastically changed my outlook on parenting. Now, I realize my limitations and I pray for God to cover me with His endlessness. I recognize shame as Satan's way of gaining a stronghold in my brain. When I get stressed over my wreck of a house, I take a time-out to pray and inhale peace. Instead of being the planner of my days, I submit my Type-A ways to the Ultimate Planner.

No, I wasn't prepared to become a mother and everything that comes with this title. But, having children has grown me into a woman who accepts her circumstances instead of trying to control the outcome. I've learned what it means to be meek, submissive, and extremely thankful. I wouldn't have my journey of motherhood any other way.

Life as a mom might be unexpected and crazy busy, and anything but underwhelming. Motherhood is an extraordinary gift, an overwhelming display of God's perfect love.

** Second Corinthians 3:18 talks about how we, believers in Jesus, are being transformed into the image of Christ. How have you been transformed into Christ's image as a mother?*

** Has there been a time as a mother where God has overwhelmed you with His love? Jot this memory down and keep it in a visible place for you to remember. When motherhood gets overwhelming, it is easy to forget God's faithfulness. Keeping proof visible is a way to keep us from having spiritual Alzheimer's.*

** The Bible has many verses about comparing God and Jesus to light (Psalm 27:1, Matthew 5:16, John 8:12, James 1:17). As a mother, you have the opportunity to be a light to your children when you submit to the Light of this world. What darkness as a mother do you need to give to God so He can bring light to your path?*

Chapter 8

Mouth Wash-More

By: Tara Dovenbarger

*“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs.”
(Psalm 100:1-2 NIV)*

The day is going about as usual. One child is on the floor doing the famous “drop and flop” after not getting her way. The laundry pile, “Mount Wash More,” is glaring at me from the other room screaming how behind I am. The older two should be doing schoolwork, but the phone rang, so they are off and running. A million other things are buzzing in my brain needing my attention all at the same time.

Overwhelmed does not come close to describing how I am feeling.

As a mom who loves the Lord and wants to leave a Godly legacy, what are some ways to combat all these pressures?

- **First, time alone with the Lord is a must.** As much as possible, try to make the time a priority. Not to be confused with adding something else to your to-do list, but weaving God throughout your day. I have memories of my mom with her Bible out at various times during her day. I also love to listen to encouraging sermons at www.sermonaudio.com while folding laundry or other chores. Getting fed with scripture helps us grow in our faith and keeps us focused.
- **Second is worship music.** The kids and I have a habit of turning up our worship music nice and loud while we clean house. This gets the whole family praising! TV off, worship music on. Many cable companies have contemporary Christian music channels available to listen through your TV, as well.
- **And lastly, I am able to focus on the Lord in the car by listening to God’s Word through music.** We have found two CDs called *Hide ‘em in Your Heart* by Steve Green. The whole family enjoys them, but the best part is the automatic scripture memory everyone gets from listening. These CDs are encouraging to me as well as my children. I have even caught my older kids singing along! They are wonderful for my child with developmental delays because they are short, simple, and repetitive. You can take a look yourself at www.stevegreenministries.org/music/hidem_in_your_heart_vol1.php.

I have found that focusing on the Lord and weaving Him throughout my day is a perfect way to combat all of life’s pressures.

* *What are some ways you can focus on the Lord in the middle of the madness of motherhood?*

* *Why would you think it is important to focus on the Lord when you’re so busy being a mom?*

* *What can you apply to your own life from the tips above?*



Chapter 9

Yes, His Name is George

By: Angela Mackey

“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NIV)

Frantically, I shifted through the assortment of toys, trash, and treasure that covered the floor of my van. My three-year-old eyed me as I muttered to myself. "Good job, Angela. You forgot again! What are you going to do? Think. Think!"

My little man knitted his brow, "What are you lookin' for, Mommy?"

My heart skipped a beat. What do I tell him? If I can't find something that starts with the letter "G" in the car, can I get him into class without him realizing we missed show and tell again?

"Mommy?"

I shook my head, "Sorry little man. I am looking for something for show-and-tell."

"I'm bringing this," he held up his purple hippopotamus.

"But I don't. . ."

"Ms. Tasha will like it right, Mommy?" he nodded expectantly.

I stared at him like a deer in the headlights. "Sure son, she will like it."

As we walked hand-in-hand into his school my thoughts started berating me. *When will you ever get it right? You can't remember show-and-tell every week? What is wrong with you? You are a bad mom.*

The weight of my thoughts hung heavy around my heart. Instead of being rewarding and worth it, mothering suddenly morphed into a never-ending list of demands. Demands I could never meet. My world shifted under me.

I can't do this again. I can't believe I am failing my little guy. Again.

As I checked my son into his classroom, I asked his teacher, "What letter is show-and-tell today?" Secretly, I had hoped it was "H" because I couldn't stand the idea of telling my boy I messed up again.

"G," she smiled as my grin faded.

"Oh, well. . . we have this hippo," I nodded to the purple animal in my son's hands.

Her eyes lit up, "His name must be George."

My heavy, overwhelmed heart suddenly felt light. With a silly grin, I looked at my boy and said, "This is *George*, you can take him for show-and-tell." His eyes shone bright. "George," he nodded and kissed me goodbye.

Then it hit me, I don't mother well in a vacuum. I need other moms, friends, teachers or relatives to help me. It could be as easy as figuring out what my child is bringing for show-and-tell or as difficult as discovering new discipline techniques. I need more than just my experiences to keep me grounded and help me be successful.

As I share my concerns with a friend, I walk away no longer overwhelmed, but energized, understood, and not alone.

* *Have you ever felt like a failure as a mother? If so, how do you typically handle it?*

* *Do you recognize the need for the wisdom of other mothers, and if so, how can they encourage you in your present circumstances?*

* *How does sharing with a friend or mentor help you feel less overwhelmed?*

Chapter 10

Overwhelmed by Uncertainty

By: Dana Bailey

“Lord, I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”
(Job 42:2 ESV)

I watched my newborn daughter sleep. I checked to make sure she was breathing okay. I counted her wet diapers and poopy diapers to make sure she was doing what the doctor told me she should. I boiled her pacifiers and anything she could put in her mouth. I did everything I knew to do to make sure I was doing the best job I could as a first-time mom.

I was 19 and still considered a newlywed since my husband and I were only one month away from celebrating our first wedding anniversary. I acted like I knew all I needed to know about being a mom, but secretly, I felt so inadequate and the thought of doing something wrong often overwhelmed me.

What if I don't hear her cry in the night?

What if she chokes on something?

My mind was always going over possible dangers to my new daughter.

As she grew and her sweet personality began to emerge, I began to wonder, “What if I do something wrong and she doesn't grow up to be the person God wants her to be? What if I don't teach her everything she needs to know about God or about being a wife and mom?”

My daughter is 21 now and sometimes I still find myself overwhelmed by uncertainty.

Uncertain I am guiding my young adult daughter into a good decision.

Uncertain that it's a good thing to let my teenage son go on a date.

Uncertain I am handling my preteen son's bad attitude the right way.

My list of uncertainties continues to grow as my children continue to grow.

- *Am I doing it right?*
- *Can I mess up my kids?*
- *What if I say something to them that will change the direction of their lives in the wrong way?*
- *How do I know I am raising my kids right?*

I just don't want to mess them up. *“Lord, I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”* (Job 42:2 ESV)

It has overwhelmed me at times to think of all I thought I needed to teach my kids or do for them to help them become who I thought God wanted them to be. I just didn't want to mess them up.

That is why I love Job 42:2. Job reminds us that God can do all things and, in spite of me and all of my bad parenting, God's purpose for my child cannot be thwarted (synonyms: ruined, hindered, prevented, or stopped). In spite of me, my children will become exactly whom God created them to be.

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9 ESV)

When I begin to consider that my children may not grow up the way I hope they will, I'm overwhelmed. Proverbs 16:6 is so good to remind me that it is the LORD who is in control, not me. He may let me think I am in control, but He is simply establishing my steps. He is guiding me as I strive to raise my children to love Him.

What a relief! My uncertainties can become certainties. I can be certain that my children's future does not belong to me, but to God. I can be certain that I won't mess them up. I can be certain that God wants to use me in their lives.

My 21 year old daughter has just moved out and will be living an hour away. When my mind begins to swirl with questions like, “Did I teach her all she needs to know to live on her own?” I am reassured by the scriptures that it is not for me to worry about. She is completely in God’s hands and He will equip her with all she needs to live on her own. It is scary for me to think about, but exciting still the same.

* *Do you get overwhelmed at the thought of preparing your kids for the future?*

* *What uncertainties do you deal with as a mom?*

* *How have you learned to overcome the uncertainties and rest in God’s plan for your children?*

* *How can Job 42:2 affect the way you raise your children?*



“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

Chapter 11

Overwhelmed by My Child's Differences

By: Debbie Taylor Williams

*"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."
(Isaiah 55:9 NIV)*

Have you ever wanted to say to your child,

"Why can't you just do what I want you to do?"

"Dress like I want you to dress!"

"Behave like I tell you."

"Talk like I talk."

"Think like I think."

Often, we assume that our precious little one is going to grow up and be a carbon copy of what we imagined they would be. When they're not, we can be overwhelmed as we try to figure out why our child is different from what we imagined. Trying to mold our child into a little *us* can end in despair.

If we were to go back in time and interview a mother who would understand our feelings, we'd certainly find a compassionate listener in John the Baptist's mom. What I would give to know a few of the details of his upbringing.

No doubt, his elderly mom had her hands full. How many times did Elizabeth have to call John in from chasing lizards to sit down for his Scripture lessons? Did she sometimes want to pull her hair out in frustration at his strong will? Did she grow exasperated telling him to take off his animal skins and put on normal clothes? When she saw him nibble his first locust, did she scream, "Get that out of your mouth!"

Did Elizabeth continually repeat to herself that God had a plan for her son's life and that she'd just have to trust Him? I think the answer is probably yes.

John didn't grow up and follow traditional religion in the sense of worship, method and dress code. John didn't follow traditional teaching of laws and rules. Rather, he preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:2-3). And he suffered for his stand on righteousness (Luke 3:21).

Where was Elizabeth during this time? Was she already in her grave? Was she alive and fretting, wondering what had become of her son? Was she crying out to God, "What happened to the joy and gladness you promised when my child was born?"

