

All scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

You look up as the school bus rumbles by, screeching its brakes as it lets the neighbor kids off at the top of the hill. Suzie sits at the end of the dining room table, a pile of tissues beside her, crying through yet a third hour of her math lesson. Billy...where is that child!?... should have been at the other end of the table finishing the writing composition you assigned two weeks ago—no longer a twenty minute quickie. And where is John? No, not in the toi.... Yes, in the toilet again.

You deal with the toddler, toss the rags from the bathroom's mopping in the washer, and sigh. The merry voices of the neighbor kids echo outside and Suzie's tears begin afresh. "I'm *never* going to get done," she laments again.

Billy dashes by the window. You grab him and look him in the eye. "Oh no, you don't, young man. Back to the composition. And then finish your piano practicing and get ready for soccer. At this rate, you'll have to miss soccer again."

What's going on, you wonder? Where is the joy and confidence and excitement that began this grand adventure of home education? You started so well. The kids were so glad to be home. You were so glad to have them here. You had such a sense of the great things God was going to do through your faithful obedience and joyful surrender. But look at today. Look at the work undone, the tears, the frustration. Look at the dishes in the sink, the clutter everywhere, the projects that have taken over the house and left it practically unlivable. Where can you go to scream? Where can you go to cry? Why is it this way? There must be some magic key you're missing. There must be something you're doing wrong. There must be.....

The phone rings. It's your husband. It's going to be another late night. Before you can return the phone to the cradle, it rings again. It's the Sunday school coordinator calling to see if you'll coordinate the upcoming kids' fair to raise money for missions. After all, you're home all day. Most of the other mothers work. And before you can take a deep breath, there's another call—the lady down the street who needs a sitter tomorrow morning. She figured you'd be home anyway.

You tick off future commitments on your fingers. Soccer tonight from 4:00 til 5:00, rush home, get supper, to prayer meeting by seven. Field trip tomorrow at 9:00, piano at 3:00. Angela was trying to arrange a play date before the end of the week, co-op is on Friday.....

You remember the conversation about Beth last week. She put the kids in school. Public school. Her husband travels so much. She just couldn't keep up with the house and the yard and the lessons and all the rest. Said she cried for a full week about the decision, but was getting used to it. At the time you had shaken your head and marveled. Today, you know exactly how she felt.

Occasional weary days are a normal part of the life of a homeschooling mom, but when days become weeks or months, and the siege never seems to end, something is wrong. How do we regain the joy? How do we move from a sense of defeat to one of success and victory? How do we calm the nagging doubt that perhaps we can't do this after all, that maybe we *are* ruining our children just like the naysayers warned us?

This little booklet is intended to be a checklist or roadmap to aid in the process of getting back on track. God is faithful. He delights to bless His obedient children. His disobedient kids He desires to bless as well, though not in their disobedience. Repentance, redirection, and restoration are His themes throughout scripture. If any of these things seem to be something you're looking for, read on.

Throughout scripture God called His children to *remember*. They were to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. They were to remember the yearly feasts and the meanings behind them. They were to remember God's commands and faithfully do them. Being exhorted to remember is important because we are a forgetful people. We may not intend to disobey or get off track, but things have a way of getting lost between the cracks. We make good beginnings, but our lives end up like the wheat and the tares, the good

fruit getting choked out by the cares of the world and distorted priorities (Matthew 13:22). So what do we need to remember?

1. Remember the vision.

It's tempting to start with the vision of *homeschooling*, but the vision to remember goes far deeper than this. What is the chief end of man? Why did God create you and me in the first place? The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us it is that we might glorify God and enjoy Him forever. I can't think of a better summary of our purpose in life. We exist to worship God, in our thoughts, words, and deeds. Our joy is rooted in a right relationship with Him, knowing His peace, celebrating His goodness.

