

Mind Your Business

Chaos shouldn't be the norm, and while we can't always change the source of the chaos, we must tend to what we can change.

LYSA TERKEURST

When will this year end?" I said as I stared at my phone, tears running in rivers down my cheeks. It was five-ish on some random Tuesday night. Instead of chopping tomatoes for the taco dinner I was supposed to be dishing up to my family momentarily, I was sending a video message of despair to three of my closest friends. The previous Friday evening, a deer had made a rather untimely leap onto the highway right in front of my husband's oncoming vehicle. The gently used car we had purchased just two months before was totaled. Unfortunately, so was the deer.

To make matters worse, three days after the carnage, our insurance company informed us of a small loophole in our policy that rendered our losses even greater. We would not be completely reimbursed for the car but would instead have to take a \$5,000 loss. Did I mention that this was not just our primary car but our only car?

I reminded my friends that the accident was the latest in a series of

Overwhelmed Mom

disasters that seemed to define 2022 for us. “Let’s rewind the tape for a second, shall we?” I said, discouragement and overwhelm lacing through every word. I began to inventory my year to them in a way that amplified the tragedies and completely dismissed the triumphs.

Due to a contract expiration at the end of the previous fiscal period, my self-employed husband lost one of his biggest clients, sending our finances into a tailspin for nearly six months. My mother’s dementia diagnosis advanced rapidly, and she no longer recognized my voice right away when I called to check on her. Her physical and emotional care was taking its toll on all four of her daughters, including me. In August, one of my older sisters, who had been like a second mother to me for most of my life, lost her seven-year battle with breast cancer. Overcome with grief, I made my way across the country to deliver the eulogy at her funeral. Only a month later, I launched my second book out into the world. In the midst of parties, radio interviews, and social media appearances, I should have felt elated. Instead, I felt numb. I was in crisis fatigue, burdened by the cumulative effects of chronic stress.

“And the hits keep coming. Now we are car-less. Second verse, same as the first,” I muttered under my breath, quietly waving the white flag of surrender as I hit “send” on my message. It was only October, but I was more than ready to pull the plug on the entire year.

I wish I could say that 2022 was an isolated season of bedlam. It wasn’t. My adult life has been fraught with pressures of all kinds. There was the year when a dangerous cocktail of immaturity and inexperience led to a kitchen fire in my newlywed apartment, forcing my husband and me into a renovation project we were not financially prepared to tackle. Then, there was the year my dad had five strokes. A heart attack capped off that tumultuous spell and eventually took his life. A handful of years later, when we had four kids, all under five, our hot water

heater decided to boycott. Until we could afford to repair it, we spent over a month boiling bucket after bucket of water like we were playing a real-life game of Oregon Trail. And who could forget the year our recently remodeled basement flooded just two days before we were to host out-of-state relatives for an entire week? Perhaps the most difficult of all was the year our daughter had a heart attack and was airlifted to a pediatric ICU several hours away. Hospital stints, long-distance trips to cardiac specialists, and an eventual surgery left us all feeling emotionally and physically fragile.

Couple all of these acute seasons of mayhem with the brain-breaking business of everyday living—the laundry piles, the dentist appointments, the meal prep, the errands, the bills, the work meetings, the sports team fundraisers, the field trips, the volunteer committees, the random spam calls from Indonesia regarding the extended warranty to a vehicle I didn't actually own—and I had the makings of a life that, at times, looked like one giant game of whack-a-mole.

The year 2022 seemed different, though. It came with wave after wave of disaster, all threatening to pull me under. I spent most of that year just dog-paddling, trying not to drown in the deep end.

Buried by Busy

Even as I stood sweat-panicking in my kitchen that fateful evening, rehearsing the year's events out loud in front of the screen while pressing my palms into my eyes to stop the torrent of tears, I knew I wasn't the only one who felt frayed by the past twelve months. The three women on the other side of that group message had stood on the knife's edge of disaster also. They, too, had clambered up a few jagged ridges, barefoot with no rope. Not even counting the reverberating effects of a pandemic, their days had been riddled with struggles of all kinds.

Overwhelmed Mom

What's more, I had tangible proof that white-knuckle moments went far beyond the four of us. Overwhelming days are universal.