I imagine if we asked Elizabeth, "What did you think would be best for John?" she might have said, "That he come home, shave, put on some priestly clothes, and act like his dad so he'd be in a position to announce the coming Messiah." However, the truth is, we moms don't always know what God's plans are for our children.

What was Jesus' opinion of John? We find out when Jesus said, "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John." (Luke 7:28 NASB).

What does this mean for us? We don't always know what's best for our children. Rather than holding to a "land mine" way of thinking we know what is best for our children, we can learn to walk in faith as God's design develops in our children.

Rather than being overwhelmed by your child's differences and personality, consider the following:

1. *Prayerfully go to God. Praise Him that His ways are higher than yours.*
2. *Confess any disappointment that your child isn't exactly like what you'd planned. Open your hands and prayerfully release your child to God's higher plans.*
3. *Commit to raise your child to know and love God.*
4. *Teach your child to live in daily awareness of and communion with God by praising God in the mornings, "Thank You, God, for this beautiful day," thanking God before meals, praying for His comfort and peace at bed and nap time, and pointing out God's goodness and majesty as you look at what He's created when you take walks or are driving in the car. Read the Bible to your child so they know God's character and ways.*
5. *Most importantly, model an authentic relationship with Christ so your children know what it looks like to follow and serve Him.*

Rather than be overwhelmed by your child's distinctiveness, seek and trust God's higher thoughts and ways as you raise child to know Him.

* *Have you ever been frustrated that your child wasn't more like you?*

* *What harm can there be in trying to make your child fit the mold you have in your mind for your child?*

* *Which of the five suggestions might you implement as you seek God's higher ways and thoughts rather than be overwhelmed?*

(Excerpts from *The Plan A MOM in a Plan B World: How to Raise Faithful Kids in a Flawed World* by Debbie Taylor Williams.)



Chapter 12

When Bitter Bubbles Over, Listen

By: Julie Sanders

*“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.
When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.
When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up;
the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”
(Isaiah 43:2-3a NLT)*

They chattered around coffee cups on Kelly’s table, making plans for a Moms’ Day Out.

“Maybe you could get your husband to watch the kids so you can go,” her girlfriends suggested.

“Yeah, right. Like he’d make time to do something for me.”

Her sharp words exposed a deep wound festering below the surface of her heart. She longed to be loved and cared for by a husband who knew her needs and cherished her, but they had grown so distant. Kelly carried the heavy feeling that her husband hardly knew her at all anymore, much less counted her precious.

She wondered if he had ever really loved her at all, before kids and career changes, stretch marks, mortgages, and disappointments. She shuddered at the thought of a lifetime of slowly withering away inside. Where does a wife turn when she’s overwhelmed in marriage?

From the time two individuals vow to become one and God joins them together, it seems like all the world works to separate them. People around us, pressures of life, and our own weaknesses form subtle wedges. Unforgiveness, fatigue, and worldly ideas feed those things that threaten to drive us apart. An overwhelmed wife feels herself slipping away from her husband as the gulf between them grows.

God shares His heart on how He views a married couple and on His intentions for their future. “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6 ESV). When a woman realizes her marriage love has grown cold, something has begun to separate what God has joined together. What’s a woman to do?

- Call on God with your heavy heart, not on your girlfriends. He’s the One who joined you, and He’s the One who can protect, strengthen, and help you.
- Communicate early and at the right time. Ignoring problems in your marriage will not solve them. Work at talking to your husband in a gentle and timely way, rather than waiting for problems to grow.
- Care for yourself. No husband can meet every need his wife has; he is not meant to be her God. Take steps to meet your needs spiritually, physically, and emotionally.
- Commit to oneness. You are a team joined by God, not opposing units. Seek out a mentor or wise counselor to help you use God’s truth to see your needs clearly and to learn to love each other.

Kelly felt like she was carrying the load of life and marriage alone; her deep sense of disappointment was not wrong. God wants her to experience a secure and satisfying marriage. He intends for a husband and wife to live as one, without wedges to separate them.

When a wife hears bitterness bubbling out of her heart and into her words, it’s time to follow the Spirit’s gentle nudging and take action to protect the union God ordained before they are painfully torn apart.

Instead of making angry words a habit, begin by prayerfully asking God to show you:

- What are my priorities as a wife?
- Am I expecting what God expects out of my husband or something else?
- Does my husband feel respected and cared for?
- Am I available to love my husband, or am I too distracted?
- Am I living with balance as a wife or teetering in the balance?

For more encouragement read:

Matthew 7:24-25 ESV

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”

Psalms 61:1-3 ESV

“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.”

* *Have you ever felt distant from your husband? Or like he doesn't love you any more?*

* *How can these verses help?*

* *How can the questions posed above help you in your marriage?*



Chapter 13

When Type A Needs a Plan B

By: Cheri Gregory

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.”*

(Psalm 23:1-3a ESV)

Lying flat on my back was not how I'd planned to spend my tenth Mothers' Day.

But it was my only option. Standing and sitting were out of the question.

And even while lying down, I was still in excruciating pain.

Monday morning. Tuesday morning. Wednesday morning. Each day I woke up expecting the pain to be gone. Instead, it persisted.

Then worsened.

Finally, by the end of the week, I saw a doctor who said I must have pulled a muscle while working out at Curves the previous week. He prescribed a muscle relaxant and a narcotic pain-killer, which finally gave me some oh-so-welcome relief.

But each time the medication wore off, several times a day, the pain returned with a vengeance.

I tried heat. I tried cold packs. Nothing helped.

As the days and weeks passed, my hopes that *this too shall pass* faded and a dismal sense of helplessness descended.

The one constant in my life became pain. Everything else drifted to the sidelines: my hobbies, my job, my husband, even my children.

Oh, in the early days, I tried valiantly to keep all my plates spinning: my home-base business, my half-time teaching, my marriage, my 10-year-old daughter, my 8-year-old son.

But the pain was overwhelming.

It wasn't just the pain I was experiencing in any given moment that overwhelmed me. It was the cumulative effect of so many nights of pain gnawing away at me and so many heart-breaking mornings of nerve-splitting pain being my wake-up call.

I could not escape the pain. I was utterly at its mercy.

One well-meaning friend urged me to claim Philippians 4:13—"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"—insisting that I'd be healed instantly if I just believed.

But the pain continued.

My entire life had changed without warning, without my permission, without any preparation. And that helpless feeling—**of being completely out of control**—was even worse than the physical pain.

It took six months for me to finally see a specialist who diagnosed me with a fractured vertebra and two herniated discs. He sent me to physical therapy where God's angels on earth taught me how to strengthen my core and brought me back from the brink of desperation.

It took a full year for me to break the narcotic dependency I hadn't even been warned was a possibility. (Dealing with the withdrawal symptoms of codeine addiction is an *Overwhelmed* story all its own!)

It took this back injury for me to realize that a major weaknesses of my Type A personality is my lack of Plan B thinking.

When I was out of commission, I discovered how dependent my home, my children, and my husband all were on Mom.

Oh, they could *make do in a pinch* when I got sick for two or three days a year. In fact, they rose to the occasion like heroes when it was clear that Mom needed a down day.

But when it came to the weekly and monthly routines of

- planning the menus
- doing the grocery shopping
- stocking up on basics
- paying the bills
- buying school clothes
- making sure homework was getting done and piano was being practiced
- making food for potlucks
- having the cars serviced
- RSVPing for a birthday party (and then buying the gift and arriving on time!)

and all the other things they were used to me managing for them, they were as overwhelmed as I was by my incapacity.

And it took this back injury for me to realize how much of a human *doing*—rather than human *being*—I had become. I actually felt smug, initially, when I saw how helpless my family was without me. *See how much they need me? They can't live without me!*

But as months passed, my husband and children rose to the challenge. And I learned (albeit reluctantly!) to relax and let them take care of everything...including me.

Two vital lessons have stayed with me in the twelve years since my injury:

1) I needed a Plan B. Not necessarily a huge binder or formal plan, although that's not a bad idea. But my husband needed to know how to access information to our various online accounts. My children needed to know how to plan a week's worth of meals and then grocery shop for the ingredients. If life comes to a screeching halt when I'm unavailable, I'm parenting for dependency not maturity!

2) My Plan A needs to be Psalm 46:1

*"God is my refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble."*

* *How would something debilitating affect you and your family?*

* *Why is having a Plan B important to the function of your home and the independence of your children?*

* *Psalm 46:1 is a very encouraging verse. What other verses also strengthen your faith and your resolve when your circumstances are out of your control?*



Chapter 14

Taken Aside by Jesus

By: Lynn Mosher

“And taking him aside from the crowd [privately]...”
(Mark 7:33a Amplified)

Have you ever had a deep, dark struggle in your life? Most of us have. I have. And it sent me to my knees to seek the Lord. During that time of struggle, I wrote this...

Oh, from these bars of confinement shutting me in, I cry out to God. From this darkness surrounding me, all seems lost. Yet, I know all things are sifted through the loving fingers of my precious Lord. Wishing to commune with me, He allows this thing to touch my life.

Though others see not my streaming tears, the Lord sees my aching heart and gently wipes away those tears. “Nearly all God’s jewels are crystallized tears,” someone once said.

Too many voices clamor for my attention. Wearied from the noise of the world, my ears impatiently wait for the comforting sound of His voice. The Lord “takes me aside from the crowd privately” into absolute aloneness with Him, that I may listen only to Him. His words of love and comfort speak thunderously in this solitude.

When darkness and loneliness loom endlessly, they yet result in the richest and most rewarding of all spiritual experiences. For it is then that I see my darkness is but the overshadowing of the wings of the Lord, and I await the radiance of His glorious light to fall from heaven that I might behold my precious Savior.

The Lord’s purpose in taking me aside is never immediately discerned. However, getting my attention and bringing me into a deeper relationship with Him is always His will in my blackest hours.

The Holy Spirit comes as the dew of dawn to silently dispense His peace and comfort. In waves of coolness, He breathes upon me like a refreshing wind.

This parched mortal vessel yearns to be filled with those Living Waters provided only by the Lord. His peace pours forth as an endless river, rushing over me to cleanse all that would obstruct my view of Him. As I go to the Well, I drink in His Life and I am revitalized.

