

Discouraged Moms' Devotions to Go



**Shelley
Galbreath**

Moms' Devotions to Go Series

Discouraged Moms' Devotions to Go

Taking Time for Yourself
to Nurture Your Soul

Shelley Galbreath

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Introduction

How did life get so complicated, cluttered, and fast-paced? When did women start the balancing act of being a wife and mother, employee and volunteer, chauffeur and errand-runner? In today's society, women do too much, especially mothers. Today's mom spends her days stuck in traffic jams and grocery store lines, running endless errands, and chauffeuring kids from activity to activity. Meanwhile, piles of laundry, dirty dishes, and hungry mouths await her at home. The "to-do" list never seems to end. Most days leave little time for her. Even a bubble bath seems a lofty goal.

Overworked and overwhelmed, most women have forgotten the things that they wanted to do in life beyond getting married and raising families. Women sincerely desire God's best for their lives and long to feel passionate about being a wife and mother. Unfortunately they are exhausted and worn-out. They lack energy and joy.

Does this sound familiar? Are you an overwhelmed and discouraged woman who longs to regain her zest for abundant life?

God truly desires for women to realize their uniqueness. He puts dreams into our hearts that bring us pleasure. Each of us is authentic with abilities and attributes that are unique. God patiently waits for us to do the things that bring us pleasure because that brings Him pleasure.

Imagine watching your child fulfill her potential by winning a race or accomplishing a long-awaited goal. How would you feel? Would it bring you pleasure? That's just how our Heavenly Father feels when we awaken our senses and live our dreams. Our pleasure gives God pleasure. Ken Gire, author of "Windows of the Soul" expresses it this way: "We reach for God in many ways.

Through our sculptures and our Scriptures. Through our pictures and our prayers. Through our writing and our worship. And through them, He reaches for us." So dare to dream and reach for the elusive dream and you'll be reaching for your Heavenly Father in the process.

This devotional is designed with a biblical basis to help you bring simplicity and focus into your life by clarifying what matters most. You'll find tips for discovering, planning, and acting on what matters most and strategies for organizing your day or week around these things.

Discouraged Moms' Devotions to Go helps you bring more balance into your life while inspiring you along the way. It's a step back from the day-to-day grind, a journey into your innermost self, a look at what you deeply care about.

I write this, not as a woman who has "arrived" or as someone who has all the answers, but rather as a fellow sojourner who longs to live the life God designed me to live. It is my prayer that the wisdom I gleaned from others helps you on your journey to living a simpler, more joyful life – the life God designed us all to live.

Section One
Awakening the Senses

When God Plants a Dream

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

Dreams. We all have them. Some dreams come and quickly depart, while others remain in our thoughts. Some we dared to dream in our childhood and we've carried them with us throughout adulthood, hoping and praying that one day the dream may come to fruition. Some dreams, because of choices we've made, seem too elusive to attain, so we resign ourselves to never achieving them and let them drift from our thoughts.

Why do some dreams stay in our thoughts, while others vanish with each passing year? Why are we so reluctant to listen to our heart and follow our dreams? Why do so many women resign themselves to living lives that aren't fulfilling or purpose-filled? God designed each one of us to fulfill a purpose. He has given each of us work to do based on our own unique design. "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do," (John 17:4).

There is no greater joy than to live for one's intended purpose, a purpose that is greater than anything we could have ever imagined, a purpose that glorifies God and fulfills the work that God prepared in advance for us to do. Rick Warren, author of "The Purpose Driven Life" writes, "You were put on earth to make a contribution. You weren't created just to consume resources – to eat, breathe, and take up space. God designed you to make a difference with your life."

Have you ever thought about the possibility that some of your dreams – the ones that refuse to be stifled by the demands of life, may have been planted by God, that your dream may be the way God intends you to contribute, may be your life's purpose?

As a child, I was an avid reader, often staying awake long after my parents were asleep just to finish a book that I couldn't put down. This love of books led to a dream of being a writer, a dream that all but disappeared with the day-to-day living as an adult. Then one day while sitting on a beach in the Bahamas, the dream returned. It was faint at first, but as the dream grew, so did my excitement. When I placed the dream in God's hands and obediently followed the path set before me, it began to unfold before my eyes.

Today I am humbled and delighted that God has allowed me to use my talents for His glory. I believe my dream never faded because it was His dream also.

What is the work God has called you to do? What dream refuses to die? Perhaps you are called to be the best secretary or the best teacher or the best nurse you can be. Or maybe your calling at this moment in your life is to be a good wife and mother. Whatever work the Lord has called you to do, He will use you as His instrument to accomplish exactly what He has prepared you to do.

Many of us never take the time to ponder where these dreams may have originated. The thought never crosses our minds that God is very possibly the One who plants some dreams into our hearts and if we trust Him, He will help us achieve these goals. Instead, we quickly dismiss them as nonsense or self-centered thinking. May Sarton captures the quest for life's purpose quite candidly in her poem entitled "Now I Become Myself." She writes:

Now I have become myself.
It's taken time, many years and places.
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces...

For me, her words really hit home. How many faces had I worn before I became the woman I am today, before I found my vocation and life's purpose? If you're tired of wearing other people's faces and want to be the

authentic woman God designed you to be, then spend some time today in prayer with the Lord asking Him to reveal your life's purpose, asking Him to help you become the woman He's always wanted you to be.

Encouragement for Today

Is there a dream that's been yours for as long as you can remember? What is it? What's stopping you from working toward it?

List five enjoyable things that you've always dreamed of doing, but for whatever reason, have not yet done.

Of the five activities you listed, which one appeals to you the most?

Today, why not take the dream to God and let Him show you whether the dream is worthy? Then you can begin to work toward the dream in unison with God.

Achieving the Forgotten Dream

Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

Yesterday's devotion encouraged you to begin a quest to understand your life's purpose, to realize your forgotten dream. Today let's go beyond thinking about dreams to finding ways to achieve them. I want you to believe that you can achieve your dreams. With perseverance and prayer you can achieve more than you ever imagined.

By setting goals and working toward accomplishing one goal at a time, you continue to move one step closer to the life you want to lead, one step closer to realizing your dream, one step closer to becoming the woman you were designed to be.

Yesterday you chose an activity, a dream that you've always wanted to do, but have never done. Today, let's set some goals for achieving that dream. No matter how big your aspiration, setting some goals is the best way to get from where you are to living your dream. Work, perseverance and trust are the way most dreams become a reality, especially if you partner with God to make the dream come true. So let's get to work.

Someone passed a concept along to me that I have used to set my own personal goals for some time now. It's called S.M.A.R.T. goals, which is an acronym for specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and targeted goals. Let's look at each one in detail.

Specific – When setting goals, identifying exactly what you want to accomplish will help you work towards achieving your goal. For example, a good goal is deciding to go back to college, but a specific goal would narrow the goal a step further by defining what field or degree you are striving toward achieving.

Measurable – Your goal needs to be identifiable, something you can measure so you can chart your progress. It would be easy to measure the goal of getting a four-year-degree in a specific subject, for example, because you can check off every class that is completed as one step closer to realizing the goal.

Attainable – Make sure your dream is something to work toward but not something that is unattainable. A working mother of four who needs to continue to work outside the home for financial reasons might be expecting too much of herself and her family if she decides she wants to attend medical school after college. A better goal would be to finish a four-year-degree in a health-related field.

Realistic – Your goal needs to be something that can be realistically achieved. If your goal is to lose weight and you are a 40-something woman like me, setting a goal of attaining the size you were in high school is not a very realistic goal. A better goal would be to decide to eat healthy, exercise, and work towards becoming the best you can be at your age.

Targeted – Goals are achieved with more success when they are clearly defined. For example, if your goal is to achieve the master's degree you have thought about for years, a targeted goal would be to decide when you want to achieve this goal and then take classes accordingly; making sure that your targeted goal is attainable and realistic.

God wants you to partner with Him to make your dreams come true. He gives you the desire and as you grow into the dream, you'll realize that the plans God has for you are more wonderful than anything you could have ever dreamed of on your own.

Trust God to bring the dream to fruition in just the right time and in just the right way. Delight yourself in the Lord, His Word, and His ways, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Encouragement for Today

Sit down and create some specific goals that get you closer to your dream. Make sure each goal is a S.M.A.R.T. goal. Then take the steps necessary to move forward in faith on the path toward authenticity.

Your Spiritual Gifts

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10-11

The Bible makes it clear that each one of us is equipped with specific abilities called spiritual gifts. These spiritual gifts are not natural talents, with which we are born, but gifts that are given to us at our spiritual birth. Our spiritual gift indicates the particular way that God equips us to serve in the community of Christ, complementing others in the body of Christ.

In Romans 12, Paul mentions several spiritual gifts including prophecy, serving, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, and mercy. How do you determine your spiritual gifts? Often your spiritual gifts correlate with your natural abilities. For example if you have always been academic and enjoy speaking in front of others, you may find that your spiritual gift is teaching. Take a look at the description of each spiritual gift below and see if you clearly fit into one category.

The best way to find your specific spiritual gifts is by taking a spiritual gifts inventory. Many churches offer these, so I would suggest meeting with your spiritual director or pastor to discuss the possibility. There are also several available online. Working within your spiritual giftedness will make your work much more interesting and you'll find that you will be much more energized working within a ministry that fits your gift.

Prophecy: Are you able to communicate spiritual truths to other believers? A person with the gift of prophecy communicates God's truth to other believers, essentially declaring the will of God.

Serving: Do you enjoy working behind the scenes, doing the work that keeps the ministry moving? If so, you may have the gift of serving, which offers practical service to the church body.

Teaching: Do you enjoy studying God's Word and sharing what you have learned with others? Then you may have the gift of teaching.

Encouragement: Do you enjoy encouraging others in their Christian walk? An encourager uses spiritual truths to encourage the spiritual progress of others.

Giving: Are you constantly giving material possessions or making monetary contributions to those in need? A person with the gift of giving provides monetary or material assistance.

Leadership: Are you a leader by nature? Do others look to you for direction? If so, you may have been given the gift of leadership or a person who offers leadership and direction, and increases the vision of the church body.

Mercy: Do others come to you with their personal problems? Do you find yourself offering advice and direction to others more often than not? If you have this spiritual gift, you very likely enjoy providing personal and emotional support to those in need.

When someone gives you a gift, what do you usually do with the gift? You open it and then enjoy what you received. God has given you a gift. Are you going to open your gift, use and enjoy it or are you simply going to let your gift go to waste?

Encouragement for Today

Look up the following verses and list the spiritual gift each verse is referring to.

Matthew 13:16

Proverbs 31:20

Acts 17:11

Acts 13:15

Luke 10:30-37

James 2:15-16

Titus 1:5

After reading those verses, do you have a clearer idea what your spiritual gift is? If so, what steps are you going to take to use and enjoy your gift?