Sitting at the bottom of my dresser drawer, tucked safely under a pile of well-worn T-shirts, was a stack of 3x5 cards—each a simple declaration of distress. I had collected them from women across the country who had attended a Q&A session at a family conference where I had been invited to speak. Each mom in attendance was given a blank index card and was asked to write down her burning questions about marriage, motherhood, faith, friendship, or any other piece of a woman's world that came to mind. Several of the cards were randomly selected and read aloud by a

**Every question said
the same thing: Help!**

**I'm overwhelmed—
overworked and
understaffed.**

moderator. The three panelists, myself included, were expected to provide unrehearsed answers to the waiting crowd.

Dozens and dozens of questions came pouring in.

"Some days, it gets to be too much—the endless cooking, laundry piles, constant questions, and bickering. What do you do when you're buried by *busy*, and you're tempted to jump in your car and drive far, far away from it all?"

"Most days, I am so emotionally and mentally spent by the time my husband gets home from work. How can I ensure that I have enough 'me' left for him while also not feeling like a crazy lady?"

"How do you steer home, school, and work without sinking all three ships at the same time?"

"I'm only one person. How can I meet everyone's needs when I'm so outnumbered? What about my needs?"

Every question was worded differently from all the others, but without fail, they all said the same thing: *Help! I'm overwhelmed—overworked and understaffed.*

Perhaps you can relate. Maybe as you're reading this, you are making a mental inventory of the questions you'd love to submit anonymously to a panel of peers someday. Possibly you, too, are wondering why life didn't come with a warning label. *Caution: flash flood zone, enter at your own risk.* I understand, friend. If an organization were dedicated to threading difficult needles, my name would be on the letterhead. So would yours. So would the names of all the women who attended the conference session. Because you see, *struggle* is synonymous with *humanity*. We can't outrun crisis. It is one of the continuous ripples of the fall.

Jesus put it this way in John 16:33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (NIV). If we were looking for advance notice about the turbulent days ahead, we'd have to admit that Christ couldn't have made His warning clearer. It's splashed across the pages of Scripture in bright red letters.

Struggle
is synonymous
with humanity.

The Path to Peace

But while *struggle* is unavoidable, feelings of overwhelm don't have to define our days. Peace is possible, even when it feels like the sky is falling. Admittedly, that message can be a hard pill to swallow, especially when the sin scars of this world seem to riddle our lives with so much difficulty.

As I stood at the counter shoving fistfuls of lettuce and cheese into waiting taco shells that night in 2022, the very idea of claiming calm amid all my chaos made me flinch. *When will Your overcoming start in my life, Lord?* I silently prayed. *When will I experience Your promised peace?* It felt like His words were aimed at everyone but me.

A few days later, while I was cocooned in a blanket on my favorite comfy chair, with my Bible in hand, my eyes fell on some verses that

Overwhelmed Mom

began to soften the brittle edges of my heart. The Lord, in His kindness, drew me to 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12—verses that I had read numerous times before, but that took on a new, vibrant glow in those dark days.

In what is believed to be his very first letter to the newly formed church, exhorting the believers of Thessalonica (a northern city in ancient Greece) to brotherly love, the apostle Paul wrote, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (NIV). The “quiet life” mentioned here is *hēsychazō* in Greek and is exclusively used in reference to keeping one’s peace in the midst of difficult circumstances and embracing the restorative rest of the Sabbath.¹

Peace and rest—if that duo is not the very opposite of overwhelm, I’m not sure what is.

Tucked safely in the middle of this lengthy letter to the church, Paul gave the two-fold prescription for living the quiet life: mind your own business, and work with your hands.

You see, it had been brought to Paul’s attention that some Christ followers were abandoning their daily responsibilities and surviving on the charity of fellow believers. They were meddling in the affairs of others and sitting idle. To some extent, their lack of peace and rest was self-inflicted.