How much of our weariness is related to chasing after things wholly unrelated to glorifying God? How much is tied to being at odds with Him through disobedience, wrong motives, and wrong priorities? What are the practical implications of such questions? Think it through. By God's grace, take action.

2. Remember the battle.

News reports of terrorists aside, most of us *expect* to live in relative peace. We expect things to go fairly easily. We don't anticipate persecution or opposition. We think things should be good, life should be stable, relationships should be rewarding. But the truth is, we are engaged in a spiritual battle. The Enemy of our souls never rests. His heart's desire is to strike at our heavenly Father through defeating His children—you and me—and our kids as well. Two of his main strategies are discouragement and distraction. Add to this the battle with the world and the flesh, and you have an equation for constant warfare.

The good news is, God has provided the tools necessary for fighting the battle. But we need to recognize the fact that it's going on, take up our armor and advance. As women, we don't tend to naturally think in terms of warfare, but we must. Spend time in Ephesians 6:10-20. Remember who the enemy is. It's not the disobedient or distracted child. It's not the clutter or tiredness. It's not the stress that comes from overcommitment. It is the fact that we truly have spiritual enemies who need to be addressed.

My pastor is in the process of preaching through "the armor of God" in Ephesians 6 and an exciting insight that has come from our study is the idea that the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God is two-faceted. First is the sword itself—sound doctrine. It is imperative that we have a good sword; an accurate knowledge of the Word. It is also necessary that we learn to *use* the sword—how to apply it in our lives. In Judges 3:1-2 it is recorded that God did not drive out all of the enemies of the Israelites at once so that He might teach generations to come how to do battle. Is it possible that the battles of *your* life are for the purpose of *you* learning to wage war? Is it possible that these things are actually for your benefit instead of your destruction? And if the Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, is it possible that the Kingdom will advance as we forge our sword through learning sound doctrine and wield it through simple obedience? Nothing fancy, nothing terribly heroic, just plain, simple obedience. What makes this possible? The next "remember:"

3. Remember the source.

One of my very favorite scripture verses is Romans 7:18. You probably won't find it in those cute little bread loaves with the verse cards. You probably won't find it on the short list of favorite verses for very many people, because what it says is, "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh..."

How depressing is that??? Why would this be on anyone's favorite verse list??? Simple. It proves to me over and over again, that success in life is not about me. Nothing good dwells within me. I see the truth of this daily. So does God. And it doesn't depress Him. It doesn't need to depress me, either. Instead, it moves me quickly to the companion truth that "God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...made us alive together with Christ...that he might show the surpassing riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2: 4-7). The gospel is for sinners. I qualify. My sin and failure doesn't surprise God; He knew about it all along. And He doesn't deal with it by telling me to try harder. He deals with it on the Cross, by suffering and dying for it and setting me free to live, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8, Galatians 2, 5, etc.).

We do a pretty good job remembering that our salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, but we're terrible at clinging to the truth that our sanctification is also through God's grace. Instead of going straight to our Heavenly Father in humility and weakness, we scurry around trying this program or that "key" or even somebody's latest Bible study or curriculum or seminar. We try harder, worry more, increase our activity level, and fix our eyes on how we're doing. And it doesn't work. If we have the presence of mind to respond to our need with prayer and searching the scriptures, we still may come up short. Why?

Perhaps we need to see ourselves as we really are. Our true need is not just a little help (and then I'll take it from here, thank you very much) but total transformation. Without God's enabling we can do nothing. *Nothing*. Only as God enlivens and empowers our efforts can they begin to be successful. The "key" to success is God's mercy, grace, and power at work in and through us. It is not about how awesome we are. It is about His faithfulness. It is about learning to rest in His power and grace. It is about dying to my agenda and yielding myself to His. It is about learning to draw our strength from Him and Him alone. Any time our reliance is on ourselves, we will either fail miserably and become depressed or succeed still more miserably and be consumed by pride.