Listen to Your Heart

There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

1 Corinthians 12:6

What an amazing sight it is to see a woman pursue an activity that she loves and does well! There's visible joy on her face and passion in the depth of her eyes. She is a woman living her life by God's design. She is a woman filled with passion.

We all have passions. Some of us are passionate about gardening or reading, while others find joy in working with children or the elderly. Webster's Dictionary defines passion as "a strong liking or desire for or devotion to some activity, object, or concept."

In her book, "Becoming a Woman of Passion", Carole Gift Page writes, "Passion is that ardor, zeal, fervor, and surge of emotion that infuses our lives, even our most ordinary days, with vitality, zest, excitement, and exhilaration. She continues, "The essence of passion is strong affection, a sense of abandon. When we feel passionate about something or someone, we feel most alive, most in tune with our senses, most in harmony with ourselves and our world."

What comes to mind when you consider those definitions? What motivates you and makes your pulse race, what are you drawn to, what fills you with vitality and zest, what do you enjoy doing, what do you love?

Your answers to these questions are the things about which you are passionate. They are the things that are your heart's desire. You need little motivation when you are passionate about what you are doing because your passion energizes you. Passion is all the motivation you need when you are doing what you love.

Imagine fulfilling God's purpose for your life doing something that energizes you and sets your heart on fire. That's exactly what happens when you are working or serving in an area that aligns with your passions. What energizes you? What work is so enjoyable that you lose track of all time when you are doing it?

Passion can also be defined as an intense, driving desire. In this context, passion can very easily become sin or even an idol. If you have a powerful passion for shopping, overeating, drunkenness, pornography, or other obsessive habits – these are not the passions that I am referring to. These are not God-given passions that will move you toward His agenda for your life. These passions are sin and they need to be dealt with in a biblical manner. The sort of passions I am referring to are God-given and will be used to glorify Him in the work that you do.

In our hectic and computerized society, many women have lost sight of the authentic woman God created them to be. They are caught up in a whirlwind of activity and day-to-day demands. Page writes, “We act and react out of a sense of duty, obligation, habit, or guilt, rather than from a sense of inner passion, ardor, and eagerness.” We allow work, family, marriage, and career to rob us of authenticity, to rob us of joy.

What commitments and obligations are robbing you of living a life of passion and zeal? Are there any changes you can make, any activities in your schedule that are unnecessary? Today ask God to reveal any changes you can make to begin living a more passionate life.

Encouragement for Today

It may seem overwhelming, to discover what God designed you to be, to do, but if you pay attention to your passions, uncovering the woman God created you to be is easy.

List five things you really like to do.

List five things you absolutely don't like doing.

Examine both lists. Are you doing things you don't like to do? If so, why?

Are you doing the things that speak to your heart? If not, why not? How can you begin to do more from the "likes" list verses the "dislikes" list?

What If?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

What if at every moment of change in your life you were afraid to take a chance
Afraid to live, laugh, and love
Afraid to embrace your last dance?
What if every time you glanced in the mirror You saw a different person than whom you desired?
Instead you saw your “reality,”
Different from those you admired
What if every time you wanted to speak so boldly
You worried too much about others’ thoughts?
Too worried to express your personality,
To model the integrity you were always taught.
What if every time you searched for answers,
It seemed that no one understood?
They couldn’t comprehend the confusion your heart encountered,
And you knew they never would.
What if when you took a chance you failed,
And were afraid again to try?
You were so afraid to be a failure—to not be perfect—
So you let all of your opportunities pass by.
What would you do if throughout your life
You constantly questioned ‘what if?’
You’d lose opportunities of happiness, laughter, and love;
You’d lose the joy of God’s gracious gifts

So live! Be joyful, and show your faith.

Don't be afraid to take a chance.

Don't be afraid to show your true colors,

Don't be afraid to get up and dance.

Kassi Galbreath

This poem was written by my fourteen-year-old daughter. When I first read it, it nearly took my breath away. If only I had had that sort of wisdom at her age or in my twenties or early thirties. Maybe I would have grasped onto my dream instead of, for years and years, lacking the courage to take a chance, lacking the faith to reach for the unknown.

The biggest “what if” in my life concerns my writing. In my early twenties my husband was in the United States Air Force and we were stationed in Germany. While living overseas, I began working on finishing my degree. During my first semester I took English composition and my professor was impressed with my work and offered to help me get started as a freelance writer.

That was a time in my life, however, when I was working toward another goal – one that I foolishly thought would make me happier than writing, so I thanked her and continued taking college classes. Just a few years later when we moved back to the United States, I regretted that decision. For years I searched for ways to work from home so I could be a stay-at-home-mother, even resorting to babysitting. I often think...what if I would have accepted her help? What if I would have just taken a chance?

A friend of mine often says, “A successful person turns chance into motivation.” What opportunities have you lost because you were afraid to take a chance? What dreams are just waiting to be realized if only you'd turn chance into motivation? Today follow the advice of Solomon by trusting in the Lord with all your heart and by not leaning on your own understanding. Today step out of your comfort zone and take a chance, stop thinking of the “what ifs” and take the first step to your life's dance.

Encouragement for Today

Is there a “what if” that you have always had regrets about not pursuing?

What’s stopping you from reaching for the dream, from turning regret into motivation?

Today I encourage you to examine the possibilities and take your “what if” to the Lord, trusting that He will show you how and when to take the first step.

Looking Beyond the Daily Routine

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24

When the day is dark and gloomy
And the fog obscures your view,
And you feel there is no challenge
Waiting anywhere for you;
When it's routine you must follow
Through a dreary weather chart,
And you feel the hand of duty
Like a millstone on your heart;
Face the skies however darkened,
When you ache to turn away
Do the job that lies before you,
Keep your courage one more day.
You can never guess how often
You affect another's life
By the fact you are a doer
Not a quitter in the strife.

Author Unknown

I know there are many of you who feel the hand of duty heavy upon your heart, who can't see beyond the clutter and chaos of dirty laundry and housework. The life you have chosen as wife and mother involves more

than you ever thought possible – making ends meet in a thousand ways from taking children to doctor and dentist appointments to chauffeuring kids from activity to activity.

Many of you also try to balance working outside the home and collapse into bed at the end of the day from complete exhaustion. Some of you, no doubt, would love to simply run away from the life you have chosen, not because you don't love your family, but rather because this just isn't the life you thought you'd be living. Yet that is not possible and is not what God desires. He expects us to persevere through our pain, through our disappointments, and to accomplish the task that lies before us, the task He has given us to do.

As Christian wives and mothers, it is our goal to glorify God in all that we do, even if the work is drudgery, even if the work offers no challenge whatsoever. And let's face it, housework, laundry, and a host of other daily duties offer little in the way of challenge. Most of this work is exhausting, unfulfilling, and never ending, yet it is work that must be done to create an atmosphere in the home where our husbands and other family members look forward to gathering.

If we are bitter about our role as wife and mother, we influence others in the home to think the same way, robbing everyone, including ourselves, of joy.

Perhaps you find yourself struggling emotionally with self-pity or feelings of not being appreciated by your family. Perhaps you feel used. Possibly you are exhausted trying to keep up with the day-to-day demands of motherhood and you feel as if no one understands the extent of your despair. If this describes how you feel at this moment, Jesus is ready and willing to help you. Comfort and healing are as close as the arms of our Lord, who knows our pain, shares our anguish and offers His peace.

A wife and mother who has a gentle and quiet spirit provides a calming and reassuring atmosphere in the home. Her inward beauty draws those around her to love her. She is a joy to be around because she has found joy in the Lord and in the work He has given her to do.

If you are struggling with a routine that seems like drudgery, take courage from the Lord and persevere, knowing that you are working for Him, fulfilling His goal for your life, and, at the same time, positively affecting the lives of those around you.

Today, I challenge you to do the work set before you with a different mindset. Today instead of doing your work for your employer, husband, or children, do it for the Lord, remembering He is the one you are serving in all that you do.

Encouragement for Today

When is the last time you saw your daily duties as the Lord's work? The Lord's work is not just done in Church. Everything we do is the Lord's work. Housework, mothering duties, errands, meal planning, grocery shopping, as well as our employment are all work where we can glorify God.

Take a few moments and reflect on your daily schedule. Is there any area in particular where you are approaching your work from a purely secular standpoint, where you are working for man and not God? Is there more than one area where this is occurring?

If so, list the areas.

Reread Colossians 3: 23-24 and write the verse in your own words.

Understanding the Soul

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:13-14

I was at a women's retreat this past year and the topic was caring for your soul. The speaker asked a question I hadn't previously thought about. She asked each one of the women at the retreat to define the soul. I found that difficult as did many other women. Right now, I'm going to ask you to do the same thing, not because I am trying to be a tyrant, but rather because I want you to really think about what your soul is. Take a few moments to ponder the soul.

Webster's Dictionary defines the soul as "the immaterial essence, animating principle, or actuating cause of an individual life; the moral and emotional nature of human beings."

As Christians, our definition goes beyond that definition. The soul of a Christian is the vital source that animates the body. It's our very essence, the place where the Holy Spirit lives, the core of our being. The soul shapes our character and is our deepest connection to the Father. It's where we find the authentic woman God created us to be.

The woman at the well in John 4 was confused about the kind of water Jesus referred to. Perhaps she was confused because no one had ever talked about spiritual thirst before. The Bible makes it clear that many spiritual functions parallel physical functions and thirst is one of them. Just as our bodies thirst for food and water, our souls long for spiritual food and water.

Is your soul longing for the sustenance that can only be found in the living Word of God? Have you deprived yourself of the very thing your soul needs to thrive? Is your schedule so full that you find it difficult to replenish

your soul? Just as your physical body becomes ill when it is not taken care of properly, your soul can become sick. And because the physical and the spiritual are so intertwined, a sick soul can actually make your physical body ill.

At the retreat, I received a handout, which defined the health of the soul in four different areas. The first stage is where everything is new and exciting. This is a time to be aware and to be alert. Otherwise the pace of life will begin to intersect with the health of the soul, and we will no longer be saying, “Yes” to God, but to other things. At this point, the second stage, we are giving it all away and have nothing left, so we have no recourse but to literally crash and burn.

This leads us to the third stage a time of change, a time where we redesign our pace of life, a time where we ask ourselves some soul-provoking questions. What am I going to say “no” to? What am I doing that doesn’t make sense? What is my soul leading me to do? What does my heart leap at? Finding a healthy balance should be our goal and is where our soul will thrive. That’s the fourth stage.

The retreat speaker described the stages of the soul this way: “Listen to God and let your life speak, stay the course, but watch yourself or else the pace of life will force you to crash and burn, where it will be time to redesign once again.”