While our contemporary minds can read *mind your own business* in harsh tones, with a degree of snark included, Paul’s admonition to “mind your own business” was meant to ensure that church members could continue to love each other generously, as they were known to do. They were to give and receive communal aid to one another whenever appropriate but were encouraged not to stir up trouble or take advantage of others. Moreover, in a culture that viewed manual labor as menial, the simple directive to “work with your hands” declared to their Greco-Roman

neighbors that labor, when done sincerely, was honorable. Their Christian commitment to walk uprightly created curiosity in the surrounding community and compelled unbelievers toward belief in Jesus. Paul's words reminded the church that society would not judge them by their theology but by their behavior. The conduct of the Thessalonian church during those tumultuous times had the potential to either glorify God or misrepresent Him to the rest of the world.

While those verses were specifically penned for a group of first-century Christians, they hold true today. We, too, can magnify or malign God to the watching world by how we respond to our circumstances. Whenever you and I feel buried with burdens, minding our own business and working with our hands can become just the shovel we need to dig our way out. Furthermore, when we make it our ambition to do both, we will not only experience the peace and rest we crave, but we'll more accurately display the gospel to others.

The Choice Is Yours

Make it your ambition—I read and reread that phrase until my eyes crossed. Those four small words declared two big things. The first was this: A quiet life was not a certainty. Paul was not providing a surefire solution. His words were a principle, not a promise. By heeding his advice, I would have a better chance of claiming peace and rest than if I just ignored his counsel. Obedience would put the odds in my favor. And the second: *Make* is a verb. My ambition or desire for a quiet life would require action. And not just any action, *my* action.

Admittedly, there will always be situations that, in my finite power, I cannot mind. No amount of work on my part will change the outcome. For instance, I will never have control over the budgeting decisions made by my husband's clients. I cannot delay the rapid decline of my mother's

Overwhelmed Mom

memory. Cancer will never be cured in my hands. And if statistics are to be trusted, deer will continue to kamikaze themselves in front of on-coming traffic during mating season. No car can ever gain immunity, including my own.

Possibly as you read this, you're replaying the last few days, months, or even years and discovering that so much of your life has felt like a hostage situation. Maybe you, too, have struggled under the weight of many outside-of-your-control circumstances, all of which have made your every day feel harder than it needs to be.

Perhaps Paul understood that everyday burden, and it was the very reason he gave his "mind your own business" proclamation. At first blush, *minding* your own business urges you to keep doing the work at hand, to train your appetites to follow through, finish a job, and stay the course. Like an athlete who aims to win, *minding* your own business requires you to remain consistent and faithful. It's often uncomfortable and, at times, necessitates self-denial. But it ensures that your responsibilities are taken care of.

Upon closer examination and with a slightly different emphasis, however, *minding your own business* implores you to keep your eyes on your own paper. It helps you to champion the work others are doing while not allowing their successes to discourage or distract you, heaping more and more on your plate.

In addition, *minding your own business* forces you to accept that some things are out of your control and not yours to mind. It urges you to relinquish seasons of deep sorrow and strife to God, trusting that in His hands and through His compassionate care, you will not be consumed (Lam. 3:22 NIV). *Minding your own business* helps you to hold your days more tenderly, treat yourself with consideration, and accept the generous support of others, knowing you don't have to hold up the entire world.

While you and I may not be able to mind certain specific devastating situations, we can mind many ordinary areas of our lives, thereby lessening the collateral damage that acute moments of disaster can bring to our days. Though some circumstances are truly overwhelming, at times being overwhelmed can be a choice. Each crazy moment of chaos will demand that you decide: *Will I give in to the cultural pressure of perfection, taking on too much in an effort to earn the praise of others? Will I attempt to carry a burden that was never mine to carry? Or will I give it all to God, set my eyes on Jesus, and do the hard work of tying all the loose ends that He's given me to tie?*

Minding your own business helps you to hold your days more tenderly, treat yourself with mercy, and accept the generous support of others, knowing you don't have to hold up the entire world.

Framing *overwhelm* as a decision might appear too legalistic or pressure-filled. But let's not be guilty of crying "legalism" when what we really mean is "I'm comfortable," "Change takes work," or "I don't want to admit that some of my overwhelm is self-inflicted." In clinging to, validating, or making excuses for why we are not minding *our* business, we will never be able to step out of the mess.

What to Expect

At the risk of looking like the mustache-twirling villain in my own book, I will share with you a simple truth: If God, through Paul, called believers to the quiet life, it is because even when all the world begins to totter, peace and rest *are* possible.