Then, I sing of His wonders and tell of His glories, and my walls of confinement fade into nothingness. The way opens before me. I see His brilliant, glistening footsteps on the path before me as if sprinkled with the glitter of heavenly dust, and only the light of praise brings them into focus.

Not all my questions are answered nor all my longings appeased, but His gracious mercy provides the path of recovery to soundness, to wholeness, to a larger place, to Himself.

It is for this that I praise Him for “taking me aside.”

~Lord, may rivers of blessings be poured out to other parched souls because of my desert. I pray that freedom may come to them out of my confinement, that light for blind eyes may come out of my darkness, and that comfort for the hurting may come out of my loneliness. Amen.

* *Have you ever gone through a wilderness period in which you longed to hear the voice of God?*

* *In what ways has He broken the silence and refreshed your soul after taking you aside?*

* *Do you struggle with sensing God’s love when you feel like He is far away or has taken you aside for a purpose you don’t understand?*

* *What are some ways you can convey to your children about the faithfulness of God as you walk through difficult days?*

Chapter 15

A Different Way to Spin Through Life

By: Heather Riggleman

“Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up.” (Proverbs 12:25 NLT)

Ah, yes, motherhood is the never-ending balancing act. Take your pick of the metaphors but we constantly morph into what our family needs.

We wear several hats. We juggle. We worry between packing lunch boxes and global warming (is that around anymore, eh, well, you get my drift).

We balance on a tight rope with motherhood on one end, work on the other, and somehow Jesus falls into place somewhere. But if your pulse is erratic and you find yourself snapping at your kids, chances are you might be a bit too busy.

These days, life in the modern world expects us to spin around our phones, our kids, and a flurry of activities. Social media, expanding technology, and the fast paced hustle and bustle create a conundrum. We program everything into those little things. Soccer, ballet, dance, doctors, work deadlines, and even what the hubby wants for dinner.

I know, this may sound a bit cheesy, corny, Bible-thumper-ish (stay with me), but what if our world spun around the Bible instead of the schedule in our phones?

I know—strange concept. But isn't that what Jesus was telling His disciples when he called them to follow Him? He called them from their jobs. He called them from funerals. He called them from parties. He called them to a life that was simplified and not as fussy as we make it out to be.

He called them to a life that spun around Him. How on earth does that get lost in the translation of the everyday life of motherhood? How exactly do we want this motherhood thing to go down?

Motherhood paced by social media icons on our phones? Motherhood paced by Jesus, creating disciples out of you and me?

It's a no brainer, we all choose Jesus. But, how many of us will live it out? And my main question is this, how do you and I, as moms, do it? We are so busy we barely have time for a shower.

Here are a few tips to help us all spin motherhood around Jesus:

Push Pause: When feelings of anxiety, exhaustion, and being plain overwhelmed seem to take over, we need to take a step back for a moment. Granted, I know this is the hardest step, but pausing allows us to pinpoint where our focus needs to be to spin through life with Jesus. Maybe you need to begin with the word “No.” Just say *No*.

My friend Audra has taught me this well. Just because I have the gifts, abilities, and the ‘want to,’ it doesn't mean I should say yes to an activity or role. It's okay to say no; in fact, get used to it and say it often. If the activity could interfere with family life or fill your plate with extra obligations, it's wise to pray and weigh the options first.

Love It Out: I remind my kids and myself often of 1 John 4:8 and Mark 12:29-31. Sometimes, I even throw in Philippians 4:13 for good measure when they don't feel like they have the strength to show love to others.

Pray: It doesn't matter if someone is asking you to become the first woman president of the United States, unless you know that God is leading you into the role, pray first and get confirmation. If God's answer is “No” then, revert back to Just Saying *No*.

Shut it down: Take a break from the computer, TV, and phone for a day. Even one day makes a huge difference on the stress level on your mind. It isn't constantly spinning from information overload.

* *Have you ever been overwhelmed because you have said ‘yes’ to far too often?*

* *What are some things you need to say ‘no’ to?*

* *Look up 1 John 4:8, Mark 12:29-31 and Philippians 4:13. How can they help you and your children?*

Chapter 16

Make Everything Okay

By: Cheri Gregory

*“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”
(2 Timothy 2:3 NKJV)*

“I just can’t get this right!”

Annemarie flings her paint brush down in frustration.

I glance at her painting, start to open my mouth to tell her how nice it looks to me and then stop myself.

“You don’t have to make everything okay!” I remind myself.

“I know *I* get frustrated when I’m writing a blog post and my words aren’t flowing,” I say, trying to empathize.

Annemarie’s next sigh borders on anger.

“Well, that didn’t help,” I scold myself. I start to feel the familiar tightening in my stomach and neck.

“You don’t have to absorb her feelings. You don’t have to be upset just because she’s upset. She doesn’t have to be happy so that you can be happy. She can be upset and you can be happy.”

I sigh and consciously relax my muscles, slow my breathing, and recite my morning scripture.

A Mom Who Makes Everything Okay

I never intended to be a meddling mom. As a teacher, I’ve complained loudly about hovering “helicopter parents” who stunt their children’s maturity by doing everything for them.

However, I failed to see that each time I jumped in to *rescue* my kids from upsetting situations, I was teaching them that they needed everything around them to be okay before they could be okay internally.

What a dangerous lesson!

If you’d asked me, “Cheri, do you want your child’s sense of self to be dependent on her external circumstances?” I would have assured you, “No way! That’s a terrible way to live!”

But during their growing-up years, my children heard me:

- vent about all the people-problems that blind-sided me.
- complain about irresponsible students and critical parents.
- blame my bad evening mood on everything that happened to me during the day.
- yell at inanimate objects, such as traffic lights and computer screens.

Looking back, I see that I modeled for my children how to be overwhelmed by circumstances beyond their control. Which is a nice way of saying that I raised them to be victims.

A Mom Who Models How to Be Okay

I spent so much time, energy, and money desperately *making everything okay* for my kids when they were little. How I wish I’d invested, instead, in learning how to *make me okay despite* everything.

Rather than a mom who modeled how to be overwhelmed, I could have been a mom who modeled how to be okay. But today’s morning scripture gives me hope that it’s never too late:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13 NIV)

“This looks stupid!” Annemarie shouts.

...all joy and peace...

“I’m no good at water color; I have no patience!” She is near tears.

...as you trust in Him...

Oh, how I want to do something—anything—to make everything okay!

...you may overflow with hope...

But I know I can’t. And I’m finally learning—some 20 years late, but hopefully better late than never!—I shouldn’t even try.

...by the power of the Holy Spirit.

* *Do you struggle with trying to rescue your children from circumstances and/or consequences?*

* *Do you need to make any adjustments in the way you handle things so that you can avoid raising your children to be victims?*

* *How can you point your children to Jesus rather than trying to always make everything okay?*



The Top Five Things That Overwhelm Women

By: Erin Bishop

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)

That feeling of being pulled in every direction visits me often. Like most women, I fill many roles: wife, mom, friend, daughter, sister, church member, chef, chauffeur, shopper, domestic engineer, writer, mentor, activity coordinator, holiday planner, and more. Just reading that list makes me feel overwhelmed. No wonder I so often feel, well, overwhelmed.

I asked my readers what overwhelms them and their comments flooded my inbox. Here are the top five things that make them, as moms, feel overwhelmed:

- 1. Finding Balance While Trying to Do It All:** Struggling to balance all their roles and the tasks associated with each role, and feeling like they have to do everything on their to-do list.
- 2. Feeling Inadequate:** The stress of not being able to do it all or not knowing how to do some of the things that are expected of them is all it takes for women to feel inadequate. This is also where we tend to compare ourselves to others.
- 3. The Need to Please People:** For many of us, our worth is rooted in knowing we pleased someone or gained someone’s approval. My pastor just preached on this very thing and his illustration was brilliant. We often hand our price tag to someone and ask them what we’re worth. We then operate out of that “dollar amount.” Or, we fill in our own dollar amount and greatly undervalue ourselves.
- 4. Guilt:** Guilt sets in when they say *no* or they can’t meet the expectations placed on them by themselves and others. We thrive on praise and words of affirmation. So it’s no wonder it hurts to the core when we have to say *no*. This also feeds people pleasing.
- 5. Lack of Time:** I’ve never met anyone who said they have more time than they know what to do with it. Most of us wish we could squeeze more time out of each day. The more roles we have the less time we have to do the things we need and want to do.

Responsibilities, deadlines and to-do lists are inevitable. But God doesn’t want us to be burdened unnecessarily.

Jesus Himself said, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV)

Doesn’t that sound like a spiritual day spa? It does to me.

What are some steps we can take to give ourselves a break from living in the land of overwhelmed?

- Spend time in God’s Word daily. Pray without ceasing. Regular time with the Lord sets the tone for our days and our household. My prayer for you and for me is that we would be so filled with Him that the things of this world will fall at our feet.
- Identify what really matters. Ask yourself, “Is this a *me* expectation or a *God* expectation?”
- Is it a “must do” or a “would be nice to do”? When making your to-do list be honest with yourself. Do you really have to do this, or would it just be nice to do it?
- Organization = success. Ask yourself how you can get organized. I’m still learning this process, believe me. Taking simple steps like having the kids’ backpacks ready the night before and putting the juice boxes and Little Debbie’s on the kitchen counter for school lunches the next day save me stress the next morning.

* *What are some things you can do to escape the Land of the Overwhelmed?*

* *Do you struggle with spending time in God’s Word daily? If so, how can you be sure to cut out some time in your day to get away with God and be refreshed?*

* *In what ways can you be more organized and what are some practical ways you can become more organized today?*

Chapter 18

Strong Wills and Big Lessons

By: Dana Bailey

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!”
(Psalm 126:5 ESV)

“You are the meanest mom ever and I am gonna tell all your friends how mean you are!”

I sat outside of the bathroom listening to my 4 year old, who had locked herself in the bathroom, screaming at me.

“I hate you! I don’t want you to be my mom!”

I don’t remember how long she sat in the bathroom yelling at me, but it felt like an eternity. Never before had any of my kids said such hurtful things to me. This little 4 year old was my ninth child, so I wasn’t new to the temper tantrums, but I was new to the battering ram of insults she screamed through the door at me. She is what one would call a “strong willed child.” She wasn’t my first though.

My first strong-willed child was a boy. He was my third born, but my first boy. He didn’t yell at me, he had a different technique in trying to get his way. He could outlast me in the battle of the wills. If I told him he couldn’t play outside, he would keep trying to get outside until finally, I just gave up.