In my flesh there dwells no good thing. Without grace we have no hope. But God promises grace to the humble (I Peter 5:6). Pitch your tent upon this truth. It is where God meets with us. It is where the fountains of grace flow forth. It is where your source of life is always to be found. And it is always enough.

4. Remember what is truly important.

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

" 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it; 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40).

"...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, and attend to your own business and work with your hands..." (I Thess. 4:11)

Did you notice the command to involve your kids in ballet and soccer? To serve on the decorations committee for the bazaar? To teach that Bible study? To volunteer for the political action group at church? To sew your girls matching dresses? Hmmm. Me neither.

The world is full of good things to do. Neither soccer nor ballet nor political action committees nor matching dresses is sin. But neither are these things required of us. God, in His infinite wisdom, made us finite. Really. It is His plan and will that you accept this fact. There is no way in the world that you can possibly do all the good things available to you. God has specifically called you to some general things—loving Him, loving your neighbor, showing mercy, working for justice. He commanded us way back in the beginning to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. He created us as women to be suitable helpers to our own husbands. Before we get overwhelmed by the extras, we need to take a solid look at the things God is committed to.

Years ago, we lived in a house with a bit of land and half a dozen fruit trees. It was really nice to have our own fruit trees, except for one thing. They never bore any fruit worth eating. At one point I did a little research on caring for fruit trees and found that I seriously needed to prune. Ouch. Being basically incompetent when it comes to horticulture, I was afraid to cut off too many of those lush branches. What if I hurt the tree? Trees need leaves, you know. I could always cut out more later if I needed to. And so year after year, we raised scrawny, wormy fruit.

For many, the homeschooling experience is like the way I cared for my fruit trees. We desperately want to make sure our kids have all they need so we enroll them in supplementary classes, co-ops, baseball, music lessons and all kinds of other good things. We search out the best curriculum and try to use it all. But the good things, like the unpruned branches of my trees, suck the life out of the best things. They show themselves to be, if not sin, folly.

A master gardener who wants to grow good fruit, carefully prunes his trees. He leaves enough branches to support the tree, but is careful to direct most of its energies into fruitbearing.

As you pursue God's calling to disciple your children, what do they truly need? Another activity? The ability to spell Saskatchewan? A solid grasp of the Caesars of the Roman Empire?

II Peter 1:5-10 has been a guiding principle in our family since the beginning of the homeschool journey. To avoid being ineffective and unfruitful, we're exhorted to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue, knowledge. Did you notice the order? Faith is where it all begins. And to faith we add godly character, virtue. Knowledge comes next. If you start with knowledge, as some educators try to do, you build without a foundation. When life is ending, when we prepare for eternity, our knowledge will be of little consequence. Our faith will be the most important thing in life. If we supplement it with Godly character, we will be able to look back upon a life well lived. If we supplement character with knowledge, we will likely see increased fruitfulness, just like apple trees thrive when they are open to the light. But knowledge cannot come first. Nor can football or cheerleading. Or piano. Or art or auto mechanics or tatting or business or anything else.

So what is God committed to? How do we sort through the myriad of choices available to us? Where do we need to invest our energies?

May I suggest first filtering everything through the grid of what has eternal value? Jesus exhorted his listeners to seek first the Kingdom of God. What does this look like? While He lived on earth He invested in relationships. He talked with crowds. He mentored the disciples. He spent special time with Peter, James, and John. He spent time with His Heavenly Father, too.

How are you directing your children to invest their lives? Will it draw them closer to the kingdom? Will it distract them? Will it help them submit themselves to the Lordship of Christ? Will it leave time for real meditation, for thoughtful consideration of what is truly valuable in life? Do they understand that history is about the work of God through time, a testimony of His faithfulness and the warning of His judgment on those who will not submit to His ways? Do they know they're learning to read so they can study God's Word and be more effective servants of the King of Kings? Or do they think it's about doing well on standardized tests? Or becoming great athletes? Or preparing to make lots of money? Or impressing others? What do their parents think? What do you communicate? Are you equipping your kids with the skills necessary to be fruitful for the Kingdom? Or will you just grow fruitless branches with pretty leaves?