Encouragement for Today

Take some time to connect to your inner self, your core, your soul, and briefly do an inventory of the condition of your soul. Is it fulfilled? Does it feel healthy? Or is it sick? Do you need the healing that can only be found by spending time with our Heavenly Father? Today, do something for your soul, something that will add zest to the vital source that animates your body. Maybe you could spend some time in God's Word, in prayer, in meditation, or simply enjoy some silence where your soul can truly connect to the Father. Whatever it is, I encourage you to take a few moments and just do it – your soul deserves it!

Section Two Nourishing the Mind

Mind Clutter

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Philippians 4:8

In today's fast-paced society, many women have fallen prey to the ideology of more stuff, more activities, more everything. They lead hectic lives filled with chaos. Today's woman may long for a simpler life, yet she continues to do more, focuses on having more because that's what everyone else does. The result is too much stuff and not enough time, creating a life that can be summed up in one word – cluttered.

Clutter dwells everywhere - in the car, in the home, at our workplace, just about anywhere we find ourselves on a continuing basis. It even dwells in the deep recesses of the mind. Bitterness, lack of forgiveness, anger, resentment, disappointment, betrayal, the list of unmet needs and unresolved feelings could go on and on for most of us. If we could physically see into the deep recesses of our minds, most of us would be shocked to find a mass of clutter and chaos residing there.

Some of us have deep hurts and painful memories that have left scars on our hearts and in our minds. Others have stuffed emotional baggage for years and years and while the feelings may be unrecognized, the accumulation of these feelings is now clouding thought patterns. Anxiety, depression, fatigue and a host of other emotional and physical ailments are common complaints and a direct result of an over accumulation of clutter in the mind. So how do we rid ourselves of this mind clutter? If only we could purchase the latest book on organizing and have it include a step-by-step process for decluttering every area of our lives, including the mind.

While that book doesn't exist, (at least I haven't found it yet!) we can apply some basic organizing principles to the mind. For example, when organizing the home, clutter is usually dealt with in two ways: either it's thrown away or it's put into its proper place. We can do the same with our minds. Paul gives us a checklist for evaluating our thoughts in Philippians 4:8-9 where he writes, "Brothers and sisters, think about the things that are true and honorable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. Do what you learned and received from me, what I told you, and what you saw me do. And the God who gives peace will be with you" (NCV). All we have to do is simply make an effort every day to sort through our thoughts, upholding each one to these standards. Thoughts that don't align with God's guidelines in Philippians 4:8 simply get tossed out, while the rest are put into their proper place: true, honorable, right, pure, beautiful, and respected. Then and only then can we begin to clear out the clutter and change negative thought patterns.

For the clutter-free lifestyle to permeate every area of our lives, the mind must be cleaned out and organized just as if it were an overfilled closet in the home. Have you ever cleaned out the clutter in overloaded area of the home? Can you remember the freedom that you felt when the last box of donations and the final bag of trash were removed from that area? Gazing into the orderly room that houses only useful items gives such a feeling of peace. Isn't it time to have the sort of peace that can only be found by making order out of chaos? If you're ready to take the first step to finding a life of simplicity, the journey begins in the mind.

Encouragement for Today

Do you have any bitterness, lack of forgiveness, anger, resentment, disappointment, betrayal, unmet needs or unresolved feelings that are cluttering your mind and keeping you from living the peaceful life God intends for all His children? If so, what are they? Do your thoughts align with God's standards in Philippians 4:8? If not, what areas do you need to focus on improving?

Look up Colossians 3:2. Write the verse in your own words. Meditate on ways to change your focus from earthly things to heavenly. Ask God to show you how you can consciously change your focus and list some of the ways below. Today, make it a priority to try to consciously change your thought patterns by following one or more of the ideas you list below.

Renewing the Mind

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

Our thoughts impact our lives in vital ways. They can energize us or exhaust us. They can lead us to God or along a path away from God. They can make us better or they can make us bitter. The choice is ours and we make that choice every day depending on whether we set our minds on things above or on earthly things, whether we conform to the world or allow God to transform our minds.

What's the best way to transform the mind? You transform the mind by filling it with things that reflect God's goodness, not things that cause sinful thoughts such as anxiety, greed, or lust to name a few. Daily Bible reading is the single most important way to renew the mind. God's Word is the Holy Spirit's way to renew our thought patterns and replace our sinful thoughts with Godly ones. By reading the Bible, we can change our thinking, behavior and perspective, make better choices and change the way we live our lives.

Donna Partow puts it so beautifully in her book, "Becoming the Woman I Want to Be." "The way to transform your mind is not by trying to rid yourself of the garbage you've been fed over the years and the negative thinking patterns that have held you captive in the past...instead, deliberately turn your attention to the positive and be very aggressive about it. As you fill your mind with the truth about who God is and all the good things He has done in the past and desires to do in the future, these negatives will eventually get washed away,"

On the average, every person has over 40,000 thoughts every day and not every one is positive. We can make a conscious effort to change any negative thought patterns to positive ones by simply confessing the negative thought to God the moment that it pops up in our minds. Then we can choose to replace the negative thought with a positive one.

For example, if you are overwhelmed with your daily schedule and anxious thoughts continue to plague your mind, simply confess your anxiety to the Lord and then replace the negative with a positive. In this case, Philippians 4:5-6 would be an excellent replacement. “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.” By doing this, we take the power away from our negative thoughts and allow the peace of God to control our minds.

Another way to transform your mind is to be watchful of the kind of magazines and books you are reading, the sort of music that fills your ears and the television and movies you watch. Are they uplifting and soul edifying or do they fill your mind with the wrong thoughts and motives? Today, why not make an effort to fill your mind with whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, excellent, or praiseworthy and think about such things? (Philippians 4:8)

Encouragement for Today

What do you fill your mind with? Is it uplifting to the soul? Does it feed the mind? Or does it inspire negative thoughts?

Is there anything that you feel God is prompting you to eliminate...movies, television shows, books, magazines, or music? If so, what is it?

Is there anything that you feel you need to add such as regular Bible reading or a Bible study? Today, list three negative thoughts that continue to plague your mind and then choose to replace the negative thought with a positive one. You might choose to look up a verse that relates to each one individually or simply find a verse such as Colossians 3:2, which reminds you to set your minds on things above – not on earthly things.

| Negative Thought | Godly Replacement |
|------------------|-------------------|
|------------------|-------------------|

Letting Go of Anger and Bitterness

In your anger, do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4: 26-27

Life isn't fair. People let us down. Situations disappoint us. Loved ones break our hearts. It's inevitable that each one of us will feel anger, disappointment, disillusionment, and the pain of a broken heart at one time or another. Jesus said that in this world we would have strife, and that strife can cause a myriad of feelings, including anger and bitterness.

My pastor has repeatedly said that when wronged, you can either choose to get better or bitter. He's right. If we hold onto the feelings of anger, it festers and becomes what Jesus calls a bitter root. In Hebrews 12:15, we are instructed to see to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

I learned this immediately upon becoming a Christian when a close family member verbally lashed out, saying things that felt as if they would break my heart. Then, she withdrew and I didn't speak to her for several weeks. The pain I felt was so real that my heart literally ached. I became anxious and depressed. My health deteriorated because I allowed the anger her words elicited to go unresolved. My relationship with God was hindered. Without realizing the consequences, I chose bitterness instead of forgiveness.

So how should we respond when we are wronged? We should deal with it immediately. Don't ignore it. Confronting anger, taking these feelings to God and taking these feelings to the person who caused the anger is the only way to effectively deal with it. If anger isn't dealt with Biblically in this manner, it festers and turns into bitterness and lack of forgiveness, and lack of forgiveness can cause emotional, spiritual and even physical related problems.

Some of you reading this are, no doubt, like me and want to avoid confrontation at all costs, so when angered, you withdraw. Others may do the opposite and confront the person who angered them by retaliating in anger. According to God's Word, neither is the correct way to deal with anger. God calls us to confront our anger His way, not our way and that means dealing with it today – not tomorrow, next week, or next month, but today before the sun goes down.

God also expects us to remain in control of our anger, for a man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires (James 1:20). He wants us to think before responding rather than to react sinfully in a hurtful situation. "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control," (Proverbs 29:11).

The next time you are faced with a difficult situation or a difficult person, remember that allowing anger to turn into bitterness is your choice. To get better, you must deal with situation God's way, never letting the sun go down while you are still angry, and never giving the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Encouragement for Today

How do you normally deal with anger? Do you blow up or clam up? Anger can show itself in many different ways: depression, anxiety, resentment, hatred, denial, jealousy, illnesses, sinful habits, self-pitying attitudes, etc. Do you have any of these characteristics that would indicate you have unresolved anger? If so, you might want to list them here and confess these sins to God.

Have you personally lashed out at someone who's angered you? If so, do you need to ask for forgiveness? Look up the following verses.

James 1:20

Ephesians 4:31

Colossians 3:8

Proverbs 25:28

Proverbs 10:19

Proverbs 12:18

Ephesians 4:29

Proverbs 21:23

What steps do you need to take today to rid your mind of anger and bitterness? Write those steps out and place them where you can see them regularly.

Forgiveness is a 5-Step Process

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32

It's easy to say we forgive, so why do the angry, bitter feelings of lack of forgiveness still linger? Why are our thoughts consumed by the replay of the offense? If we are Christians, why is it so hard to completely forgive?

As a woman who has struggled with this issue, I know the conflicting emotions and overall stress the lack of forgiveness causes. Our Christian conscience literally screams at us to forgive as Christ has forgiven us, yet our natural instinct tells us to retaliate because we are feeling genuine pain. We expect forgiveness from God for our own transgressions, yet we refuse to freely give forgiveness to others. This conflicting turmoil of emotions eventually causes us to end up in bondage to our hardened heart. And this results in a broken relationship with God and others.

When I finally realized I wasn't capable of forgiving on my own, I cried out to God and He led me on a journey to complete forgiveness that has changed my life. With the wisdom of the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I found a five-step process, which finally enabled me to forgive and release the bitterness bottled up inside. Here are the five steps that can help you find that freedom:

Admit Your Anger to God.

Harboring anger, a lack of forgiveness and contempt toward another person is to be guilty of something that in God's sight is similar to murder. Indulging in those thoughts and emotions grieves the Holy Spirit with us. To be set free from the sin of anger and hardness in the heart, one must first confess the sin to God. The apostle John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

Reconcile as Much as Possible.

Despite the offender's reaction, it's important to be a peacemaker. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9). We are disobeying Christ if we refuse to make the first move to make things right – even if the other person is also in the wrong, perhaps more so than we are.

Pray For a Change of Heart.

Complete forgiveness begins with prayer. Jesus said when we pray if we hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that our Father in heaven may forgive us our sins. God is the only one who can take those angry, resentful feelings and replace them with forgiving grace.

Let Go of the Past.

Saying, "I can forgive but I cannot forget" is only another way of saying, "I will not forgive." It's our human instinct to remember even the smallest offenses and to replay the same transgression over and over. Complete forgiveness means letting go of the past.