One day, I remember my husband coming home from work to find my son crawling out of his bedroom window. He came in and asked if Josh was supposed to be outside and if I knew he was crawling out the window.

“I don’t care! Let him stay out there! I’m tired and just need a break from him.” I answered, totally overwhelmed by the day I had with my son.

For a time, it was common for my husband to come home from work and find me in tears over all the mischief Josh had caused during the day. That child just overwhelmed me to the point of exhaustion at times. I didn’t know what to do with him or how to handle him.

Using Gary Chapman’s book, *The Five Love Languages*, the Lord gave me a window view into Josh’s heart and I saw needs he had that, because of my being so overwhelmed by him, I couldn’t see. The Lord showed me that my son needed a simple, gentle touch from me. A hand on the shoulder as I walked by, a gentle squeeze of his hand or arm when I sat by him, or a great big bear hug!

It was so simple, but so hard to do because that kid could push buttons on my temper I didn’t even know existed. But, you know what? It worked! Over time, my efforts paid off and my son slowly began to respond to me and not battle me at every turn. But, it was so hard.

So, back to my screaming four year old daughter. While sitting there listening to her scream, the Lord reminded me of what he taught me about Josh. Gracie needed something from me that I wasn’t giving. She needed my time and because her baby brother took up a lot of my time, she was fighting for it!

I unlocked the bathroom door and then locked myself in the bathroom with Gracie. We sat on the floor talking about what had just happened. We talked about how Jesus expects us to act. After I had addressed her behavior, we left the bathroom and sat in the living room on the couch where she handed me book after book to read, and we read and we read and we read. She needed my time.

Today, Josh is 19 and Gracie is 8. They are still my most strong-willed children. Josh still comes for his hugs every day and it thrills my soul to have my big, tough son come in from work and give his short little Momma a hug. “Hey Momma!” he says.

There were many days when I prayed the Lord would let me survive his childhood and see him as an adult, because there were days when I wondered if I could survive his childhood.

Gracie...well, Gracie and I are still working on her attitude, but we love spending time together. She reads to me and loves helping me with her new baby brother. We definitely have more good days than bad.

Raising strong-willed children is really difficult and many days may be sown in tears. But, the Lord has been so faithful to help me and give me the wisdom I need to handle these dear children of whom I often would like to lock in my closet for just a brief moment of peace. I'm so thankful for His wisdom and faithfulness. I am now reaping with shouts of joy as I see my young adult son growing into a man who loves the Lord.

* *Do you have children who absolutely drive you over the edge?*

* *How do you handle these children who require so much of your time and energy?*

* *What has God taught you about yourself through your strong-willed child(ren)?*

* *Have you discovered your children's love languages and how to love them in a way they understand best?*



Chapter 19

Overwhelmed by Serving Others

By: Julie Sanders

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

(Mark 10:45 ESV)

How low can you go?

After I cooked breakfast, the kids were out of the house early with the lunch boxes I had packed, and my husband darted out the door with his agenda. In the flurry of the morning, farewells were fast and kisses just afterthoughts.

What? No thanks or grateful kisses on the cheek? I silently asked myself through twisted lips, finished off with a shrug. I grabbed my own list of to-do's and headed off to the church.

Eager to spread tablecloths, lay centerpieces and place candles, I stopped suddenly when I was greeted by the sight of an empty room. Instead of the set up I requested, I found piles of Lost and Found items, balls, random chairs, a stroller, and unused boxes. Digging in, I worked fast so that we could set up equipment, so that we could decorate for the event I had planned. I muttered inside my heart, dredging up clumps of irritation leftover from my kitchen that morning.

I don't mind serving everyone, I thought, *but I wish they wouldn't treat me so much like a...servant!*

What's a mom to do when she sees so many ways to meet the needs of the ones she loves? Serve them. How can a mom be a servant and not a doormat? How can we avoid letting the sweetness of our servant's heart grow sour?

To be a servant we have to begin by humbling ourselves, just like Jesus did (Philippians 2:6-8). He lowered Himself to become like we are. It's against our nature to feel at home *low down*, but that's what it takes to be a servant.

“... some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” (Luke 13:30 ESV)

God honors those who serve, but He looks for service that reveals a heart attitude of love, not service that's meant to bring us recognition or credit. He enjoys blessing those whose work is truly a labor of love.

It's not easy to be treated like a servant, especially when others don't make it easy or even appreciate it. The world around us rarely honors those who empty themselves for the good of others, yet Jesus modeled that very example when He traveled with his own group of dirty footed, simple, pride-filled men.

“When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.’” (John 13:12-17 ESV)

Jesus seeks mothers with hearts that overflow in acts of service to those around them. As mothers serve, fragrant offerings of Jesus-like selflessness rise to heaven, and God is honored.

God is not honored when we serve out of pride, when we attempt to serve in our own strength or to demonstrate that we can out-serve any other mom on the committee or in the kitchen. He is honored when we serve out of love for Him and for others.

To keep from being overwhelmed as a servant:

- **Serve sweetly.** Don't substitute serving for time alone with God. If you do, a stinky substitute of service will rise up, instead of a fragrant offering.
- **Serve strategically.** Know how God has designed and gifted you. Focus your serving in areas where you are uniquely made to serve. Ask your husband for wisdom in time commitments.
- **Serve prayerfully.** Resist the urge to jump ahead to the task (or Lost and Found pile) at hand. Pray before, during, and after you serve. Make your serving an offering.
- **Serve lowly.** Embrace a humble heart posture. When you have the sense you're being treated like a servant, thank God for the chance to understand Him more, and ask for His strength.

Other scripture that will encourage your servant's heart:
Joshua 24:14-15

* *Do you struggle feeling like a servant rather than serving out of love?*

* *How can you serve sweetly, strategically, prayerfully, and lowly in your circumstances today?*

* *Read through Joshua 24:14-15 and consider how those verses can help you serve to the glory of God?*



Chapter 20

Overwhelmed by Hopelessness

By: Debbie Taylor Williams

“And now, Lord; for what do I wait? My hope is in You.”
(Psalm 39:7 ESV)

“I can’t go on.” Tears rolling down her cheeks, she sobbed, “I can’t do this another day.”

I looked at the sweet mom in front of me and didn’t know what to say or do other than put my arms around her and hold her.

You know the feeling. You’re exhausted. Sleep deprived. There seems to be no end to the bills, medical problems, baby crying, house being a mess, wash, and tension with your husband. It seems hopeless. But is it?

Although, in a freeze-framed moment or even over a period of extended time, things can appear hopeless, they’re not. May I repeat that? Things are not hopeless.

If you are a Christian, you have the God of all hope. He promises to be there for you, to guide you, to help you. But sometimes, if you’re sleep deprived, you can’t even think straight, much less concentrate in prayer.

Sometimes, you need the first step of physical attention before you can move on to the emotional and spiritual. In other words, as God attended to Elijah in his state of complete exhaustion, God wants to attend to you.

Why might God be interested in attending to your physical needs? He created us body, soul, and spirit. When you are sleep deprived, it affects your emotions and even ability to think clearly. As a Christian author and speaker, I can tell you all day to look up and praise God for your many blessings, but if sleep deprivation has you in its grip, you may not even be able to take that simple spiritual step.

What is sleep deprivation? Webmd defines it as “a sufficient lack of restorative sleep over a cumulative period so as to cause physical or psychiatric symptoms and affect routine performances of tasks.”¹

In addition to excessive daytime sleepiness, the American Academy of Sleep Medicine lists the following effects of sleep deprivation²:

Mood

- Irritability o Anxiety
- Lack of motivation
- Symptoms of depression

Performance

- Lack of concentration
- Attention deficits
- Reduced vigilance
- Longer reaction times o Distractibility
- Lack of energy
- Fatigue
- Restlessness
- Lack of coordination
- Poor decisions
- Increased errors
- Forgetfulness

Health

Sleep deprivation has been associated with an increased risk of these medical conditions:

- High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Heart attack
- Diabetes

In other words, your lack of sleep may be contributing to your feeling of hopelessness.

Think about this if you can stay awake -

¹ <http://dictionary.webmd.com/terms/sleep-deprivation>

² <http://www.aasmnet.org/resources/factsheets/sleepdeprivation.pdf>

Lack of sleep affects your ability to think clearly. Your ability to think affects your ability to strategize about the best way to parent your child whether it is getting them to eat, sleep, or obey. It affects your ability to think clearly about their medical needs; all which contributes to whether you feel hopeful or hopeless.

So, the question is, what hope is there for you to get some sleep? Consider implementing or at least investigating one of the following:

1. **Ask for help.** Sometimes, we are too prideful to ask for help. We look around and everyone else seems to be handling being a mom, so we feel like we're the lone ranger in needing help. But, *IF* we were thinking clearly, we would know that's not true. Everyone struggles. Be honest and tell a friend or family member that you desperately need sleep and ask if they can help you. Help might come in the form of a neighbor taking your kids from 4-5 a couple of times so you could take a nap before the long night begins. Help might be a family member sleeping on the couch and attending to little one during the night for you. Help might come in the form of you sending the kids to the park with a babysitter so you can get a power nap. Pray and ask God to show you who to ask and keep asking in prayer and asking others until you find someone willing to help you.
2. **Evaluate what you're eating.** Foods affect our mood. It's a fact. There's even a book about it. A destructive cycle begins when we are down and tired. We grab for comfort and processed foods that give us a quick rush of energy. The only problem is they don't sustain us and so as fast as we get the sugar rush, we come crashing down. So, we grab for a caffeine drink and French fries or a muffin. Our body, mind, and emotions teeter due to lack of sleep and constant sugar rushes and plunges.

I know it's hard to make food changes, but it's important to at least make one or two. Grab almonds, walnuts, or celery sticks instead of French fries and muffins. Try tea or my new favorite, cranberry water, and get off soft drinks and diet drinks that are proven to be harmful to you.

3. **See your doctor.** You may need medical attention. Thyroid, hormonal, and other issues can be addressed and could be your ticket to hope.
4. **Look up.** Even more important than our physical condition is to our emotional state, is our spiritual condition. People can be lying in bed dying, but have hope.