And as we seek first the Kingdom of God, it is also necessary to consider our individual callings. Woman was made for man—not men. You were designed to be a helper to *your* husband. You are to train up *your* children. Your primary responsibility is *not* to fulfill the responsibility of another. Can you help others? Certainly—but not at the expense of neglecting your own calling. What is God's design for accomplishing His work? Seek it out in scripture. Apply it in life. Note the commands to fathers and mothers, to husbands and wives. Note God's call to hospitality and the personal bearing of one another's burdens. As you follow God's design, you will probably find the time for humanly designed programs and other substitutes disappearing. But in due season you will also be able to pluck large, juicy fruit from your own trees—a gift to refresh others through the work of the Light, the Living Water, and a well tended tree.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus tells his weary followers to come to Him and He will give them rest. He exhorts them to take HIS yoke upon them—not the yokes of their own making. As those who walk with the Lord, we need to remember that He is the "lead ox." Trying to pull in a different direction will exhaust us. His yoke is only easy and his burden light if we're in step with where He is going. And when He lies down to rest for the night, we are not required to do more. No matter what the culture says. Or your mother-in-law. Or some homeschool magazine. Or even your kids who want to be involved in another good activity.

There's the foundation. Following are a few "bricks" that may address specific challenges you face as you seek to enter into God's rest while being faithful in the training of your children.

T Deal with unrealistic expectations.

You cannot involve each of your children in “one team sport and one individual sport” and remain sane. You cannot be gone every day of the week and remain sane. You cannot raise thoughtful children without giving them time to think. They cannot develop initiative if every moment is scheduled for them. You cannot survive on six hours of sleep a night for an extended period of time. You cannot meet everyone’s needs all the time. You are not God. It is blasphemous to pretend you are.

T You cannot have peace or rest if you will not deal with sin in your life.

God’s “formula” is confess, repent, forsake, and accept His forgiveness. Make restitution where you can, then move on. Don’t mock God’s holiness by playing games with your sin. Don’t mock Jesus’ sacrifice on your behalf by insisting you must somehow add to the completed work He has done.

T Heal broken relationships.

Bitterness poisons all it touches. If you struggle in this area, invest in *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande, (Baker Books, 1997), and read it cover to cover. Apply what you learn. Now.

T Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

God, in His goodness, has given us a day to rest. While works of mercy and necessity are permissible, strive to honor the Lord by not doing your own pleasure, by drawing aside for the refreshment of worship. Seek to manage the other six days well so you can rest with a clear conscience. And get a good nap.

T Discipline your children.

Have you ever tried to push a rope? Herd cats? Disciple children who have no self-control? If your children are working at cross purposes to what God desires of them, stop and deal with obedience issues first. Start with faith, begin to build virtue, and *then* add knowledge. Honor God by establishing consistent, faithful discipline in your home. The fruit it produces is tremendous. Proverbs 29:17 says, “Discipline your son, and he will give you *rest*...”

If you need help in this area, read and apply Tedd Tripp’s book, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*. (Shepherd Press, 1995) If you have older kids, pick up his brother Paul’s book *Age of Opportunity* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001) and learn from it as well. There are a lot of child-training books on the market but I have found these to be the most balanced, realistic, and truly helpful.

T Plan “margin” into your schedule.

You expect your kids to hand in neatly written papers with appropriate margins; expect it of yourself in the way you live. Frenzied rushing from one thing to the next honors only Satan. God has provided all the hours you need to do all He intends for you to do. Leave space in life for the unexpected, for special ministry opportunities that just “pop up,” for meeting needs of others, for taking time to listen, to contemplate. Only in times of extreme crisis should your schedule be so packed that a single glitch could throw you into a tailspin. God gives grace for the challenges He sends, but has no responsibility to honor our foolishness.

