

C H A P T E R 1

LIFE ON THE  
TREADMILL

*“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”*

— Mark 6:31

5:00 P.M.

Quitting time at last. I leave a pile of unfinished business on my desk and race out the door. Tonight’s going to be busy again, just like last night, and the night before that.

6:00 P.M.

After a quick dash to the grocery store and the babysitter’s house, I rush in the door, juggling sacks and dropping junk mail on the floor. My husband, Dave, waves from behind the lawnmower and yells, “When’s dinner? I’m starving!”

6:30 P.M.

After a slice of frozen pizza and a change of clothes, it’s time to go. Dishes will have to wait again tonight.

“When are you going to stay home for a change?” Dave asks in frustration, as he cuts up a piece of pizza for our two-year-old daughter, Kristi. “She misses you, and I need a break!”

“We’ll talk about it when I get home. I’m already late...love you!” I say as I shove the last bite in my mouth, grab my Bible, and head to the door.

Instantly little Kristi takes off toward me on a dead run, her little arms outstretched and big tears in her eyes. “Mama, Mama!” she cries. *Surely her mama wasn’t going to leave her again already...*

# COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

“I’ve got to go,” I explain, trying not to look as guilty as I feel. “Mommy will see you in the morning.” And with that I have to shut the door in her face. As I get in the car, I can hear her heart-rending sobs through the open window.

“I have to go,” I tell myself, holding back tears. “I’m teaching tonight, and I can’t let everyone down. After all, I’m just trying to help them grow.” Grow? Who was I kidding? Did I really want the women in my Bible study to follow my example?

7:05 P.M.

I rush into church, apologizing for being late and frantically trying to get organized. Putting on a polite smile, I ask, “Would someone like to pray, and we’ll get started?”

Pray? Oh yeah, that’s what I’d forgotten to do today. Come to think of it, it had been a long time since I’d really been in God’s presence. I’d felt overwhelmed and out of control for weeks now. Always answering to everyone else first, I had practically forgotten what it was like to listen for God’s direction in my life. I was tired, frustrated, and I felt far from the Lord.

I’d been gloriously saved a few years earlier, and so, like a beggar at a smorgasbord, I’d piled my plate full to overflowing with “Christian” activities. But now I was killing myself to do everything *right*; yet something was desperately *wrong*. I was just trying to make everyone happy. *Wasn’t all this just part of being a good Christian? Or was it?*

**Sound familiar? Share about a time when you really sought God for specific direction in your life, or a time when you didn’t but wished you had. What difference did it make?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## A BALANCING ACT

As busy Christian women, many of us deal with this kind of daily commotion. Juggling schedules, children, job responsibilities, and church and community commitments while trying to maintain some element of sanity can be overwhelming and discouraging. Too often our frantic schedules keep us from seeking God's specific purpose for our lives. Before we know it, we're burned out, spiritually drained, and exhausted. What time we do take to be with our heavenly Father is reduced to one more thing on an already long "to-do" list.

Jesus' friends, Mary and Martha, found themselves in a similar pressured situation. Can you imagine? The King of kings was coming for dinner! Talk about stress! Martha's mind must have been racing: *What shall we eat? Is the house clean? All the beds made? Do I need to pick up anything else from the market? I'm sure glad Mary's here to help!*

Read Luke 10:38–42.

What were Mary and Martha's individual priorities?

---

---

Which of these women do you tend to be most like?

---

When Jesus said in verse 42 that "*only one thing is needed,*" what do you think He meant?

---

---

---

I find it ironic how these two women are remembered. The Martha Stewart of Bible days tried so hard to do good works for the Lord, but in a lot of ways, she missed it! *In her efforts to make everything perfect, she failed to see the blessing of simply spending time with Jesus.* Meanwhile, Mary's act of quiet devotion to Christ landed her an eternal place of honor in God's Word!

# COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

But in case we're tempted to look down on Martha, let's remember that she was no loser. Her resume' might have read, "Hard worker with an eye for perfection," or, "Able to adapt quickly to unforeseen circumstances." *Yet she made the mistake so many of us make on a daily basis: She became distracted by the crisis at hand and lost sight of the big picture.* Think about it. This was the opportunity of a lifetime. A personal audience with the King of kings! A Q and A with the Master of the universe! And she missed it because of housework? Ouch.

Yet how many times do we fall for similarly lame temptations and choose the temporary over the eternal? I've done it so often that I can write a book about it! Been there, done that too many times to remember, and I *don't* want to go back!

Maybe you see yourself in this picture...working so hard, yet never taking the time to be refreshed in God's presence. Maybe you're the frustrated one, constantly going the extra mile, but receiving little joy from it. *Could it be that you've somehow gotten off track, filling your time with good things without reserving time for God's very best?* It's easy to do. A frantic pace is the status quo these days, yet our loving Father patiently woos us back to a closer walk with Him.

**Read Matthew 11:28–30.**

**To whom was Jesus speaking in verse 28?**

---

**What two words describe His character?**

---

**What promise does He make to those who come to Him?**

---

---

*Herein lies the reason for this study: to learn from the Master how to live life right and find rest for our weary souls in the midst of a crazy world.* My goal in writing this study is to hold up the standard of who God is, and to offer the hope of all we can become as we learn to walk in His strength instead of our own. My prayer is that this study will serve as a landmark in our lives as we use the Word of God to truly take stock of where we are in our relationship to God, where we want to be, and how we can get there.

I pray that this study will challenge you to the point of change and encourage you as you discover the unmerited grace of God. In these pages I will share biblical principles that have shaped my own life, as well as practical ways to apply them. But don't be fooled! I have no "magical formulas"! There are no three steps to perfection — just hope to live a balanced life of faithfulness to God, and to your family, as you learn to abide in His strength.

And just in case you're tempted to look to me as a biblical guru of some sort, I have a confession to make. I'm just like you! Like Martha, I've lived all of my adult life in the fast lane. Our van has functioned as an office, a mobile dining room, and practically a second home. As a mother of three very active children, now ages 18, 14, and 11, I know all about crowded schedules and needing to be in two places at once. And yet, by God's grace, I am learning to become a Mary. We're on the same journey! Yet through the school of hard knocks, I am learning to treasure my time with God above all else.

And you know what? I find that when I choose to start my day with God in prayer and in His Word, I am actually able to accomplish *more* than when I don't! I used to think I had to choose one or the other — be a Mary and pray all day, or be a Martha and actually get things done. But thank God, that is not the case!

Instead, I find that through my time with God, I am directed, motivated, and empowered to accomplish all that He wants to do through me each day, and to weed out the rest. It's a win-win situation when I let Him be in control. And when I don't? I spin my wheels, trying desperately to carry out *God's* plan in *my own* strength. Take my advice: It's not worth it!

## THE BENEFITS OF A LIFE OF WORSHIP

Let's look to God's instruction manual to discover the conditions and benefits of choosing to be a worshipper — living a *lifestyle* of worship that is truly honoring to God.

**Read Matthew 6:5–6.**

**What is the condition set forth in this passage?**

---

# COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

What is the benefit?

---

Read Matthew 6:25–33.

What is the condition set forth in this passage?

---

What is the benefit?

---

Read Isaiah 40:31.

What is the condition set forth in this passage?

---

What is the benefit?

---

Which of these benefits sounds especially good to you during this season of your life? Explain your answer.

---

---

---

## CHOOSING GOD'S BEST

But this book is *not* about making excuses to turn down hard work! Serving others is a huge part of the Christian life. In fact, the two greatest commandments can be summed up as to love God and to love other people. This study is about clearing the clutter from our schedules that can cause us to miss the joy of God's plan for us. God has specific, wonderful things for you to be doing during *this* season of your life, and over the course of your entire lifetime. Don't blow them off! They're too good to miss!

Read Philippians 3:12–14.

---