A practical teaching in my book, *Pray with Purpose, Live with Passion*, and that I teach across the nation at women's events, is to "Stop, Drop, and P.R.A.Y."³ Just like firemen teach children to stop, drop, and roll to prevent them from physical harm, our Lord Jesus Christ models "Stop, Drop, and PRAY" when He stopped in the Garden of Gethsemane, dropped to His knees, and looked up to His Heavenly Father.

Years ago when I was going through an emotionally trying time, God taught me to look up and begin praising Him for who He is. When we set our eyes on our Almighty God, we remember that nothing is impossible to Him. When we praise Him for being the Bread of Life, we acknowledge that things aren't hopeless and that He can sustain us through our day. When we say, "Lord, You are the Comforter," and we ask Him, "Lord, please comfort my heart," we open the door for His encouragement. Praying through God's A-Z attributes brings a countenance change.⁴

"I can't go on. I can't do this another day," can be turned into, "Lord, I can't go on without you. Help me."

Hopeless? You don't have to be. The God of all hope loves you and is here for you.

Look up!

* *How might your feeling of hopelessness be tied to your lack of sleep?*

* *Which of the suggestions for getting rest will you consider?*

* *How often do you grab a soft drink or processed food to give you an upper?*

* *What one healthy food change will you make to help you be more physically stable?*

* *Have you decided God can't help you and you've quit praying? How might "Stop, Drop, and P.R.A.Y." prevent you from an emotional breakdown?*

³ Debbie Williams, *Pray with Purpose, Live with Passion*, West Monroe, LA: Howard Books, 2006, 11-17.

⁴ Debbie Williams, *Pray with Purpose, Live with Passion*, West Monroe, LA: Howard Books, 2006

Chapter 21

Talking Myself Off the Ledge

By: Holly Smith

*“When I was upset and beside myself,
you calmed me down and cheered me up.”*

(Psalm 94:19 Message)

Shaking in fear, hands tied, feet standing on the tiniest sliver of a ledge, I cry out to God with helplessness, hurt, and the deepest pain I have ever felt. I stand overwhelmed, without a glimmer of hope. Yet, because I know the Lord, I cry out—for He hears me. I am His own beloved child.

Difficult life is a consistent cadence, the beating of a steady drum. Life is just plain HARD. As a mom of four, I cry out to God not only in my deep need, but also in theirs—for they steep in the life surrounding them. They rely on me to show up every day and follow through on my calling as a mom. Panic will not do.

Anxiety came to visit when I lost two of the closest people in my life, not because they died, no because they chose it. Their own rejection, abandonment, and deep-seeded anger left me an orphan at age 34.

Then, my husband’s job loss occurred and the market turned down, leaving our home upside down in so many ways. Next, despite my husband’s new job, we went bankrupt—three years of going face-first through the mud. Oh, my heart could barely take it.

In the midst of turmoil, despair, fear, and uncertainty came two close brushes with foreclosure. What more could we stand, Lord? Our hearts were splayed open. We were beyond, way beyond, our ability to stand against this storm. Parenting in the midst of this was quite hard. To do so, we had to release the anxiety to You, Lord. There was no other way.

Your consolation brought me...and not only brought, but continued to bring me consolation...a salve covering our open wounds, mending us stitch by stitch, re-breaking and resetting the bones, so they may heal rightly.

Oh Lifter of our heads, Your truth sets us free. Your ways are right, Lord. Whatever it takes, Father, as long as You go with us. Oh Immanuel, you ARE with us. More than anything, we want to do Your will. We want to walk out Your precepts before our children and hand them out like batons in this race.

JOY! Oh, that we may press on to know You, then our righteousness will shine like the sun, Lord Jesus. We stand in the right-ness of You, in the wrong-ness of this fallen world, and we give You unabashed praise. It spills over onto our children, who see more than dimly that the God who called us is faithful. The God who comforts us is home. Our Jesus who saves us, loves us completely, and cares for us. We are not alone.

And once again, we talk ourselves down from the ledge, reminding ourselves and our children of the character of God, how His loving hands shape us, as He allows and filters hard circumstances our way. Though He slay us, we shall praise Him for we know that our Redeemer lives and when He comes, we shall stand with Him.

We cannot keep the hard circumstances from touching our children, but we can tell them of the Healer, Provider, Protector and King, who loves them more than His own life. Oh, Jesus, we thank You.

Lord, grant consolation and joy to Your people. Give us an ornament, a garland-a diadem of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment expressive of praise instead of a heavy, burdened, and failing spirit-that our children may be called oaks of righteousness-lofty, strong, and magnificent, distinguished for uprightness, justice, and right standing with God-the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified through our family line until Christ returns. In Jesus, we pray. Amen (Based upon Isaiah 61:3 Amplified)

* *Have you ever walked through a valley that left you feeling like you were about to go over the edge?*

* *What lessons can you teach your children by the way you handle...and trust God through your circumstances?*

* *How does your perspective determine your response to tough times?*

Chapter 22

How I Overwhelm Myself

By: Cheri Gregory

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

(Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV)

It was my second year of teaching, and I was feeling completely overwhelmed.

Hoping to get some sympathy, I went to my principal and started listing for her all the things I was trying to do:

- I'd just bought a new computer for my classroom and was trying to learn how to use it (and this was 20 years ago when computers were not “user-friendly”!)
- It was my only second year of teaching, and I had to come up with lesson plans for multiple subjects for my combined class of 7th and 8th graders every day plus keep up with the grading
- I was a newlywed, barely into my second year of marriage
- I was throwing a parent-student banquet and directing a big play for the entertainment
- I was pregnant with my first child.

I was hoping my principal would look at me and say, “Cheri, you’re so hard working, you’re so dedicated; I can’t believe you’re doing all these wonderful things for your students! Why don’t you take a day or two off? Better yet, how about the whole week! I’ll cover your classes.”

Donna listened to me very patiently and then said, “Wow, Cheri, you’re right. You sure have done all of this to yourself, haven’t you?”

Well.

Was I ever taken aback! I slunk away and shed a few tears of disappointment that instead of the hoped-for rescue, I’d received a reprimand.

But by evening, Donna’s words of truth had sunk in, and I realized that I really had done every single one of these things to myself.

Nobody had told me I had to do any of the things on my overwhelming list. They were all things I had decided would be good to do. And certainly, none of them were “bad.”

But I had gotten to the point of being totally overwhelmed by all the “good” things I was doing.

And *that* was bad.

Each personality type tends to “do it to herself” a bit differently. But we’re all very capable of feeling like a martyr, wondering how we got into an overwhelming situation, and wanting to lash out at or blame others.

Sanguine / Expressive: People ask us to help, to get involved, to be a part of things. We love people, so we say, "Yes!" to the concept, to the idea, to the person. But we can become overwhelmed by the details and complications.

Melancholy / Analytical: Can get so caught up in the details that we miss the bigger picture, especially when things that should be going *right* aren't; problems can turn the entire project / event / season into an overwhelming failure.

Choleric / Driver: We love initiating and taking charge of so many wonderful things; we often forget that there are only so many hours in the day. And we can become overwhelmed when other people get in the way of progress toward our goals.

Phlegmatic / Amiable: Often by default, we end up in commitments to which we never really committed. We didn't say *yes*, but we didn't say *no* either. As deadlines approach, we can become overwhelmed with feelings of, "but I never agreed to..." We need to fully engage or fully decline.

*You will keep in perfect peace
him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in You.*

*Trust in the Lord forever.
For the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.*

(Isaiah 26:3-4 NIV, emphasis mine)

This verse reminds me that regardless of my personality type, I can't trust myself to decide what I will or won't do. I need to trust the Lord to direct me toward what He wants me **to** do and away from what He wants me **not** do.

When I trust in Him, rather than myself, I will live in perfect peace.

* *Which way of overwhelming yourself sounds familiar?*

* *How much of your stress is self-imposed vs. caused by outside factors?*



OVERWHELMED

Chapter 23

Going Fishing

By: Lori Wildenberg

*"I'm going out to fish."
(John 21:3a NIV)*

Unsettled. Undecided. Unknown. For my personality, **un** places are overwhelming. I like living in the **non-un** spots, preferring the expected predictable locations. My family is in a waiting place for many big things: school decisions, employment, potential moves, a book contract. It feels like running in place. Lots of energy is expended, going nowhere.

Resting, rejuvenating, and recharging are all needed when hovering over life's ever-changing direction. As moms and dads, we have all noticed change can bring good things but the moments leading up to the change is where the struggle is most intense. Exhaustion sets in; the world feels heavy. How do we come to Jesus to get the rest He promises when we are weary?

We pray, we read, we seek His face. We camp on His promise of rest. And...we trust.

I love to go running and hiking. These activities refresh my soul, my outlook, my attitude. My best companion for those times is Murphy, my Labradoodle. He keeps me company while I talk to God. Murphy's zest for going on a w-a-l-k gives me joy. It reminds me of the simple normal pleasures in the mix of complicated, looming change.

Maybe this is why Peter and the guys went fishing after the crucifixion. They didn't know what to do-frightened by the immediate past, feeling a sense of loss in the present, not knowing what the future held they returned to what they knew.

There is peace in the familiar.

Catching (or not catching) fish was like eating comfort food or putting on an old pair of sweats to the former fisherman. Then, Jesus showed up and even made lunch (John 21). After this, Peter got his next assignment.

If you are in the place of being overwhelmed with what the future may hold, find joy in doing a *comfort* activity to receive God's rest. Pray. Teach your child to pray. With expectancy and hope, lay it all out before Him, the God who holds time in His hand. Clarity is coming.

* *Name some things you enjoy doing?*

* *What can you do the next time you feel overwhelmed that will help you find rest in Christ?*

* *What can you teach your children about resting in the Lord by the way your respond to overwhelming circumstances?*



Chapter 24

When I Dare to Compare

By: Stephanie Shott

*“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”
(2 Corinthians 10:12 NIV)*

There she was, standing in the checkout line at the grocery store. Her children, like stair-steps, were perfectly poised in a cute little row behind her. I think there were even halos hovering high above their heads as they quietly took itty-bitty steps in unison with every movement their momma made.

I wanted to be like her. But I wasn't.

I wanted my kids to act like hers. But they didn't.

My boys were not quite so poised. They loved to play, liked to make noise and hated to go shopping. They fussed, feuded, and occasionally fought. They sometimes complained, periodically cried and were even crude when the mood hit them right.