Have Patience.

Don't expect to forgive in a single second. If the hurt is deep, complete forgiveness may take longer than we expect. Wait for it patiently. God is slowly building our character and we need to keep in mind we are exactly where He wants us to be for our spiritual transformation.

The blessings of forgiveness are just waiting to be grasped. Forgiving those who hurt us is the key to personal and spiritual peace, and finding the joy that we all long for.

Encouragement for Today

Is there someone who has hurt you that you haven't forgiven? If so, who?

Look up the following verses and write down what God says about forgiveness.

Psalm 66:18

Colossians 3:13

Matthew 5:23-24

Luke 23:24

How do those verses make you feel?

What steps do you need to take to forgive the transgressor?

What's stopping you from taking those steps?

Connecting to God in an Intimate Way

Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4:8a

As daughters of the King, we were created to experience an intimate and loving relationship with Him. Our Father wants to get to know us better. He wants us to actually know Him, not just know about Him. He's patiently waiting for us to draw near to Him so that He can draw near to us.

A few years ago, I experienced the difference between knowing about God and actually knowing God. I was one of those zealous new Christians who embraced my faith with a fervor, joining one Bible study after another – sometimes attending more than one at a time, just to learn more about God and the Christian faith. I was a regular volunteer at the church, taking on one commitment after another. I thought I was the epitome of what a Christian woman should be. Yet I was struggling. I wanted and needed something more. For months I searched, yearning for something I couldn't define.

Finally I realized I was looking for a deeper, more personal relationship with God, a relationship where I could be truly honest and reveal my inequities, my struggles. I had been so busy doing things for God that my relationship with Him simply had not grown. Now He was showing me that what I wanted and needed was to stop doing and to focus on drawing near to Him. This was a difficult step for me because I had grown up doing good deeds to earn approval and affection. I had spent my life focusing on pleasing others and very simply had carried that ideal into my Christian faith. I was now doing good deeds in an effort to please God and earn His affection.

I knew God's love was not something to be earned, yet I was still trying to do more good deeds in an effort to earn His love. I was too busy doing to connect to God in an intimate way. When I began to draw near to the Lord, He began to draw near to me. It was then that I began to feel His love in a very real and powerful way. It was then that God's love permeated the deep recesses of my soul.

For a variety of reasons, many women view God from a distance and live their lives maintaining a distant, often superficial relationship with Him, much like I had been doing. Some women may have had earthly fathers who were distant or fathers that hurt them in one way or another and so they place that ideal upon God. For me, things began to change when I replaced my false ideals of who God was with the truth of who God is. Things began to change when I began to let God be my Abba Father and truly opened up my life – all of it, not just the good stuff, but all of it to my loving Father. That’s when my Christian walk changed. That’s when I felt God’s love, His unconditional love, in a powerful and very real way. Why? The answer is simple; I connected with God because I began to remove from my life anything that would get in the way of my relationship with Him and the sin that had held me back for the past few years. I began to run with perseverance the race set out before me. So let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, (Hebrews 12:1).

Intimacy happens when we stop doing and consciously make an effort to draw near to God, developing an intimate relationship with our Abba Father – instead of a superficial one. We must open our hearts wide revealing everything that hinders and the sin that entangles so we can embrace the love that our Father so desperately desires to shower upon us. Then we can connect to God in a very real and intimate way.

Encouragement for Today

What are some characteristics you remember about your own father, stepfather, or guardian?

Have any of your these characteristics been transferred to your ideal of what God is like? If so, what characteristics?

Has this harmed or hindered your own relationship with God?

Look up the following verses and list the attribute that is revealed about God.

Exodus 6:2

Deuteronomy 32:4

Psalms 18:30

Ecclesiastes 12:1

Malachi 3:6

Romans 10:12

1 Thessalonians 5:24

Hebrews 11:6

1 John 4:8

What, if anything, do you need to reveal to God in order to deepen your level of intimacy with Him?

Take a few moments today and ask God to show you any areas in your life that you have concealed from him. If He reveals an area to you, confess any sin and open your heart to receive the love your Father has been waiting to give you.

Creating a Quiet, Solitary Place

Be still and know that I am God. Psalm 46:10

Quiet time spent with God is the most important part of the day. For this reason, I regularly get up earlier than the rest of my household to spend some time in recollection, meditation, and prayer. For me, this time is spent with my Bible, devotional, Bible study, and most of all – my journal. On the pages of my journal is where I converse with God, where I express my frustrations, hopes, and dreams, and offer praises to my Father.

Onto the pages of my journal I write whatever is on my mind and unsettling my spirit. It's where I bare my soul and cry out to God. I simply can't say enough about the importance of journaling in my spiritual walk. Many of you, I know, don't enjoy writing and when someone places a blank page in front you, oftentimes your mind is a reflection of the page - it's blank. That's okay. Journaling certainly isn't for everyone.

Some women converse with God over their morning coffee, others bare their souls when they get into bed at the end of the day and some spend quiet time with their Father during an early morning walk or a late afternoon jog. It doesn't matter where or how you spend time with God; the important thing is finding that quiet, solitary place where your spirit can connect to His.

Everyone needs some time alone for reflection. Some time when she hears nothing except her own thoughts and the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. Some time when she can be still and know He is God (Psalm 46:10.) This quiet time of reflection helps minds focus and lightens the day-to-day load, especially when burdens are turned over to a loving Father in prayer. Some of you are reading this and loving the concept of creating a quiet, solitary place where you may converse with God, but you are wondering where in your hectic day you can find a place even remotely quiet.

Listed below are some ideas to help you find ways to silence your mind, quiet your spirit and open your heart to God, nurturing your relationship with the Father. Today, choose one of these tips and carve ten minutes out of your schedule where you can spend some time – just ten minutes - alone with God, listening for His voice amidst the hustle and bustle of life. It's only by creating a quiet, solitary place that we can truly connect to God in an intimate way, nurturing our mind, replenishing our spirit and receiving His love in our heart.

Encouragement for Today

Here are several tips to help you spend time every day in the presence of God. Choose one today and then follow through, spending just ten minutes at the throne of God and see what a difference it makes! You may want to experiment and try one every day for the next few days, or you may come up with your own idea for creating a quiet solitary place to connect with God based on these suggestions.

Get up a few moments earlier than the rest of the household and spend the first few moments of your day with God. You may want to make yourself a cup of coffee or tea and find a quiet, comfortable place where you can spend some time relaxing in the presence of the Father.

After everyone is in bed, curl up in your most comfortable chair and spend ten minutes recollecting the events of the day with the Lord.

Go to bed a little early this evening, spending some time reflecting on God and His attributes.

Take a bath, instead of a shower today. Add some of your favorite bath salts or bath oil into the water and spend ten minutes soaking in the bathtub, enjoying a conversation with God.

In the car, while waiting for your children, find an easy-listening station on the radio, close your eyes and relax in the solitude, calming your tension and gaining perspective for the rest of the day.

While preparing dinner, think of ten blessings in your life. Thank God for each one. If you desire, you may want to write these blessings on a tablet or in your journal. This written record can provide guidance and insight during future life events.

While toddlers are napping, spend some time alone with God to reenergize for the rest of the day.

During your regular exercise routine, whether it's walking, jogging, lifting weights, or another form of exercise, focus on conversing with God instead of watching television or talking to an exercise partner.

If you're a gardener, set aside time spent in the garden as time to spent praising God for the beautiful creation of nature.

Come up with your own idea for spending just ten minutes alone with God and write it here.

Cultivating a Life of Prayer and Praise

Very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35

We are offered the greatest privilege imaginable – access to the attentive ear of our Heavenly Father, yet many of us seldom take advantage of this. I am a Martha by nature. I seem to always have lots to do – laundry, cleaning, cooking, errands, writing projects, gardening, the list could go on and on.

These things often interfere with time that is normally spent in the presence of the Lord and while my intentions are to meet with Him later in the day, most of the time I find myself slipping into bed, exhausted, and too tired to focus on anything other than sleep.

Other days, when I am in the midst of prayer, my mind wanders, the dogs demand my attention, someone knocks at the door, the phone rings or my mind simply won't stop thinking of all the items on my "to do" list – all while in conversation with God. We all lead busy lives, with lots to do and less and less time to accomplish these tasks, but finding time to make prayer a way of life is essential to discovering an inner wellspring of peace and serenity.

Jesus example of rising early and finding a solitary place to pray has been my inspiration. I developed a habit of spending my first moments every morning with Him and my prayer journal, getting up a few moments earlier than everyone else in the house. Otherwise, if I begin any task or in any way get off track, I never seem to find the time to spend alone with my Heavenly Father cultivating my prayer life.

Prayer is so important in gaining intimacy with God. It's the language of the heart and gives us a tool to express our inner thoughts and emotions. It's a special connection to God, an ongoing conversation and growing

friendship through words and thoughts. It is the way we communicate with our loving Father and the way we lighten our load as we turn our burdens over to the Lord.

Prayer is also a great time to take stock of the blessings in your life, giving thanks to the Lord for all He has provided. I've often heard others suggest that by making an inventory of all the things in your life that you are grateful for, daily problems and difficulties begin to take on a new perspective, sometimes even dwindling in comparison to the blessings. There are journals available designed specifically to be used as gratitude journals – a place to list the blessings in your life. Today, why not begin to cultivate an awareness of gratitude by listing five items you are grateful for, taking the time during your conversation with God to thank Him for each one? Then watch, as your problems seem to shrink when compared to all that is good in your life!

In addition to praising the Creator for all that is good in our lives, we are instructed to be thankful for the difficulties we endure as well. Each difficulty God allows in our lives makes us a little more dependent on Him and less on ourselves, while, at the same time, brings us closer to the woman we've always wanted to be – the woman God designed us to be. It's during difficult times that we are prone to turn our attention more fully to God, learning more about His attributes and cultivating an intimate relationship. It's then that we begin to trust and obey Him, knowing that our suffering is oftentimes simply a faith stretcher that leads to godly character.

Today as you spend quiet time with the Lord, take the time to thank Him for a difficulty you encountered recently. Thank Him for stretching and strengthening your faith and for developing your character. Express any sinful thoughts or negative feelings such as anger or resentment to the Lord. Ask for forgiveness. Admitting these feelings deepens your relationship with the Lord and lightens your burdens, advancing you one step closer to attaining a simpler life.

Are you ready to experience serenity instead of stress? Are you ready to delve into a deeper, more intimate relationship with your Heavenly Father? Gratitude, in spite of difficulty, is the key that will unlock the door to the serene life, regardless the turmoil and chaos your life may encompass. "Blessed is the man who perseveres

under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him,” (James 1:12.)

Encouragement for Today

List five items you are grateful for and take a few moments to thank God for each one.

What sort of difficulty have you encountered recently?

