

## Chapter 1

### Just a Skit

It was supposed to be only a skit, a simple illustration for family worship at camp meeting. Six children volunteered to participate. All I had to do was stand on the stage pretending to spin plates on sticks - like a juggler. In one hand, I held three sticks. As each child walked past me, he or she showed the audience, and then me, a poster depicting a role or responsibility - Pathfinder leader, cooking healthy meals, Bible study, mom, exercise, gardening, *etc.* When the child offered me this new role, I'd say Yes. Then he would hand me something associated with that role - a doll, a Bible, a pan, a hoe - and put another plate on my sticks, give it a spin, and walk off. I'd be left spinning another plate on the sticks in one hand and trying to hold all the accessories in the other. Until finally, I couldn't hold another thing - literally.

As the last child walked off, I dropped everything except the Bible and read a verse. For the rest of the week, kids would pass me and say, "Hey, there's the lady that dropped everything!" Women would stop me and say, "That was too real!" or "That's my life!"

It was supposed to be only a skit, but it was very real. It was too much like our lives, too much like my life. Juggling so many roles and responsibilities, with more given to us constantly, we feel like we're going to drop it all. We always have a sense of being behind, of having to rush. We just can't keep up. But we don't know what else to do, except to keep on struggling.

Marcy works full-time outside the home - and inside the home. Her husband doesn't help much with the housework or the kids. Between juggling work and home, Marcy attempts to fit in a Bible study one evening a week and a weight management class another evening. Plus, she teaches Cradle Roll at her church. "I want to be involved at church, and I need the Bible study and weight management for myself," she says. "But when I walk in the house at the end of the day and the kids are fighting, the wash is piling up, and I can write my name in the dust on the furniture, I just feel like screaming."

Ashlin doesn't have children. Her husband and she have divided the housework in half. "We haven't gotten involved in church or our community much," she admits. "There is so much we want to do right

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now while we're young." She and her husband spend a lot of time playing. Hiking. Canoeing. Rock climbing. Biking. Traveling. They're always going somewhere or doing something. "Sometimes I think it might be nice to stay home one weekend and just work around the house or something. Or take the time to build a friendship with one of the women at church," Ashlin says. "But there is so much to do. We say we're going to stay home and get involved at church, but then there is another mountain to climb or a new bike path to try out."

When her oldest daughter was born, Steffany chose to quit her job and stay home with her children. "At first life was a fog. Never getting enough sleep. Always being tired. I felt that I was accomplishing something just to take a shower and get dinner ready by the time Neal got home. But then as the kids got older, people tended to ask me to do things because they thought I had all this time. I was at home. I didn't work. Even I forgot that my priority should be to play with, teach, and just be with my kids. Some days I just can't keep up with all the demands." Steffany serves as room mother for two of her children at school. There are field trips and fundraisers to organize and cupcakes to bake. At church, she teaches the juniors and organizes the fellowship meals. "And someone is always wanting me to babysit since I'm already home," she adds. "How can I say No?"

My own life tends to get out of balance easily. I have good intentions. Now that the boys are both in school during the day, Tim and I have chosen for me to remain at home in order to write and serve the ministries in which I'm involved. But too often my days are so full of other things that writing gets put off - not just for days, but for weeks and months. My list of things to do for the ministries grows longer and longer while I take care of the urgent requests that pop up each day - until the to do list seems overwhelming, and I put it off because I doubt that I can ever get caught up.

No matter how much we're asked to do, we continue on. We struggle to find balance. To juggle everything without dropping any of it. We try to find ways to juggle fewer things. We try time management ideas. We try to learn to be more organized. And it helps some. Still there is always more that needs to be done. And we find ourselves barely able to keep our heads above water.

But I don't want just to get everything done. Just to manage somehow to keep up with all my responsibilities. I don't want just to make it through each day, accomplishing the urgent, falling into bed exhausted at the end of the day. I don't believe that is what God wants

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for me. Or for you. I believe He's promised us more - rest, joy, an abundant life.

But too often life gets out of hand. The demands become too many. Rest and joy are non-existent, and the only thing that is abundant is the list of things to do.

Recently I sent a card to a friend that pretty much sums up the problem. It said, "We wouldn't have so many bad hair days if we weren't wearing so many hats." Too many hats. Too many roles. Wife. Mom. Daughter. Friend. Employee. Church worker. Volunteer. Housekeeper. Taxi driver. Nurse. Encourager. Cook. The list goes on and on.

And each of those roles carries so many responsibilities. As a mom, it's hard to keep up with cooking, cleaning, shopping, homework, getting kids to school, to soccer, and to a myriad of other places, plus teach them about strangers, sex, dating, God, and how to ride a two-wheeler. On top of all that, what our kids really want is for us to spend time with them. Playing. Talking. Snuggling. It's a full-time, important job. And that's just one role! Add to that all you need to do at work, church, and in the community, plus the time you need to give to other family members and friends, and it's no wonder so many of us feel that we're constantly running and constantly tired.