At times, my eyes would wonder and I would get a glimpse of the peripheral world around me. Moms who seemed to have it all together were everywhere. But when I compared myself to them, I never measured up. My mothering seemed to pale in comparison to those Pinterest perfect moms.

I wasn't crafty or creative. I didn't bake my own bread or make every meal from scratch. I didn't color coordinate our clothes as I hung them in the closet and I was definitely not a decorating diva.

But one day I realized that Proverbs 22:6 really hones in on how individual our children are and how God has placed each child in the homes of specific parents for a purpose. Wow! My boys were mine because God wanted *me* to be their momma!

That familiar and precious verse took on a whole new meaning. *“Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.”* (Proverbs 22:6 NLT)

Yes. The Lord placed our children in our lives for a purpose. They were uniquely created to be pieces that help complete our family puzzle. We were specifically and intentionally placed in each others lives by the Creator of the universe.

What a WOW moment for me! I wasn't the perfect parent, but I was the perfect parent for them.

Other moms wondered how I could listen to my youngest son play the drums and the guitar so loudly. I honestly didn't even notice. They wondered why I provided my boy with an endless supply of art supplies and a computer he didn't really need. But I notice that when I helped him feed his talents, he became more talented. Today, he is a graphic designer who is also an extremely gifted singer/songwriter.

Some moms didn't understand why I let my oldest play every type of sport on the planet. But it's what he loved. It kept him busy and fed his talents. Today, he uses his affinity for sports to minister to kids every week.

When I compared myself with other moms, I couldn't help but admit that I wasn't like that perfect mom in the grocery store...and I definitely wasn't a perfect mom. But I finally realized that I was the perfect mom for my boys.

Through the years, I've learned that comparing myself with others doesn't always have to be a bad thing. Iron sharpens iron and I grow from those around me.

Other moms have taught me the value of consistency, the power of a mother's words, and the need to be my children's biggest cheerleader and most relentless prayer warrior.

We are all a work in progress and sometimes it's okay to compare ourselves with others. But not so that we feel inferior or inadequate...not so we can be like them, but so that we can be the best 'us' we can be.

Sweet mom, don't you dare to compare yourself to another if you are going to let it intimidate you. But don't be afraid to notice characteristics or behaviors in others that will help you become a better mom. Let other moms sharpen you without making you unidentifiable to your kids. They need you to be you...but they also need you to be the best you can be.

My boys weren't perfect kids and I was definitely not a Pinterest perfect momma, but throughout the years, we loved God, loved each other, and loved to laugh...and it worked.

Be the best you that you can be and it will work for you, too.

* *Are you intimidated by other mothers who seem to have it all together?*

* *Have you ever compared yourself with another mother and found that you could learn something beneficial from her?*

* *What are some of the characteristics of your family that make it unique and how can you use those unique characteristics to strengthen your children?*



Chapter 25

The Weight of Our Work

By: Julie Sanders

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,
as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”
(Colossians 3:23)*

She stood in front of me, dressed in a trendy outfit complementing her Sunday morning make-up. Taking a step closer, she began to answer my, “How have you been doing?” question.

After only a few words, her eyes welled up with tears as her emotions began to spill out. Carrying some health problems of her own, while dealing with extended grief, the weight of her job was too heavy to add to the load.

She knew that her family was getting the meager leftovers after her job, and it was eating at her deep inside. “Consuming my life” and “can’t do enough” painted a picture of a tired woman overwhelmed as an employee.

What do you do when life as an employee becomes a burden? If the yoke of following Jesus is easy and His “burden is light” (Matthew 11:30), why do we feel so overwhelmed in our work?

Does the paycheck make a difference? Some work is rewarded with a paycheck, but some is not. Does an employer make a difference? Some bosses motivate and inspire, while others remain distant and demanding.

Can we blame the load on our co-workers? Office mates may become friends, but sometimes they qualify as *work* on their own. Is it part-time or full-time? They can both feel like “all the time!”

Part of God’s plan for mankind involves meaningful work that bears fruit. As we use our talents and abilities to reach our potential and do good, God is glorified.

Shouldn’t that be enough to take our employment from *work* to *joy*?

We don’t have to be in our *dream job* to find the magic combination of work and wonder, job and joy, employment and encouragement. There is a way to find fulfillment and balance as an employee without selling our soul and our time to the boss who signs our paycheck. We can put our workload back where it belongs by remembering whom we work for and identifying what we need to do.

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24 ESV).

- The job is not the determining factor for our joy. Whatever we do, we can find balance.
- We ultimately serve the Lord Christ, though we may work for a human employer.

As we daily remember to focus on pleasing the Lord in all we do, wherever we do it, the quality and spirit of our work becomes an offering to Him, instead of the fulfillment of an obligation. To recapture the yoke Jesus invites you to bear, take these five simple steps:

1. Seek the Lord – Be sure He wants you to work where and how much you are. Sometimes, inner conflict reveals decisions out of alignment with God’s plans. Our work life should please Him.
2. Know your priorities – Make a list of what matters most in your life; put them in order. Our schedule, use of energy, and affections should reflect our priorities.
3. Communicate with your employer – Use available lines of communication to seek out options for adjusting your schedule, responsibilities, and circumstances. Speak up graciously.
4. Leave work at work – It’s important to shift so you can rest and so the people in your life have your attention and care. It may mean a quick walk, moments of prayer in the car, or a five minute stretch routine before you walk into your most important place of work: home.
5. Take time off – Whatever the amount of time off you have, take it all. This helps to keep your job in the proper place in your life and provides the restoration and refreshment you need.

We are not meant to be consumed by our work but to glorify God with it. If life as an employee feels overwhelming, do some reevaluating and put your job into its proper place. Please the Lord with your best work and deposit your greatest investments in eternal things.

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.” (Colossians 3:23 NKJV)

Lord,

How did I manage to take my work away from You? I want all of my life to be in Your control and for Your glory. Help me to know how to please You and how to plan and communicate so that I am employed by Your plans for my days. Would You keep this truth on my mind and heart, whatever I do?

** Do you ever feel like your work consumes your life? Are you overwhelmed by your work?*

** Where is your job on your list of priorities? Does your family agree?*

** Is your time and energy an accurate reflection of what you value, or do you need to make changes?*

** Who can be an accountability partner for you to give you a reality check, a loving nudge, or a hug of encouragement as you put your work in the place God desires?*



Chapter 26

What “Too Sensitive” Means to Me

By: Cheri Gregory

“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close.”
(Psalm 27:10 NLT)

“You’re such a crybaby!”

“You take everything so personally!”

“You’re just too sensitive!”

All my life, I’ve been embarrassed by my tears. I’ve wondered what’s wrong with me that I am so easily hurt by a few careless words. I’ve considered myself defective because I feel everything so deeply.

And I’ve felt completely alone because nobody understood me.

“Too” Sensitive as a Child

My father recalls: “As a young girl, in kindergarten and primary grades, you reacted immediately to me. If I simply moved my finger, you instantly knew what I meant and immediately changed what you were doing. At the slightest demonstration of my displeasure, you began to cry.”

“Too” Sensitive as a Teen

I recall my joy at hearing my geometry teacher announce to the class:

“Cheri achieved 100% on every single test during first quarter!”

I was basking in my moment of glory – approval from a teacher I admired – but my 15 seconds of fame were brought to a quick halt by his next words:

“But today, I’d like to introduce a brand new student who will beat her next quarter.”

I couldn’t breathe. The room swam around me as I tried desperately to control my tears. Mr. Vickers had known me for three months and yet, he stated with conviction that this new student – whom he had just met – would beat me. The achievement of which I was so proud was suddenly meaningless. Worthless. *I* was worthless. Otherwise, how could Mr. Vickers know that I would be so easily beaten?

As I cried in the girls’ bathroom after class, my friends taunted me for being a “poor sport” who couldn’t share being “teacher’s pet.”

Even my BFF of ten years didn’t understand why I was so devastated.

“Too” Sensitive as an Adult

Shortly before I turned forty, I sat in the congregation as a preacher denounced cheap grace.

“You may have heard that God loves you just the way you are,” he thundered, pounding the pulpit for emphasis.

“But I am here to tell you that God does **not** love you just the way you are!”

Intellectually, I understood the point he was making. My logical brain agreed that, of course, God loves me too much to leave me where I am.

But even as I fought to stay rational, powerful emotions arose—along with a torrent of tears—and engulfed me:

Dismay.

Devastation.

Despair.

My heart felt as though the one truth that kept it beating had been ripped right out. My body convulsed with crescendoing sobs.

My bewildered husband sat stiffly, gazing intently forward, until I composed myself several long minutes later. Later, in the car, he asked, "What set you off this time?"

After I explained, he said, "Well, you were the only one who chose to hear it that way."

A highly logical man, he didn't understand why I hid in the guest bathroom for a full hour after we returned home.

A "Highly" Sensitive Person

Last year, after reading Elaine Aron's *The Highly Sensitive Person*, I stopped thinking of myself as "too" sensitive and started exploring what it means to be created in the image of God as "highly" sensitive person.

As a highly sensitive person, I become overwhelmed more easily than most people. So, I need to take responsibility for getting my sleep, nutrition, exercise, and solitude. I need to advocate for my needs rather than assuming others can read my mind. I need to recognize my emotional triggers and respond from maturity.

A "Highly Dependent" Child of God

I'm also discovering that being highly sensitive means that I am *highly dependent* on Jesus.

Some consider me childish for living on the edge of tears; they tell me to "just grow up" and "get a grip." But while I recognize my need to "put the ways of childhood behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11b), I also find assurance in Jesus' welcome of those of us who have child-like places in our hearts:

"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" (Mark 10:13-14 NIV)

In fact, Jesus warns that...

"anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mark 10:15b NIV)

And to show what "receiving the kingdom of God like a little child" looks like,

"He took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." (Mark 10:16 NIV)

When the 5-year-old part of my heart begins to break, yet again, I'm learning to run not to the bathroom to hide my tears but straight to His arms, where I find refuge in His ever-present strength. (Psalm 46:1)

My "Highly Sensitive" Savior

And to my delight, I'm discovering that in Jesus, I have a highly sensitive big brother (Hebrews 2:11).

When I'm feeling emotionally fragile, I remind myself that He's got my back.