Write out your own prayer to God, thanking him for the difficulties you are encountering, for stretching and strengthening your faith and for developing your character.

Section Three
Caring for the Body

A Woman's Body – God's Temple

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Corinthians

6:19

No doubt you looked at the topic of this section and cringed...I nearly did when I thought about the task of writing about it, yet if you are like most women, it's an area of your life that is careening out of control. Physical discipline is a constant struggle, especially with busy schedules and constant temptations.

Let's face it, it's easier to grab fast food than it is to take the time to plan and prepare a healthy dinner, especially when you are chauffeuring kids from activity to activity or when you work outside the home. Each one of us knows we need to eat right, exercise, drink plenty of water, avoid stress – basically care for our body the way we care for those we love. So why don't we? Why do we let the demands of life rob us of doing something that is so vital to our health?

When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit lives in us and we are obligated to care for our bodies as the living temple of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately many of us are slaves to our bodies, its appetites and its desires.

Like many women, I love sweets, especially chocolate, I don't enjoy exercising, and I often don't drink enough water. Caring for others has taken a toll on me, as it has many of you, and I have little energy left for personal care like manicures, let alone spending an hour at the gym every day. Yet that is exactly what I need to do for myself in order to care for my body, in order to care for God's temple the way He desires. I need to make the time to care for myself or else I won't have the energy to care for my family the way I desire.

Stormie Omartian, author of “Greater Health God’s Way,” writes, “If you don’t make room for a specific thing in your schedule, you won’t have room for it. Sit down and decide the five W’s: who, what, where, when, and why.” Omartian stresses that the seven steps to greater health are as simple as peaceful living, pure food, proper exercise, plenty of water, prayer and fasting, periods of fresh air and sunshine, and perfect rest.

Today, I encourage you to free some time in your schedule to exercise, even if it’s only a ten-minute walk around the block. Begin to care for your body, not as your own, but as the living temple of the Holy Spirit. After all, if God were sitting at your dinner table, would you offer him cookies or a healthy meal of protein, hearty grains, fruits and vegetables?

Encouragement for Today

Have you ever thought of your body as the living temple of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

What does 1 Corinthians 6:19 mean to you? Does it make you more aware of how you care for your body? Does it make you want to take better care of yourself?

In what areas do you need to take better care of your body? Do you need to begin an exercise program? Are your eating habits bad? Are you getting enough rest and avoiding stress as much as possible? Do you smoke? List three ways you could take better care of yourself physically.

Today why not choose one of the poor habits you listed above and dedicate yourself to expunging it from your life. Write the habit in the space provided below and next to it a new habit that will replace the unhealthy one. Once you have overcome the unhealthy habit, begin to knock off the other unhealthy habits one at a time until you have replaced each one with a healthier alternative.

Discipline is a Journey

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11

When most of us think of discipline, we think of the unpleasantness of our youth, getting in trouble at school and undergoing punishment are the first things that usually come to mind. But discipline is so much more than that. Discipline is the reason athletes make the Olympics. Discipline is how people graduate from college and go on to law school. Discipline is how people who have been overweight all their lives are able to lose 50, 75, even 100 pounds.

The secret behind every successful person is discipline. Yet discipline is so opposite to our culture and the way most of us live on a daily basis. Television and radio advertisements tell us to buy more, eat more, and do more. Psychologists tell us if it feels good – do it. And infomercials are always offering the quick fix for weight loss, younger looking skin, eliminating cellulite, and becoming wealthy – just to name a few.

It's no wonder, then, that we want it all and we want it now, whether it's a house full of possessions, the loss of 20 pounds, or achieving a long-awaited goal. Yet nothing worthwhile comes quickly. Maybe that's why so many lottery winners end up unhappy. It takes discipline to achieve worthwhile goals, no matter if they are physical, mental, educational, or spiritual. Quick results – we all want them, but our character is built when we discipline ourselves, set goals, and focus on the journey instead of quick results.

Discipline binds together the mind, body, and spirit on a quest to achieving a much-desired goal and the abundant life that achieving the goal provides. God's abundance and joy are the result of a disciplined life.

I have tried to lose the same 20 pounds for the past several years. Sometimes my weight is up and other times I'm a step closer to success. Why does success elude me? It's because I lack the discipline to follow a diet and

exercise program regularly on a long- term basis. I want the quick fix. I want to be at my desired weight after just a few days or a week, but 20 pounds takes longer than that to lose.

What's my biggest mistake? Instead of seeking the quick fix, I need to take joy in the journey. The weight did not appear overnight and it will not disappear with a quick fix. It's only through the daily discipline of eating right and exercising that I will ever lose those dreaded 20 pounds.

Do you have weight to lose? Do you need to add exercise into your daily routine? If discipline is your roadblock to success like it is mine, then heed the words that Solomon writes in Proverbs 15:32. "He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding." The Message has an even more powerful translation. "An undisciplined, self-willed life is puny; an obedient, God-willed life is spacious."

If we've lived most of our lives solely by our passions, discipline may be a difficult task. So how can we succeed? Instead of responding to a disciplined lifestyle by feeling sorry for ourselves, we can accept it gratefully knowing that we are one step closer to finding balance and consistency in our lives. Sometimes it's the small steps that achieve the goal, rather than trying to do everything at once. Soon those small steps will turn into much larger ones, and before you know it, you will have achieved your goal. And remember, if discipline were easy, the results would not be so rewarding.

Encouragement for Today

Do you lack discipline in an area of your life? If so, what area? Look up the following verses and list reasons why discipline is important.

Proverbs 1:7

Proverbs 12:1

Proverbs 23:23

Proverbs 25:28

Proverbs 28:19

Do you think that you can achieve any goal without discipline?

What small steps are you going to take today to add discipline into your life?

Coping with Physical Ailments

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Psalm 119:71

Just as our spirits need time for rest and restoration, so do our physical bodies. Often, though, we continue our break neck pace, forcing our bodies to work harder and harder while sleeping less. We ignore the signals our bodies send us, ignore the ways they speak to us in the form of aches, pains, headaches, exhaustion, and a host of other ailments. We shut them up by popping a few more pills to stop the pain. We don't want to slow down long enough to listen to what our bodies are trying to tell us and then it happens...our bodies have finally had enough.

Psychologist, marriage and family therapist, Dr. Steve Stephens, coauthor of "The Worn Out Woman," writes, "As long as you deny, ignore, or minimize these symptoms, you are headed for trouble. If you don't do something to change, you can easily end up with health problems, broken relationships, severe depression, or a number of other difficult consequences."

I abused my body for years living an unhealthy lifestyle of yo-yo dieting, taking all sorts of supplements to aid in weight and fat loss with bouts of overeating followed by starvation diets, all with no regard to what it was doing to my body. I was desperate to stay thin, when my genetic makeup didn't support that ideal and I was willing to do just about anything to remain that way. All that came to an abrupt end about five years ago when I was diagnosed with an under active thyroid – no doubt from the years and years of abuse it endured, which was followed by two years of severe fibromyalgia symptoms. When my body finally shut down, I was forced to take the time to find out what was wrong. I had no choice. I realized that my choices – the way that I ate, the way I pushed my body refusing to rest, and my refusal to maintain an exercise program had finally taken its toll. I had to change. I wish I could say it was a quick and easy process. It wasn't.

God slowly began to guide me to the right medical professionals, books, and individuals who would show me ways I could improve my lifestyle choices. I went to several different doctors, including a therapist who specialized in fibromyalgia, had a variety of tests, and quickly realized that my overall health was in a shambles.

Living through those two years of pain and exhaustion, not knowing when or even if I would ever feel better, made me appreciate caring for my body in ways I never thought possible. I learned that it's okay to rest, even if that means taking a nap in the middle of the day. I learned that it's okay to say "no" to activities – even good activities, if you know it may impair your health by causing exhaustion and burn out. I learned that I can't do it all, no matter how much I want to. But most of all I learned to rest in my Father's arms, even on days when despair made it difficult to think, let alone pray.

As I look back, I realize that the collapse of my body was one of the greatest blessings in my life. It forced me to appreciate the poor health I have always had, knowing that it could be so much worse. Most of all, though, it made me focus on Jesus, who truly is the answer to all our troubles, and the journey He guided me on to better health.

I wish I could say that my journey to health and vitality is over, but it's not. My health is still a challenge for me and I think it probably always will be. Recently diagnosed with diabetes, I am learning even more ways to live a healthy lifestyle. I have maintained an exercise regimen for the past several months and am eating healthier than I have in years. My faith is strong and I am more determined than ever to live a lifestyle that glorifies God and this temple He has given me to care for.

Encouragement for Today

Take a few moments and take an honest look at yourself. What physical, emotional, or spiritual symptoms do you have that may indicate you are operating on overload? Write out these symptoms.

Think about your lifestyle for a few moments. Are there circumstances that are contributing to these symptoms? If so, list them. Can these circumstances be changed?

God is ready and willing to provide guidance and comfort in our times of weakness and suffering. Look up the following verses and write out the ways God provides help.

Philippians 4:19

2 Samuel 22:33

2 Corinthians 4:7-9

Isaiah 40:30-31

Psalms 91:4

Finding Satisfaction with the Woman God Created

Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load. Galatians 6:4-5

In today's society where perfect women with perfect bodies are plastered on billboards, on magazine covers, on television and movie screens, it's no wonder women find themselves constantly comparing their endowments with the world's standards. And it's understandable that many women, including myself, find they simply don't measure up.

With the average size of these supermodels ranging from a mere size "0" to a whopping size "3", it's no wonder today's wife and mother feels inadequate to say the least. Most of us have never seen sizes that small, except when we were children, at best. Have you ever noticed that size 12's are rarely left on the racks, while all those tiny sizes are left in abundance? That's because, according to clothing manufacturers, size 12 is the most common size in America.

Did you know that one of the most famous actresses in the 1960's wore a size 12? That's right...Marilyn Monroe, the sex symbol of that era, wore a size 12. So why are we comparing ourselves with today's super thin, exercise obsessed models?

"Have you ever noticed that women are constantly comparing themselves with one another? It's like a national obsession! We compare our hair, our clothes, our bodies. We compare our husband and our kids. We compare our status as working or stay-at-home moms. We're constantly comparing! And what good ever comes of it? None," writes Donna Partow, author of the book, "Walking in Total God-confidence."

I have to admit, I've been caught in what Partow refers to as the "comparison trap" for nearly all my life. I'm constantly criticizing myself and wishing that I had longer legs, a smaller stomach, better health and that overall I was a thinner person.

I long for what Kelly or Susan have, instead of being grateful for what my Heavenly Father has given me. Perfect-looking women intimidate me and to my dismay, many times cause feelings of jealousy and envy to overtake my demeanor.

