

THE UNBALANCED LOAD

Soak me in your laundry and I'll come out clean,
scrub me and I'll have a snow-white life.

—Ps. 51:7, TM

“Not another one!”

This was the somewhat-less-supportive-than-anticipated response I got from a good friend after telling her about my new book project, one geared toward encouraging women to bring balance back into their lives. Admittedly, it threw me a bit off-balance.

With a significantly softer tone, she continued. “Don’t we all know what the problem is by now? We’re too busy. Why can’t we just figure it out and fix it once and for all?”

Well, that is the question, isn't it?

One that is being continually explored, judging from the number of articles in every major women's magazine on eliminating stress, organizing your time, space, thoughts, and so on.

Obviously my fastidious friend is right. Many articles and books have been written outlining the steps for setting boundaries and drawing margins in your life—and, may I add, purchased by the pound, indicating to me an urgent and ongoing need.

Still her comments confirmed something I had already determined. This book would need to take a different twist. Rather than expounding more on the what-todos, I decided that exploring the why-we-don'ts might prove more helpful. Now all I needed was a profound theme, one that every woman would relate to.

Of course—laundry.

You see, I have a theory that life is like laundry. If we don't stay on top of it, it piles up quickly and, when neglected too long, can get really stinky. Then what do we do? Instead of taking time to sort things out, we just toss everything into the washer at once to save time. The next thing we know, the machine is overloaded, unbalanced, and dancing out of control. And the items inside? Too soon we discover that either what should be dazzling has come out dingy or, worse, the colors have all run together.

When that happens, it's time to turn off the spin cycle and take a look at how you're handling the home goods.

Of course, we're not talking laundry here but how to

THE UNBALANCED LOAD

manage our lives and relationships in order to avoid the need for costly future repairs. It's no secret. A machine that's constantly overloaded needs more maintenance and may still eventually break down.

The original adage "It all comes out in the wash" actually means not to worry. Given enough time, everything will eventually come out clean. Nice thought, and still true in some instances. However, today's "wash" has become a lot more complicated. We simply have to realize that the more we stuff in there, the less likely we're going to be pleased with how things turn out.

Unless you live alone on an island—and everyone who saw the movie *Castaway* knows even that has its challenges—life is full of complexities, usually in the form of people, responsibilities, and things. The common solution, in laundry terms, is to sort things out, keep the loads manageable, and maintain the machine. Yet how many times have we resolved to take control of our time or get better organized only to find ourselves a few months later overloaded and overstuffed once again? And maintain the machine? Yeah—like we have time to do that.

So what's a sister caught in the spin cycle to do?

Contrary to popular teaching, the key is not just better time management or optimum organization. Certainly those things can be useful tools in eliminating the clutter from our schedules and spaces. However, based on responses I've received from a vast repertoire of women's retreats, plus my own experience attempting to balance the myriad responsibilities and expectations accompanying 38-plus

IT ALL COMES OUT IN THE WASH

years of marriage and ministry, I've come to another conclusion: Discipline works long-term only when it's spiritually motivated.

The best motivation for getting our lives in order is to truly understand how much God loves us, what a wonderful plan He has for our lives, and, if given a chance, how He will help us eliminate whatever interferes with it. A certain popular pastor recently wrote a whole book about that—on purpose.

Trouble is, even with the best of motives, it's not going to happen instantly or miraculously. That, my frazzled friend, is where the detergent hits the agitator.

Living in an instant-answer, self-gratifying society, many of us continue seeking a one-time, one-size-fits-all solution. Something we can just plug into our emotional outlet and, *Voilà!* From that point on everything balances out and falls into place with minimum effort on our part.

We're also a generation of women who have been told we can do it all. Except we're not even sure what *all* is. Instead, with the breeze of women's liberation blowing in our hair, we continue to take on more and more responsibility, only to end up stressed and depressed when it becomes obvious that trying to do too much inevitably means doing nothing well. *Why, many of us wonder, instead of feeling fulfilled, do I feel as though I can't keep pace with the expectations I've put on myself?*

This brings me to the poignant point my aforementioned friend went on to make, though much more elo-

quently than I. “The Body of Christ in particular,” she lamented, “is still missing the fact that the problems of stress, overload, and balance are really surface-to-root issues. It’s much deeper than merely adjusting one’s calendar and trying to locate margins, although granted, this would help. Understanding the spiritual root of what our society has evolved into, including the fact that ‘the world is too much with us’ (a la Wordsworth) is the primary place to start. Without it, I don’t think any of us will get accomplished what we’re hoping to accomplish, and we certainly won’t influence the world for the Lord.”

Well said.

Frankly, I’m not convinced that women want to do it all. Could it be that much of the added activity we take on boils down to a subconscious search for identity, affirmation, and validity? In our persistent pursuit of being everything for everybody, we just keep adding things on without taking time to prioritize or evaluate what needs to be subtracted. As a result, it’s a long, frustrating time before some of us discover where our true God-given gifts and passions really lie.

Whether we put the expectations on ourselves or others put them on us, we don’t want to disappoint or shirk our responsibilities, so we simply can’t bring ourselves to say no.

Then what happens? We can end up feeling frustrated because we can’t control our circumstances, and we feel powerless to pursue our real passions and interests. We may

IT ALL COMES OUT IN THE WASH

end up resenting our responsibilities and anything, people included, we perceive is keeping us from feeling personally fulfilled.

Life comes in all shapes, sizes, and fabrics. While the permanent press parts of our lives may withstand a little more stress without showing the wear and tear, there are still the parts of our hearts labeled “Handle with care.” That’s the place where hopes and dreams hover, where our secret longings languish. We can’t treat them the same and expect them to hold up.

Some of us have misplaced the care instructions. Many in our society have wandered far from their spiritual moorings. Today’s lines of morality have been blurred; nothing is absolute. As a result, many of us are confused about what the roles and responsibilities of women really are. Some bear the emotional scars from unwise choices made based on corrupt counsel. Others live with the consequences of the poor planning of others. We come from broken homes with broken hearts, our foundation for setting solid priorities in crumbles. Is there hope, we wonder, of ever regaining control over our lives and finding joy in our current set of circumstances?

Yes. And therein lies my real reason for writing yet another book on this subject: to share some hopeful insights on life in the laundry room. If nothing else, we need encouragement to know that we’re not in there alone.

The truth is that no one lives without stress. If someone claims he or she has successfully eliminated angst from

his or her life, check for a pulse. Stress is part of life and may not always be a bad thing. Why? Stress can motivate us to take stock and make improvements. Face it—if our lives worked like a well-oiled machine, there would be no need for improvement.

There would be no need for God.

You see, to be stressed is human, to ask for help, divine. We're human, and as such, we're in need of divine direction. Here's the really good news: once we realize we need His help, God may actually be able to do something wonderful with us.

It has little to do with being skillful or competent. Women have always been amazing in what they can accomplish. Maybe that's part of the problem. We're too good at what we do. My hope is that we can step away from the spin cycle long enough to discover one important thing: the difference between *doing* it all and *becoming* all God wants us to be.

So, ladies, are you ready to do some laundry? Perhaps together we can *Gain* some knowledge that may help us turn the *Tide* and determine the right reasons for making some necessary and important changes—ones custom-made in the right sizes and shapes.