Re-playing the scene of Mary weeping at Jesus' feet, I hear His words, "Leave her alone" (John 12:7) defending me from those who would mock me for crying behind bathroom doors.

Remembering how He was so "deeply moved in spirit" by Mary's tears that He wept publicly with her (John 11:33-35), I sense His presence with me in my suffering.

When I'm feeling overwhelmed by my high sensitivity, I no longer turn to unsafe people—or even well-meaning but clueless people!—who will only bruise me further.

In fact, I no longer even feel the need for them to understand me.

I look, instead, to the One who always understands.

* *Do you struggle with being too sensitive or highly sensitive?*

* *How does it help to know that when Mary was weeping at Jesus' feet that He told those around her, "Leave her alone"?*

* *Are there areas in your life where you feel like you need to become stronger and if so, what are some practical steps you can take to strengthen yourself?*

Chapter 27

Overwhelmed by Too Much Stuff

By: Debbie Taylor Williams

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”

(Matthew 6:19-20a NIV)

Stuff. Everywhere I looked was stuff. Stuff to wash. Stuff to fold. Stuff to put away. Stuff to clean. Stuff to throw away.

Then, God opened my eyes through a friend. He showed me that I had too much stuff, and it contributed to me being overwhelmed. My friend’s comment? “I read a magazine and then throw it away.”

“WHAT? You’re kidding! I keep mine in case I want to look back through it for a decorating idea or recipe,” I replied. My mind then raced to where I stuffed the magazines in my already overstuffed closet.

STUFFED AWAY.

If you’re like me and have a tendency to let magazines, unmatched socks, burp pads, bibs, toys, baby bottles, and junk mail accumulate, here are a few tips to help you stuff your stuff in the trash. Or, if it’s in good shape, give it to a charity.

1. Handle junk mail one time.

Junk mail is a time waster and adds to the stuff in our house. When the mail arrives, look through it once and immediately stuff the junk mail in the trash. There’s no need to leave it on the counter, your purse, or in the car. It only adds to the clutter.

2. Handle bills once or two times at the most.

Bills aren’t stuff, but if you don’t have paperless bills, the envelopes and all the little extras that come with them are stuff. As with junk mail, handle bills as few times as possible.

For instance, rather than carry bills from the mail box to your kitchen counter and then move them at meals to a stack of other stuff, remove the bills from the envelopes and THROW the envelopes and inserts in the trash. Pay the bill if you can. Or, walk the bill to that special place in your home where you keep your bills until pay day.

3. Rethink Socks and Clothes.

Many times, we buy more stuff because we can’t find matching socks or shorts and shirts. If you have a drawer that is hard to close because it’s overstuffed, pour the contents of that drawer in the middle of the floor.

Yes, your toddler will crawl in the middle of the socks, t-shirts, and underwear. It’s okay. Let them play. Play peek-a-boo with a keeper t-shirt while chunking your t-shirts with stains in the trash sack. Do one drawer a day and you’ll have less stuff to drive you crazy.

While you’re at it, commit to less and more easily organized stuff. Buy all white socks rather than some that have bears and some that are striped? You’ll have less mismatched stuff, fewer headaches, and your kids will have a happier mom.

4. Think Before You Buy.

Our collection of stuff goes beyond junk mail and clothing. Before buying another toy car, doll, bow, candle, decorative pillow, or jewelry, ask yourself, “Is this really necessary? Or, is it going to be more stuff for me to put away and keep organized?”

Acknowledge that we’ve become a self-indulgent society and it’s not only good to model self-control to our children, it’s Godly.

Store Up Treasures in Heaven.

Jesus talked about what we should have in our lives instead of just stuff. He said our lives should consist of things of eternal value.

How can you store up treasures in heaven?

1. Store God's Word and Love in Your Children.

I can't think of a better way for us to store up treasure in heaven than by storing God's Word and love in our children's hearts. Think about it! Every Scripture and display of Christ's love you place in them, they'll take to heaven. Your child is a depository. Store eternity in them!

2. Christian books, games, coloring books, CDs, and DVDs.

When we do need to buy age appropriate *stuff* for our children's growing needs, why not buy those that promote Christian values? Your children will have fun while you're storing God's love and ways in their hearts.

3. Conversations.

Throughout the day, you have opportunities to plant eternal truths in your children. Talk about the beauty of God's world, how wonderfully their body works, and how to treat others. Even when correcting our children, we can store eternal truths in them. For instance, if a fuss breaks out between two children, instead of just saying, "We don't hit," we can plant God's eternal word in their minds: "Remember, Jesus says, 'Be kind to one another.'"

I'm cleaning out a closet today and making more room in my heart and day for Jesus. What about you? Do your children need more stuff or a mom whose heart is stuffed with Christ's love?

* *How often might your feeling of being overwhelmed with the wash and bills be related to disorganization and too much stuff?*

* *Which of the above tips might you do to reduce being overwhelmed by stuff?*

* *How might you and your kids benefit from less stuff in the house, drawers, closets, and shelves?*

* *In what ways are you modeling to your children to store up things of eternal value rather than to store up stuff?*

* *How do you plan to follow Jesus' words, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." Matthew 6:19-20a?"*



Chapter 28

Overcoming Overwhelmed

By: Kela Nellums

“I will lead blind Israel down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will brighten the darkness before them and smooth out the road ahead of them. Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them.” (Isaiah 42:16 NLT)

“This isn’t like me! Where did this come from, and why is it lingering?”.

For the first time in my life, I was truly, emotionally overwhelmed and to be honest, it scared me pretty badly.

I felt that I was losing control-wondering if it was something that I should be trying to control.

It was two weeks before the kids were scheduled to start the homeschool year.

After six years of doing the home school thing, I was considered a veteran home educator. So, I had agonized over curriculum before.

But this year was totally different. I felt anxious. Even with one less child to educate, I still was overwhelmed.

As I thought about what it was that was causing me to feel so overwhelmed, I decided to make a list. I have found that when I write out the things that seem to grip me, it has a way of loosening their hold on me. It’s much easier for me to banish the negativity when I’m not hoarding it.

- There were more pressing things I wanted to teach my children; things that I *really* needed them to learn. So, I stressed about finding *The. Absolute. Best. Resource* to accomplish it.
- There were more activities for the children. And more activities equal more on the schedule, more on the schedule equal stretched time with overlapping events. Stretched time and overlapping events equal a frazzled mom that feels like she is meeting herself coming and going. But schedules are nothing new for me. I was just overwhelmed by the super abundance of events I needed to juggle.
- Making sure our oldest daughter got into cosmetology school. This was new territory for me. I had done all of our home schooling *in-home*, but now I was having to deal with higher education. What if the school goes over her transcripts with a fine-tooth comb? What if her homeschool diploma doesn’t suffice? What if she doesn’t get the financial assistance she needs? What if I didn’t equip her with adequate study skills?
- Continuing to be a great wife. I felt that I was becoming so overwhelmed with what was going on with our children that I didn’t have anything left for my beloved. From the beginning of our marriage, my husband and I have made each other a priority and I felt overwhelmed with the thought that I was slipping in this most important area. I didn’t want my husband to think that I was neglecting him.

I tried clinging to things; clinging to my husband for security and the reassurance that I wasn’t losing my mind; clinging to my friends because I know that they would love me no matter what.

Then, I did what I knew I should have done in the first place...I began to search for my true source of peace. And then I found it...my lifeline...a promise in God’s Word I could cling to, and the only way I can truly overcome *Overwhelmed*:

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV)

- * *When you find yourself overwhelmed, is there a Bible verse that you cling to?*
- * *What are the steps that you take to calm your spirit and overcome being overwhelmed?*
- * *How can making a list of what is overwhelming you help you to begin to see it more clearly?*

Chapter 29

When Fear Is Overwhelming

By: Stephanie Shott

*“Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can’t stop shaking.
Oh, that I had wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest!”
(Psalm 55:5-6 NLT)*

As I covered in the corner, clinging to my kids, I found myself trying to be brave in the storm that was dubbed, *The Storm of the Century*.

Storms have always sent me running for cover. In my mind, I’m able to leap tall buildings with a single bound, but in reality, I’m sissy to the core.

The storms of life can often send me running, too. When times are tough, I want to tuck tail and run. When I’m afraid of messing up and fessing up, I look for a way out. When the task is bigger than me, the call is greater than I can handle, and the road is just too long, my first response is fear.

Whether you are afraid of storms or afraid of your own shadow, fear can really rock your world.

But when you put it all in perspective, the majority of things we fear come from the *what ifs* of our heart.

What if lightning strikes me? What if I make a fool of myself? What if I don’t do it right? What if they don’t like me? What if my child gets hurt? What if I say the wrong thing in the job interview? What if I mess up my kids?

What if? What if? What if?

But, if we let the *What ifs?* in our hearts dictate what we do and don’t do with the days we are given under the sun, then we will live lives of regret and never step into our God-given destinies.

Fear has a way of paralyzing us and preventing us from becoming who we were created to be. And unfortunately, our fears leave imprints on our children’s hearts that can hold them captive to less than they were created for, as well.

Sweet mom, fear may be overwhelming, but you don’t have to let it overtake you.

Throughout Scripture, the Lord continually tells His people, *“Fear not! I am with you.”*

You see, His presence makes all the difference in the world. You don’t have to allow fear to stop you dead in your tracks. Rather than letting your kids see you shaking in your shoes when the storms come, choose to let them see you dancing in the rain and laughing at the storm.

Like the Proverbs 31 woman, others can say of you, *“She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future.”* (Proverbs 31:25 NLT)

Like Joshua, you can trust God’s promise to you, *“This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* (Joshua 1:9 NLT)

Like Esther, you can determine to put your fear on the back burner for the sake of others and understand you were born for such a time as this, *“If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?”* Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: *‘Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.’*” (Esther 4:14-16 NLT)

Today, we are each faced with the choice to face this life boldly, with our confidence in Christ, or to fearfully continue to be afraid of our own shadows.

Each time we overcome our own fears, our children see reflections of faith in our lives. Every time we live courageous lives, they learn what courage looks like and begin to dare to be brave, as well.

Fear can be overwhelming but faith overcomes fear every time.