Jealousy and envy are joy robbers that lead to bitterness and a host of other unhealthy things. This is not what God wants for me or for any of you. He wants me to be me and for you to be you and He wants us to be thankful for the women we are, the women He created us to be. God doesn't make mistakes. He designed us with care and deliberation and He loves His creation. We are His children created in His image.

Isn't it time we act like the royalty we are? Isn't it time to let go of the world's expectations and focus on being the best women we can be? Isn't it time to fix our eyes on Jesus, and compare ourselves to true perfection from the inside/out, instead of being distracted by those around us who seemingly have it all together?

Today, I encourage you to ask God to show you how to overcome personal dissatisfaction. After all, true satisfaction doesn't come from the way we look, what we do, or what we have, but rather is a result of Who we know.

Encouragement for Today

Is there a certain characteristic that you have always disliked about yourself? If so, what is it?

Is there an attribute that you are glad you were born with, something that you wouldn't want to change?

Take a few moments and praise God for creating you just the way you are, admitting that He never makes mistakes, that He created you just the way you are because that's the way He wanted you to be. Ask our Father to help you accept your faults along with your attributes and to show you ways to improve areas that you are dissatisfied with.

Exercise: Developing a Daily Routine

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1

Let's face it – we all know that we should be exercising and our intentions are to do just that. Yet the busyness of life and the hand of duty wreak havoc on our schedules and most days, as well intended as our intentions may have been, we fail. Why? What's the number one reason we fail to exercise?

The most common excuse is that there's not enough time in the day because of time spent caring for family and the resulting exhaustion that drains any desire to exercise. I struggled with this very issue for years.

Sometimes I would begin an at-home exercise regimen and manage to maintain it for a few months. Every so often I would join a gym and stay the course for a time, but inevitably something would happen to me physically and I would be forced to quit. Other times I would haphazardly exercise once or twice a week, not really gaining much benefit from the ease at which I exercised. Most of the time, exercise was simply not important enough for me to find the time to do.

However, with the onset of diabetes, that was something I had to change. Exercise had to become a habit for me. I no longer had the option of shrugging my shoulders when I looked at my out-of-shape body in the mirror. Now I had to do something to rectify years and years of neglect.

For me, the key to maintaining an exercise program was making it a daily regimen that is scheduled. It's too easy to get up in the morning and get involved with housework and other day-to-day demands, thinking that I would exercise later in the day. All too often that just didn't happen.

The key to making regular exercise a habit is to just do it, even if it's only ten minutes a day. And the key to maintaining a regular exercise program is quite simply to not miss a single day, except Sunday. For me – and I think that we women are pretty much the same on this account, missing one day often leads to two and once you miss two it's easy to fall off the wagon, so to speak. My number one rule is to exercise often, because once I get into the habit of exercising regularly, my body misses it if I skip a session.

You may be reading this and know that exercise is fine and dandy, but are thinking there's no way you can fit it into your schedule. I know how busy your life is, but I am telling you that you can fit some form of exercise into your schedule. Truly you can. And you must, not only for yourself, but also for the loved ones you care for every day. Don't wait until your health fails to make exercise a priority – like I did.

Today, carve out just ten minutes and take a brisk walk around the block. I guarantee you'll feel better and have more physical, emotional, and mental energy for serving and giving to others. And by making exercise a daily habit, you'll look better, sleep better, enjoy all-around better health and maybe even lose a few extra pounds you've been carrying around for the past several years. If that's not reason enough to exercise, how about this: God's purpose for our lives calls us to discipline our bodies, to offer them as living sacrifices to our Heavenly Father.

Now, get your walking shoes on and take a stroll. You'll be doing something that benefits everyone you love, including yourself. In addition, you'll be worshipping your Heavenly Father in the process. What other reason do you need to make exercise a part of your daily routine?

Encouragement for Today

Each one of us has reasons for not making exercise a priority. What keeps you from exercising regularly?

List your excuses.

Take a few moments to examine your schedule. Where can you carve out some time for exercise? Could you find time first thing in the morning before everyone is awake? If you work outside the home, what about the last ten or fifteen minutes of your lunch hour? Maybe your family would enjoy taking a walk after dinner. Or maybe the yoga class you've wanted to try would be a good way to add some exercise into your schedule. In the space provided below write some ways to incorporate exercise into your daily regimen. For the next few weeks, try each of the ideas listed above and see which one fits into your daily schedule better, which one is so enjoyable that you will do it every day. And then, just do it and reap the rewards of disciplining your body.

The Benefits of Laughter

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs: 17:22

When was the last time you laughed, really laughed, the kind of laughter that brought tears to your eyes? Not counting the random chuckles, smirks, and grins that are shared in everyday conversation, how many times in a day, a week, a month, do you spontaneously burst into bouts of belly laughter? Most of us have a difficult time remembering the last time we laughed like that. Life has become so stressful and time-filled that we seldom slow down long enough to find the humor that is in everyday life. And laughter is a necessary component to overall well being.

Therapeutically, laughter not only lightens the mood, but also has far-reaching healing effects on the body.

Studies show that laughter boosts the immune system by reducing the dangerous stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, in the body. Some researchers suggest laughter has much the same effect as aerobic exercise on the body – relaxing and warming the muscles, nerves, and heart, as well as cleansing or ventilating the lungs.

Don Colbert, M.D., in his book, “Deadly Emotions,” writes that laughter is an infectious and spontaneous response that begins with a smile. “Smiles are built into you – it’s up to you to choose to express them. So... choose to smile,” notes Colbert. He suggests joy is a choice and so is misery, but by choosing joy, by choosing to smile, people will feel more and more like smiling. ““Laughter comes on the heels of smiling,” writes Colbert. “So even if you don’t feel like smiling, smile!” In the following paragraph, Colbert challenges his readers to choose joy and conquer stress-related deadly emotions.

“Let me ask you these final questions: How pleasant can you make today? For yourself? For those you love? For total strangers around you? I truly believe the more you give away joy – including smiles and words of encouragement – the more you will feel joy welling up within. Try it.”

Now that you know the benefits of laughter, go rent or buy some movies – comedies of course – read the comics, buy a joke book, or just sit back and giggle for no reason at all. After all, the Bible says, “A merry heart does good, like medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). And when the Great Physician prescribes laughter, it’s definitely worth trying!

Encouragement for Today

We often offer ourselves the least, and that includes a smile. Today, instead of looking critically at your faults, pointing out imperfections and examining all your blemishes, look at yourself with fresh eyes.

Look at yourself with the loving and forgiving eyes of our Heavenly Father and smile – really smile at yourself. And as corny as it may sound, look into your eyes and whisper out loud, “I love you just the way you are and God loves you too.” Who knows, you might actually begin to change from the inside/out.

Today, take the advice of Dr. Colbert and practice smiling at all the people you meet. You'll not only have a positive effect on everyone you encounter, but you'll also be caring for your body in a positive manner – and I know every one of you could use a little more TLC!

Uncovering the Goddess Within

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 1 Peter 3:3-4

The Bible describes Esther as a woman who took care of her appearance, dressed with care, and obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her (Esther 2:15). As soon as King Xerxes saw her, his heart was stolen and he made her his queen.

We've all known women like Esther. These women are beautiful from the inside/out. When they walk into a room, beauty emanates from within. Their beauty, like Esther's, is not only physical. Instead, it's more from character than from actual physical beauty, although many would describe these women as beautiful to look at. I'll bet when Esther walked into a room, people stopped and stared. I can only imagine how drawn to her pure beauty people were.

What woman doesn't long to be beautiful like that? All my life I have wanted to be beautiful on the inside as well as the outside. I think we all long for others to see us as more than flesh, but rather as beautiful souls. I believe Esther was a beautiful soul.

In today's society that's obsessed with beauty and fashion, it's difficult to find a balance between obsessing over our outer body to being slothful and lazy with regard to our physical appearance. Esther found that balance. She cared for her appearance and dressed with care, but she found favor with all who saw her because she also nurtured her attitude and inner spirit. Esther knew that true beauty begins inside and that others would be won over by her character instead of her outward appearance. Esther loved God and it showed.

The Bible actually contains very little about the outward appearance of women. In Genesis, Abraham called Sarah a beautiful woman, and both Rebekah and Rachel were described as beautiful of form and face.

The Proverbs 31 woman wore fine clothes of silk and purple, but verse 30 states, “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” The Bible is also clear that we are to bring glory to our husbands.

That means we should strive to look our best for him as often as we can. Applying makeup, wearing our hair in the style he likes, painting our nails, and dressing in clothes that compliment our size and shape are all things that we, as wives, can do to please our husbands. And let’s face it, we all feel better when we take the time to care for our appearance. It was part of the reason Esther was described as beautiful.

The gentle and quiet spirit referred to in 1 Peter 3 is something that can only be achieved by a close relationship with Jesus, by opening His Word and allowing it to transform you from the inside/out.

So today, give yourself a facelift from the inside/out. Open God’s Word and let His transforming power give you the beauty treatment of your life.

Encouragement for Today

Is there a woman who comes to mind who has inner and outer beauty like Esther? If so, what do you most admire about her?

What can you do to make yourself more like the woman you admire? Is she soft-spoken? Compassionate? Does she smile so big it reaches her eyes? Is her voice soothing? Do you feel loved when you are next to her? Do you like her perfume? The way she dresses? Think of some ways she emanates beauty and list them.

Then make an effort to incorporate one or two into your next conversation with friends or family. Before long, people will be admiring you and your beautiful soul!

Is there something special you could do to yourself today to make your outer appearance more appealing to your husband? Maybe something that he especially likes that you haven't taken the time to do lately? List some things he really likes you to do and choose one or two to incorporate into your routine.

When is the last time you asked God to help make you beautiful from the inside/out? Today, ask your Heavenly Father to help you become the woman you've always wanted to be, the beautiful woman He created you to be.

Section Four Realizing the Dream

The Secret to Serenity is Simplicity

For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret to being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. Philippians 4:11a-12

For years I was addicted to the whirlwind of activity that working, caring for the home and family, volunteering, and staying on top of the social agenda created in my life. That is until the chaos of living that way began draining my energy and suffocating my joy. It was then that I began yearning for a simpler lifestyle.

My quest to lead a simpler life began several years ago when my neighbor surprised me with an early gift a few days before Christmas. Inside I found a wooden sign with a simple, slightly primitive drawing of a country home. The word “SIMPLICITY” was at the top in oversized, bold lettering. “Simplify your life and you’ll find serenity,” she said with a knowing smile. Incredulous, I looked at her and half-heartedly smiled, thinking that a simpler life was a nice idea, but impossible to attain in this day and age. I was too caught up in the hustle and bustle of my own life to stop and think about the wisdom of her words. Instead I scoffed at her advice and hung up the sign in an out-of-the-way place.

Simplicity wasn’t a new concept to me. God had been trying to get my attention, trying to show me I didn’t have to do all and be all, and while the concept of a serene life appealed to me, I ignored His counsel and continued at my break neck pace.