I know. This has been my life. Just trying to keep up with the things that had to be done each day took all my time. Many important things fell by the wayside. I was forgetting things. Losing things. And feeling guilty for all the stuff I wasn't doing - or was doing, but not as well as I could. I got on the plane in tears the day my youngest son kissed me good-bye at the airport again and said, "When you come home this time, Mommy, can you stay awhile?" (Later I found out that his concern wasn't due so much to the fact that I had been gone a lot, but to the fact that when I was gone, his dad kept him busy working!)

I knew something had to give. But what? All the things I was doing were good things. Most were things I felt sure God had called me to do. But I knew in my heart that the things in my life weren't in the right order. Too many days I was too tired from all the good things I was doing to get up and have time with God. I had quit my job when my oldest son was born to stay home and raise my children. But I was putting in enough volunteer hours to be working a full-time job. And the boys were spending most of their time playing by themselves while I tried to keep up with everything. That's not what I had intended. It's not what I wanted. Was that how life was going to be no matter what?

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Somewhere there had to be a balance between “doing” and “being.” There had to be a way to work, raise a family, and enjoy life, too.

I wanted time to play with my boys, to talk with them. Josh is a teenager now. So many changes. So many challenges. I know how critical the teen years are, and I want to be there for him. To keep the doors of communication open. To be involved in his life as much as he will allow. To guide him through the tough stuff that I know lies ahead. I believe that its more important for me to be here for him now than at almost any other point in his life.

I needed time to spend with friends - not always working on a project together, but just having fun and talking. But it seemed that the only time I got together with friends was to work on some church or school project. When one of my closest friends moved out of state, it hit me that I hadn't taken the time to cultivate new friendships. Seldom did I call someone just to talk. Notes and phone calls of encouragement were few and far between - yet that's how my ministry had begun. And many people were afraid to call me because I was so busy. They didn't want to interrupt all the “important things” I was doing. How could I have friends or encourage others if I didn't have time for people?

Then there was Tim and family. Tim and I had made a commitment to “date” once a month. But it had been months since we had had any time to ourselves, since just the two of us had gone out together. Days slipped by easily without meaningful conversation. Nights found us both falling exhaustedly to sleep, barely able to say good night. And the only time I saw my family was on holidays. Weeks would go by without time to stop by my mom's house, and she lived only ten minutes away! Weren't people more important than things accomplished?

At the same time, I loved most of what I was doing. I loved writing and traveling and speaking. I loved meeting all the new people and seeing God work in incredible ways. I loved my involvement in women's ministries at the conference and union levels. These were all things I felt God had called me to do. They hadn't been things I had ever dreamed of doing. Yet God had dreamt them for me. And I enjoyed it all. But still, the appointments were coming more frequently. And I was always planning some new idea or project.

And I still wanted to be involved in my local church. I loved the dozen or so kids in the junior-earliteen class I taught. I enjoyed

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working on all the church committees and teams; each held a special place in my heart. But I knew I wasn't doing any of these things as well as I should. Too many things were going undone. Too many details were falling by the wayside. But what should I quit doing?

Besides, I was growing older. And heavier. Where was the time to eat right and exercise? Wasn't I supposed to be taking care of my body, too? I couldn't get up any earlier or go to bed any later. Where was I supposed to fit it all in? In the busyness of the day, meals were too often whatever I could grab.

And of course, my time with God was supposed to be the most important part of my day. I was supposed to include Him throughout my day. I said He was my top priority, but too often the way I spent my time showed that my real priorities were deadlines and getting things done. Too many mornings I overslept and hit the floor running - skipping time with God, skipping breakfast, and flying through the day without much thought about it.

I had come to a place of exhaustion. I was tired of running. Tired of feeling guilty because I couldn't keep up with everything. I felt that I had nothing left to give. Heading out for another weekend away from home, I desperately wanted to cancel. To call and say I couldn't come. That I didn't have anything left to share. There were several Sabbath mornings when getting ready for church took every ounce of effort I had. Just putting one foot in front of the other seemed to take every bit of my strength. I didn't want to go, and I didn't know why. It wasn't like me. I had always wanted to be at church - to be a part of things. But all the demands on my time were catching up with me. Something had to give.

I'd been here before. Attempting to slow down. To simplify my life. To cut things out. To say No. I had learned a lot in every one of those areas. Yet the results weren't lasting. I'd do fine for awhile, but before I knew it, I'd be overwhelmed, overworked, and over-tired. How could I find lasting balance? How could I find time for what was really important? How could I do all I needed to do, all I should do, and still find time to be me?

I knew where to find the answer. It was just like the skit had said - I needed to drop everything and turn to God. "So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12, NKJV).

Yes, Lord!

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### Thinking and Talking About It

1. What is your schedule like? Comfortable? Too hectic? Over-demanding?
2. Make a list of all your roles - including employment, church committees and responsibilities, volunteer activities, roles involving family and friends, *etc.*
3. List all your roles in order of priority to you.
4. If you could spend an afternoon doing anything you like, what would it be? What would it take to make that happen?