T Establish routines to maximize and guard your time.

I grew up in a home where every Monday and Thursday was washday, Friday was for cleaning, Saturday for grocery shopping. When I left home I was rather proud of myself for being able to do my laundry any time I wanted—usually when I was out of underwear. As life grew more complex with the addition of a husband and kids, I started to think a routine might be helpful. If I just did the wash on schedule, I wouldn’t have to spend time trying to figure out when I could get it done. Then I discovered how hard it was to discipline myself to actually follow a schedule. Sigh. But over the years I have found that making routines my servants is a tremendous help. And if things like housecleaning are done routinely instead of in crisis, (Hurry! They’ll be here in half an hour!), it’s much harder to upset the household equilibrium. With a schedule, I don’t have to give thought to when something will get done. I know it’s covered. With a schedule I can say no—I have a prior responsibility. With my children involved in the schedule, I become more of a supervisor and trainer (one of our God-given responsibilities, by the way), and as the children mature, the household begins to appear to run itself.

Schedules are also vital for protecting time for the truly important things. Do you need time for rest? Schedule it. How about time for simple conversation with your husband? Schedule it. Time for hospitality? Bible study? Prayer? Give it a place in the planner. Is there too much to do? Prune. Remember the goal of bearing fruit. Remember, too, that God will probably give you tomorrow and the next day. Not everything has to happen today or this week or this year. Life takes time to live.

But also remember that a schedule is a tool. It is a servant and you are its master. If the schedule gets in the way of glorifying God, it needs to be amended. If it takes over your life and leaves you frustrated, change it.

T Remember your season of life.

What has God placed before you? Do you have young children who need plenty of guidance as they pursue their studies? Do you have a child with special needs—or one who needs some help adjusting to school at home after a season in traditional school? Is there a toddler or nursing baby in the house? Are you expecting? Does your husband need help with his job responsibilities? Have you just moved and have a household to settle? Do you have elderly relatives who require special care? Are there physical needs that must be attended to?

Realize that different times of life have different responsibilities and freedoms. Learn contentment with today's tasks. Give up the expectation that you should be doing what the mom with two older daughters and no toddlers can do. Get your eyes off those families who sing together and wear matching clothes. Or the ones who win national geography bees or sports trophies or scholarship competitions. Those things may be yours at some point, but today is the day for today's work. If it means wiping noses and changing diapers amidst drilling math facts and reinforcing phonics, so be it. You're building a life. Your children will change and grow over time. Focus on being faithful in the little things now, and tomorrow you will reap the peaceful fruit of righteousness. You may even sing in matching outfits.

T Declare war on stuff!

Some women are tremendously organized and have a place for everything and everything in its place. God bless them. Then there are the rest of us. We know that the day we throw something out we'll discover a need for it, and even if we don't, we can think of all kinds of creative ways to use it—if we only had time. And that cute little toy from Grandma and those old books we might use again and the clothes from when Sammy was little and....

Somebody once said, "Don't love anything that can't love you back." It's not scripture, but it's pretty good counsel. How often do you hunt for things you thought you had somewhere that are lost in a sea of stuff? How many hours do you spend shifting piles and picking up toys and sorting through overfull drawers? How restful is it to sit down for a much-needed break and be surrounded by chaos?

The "experts" recommend going through your house room by room with three trash bags—one to throw away, one to give away, and one to put away. Take those extra fifteen minutes and deal with a kitchen drawer. Make 3:00 your blitz time—everybody dropping what they're doing and picking up what they can in ten minutes. Simplify where you can. Pass what you don't need on to someone who does. God is faithful. He will provide what you need in the future just like He has in the past. Don't let fear or greed add clutter to your life. Rest in God's promise of provision.

T Avoid comparing.