Just a year earlier, my husband had thoughtfully given me the book, “Simple Abundance,” written by Sarah Ban Breathnach. “I knew from the moment I saw the title it was something that you would like,” he said as he

handed me the book. He was right. I spent every morning eagerly reading her words of wisdom and contemplated how to incorporate simplicity into my own hectic and harried schedule.

Another book, the timeless classic, “Gift from the Sea,” written by Anne Morrow Lindbergh, also found its way into my home. While Lindbergh wrote the book in the 1950’s, the wisdom found in its pages offers insight into reconciling our most deeply personal needs with obligations to family, friends, husbands, and work, and ways to find solace in the simplest of daily tasks. Her book offers a glimpse of the contentment and serenity that pervades the soul of those who seek simplicity, and made me long even more so for simplicity and the serenity that seemed to follow in its footsteps. Yet I continued being the epitome of today’s woman – a woman blindly doing too much, buying too much, a woman lost in the demands of day-to-day living. A woman lost in overabundance.

That holiday season, like most others, I’d spent the entire month of December attending several functions – a few that I even hosted myself, decorating our home as if it were a department store and making cookies and candy in ridiculous quantities. There were even handmade gifts in elaborately wrapped packages for each friend and family member. If I thought that doing all these things was going to give me an old-fashioned, serene Christmas, I was completely wrong. While my home was beautiful with its handmade decorations and home-baked goodies, and all the preparations that were intended to create an old-fashioned serene atmosphere, the holiday season lacked serenity in every sense of the word. My nerves were too frazzled and my schedule too full to relax and enjoy the festivities.

Shortly after that holiday season, my body had finally been pushed far enough and my health began deteriorating. For the first time in my life I was forced to slow down. “Yes” was no longer my response to every opportunity – it couldn’t be, which was one of the hardest things that I have ever had to do, but is exactly what I did. I even had to go as far as backing out of commitments that I had already said “yes” to, which was embarrassing to say the least. I had to cut out a lot of activities in an overloaded schedule. I had to pare down.

For me, paring down meant clearing out the clutter in every area of my life. It meant finally getting rid of the burden of extra baggage that I had hauled around for years – feelings of anger, bitterness, a lack of forgiveness and accumulations of things that cluttered my home. I sought the counsel of a very good therapist and during the course of the next six months unloaded a lifetime of anger and resentment. I also cleaned out every nook and cranny in my home and donated piles of excess to a local charity.

The little wooden sign has now taken a more prominent place in my home and every time I pass it I smile and think of all the wisdom that such a simple word holds. I thank God that my eyes were opened to see contentment from His point of view. Finally I have learned inner serenity is found when you let go of the nonessentials in life and make room for the things of spiritual importance instead. Serenity truly is found through living a simpler life, a life more focused on the purpose God has for each one of us, instead of on the nonessentials in this world.

Encouragement for Today

Is your life too busy? Your to-do list too overwhelming? What overwhelms you the most? What do you long to change?

Reread Philippians 4:11-12 and write these verses in your own words.

Do you long for the contentment Paul speaks of in these verses?

Paul's contentment came from seeing life from God's point of view, from focusing on what God wanted him to do and instead of what he felt he should do. Are you trying to do things your own way? Do you feel as if you should have more possessions, more abundance? If so, you may be creating stress with the choices you are making. Paul's example shows us that simplicity and contentment begin when we relinquish our desires to God's will for our lives. Does this sound too difficult to do? Read Philippians 4:13 and write the verse in the space provided.

The power we receive from the Holy Spirit is more than enough to enable us to accomplish God's will for our lives, to find the contentment Paul exhibits. Today, I encourage you to memorize Philippians 4:13 and focus on living out God's will for your life and not your own. You can do everything through Him who gives you strength!

Tunnel Vision

Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left. Proverbs 4:25-27

When I first became a Christian, I poured myself into every Bible study and ministry opportunity that came along. My ministry ranged from serving in the children's department to co-leading Bible studies. After awhile I began feeling overwhelmed, frustrated and exhausted, yet I continued.

One evening after I said "yes" to another volunteering opportunity, I sat back in my chair and contemplated how I could possibly keep up with everything. Job responsibilities, housework, errands, dinner preparation and chauffeuring my daughter to her activities, as well as all those evening meetings at the church, weighed heavily on my mind as I got into bed.

As a Christian wife and a mother, the volunteering opportunities are endless, so how does a woman know what to do or not to do? How do we learn to prioritize and let the other things go? I believe the answer is...tunnel vision. God does not intend for us to be so busy we have no free time, no quiet time alone with Him. After all, how can we be effective servants when we are so frazzled and stressed by our hectic schedule? We can't. We have each been uniquely equipped for different ministries based on our talents and interests - our spiritual gifts.

If you do not know what your spiritual gifts are, I encourage you to find out by taking a spiritual gifts test. Once you are aware of your gifted areas, it makes it much easier to volunteer only in areas where your gifts are used. Knowing my spiritual gifts has made it so much easier to avoid ministries that do not fit within their scope. We all need to remember that volunteering is good and can be a great source of satisfaction, but God gifted us for a reason...we cannot do everything in the Kingdom.

Tunnel vision is not easy for me. My eyes are constantly drifting to new opportunities because there are so many worthwhile ministries. And I would love to do them all, but I can't do everything and I am certainly not useful to God if I am completely overextended and overwhelmed. So I have learned to stay completely focused on the ministries that complement my spiritual gifts. And so must you if the desire of your heart is to live a less stressful and more joyful life.

Encouragement for Today

Are you overcommitted and overwhelmed? If so, what activities do you wish you weren't doing?

What activities do you wish you were doing?

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If so, do they fit in with your ministries and activities?

What changes need to be made to your schedule so that you are serving in areas that compliment your spiritual gifts?

If you still don't know your gifted areas, visit your local bookstore and inquire about books that will help you uncover yours.

Managing Your Time

Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. Psalm 39:4

Most women long for a well organized home where clutter is nonexistent and housekeeping chores and tasks are simplified. Yet time management is an insurmountable task for many, especially women who work outside the home. How often do you sit down exhausted at the end of the day and wonder where the time went? If you're like most women, I am certain you do it all too frequently. The path to serenity begins by knowing what fills your schedule. Spreading ourselves too thin, unrealistic to-do lists, and the tyranny of the urgent are notorious time stealers, which rob us of precious time. Some other time wasters are:

Refusing to delegate. I tend to have perfectionist characteristics and I am impatient. I want it done right and I want it done now. That mentality has contributed greatly to my exhaustion because very rarely do I delegate. I try to do it all myself. Time management experts suggest to overcome lack of delegation, we should convince ourselves it's not necessary to do everything ourselves by offering clear instruction to those we are delegating responsibilities to.

Refusing to say "No." Why do we want to say "yes" to everything we are asked to do? It's inevitable we are going to crash and burn because we can't continue to say "yes" without spreading ourselves too thin. To avoid this, experts suggest we must decide what must be done and what we want to do, and then say "no" to all other requests.

Talking on the phone. Don't let other people interrupt your day. Time spent talking needlessly on the telephone robs you of time you could be spending doing something else that's more enjoyable. Some ways to avoid this time waster is to let an answering machine or voice mail take your calls, screen your calls or schedule a specific hour where you return all calls.

Procrastinating. This, quite possibly, is the biggest time stealer of them all. It's also an energy drainer. Doing unpleasant or important chores first and dividing large tasks into smaller ones are some ways to stop procrastination from draining energy and stealing time.

Kathy Peel, author of "The Family Manager Takes Charge," recommends using what she calls, a Daily Hit List or a to-do list that helps sort and prioritize tasks. "Using a Daily Hit List saved (and continues to save) my sanity. Every day I think about and list everything that needs to be done, delegate whatever I can to my family, and delete the items that really don't need to be done," Peel said. The Daily Hit List divides the to-do list into seven distinct categories: home and property, family and friends, special events, food, money, time and scheduling, and self-management.

Sometimes taking an honest look at our activities and lifestyle can give us ways to save time and reduce stress. And once you have a better idea of where your time is going, it's easier to evaluate your choices and start looking for ways to cut back and pare down.

Then you can finally create a healthier and saner lifestyle. Today, make note of where you are spending your time by actually writing down everything you do and how long you are doing it. While this may seem like a nuisance, it will actually reveal where you are wasting time, so that you can begin to live the simpler, more serene life we all long for, the life God intends for us to live.

Encouragement for Today

Jesus was an expert time manager. Look up the following verses and list what tactics Jesus used to manage His time.

John 6:38

John 8:28-29

Mark 1:35

Mark 3:20-21

John 7:6

Could you apply any of these principles to your own life to help you manage your time better? If so, which one (s)?

Choose one of the verses listed above that best relates to you and write it on a card. Keep it with your to-do list and refer to it often when you are planning your day, week, or month.

Simplifying is a Journey

But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. 1 Corinthians 14:40

Simplifying is a journey you choose to take. It doesn't happen naturally – at least not in this lifetime. If you want to do the things you enjoy, if you want to live out your dreams, you must make the time to do them. To make your life easier, to find the serenity we all long for, you must stop jam-packing your schedule and you must find better ways of doing the every day chores in your life.

We all know that getting organized is a great way to save time, avoid stress and to make our lives easier overall. Yet choosing to change is often hindered by the day-to-day demands of living. By conscientiously making the choice to take the journey to an organized and clutter-free life, we can begin to focus on realizing our dreams, instead of worrying about pressing duties and deadlines. In order to be organized, we must stop wasting time looking for the misplaced, we must stop shuffling piles of clutter from one place to another. Instead, we must find a place for everything. There simply isn't a better feeling in the world than living in an organized and clutter free home. While this may seem like a lofty goal to say the least, it's actually quite easy to achieve. Below are some tips from organizational experts, as well as some of my own, for organizing the home, reducing clutter, and living a life more focused on abundant, yet simple living.

Try cleaning for just 15 minutes a day, one room at a time, until it's done. When one room is finished, you move onto another until the entire home has been cleaned and organized.

Clean out one closet, one room or one area every month. That way, you'll constantly be organizing and reducing clutter.

Keep a bag or box somewhere in your home for charities and donations, and when you find something that belongs there, put it there immediately. Drop the box off every few months or whenever it is full.

Put things away immediately. Instead of leaving things on the counter or by the back door, put things away as you go so that a sense of chaos never develops.

Sort mail the same day. Stacks of mail are one of the biggest nuisances in homes.

But by opening, sorting, and placing mail where it needs to go – immediately, mail never has a chance to develop into a stack of clutter.

Kathy Peel, author of “The Family Manager Takes Charge,” suggests enlisting the help of your family when organizing the home. She writes, ”Have a nightly seven-minute pickup sprint. Set a timer for seven minutes when everyone in the house picks up and puts away the accumulated clutter for the day.”