“But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?” (Psalms 56:3-4 NLT)

- * *What fear or fears overwhelm you?*
- * *How do you handle it when you're overwhelmed by fear?*
- * *How do your fears filter to your children?*
- * *What are some things your fears are preventing you from doing?*



Chapter 30

Be Joyful Always

By: Genny Heikka

“Be joyful always.”
(1 Thessalonians 5:16 NIV)

It was early in the morning, right after I woke up, and I heard my kids laughing down the hall.

I tip-toed toward their rooms, wondering what was so funny.

But halfway there, I stopped. (I didn't want to interrupt because I didn't want their laughter to end.) A smile spread across my face as I stood there, hiding and listening.

I lingered for a while, soaking in the moment.

Hearing my kids laugh made me laugh. I was filled with joy at their joy. (I found out later they were laughing at their pet fish.)

But I'm the first to admit, my attitude isn't always like that...filled with joy from being a mom.

Sometimes I get impatient and cranky, or frustrated and stressed out. And there are plenty of days I doubt myself (especially as my kids have approached their teen years!).

But even though the demands of motherhood can be hard, and even though there are days I feel inadequate, when I see my kids joyful like that, I'm reminded of the gift of being their mom.

These precious people I call my kids—these little souls I'm put in charge of—have changed my life forever.

And even if some days parenting is hard, there is joy to be found.

There is joy in the little things.

Joy in the hugs.
Joy in the smiles.
Joy in the laughter.

Sometimes even joy in the tears.

Being a mom is filled with joy. Sometimes, we just need to remember to linger in the hallway and listen for it a little longer.

My prayer:

Lord, help me to find joy in being a mom today. Help me to focus on the smiles and the laughter, not on the challenges and worries. Help me to create a home where joy can grow and flourish. Even when I am stressed, and even when my kids are less-than happy, remind me that being a mom is a gift and that each day has more than enough joy in store for me, if only I pause long enough to find it.

-Amen

* *Would your children describe you as joyful?*

* *Do you enjoy hearing your children laugh or do you struggle with being cranky, frustrated or stressed out?*

* *What are some ways you can teach your children to be joyful...in the good times, the bad times and even through the tears?*

Chapter 31

When Life Is Hard and Hormones Rage

By: Stephanie Shott

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV)

There I was driving down the road when I found myself in the middle of a meltdown moment. No real crisis. No big issues. Just a mountain of molehills multiplied by mounting hormones.

My sweet little boy bore the brunt of my bad behavior after just a bit of bad news sent me over the edge. Frantic, frustrated, and frazzled, I began ranting and raving like I had lost my mind. I knew I was losing it, but I just kept spewing like a broken fire hydrant.

After a two minute tirade, I came to my senses and my heart sank. What had I just done? Why did I lose my cool like that? Did the bad news really warrant such a volcanic response?

Maybe you've been there too...when life is hard and hormones rage.

Life. It has a way of overwhelming all of us.

When the little things seem to build, hormones begin to rage and you find yourself at the end of your proverbial rope, life is hard.

When the bills are bigger than your paychecks and you aren't sure whether you need to buy groceries or pay the electric bill, life is hard.

When the baby keeps crying, your toddler has just pulled the high chair down on top of him, and the pasta is boiling over, life is hard.

When you feel like you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders and your circumstances are too big to bear, life is hard.

But *overwhelming* doesn't only happen when chaos creeps in or when our worlds fall apart. Sometimes, it's in the little things.

Like a stack of straw, the result of one stick at a time. And then it happens...

Something or someone comes along and flicks a spark onto our already heaping pile and the whole thing goes up in flames. And when hormones are involved, it's more like someone threw gasoline on the whole thing.

So, what do you do when life is hard and hormones rage? How do you control your response when you feel so out of control?

The best defense to overflowing or out of control emotions is to create an offensive strategy for your heart. It's like putting tools in the tool chest of your mind and being prepared to use them before you lose it.

Filter your emotions through *L.O.V.E.*

L ~ *Linger with the LORD.* Begin your day by spending time with Jesus, in the Word and in prayer. Seek your Father's face before you come face to face with the busyness of your day. Make memorizing Scripture a priority. Look for ways to intentionally live out the Word and pray like crazy. Linger with the LORD.

O ~ *Orchestrate the Outcome.* Think about the consequences of your response. How can you respond in a way that will be best for those around you? How can you filter your reaction through the lens of love? Don't just *think* before you speak, orchestrate your outcome so that you won't hurt those you love most.

V ~ *Determine to use Verbiage with Valor.* Your words matter. Be careful not to be vicious, malicious, or create victims with your words. Speak life-not death to those around you...especially to your precious children. Be a woman who is gracious no matter how hard life is. Determine to use verbiage with valor.

E ~ *Edify, Educate, Endure.* When life is hard and you feel like you're about to erupt, you can change course and use it as a teachable moment. To build up your children, to teach them something important and demonstrate how to handle life under pressure. You are their most important example and they look to you to be built up, to learn and to know what it looks like to handle life well. Edify, educate and endure.

Life is hard and hormones rage. And sometimes being a mom is the most overwhelming job on the planet. We've all been there. It's inevitable. But when you pause to filter your response through LOVE, your children will learn how to handle life well instead of letting life handle them. And they will know you love them regardless of how tough life can be.

* *When is the last time you had a meltdown moment and how were your children affected by it?*

* *What has you feeling overwhelmed today?*

* *How could filtering your response through L.O.V.E. make a difference in your life and your children's lives?*



Overwhelmed ~ 31 Stories from M.O.M. Contributors in Alphabetical Order

Dana Bailey ~ Dana Bailey loves to write about her crazy life as mom to 11 kids and wife to one amazing husband. She is passionate about encouraging and equipping moms in their biblical roles as wife and mom and finds great joy in sharing her love for Jesus with moms. In addition to The M.O.M. Initiative, you can find Dana at her blog, www.danabailey.blogspot.com.

Erin Bishop ~ Erin Bishop is the founder and president of the Whatever Girls Ministry. The Whatever Girls mission is "intentional moms and intentional daughters". They strive to empower teen girls to choose God's best for their lives by exemplifying the pillars of Philippians 4:8. www.thewhatevergirls.com Erin lives in Washington State with her husband and their two children.

Tara Dovenbarger ~ Tara Dovenbarger's deepest longing is to lead moms to never give up their faith when life pours forth hardship. She lives in east Tennessee with her husband of 17 years and has five children; one which passed away and two of which have special needs. You can read about her journey at www.taradovenbarger.com.

Cheri Gregory ~ Cheri Gregory is a 40-something Christian speaker, writer, and teacher. She's been married for almost a quarter-of-a-century to Daniel (her opposite Personality) who is a pastor / teacher / musician. They have two 20-something college kids (who are also opposite Personalities!) Connect with Cheri at www.CheriGregory.com and www.facebook.com/cheri.gregory.author!

Genny Heikka ~ Genny lives in Northern California where she balances writing with motherhood, and loves both. She's an author, speaker, blogger, and coffee lover. Stop by her blog at gennyheikka.com and share a cup!

Angela Mackey ~ Angela Mackey is a stumbling child of God who longs to make much of her savior. She encourages her readers to rethink their thinking in light of God's word so they may live transformed lives. She and her husband have three kids who keep them humble and bring them joy. To connect with Angela, visit her website at www.rethinkingmythinking.com.

Lynn Mosher ~ Lynn Mosher lives with her hubby (since 1966) in their Kentucky nest, emptied of three chicklets and embraced three giggly grand-chicklets and an inherited dog. Lynn's passion is to encourage others and glorify the Lord with her writing. Stop by for a refill at her website, Heading Home, <http://lynnmosher.com>.

Kela Nellums ~ Kela is a Christ-follower who writes about faith, marriage, motherhood and home education at Pursuing What Is Excellent (www.KelaNellums.com). She's the wife to her beloved, 18 years and counting, and the mom to 6 children. Her blog's signature, Living With Sword and Coffee, describes her passion for God's Word and strong like for coffee!

Christen Price ~ Christen Price blogs at Illuminate, where she seeks to brighten, reveal, and make clear the uncontainable truth. She is the Children's Ministry Coordinator at her church, married to her high school sweetheart and mother to premature twin girls. You can find her on Facebook and Etsy, or on Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter @chris10price. To find out more about Christen, visit her website at <http://theuncontainabletruth.com>.

Heather Riggleman ~ Heather is a wife and mother to three, one with special needs. You can find her sipping coffee and sharing her latest in the trenches of motherhood at her site, www.heatherriggleman.com, but she has more to share, her book, Mama Needs A Time-Out was released this past May. To connect with Heather, visit her website at www.heatherriggleman.com.

Julie Sanders ~ Julie believes moms can know peace to pass understanding in all seasons. Bible teacher and Women's Ministry Leader, she has a passion for strong marriages, crossing cultures, and teaching children well in all settings. Julie opens God's word to refresh women with transparent, practical stories of truth in life. www.juliesanders.org.

Holly Smith ~ Holly loves her job as wife to Chris and mom to Noah, Kylie, Tabor and Sydney. God has gifted Holly with a love of all things creative ~ from painting and wall papering to scrapbooking, writing and design work. Holly and her family make their home within site of year 'round snow-capped mountains in Colorado. Visit her website at www.amarthaheart.com.

Stephanie Shott ~ Stephanie is an author, speaker and founder of The M.O.M. Initiative. For over 20 years Stephanie has led women to lead full, fearless and faithful lives. Her passion is contagious and her story is riveting. To find out more about her, visit her website at www.stephanieshott.com.

Lori Wildenberg ~ Lori is co-founder of 1 Corinthians 13 Parenting, an author, speaker, licensed family and parent educator, and mother of four lives in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. You can connect with her at <http://www.1Corinthians13Parenting.com> or <http://www.loriwildenberg.com>.

Debbie Taylor Williams ~ Debbie Taylor Williams is a sought out Christian author of seven books and a nationally known keynote speaker. Her passion for Christ and applicable, humorous illustrations leave audiences and readers with a renewed zeal for Christ and practical take-aways to live out their faith. To connect with Debbie, visit her website at <http://www.debbietaylorwilliams.com>.

The M.O.M. Initiative

A Fresh New Vision for an Age-Old Calling



“If the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world, then the church that mentors those hands will win it.” ~ Stephanie Shott

To find out how you can start a M.O.M. Mentor Group in your community, visit <http://www.themominitiative.com/join-here/> or email The M.O.M. Initiative at stephanie@themominitiative.com.