II Corinthians 10:12 warns us that comparing ourselves among ourselves and measuring ourselves by ourselves is NOT WISE. Someone keeps a perfect house? Peace. Someone has kids who are piano virtuosos? Peace. God didn't make you to be anyone's clone. Your job is to follow Him and glorify Him. It is to take your own place in the body of Christ, not anyone else's. If someone's bragging is making you insecure, hustle back to the fountain of grace. Remember, it's not about you. It's about glorifying God as He has chosen in His sovereignty to make you, with all your strengths and weaknesses too. It's about embracing your situation, season of life, kids, husband, living situation and all the rest, and showing an unbelieving world how God is truly Lord of all.

T Learn to use the "N" word.

Years ago I remember seeing an episode of *Happy Days* where Fonzy had to admit he was wr..wr..wr..wr..uh..wr..wrong. Boy, was it hard to say. As homeschooling moms, we have a different word we tend to struggle with: No.

Perhaps it helps to remember that every time you say “yes,” you, by default are really saying no to something else. Did you really want to say no to quiet conversation with your teenager? Did you mean to tell your husband he isn’t important in your life? Did you intend to let your second grader believe the picture he made for you was a waste of time? By saying yes to something, we crowd out something else. Time is one of the most valuable resources we have. We can never get it back once we have spent it. Spend it wisely.

If you need help to say no, agree with your husband to check with him before taking on any new commitments. Ask him to help keep you in check. If you need an excuse, he can provide it. And if you do have his support on something, you avoid conflict if life gets crazy--he was part of the decision, too.

T Delegate.

You don’t have to do everything. Is that hard to accept? Then consider how many women today were never trained by their mothers to manage a household. What do you spend most of your life doing? Managing your household. It is shortsighted and unloving to leave your daughters ill-equipped for life. If you will equip your children with household management skills, you not only enhance their future success, you ease your own burden as well. Include sons in the process. They may one day experience bachelor living or have a pregnant wife who desperately needs a hand. Hard as it may be to accept, delegating is actually a loving thing for you to do.

T Evaluate the need for outside help.

Sometimes delegation alone is not enough to get the job done. “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me,” doesn’t mean God has made you omnipotent. It simply means He has provided grace for every situation in which He places you. That grace could be a supernatural strength. It could be the grace to “prune.” It could also be the money to hire a maid. Do you remember the Proverbs 31 woman provided tasks for her maidens? The model wife actually had household help. God’s grace to you could also be a grandmother or “adopted” grandmother to come alongside and share the load. What about an energetic 12-year-old homeschooled boy who could wear out your toddlers while you focus on phonics with your six-year-old? How about an older girl who’s catching a vision for ministry to lend a hand with all those things moms do—cooking, cleaning, laundry, teaching, just being available? Moms of older kids, please hear this as an appeal to help your kids learn to minister. Their gifts could mean a huge difference in the life of a weary young mom.

If you decide to delegate outside your home, choose wisely what you delegate. Delegating the discipleship of your children so you have time to clean house shows confused priorities. Likewise, be aware of what God may be teaching you through your pressures. Don’t run from the classroom He has you in by hiding behind the need for help. Be faithful to truly do what you can as you seek grace for what you cannot.

T Take time to laugh.

A merry heart really does do good like a medicine.

T Get a nap.

I know a family of eight who requires everyone to be on their bed from 1:00-1:30 every afternoon. Older kids can continue to work on school or read a book. Younger kids usually sleep, and mom gets a chance to be quiet. The rest of the day is far less challenging with a break for recharging in the middle. Think about flashlight batteries and car batteries. The flashlight batteries last only a few hours at best, but the car battery keeps on going. That’s because the car battery is being constantly recharged as the car drives. The flashlight goes dead, the car keeps going. Which do you want to be like?

T Deal with physical health issues.

Sometimes you're tired because something is physically wrong. Take advantage of your doctor's expertise if other solutions don't seem to help. Realize that regular exercise will increase your energy, as will healthy eating. Sure, spiritual issues are more important than physical ones, but as long as you live in a physical body, it's the only tool you have to do spiritual things.