Establish one or two days a week where you do laundry, instead of trying to do it every day.

Purchase one of the many books available on organizing the home and follow the principles suggested to rid your home of unwanted items and clutter.

Have a garage sale. Clean out every room in the home and absolutely get rid of everything you don’t love or use regularly. You’ll make a little money and rid your home of clutter in the process!

Encouragement for Today

Today, begin your journey to living a simpler life by choosing to find ways to organize your home and reduce clutter. List some things you want to do every day to help you reach your journey's end.

Waiting on God's Timing

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Psalm 37:7

I'll be the first to admit – I'm impatient. I don't like to wait in lines or traffic, or for the results of something important. One of my favorite television shows is American Idol. On results night, the slow pace at which the results are revealed absolutely drives me crazy. And if someone I perceive as worthy is eliminated from the show, well, it upsets me. I very much want things done the way I perceive as right and I want things done now, hence I am a "right now" sort of woman.

That doesn't bode well living in this world as a daughter of the King. It's taken me years to grasp the realization that He works on His timetable, not mine. My natural tendency is to think that my life is all about me, what makes me happy, what makes me comfortable, what meets my needs and my timetable.

This way of thinking even extends to my family members. I am concerned for their comfort and happiness and foolishly place those same expectations on God. Yes, waiting on anything, even God's timing just doesn't come natural to me. I'll bet that many of you are much the same. Yet we are called by God to surrender our expectations, our timetable to Him and to wait on His timing, for His timing - unlike ours, is perfect.

When I decided I wanted to pursue my dream of becoming a writer, I foolishly wanted it to happen overnight. It didn't. Getting to the place I am today required several years of preparation. And honestly, I am still not where I'd truly like to be. One of my favorite sayings is, "Anything worthwhile is worth waiting for." That certainly has been and will continue to be true for my writing and it's true for most worthwhile dreams. Hence, patience has been forced upon me in the realm of my writing.

I learned several years ago to surrender my dream of writing to God and I have not been disappointed yet at where He has taken me or my dream.

Recently, God has been teaching me to surrender all my expectations to Him and to do it on a daily basis. If I don't do this, I internalize my impatience, which causes stress and chaos in my life. But when I give my expectations to God, He gives me His peace in return. And His peace is so amazing. It surpasses all understanding and calms me even in the most upsetting of situations. His peace is present in the midst of chaos, not despite it - but in spite of it.

Have you been stressed about God's timetable? Do you want to realize your dream today? Are you tired of waiting? If any of these questions are true for you, I encourage you to relinquish the controls and offer your dream to our Heavenly Father. For when you surrender all your expectations to Him, when you give-up on being a "right now" sort of woman, that is oftentimes when God decides to be a "right now" sort of God.

Encouragement for Today

I absolutely love the old-fashioned hymn, “I Surrender All,” by Judson W. VanDeVenter. The story behind the lyrics reminds me to be sensitive to the Lord’s leading, to surrendering. VanDeVenter’s dream was to become an outstanding and famous artist, and Christian service was the farthest thing from his mind. He felt God nudging him to give up his position in the public school system to enter the evangelistic field. VanDeVenter refused to surrender. The battle lasted for five years. Then VanDeVenter surrendered all his time and talents to the Lord, and wrote “I Surrender All” to commemorate his surrender to the Lord’s will.

Is today the day you need to surrender everything to our Heavenly Father? You may want to offer these words as your own song to the Lord, surrendering all of your talents, all of your dreams, all of your life to the One who loves you so deeply.

I Surrender All Judson W. VanDeVenter

All to Jesus I surrender; all to him I freely give;
 I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live.
 I surrender all, I surrender all,
 All to thee, my blessed Savior,
 I surrender all.
 All to Jesus I surrender; humbly at his feet I bow,
 Worldly pleasures all forsaken; take me Jesus take me now.
 All to Jesus I surrender; make me, Savior, wholly thine;
 Fill me with thy love and power; truly know that thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender; Lord, I give myself to thee;
Fill me with thy love and power; let thy blessing fall on me.
All to Jesus I surrender; now I feel the sacred flame.
O the joy of full salvation! Glory, glory to his name!

Friends are a Gift from God

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2

When life becomes a battle that seems too heavy to bear
A friend who loves the Lord is a friend beyond compare.
She listens to the heartache that we've managed to conceal,
She prays for us and with us until God's love seems real.
She admonishes and gently guides as we reveal our deepest fears,
And keeps the secrets of our souls, while she comforts and wipes our tears.
A friend who loves the Lord is a special gift from the King,
She's available day and night, and compassionately listens to everything.
I thank my God each and every day for giving me the gift of her love,
She's such a beautiful image of Christ, a gift sent from Heaven above.

Shelley Galbreath

Friendship is the cornerstone of life, the place where we, as women, can be ourselves. Yet, when demanding schedules and daily responsibilities distract us from appreciating life's most priceless gifts, we sometimes neglect to cultivate friendships. Friendship truly is a gift from God. A good friend laughs with you, cries with you and stands beside you no matter what trial you are facing. A good friend listens to our dreams and never doubts. Instead she helps you grow and believe the best in yourself when no one else does. Friends are treasures who enrich life and help us to realize our dreams.

When I wrote the poem listed above, I was at a women's retreat where the speaker had just finished talking about the importance of friendship. Before she left the podium, we were assigned a creative project to share with the rest of the women and I was inspired to write those words about a very special friend God had recently

placed into my life. This woman had intrigued me for years. She was warm and welcoming and she had a smile that lit up her entire face. I desperately wanted to get to know her better, but for some time my shyness kept me from approaching. When I realized she regularly mentored women who, like me, felt lost in a maze of despair, I finally found the courage to ask her if we could talk. That's a decision I have never regretted. We've been meeting regularly for the past two years and have become very good friends.

I share this because my friend's love, compassion, and guidance were vital in reclaiming my health and focusing me on what is truly important in life – my relationship with my Savior. During the time I spent with her, I laughed and cried, confessed and confided, and opened my soul to encompass the love of my Father like never before. I have never felt closer to any other human being, besides my husband, than my friend. For the first time in my life I removed the masks I'd worn for years and years and let someone see the real me. I shared my hopes, my dreams and my heartaches. I let her see the pain I'd hidden deep inside from the rest of the world and in doing so, I realized I'm really no different, no worse than anyone else. Without the love of our Father, without His forgiveness and grace, we all must hide behind a mask for fear others will see the ugliness we hide on the inside. But with His love, His forgiveness, we are set free.

Today, I truly feel set free from the chains that were holding me captive. And I know I would not be where I am today, I would not be writing this book, without the acceptance, guidance, and love from my friend. Today I encourage you to make room for friends – old friends, new friends, and acquaintances who may simply intrigue you. Why not think about meeting with one, as accountability partners, and develop a close, honest relationship, carrying one another's burdens and honoring God, while making your world a better place?

Encouragement for Today

Take a moment to think about your friends. Do you have one in particular that you feel especially close to? Have you ever thought of meeting together as accountability partners? Why or why not?

Is there someone who intrigues you, possibly a more mature Christian woman that you would like to get to know better? Would you feel comfortable asking this woman to lunch and approaching the possibility of meeting together? Why or why not?

A friend accepts you just the way you are. Who you are in your friend's eyes gives you a glimpse of who you are in God's eyes. Today, contact an old friend and make plans to get together. Why not tell your friend how important your relationship to her is and thank God for sending her into your life?

Finding Balance in an Unbalanced World

It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

Ecclesiastes 7:18

What's the key to staying balanced in a world that is far from balanced? I believe that by living harmoniously in mind, body and spirit, our lives as women, wives, mothers and daughters of the King, will find balance. This elusive balance is found when we avoid all extremes, when we begin to nourish our mind by transforming and aligning it with God's, when we begin to care for our body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, when we allow simplicity to permeate every area of our lives, including our souls.

Finding balance isn't easy to do, especially at first. It takes a conscientious effort to begin to make the changes that will ultimately change our lives from chaotic busyness to peaceful living.

The first step to a balanced life begins with making the time to connect to our Father on a daily basis, by actually working to cultivate the relationship. If today, as you are reading this, you still aren't carving out a few moments every day to spend with our Father, I cannot urge you strongly enough to begin. Did you know that it only takes 21 days before an activity becomes a habit? Can you spare just a little over three hours in the next three weeks to spend with a loving Father who longs to get to know you better, who longs to help you find balance in your hectic life?

Listed below are ten tips for simplifying your life and learning to rest for a few moments every day in the loving arms of our Father.

Set aside regular appointments with God on your daily calendar.

Memorize Scripture while you are waiting in the doctor's office, in traffic, or when you are waiting for your child to emerge from an after school activity.

Get up a few moments before everyone else in the house.

Spend the first few moments you are awake, lying in bed, praising God for the blessings in your life.

Read My Heart, Christ's Home and imagine Jesus in every room of your home.

Offer yourself every morning to God in faith – not in fear.

Take a bath and spend the time away from the rest of the family in the presence of God.

Take a walk and spend the time praising God for His many attributes.

While your kids are at school or taking an afternoon nap, take the time to do some stretching exercises and focus on praying for someone who is truly in need.

Surrender your time to God every day and ask Him to help you find ways to balance your life.

Encouragement for Today

Of the ten suggestions listed above, choose two or three that appeal to you. Write them in the space provided. Can you think of any other ways you could spend time in the presence of the Lord? If so, write your ideas here.

Spend the next week devoting yourself to trying the tips that most appeal to you or you may want to try a different one every day until you find the ones that work the best for you. What's important is to find some time every day to spend focusing on God and not on the demands of life. For the woman who cultivates her relationship with God can find balance, simplicity, and tranquility of spirit because she is resting in God and not in the world.

Conclusion

My dear friends and fellow sojourners, I hope the journey proved to be a time of renewal and reflection for you, a time when the demands and cares of everyday life were replaced with a focus on you and your relationship to our Heavenly Father. It has been my prayer for you throughout this journey that something of importance from this 30-day devotional would find its way into your life and would become a starting point for positive change.

I want to leave you with this prayer that was forwarded to me and so appropriate to end this book. May God guide you and bless you abundantly as you obediently follow His leading, His calling on your life. Thank you for reading Discouraged Moms' Devotions to Go.

A Mother's Prayer

Dear Lord, it's such a hectic day, with little time to stop and pray;
For life's been anything but calm, since you called me to be a mom.
Running errands, matching socks, building dreams with matching blocks,
Cooking, cleaning and finding shoes, and all those things that young ones lose.
Fitting lids on bottled bugs, wiping tears and giving hugs,
A stack of last week's mail to read – so where's the quiet time I need?
Yet as I go to bed each night, my heart is filled with true love's light;
As I take one last peek I see, this treasure You have given me –
God's own sweet blessing sleeping there, the answer to a mother's prayer.

Author Unknown

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