T Patch the drips.

Little things that go on and on can become big things. Little sins, little inconsistencies, little irritations, all take their toll. Deal with problems while they're small if at all possible. Don't wait until you have major work to do to fix things, whatever they are.

T Reject perfectionism.

Notice it is not excellence we are to reject, but perfectionism. Excellence is a very good thing. It is seeking to delight and honor God through faithful service. Perfectionism, on the other hand, is rooted in pride. It says, "If I can't do this perfectly, I won't do it at all," or requires us to keep striving far beyond what is adequate. Perfectionism hates to practice hospitality because its house isn't clean enough or it's not a good enough cook or its children aren't well enough behaved. It says no to the offer to bring dessert and spends all day getting ready for what should be a time of congenial conversation and refreshing fellowship. Perfectionism can't leave a unit until the students know all there is to know and have mastered all there is to master. It often imposes on four-year-olds what no one else expects of them until they're eight and leaves little room for growth and experimentation. Perfectionism focuses on self instead of God. Perfectionism has no faith. It rests only in what I can do, not God's work in me. No wonder it leaves us weary.

T Recognize and conquer slothfulness.

There are two kinds of tiredness. One comes from an honest day's work and is part of the work/rest cycle God has ordained for us. It is a fine and appropriate thing, not to be despised. The other comes from disobedience or foolishness, either our own or someone else's. The slothful person doesn't know the difference.

It is imperative that, as daughters of God, we recognize fruitful labor is not a curse but a gift of God. Adam and Eve worked before the fall. We are called to faithful labor as well. Slothfulness creeps in as we begin making little, soft choices. It grows and magnifies when we see the consequences of those soft choices and, instead of repenting and doing what we ought, let the black clouds overwhelm us. The "lion in the streets" (Proverbs 22:13), seems very real and the possibility of getting back on track seems beyond our ability.

Slothfulness doesn't finish what it starts. It may begin by investing effort—even much effort—but doesn't carry things through to completion, therefore all the work is lost (Proverbs 12:27).

The slothful person is a great waster of time. She may consider and consider, but she seldom acts. She often has good and right desires, but is overwhelmed by what it will take to accomplish them, so she considers, and dreams, and wishes, and regrets—but she doesn't act, at least not in any sustained, useful way. She is weary, but not because of honest labor. She is exhausted by the "what if's", the "could have beens," and vague and floating fears. The lack of perfection in any of her options causes her to sigh and fret, hoping something better will come along to set her free to do the awesome things God designed her to do.

If you find yourself trapped in the upheaval slothfulness brings, begin by repenting. Then get up (literally) and begin to do what you *are* able to do, by the grace of God. You will not find everything becoming better all of a sudden. It takes time to fall into the pit created by slothfulness and it takes time to get out. Learn daily faithfulness. Ask your husband or an honest friend to hold you accountable. God has given you the time and resources to do all He wants you to do. Stop sitting on them.

T Finally, don't try to do it all at once.

Pick one or at the most two of these things to lay before the Lord and ask His help to apply. Change is hard. Don't set yourself up for failure by attempting to change everything at once. After one thing gets in

order, try another. You have a lifetime to live. It doesn't all have to happen today. And in the midst of it all, remember where you will find your rest.

Have you ever thought of your weariness as a signal, a reminder to stop and reassess your choices, to realign your thoughts and actions with the truth, to urge you back into the presence of Almighty God? Seventeenth century poet and pastor George Herbert wrote a little poem that has called me back on many occasions. Here it is:

The Pulley

When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
'Let us,' said He, 'pour on him all we can;
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.'

So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flow'd, then wisdom, honour, pleasure;
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that, alone of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

'For if I should,' said He,
'Bestow this jewel also on My creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;
So both should losers be.

'Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness;
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast.'