This is the part of our journey together where you probably expect me to say something like, "We've all been given the same twenty-four hours in the day." But while that may be true in principle, it's grossly inaccurate in practice. So I'm not going to say it. You see, there's a big difference

Overwhelmed Mom

between the time constraints of a single, unmarried woman and those of a single mother of three. There's also quite a disparity between that same single mom's day and that of a mother who has a dependable spouse to help carry the parental load. The truth is, although we may all have twenty-four hours at our disposal, the hours aren't all the same.

I don't know which camp you fall into, nor why you decided to pick up this book. I can only assume that the word *overwhelmed* caught your attention. Perhaps you've been spinning so many plates your life looks like a low-budget circus sideshow. Or maybe your overwhelm has nurtured seeds of apathy. There are not enough hours in the day to keep up with all that your life demands and you've convinced yourself that if you can't do it all, then you might as well not even try to do any of it. It could be, instead, that your overwhelm has bred feelings of disappointment and guilt as you look around and see other women thriving while juggling twice the number of responsibilities that you have. Clearly, everyone has learned some hidden secret except you—or at least that's what you've begun to believe.

Regardless of what pulled you to these pages, I can only assume that, like the Jamie of 2022, you're not only looking for ways to reshuffle the deck—to balance what feels off-kilter—but you also want to be seen. You want someone, anyone, to notice how hard life is right now and to acknowledge that, despite being dealt blow after blow, you're still standing. You haven't given up, and *that* in itself is a victory.

Well, overwhelmed mom, I see you.

I see you, preschool wrangler, who doesn't remember what it feels like to go to the bathroom without an audience. Your toddler acts like a terrorist at every meal, threatening anarchy if you dare to give him even one more vegetable. Each day feels more tedious than the last. You feel beaten by *busy* but have nothing to show for your efforts.

I see you, mom of grade schoolers, who's busy playing chauffeur, nursemaid, head chef, laundress, and referee. Your time and patience have been stretched so thin they're both practically see-through. You're filling out permission slips, tripping over misplaced musical instruments, and navigating complicated carpool politics that make every day feel like a competition.

I see you, mature middle-ager. Your life is crowded. You still have kids at home, are launching adult children, and are helping care for aging parents. Your body is starting to betray you, so even simple tasks feel hard to do. (I don't know about you, but I blame gluten. Or maybe Big Pharma? Red dye 40?) Your marriage is well-worn. At times, that means it fits like a favorite college sweatshirt. At other times, it feels threadbare.

I see you. I won't pretend to know just how many holes are in the bottom of your leaky boat right now, but I've watched you bail water by the bucketful and row with all your might. I know you're watching the horizon, bracing for another cloud that will surely unzip a downpour, threatening shipwreck. I hope these pages will be like a life raft to pull you to the safety of shallow waters.

My words may tug on your heart in some painful ways. At times, they'll feel about as soothing as a political debate during an election year. But trust me, fragility and offense will only sabotage our time together.

I won't boss you around or guilt-monger you into doing things my way. (Social media has probably done enough of that to you already.) Besides, bookstore shelves are buckling under the weight of time management books with Take-Back-Your-Life anthems. Those messages have been delivered before. It's highly plausible you've already read many of them, yet here you are. Frankly, if you're hoping for another book that will be like all of those—a secular rosary to keep the pressures of life at bay—you should keep browsing. This is not your book.

Overwhelmed Mom

If you're looking for a title that will encourage you just to duck out, burn everything to the ground, and start again, save your money. This is not your book. Spoiler alert: A simple do-over will lead you to the exact same pile of overwhelm if you never plan a new route along the way.

But if you're looking for a resource focusing more on biblical principles than prescriptive solutions, keep reading. These pages were written especially for you.

I know from experience that minding your own business is long-haul work. I also know you'll be more persistent in your efforts when you see small changes happen immediately. So, at the end of each chapter, I've added some thoughtful questions to help you examine how you are or are not using your time, talent, and resources in helpful ways. In addition, between every few chapters, I've included some battle-proven suggestions to help you start tackling the mother lode of Motherload you face daily. Consider these a buffet of ideas to pick and choose from.

Please know that, like Rome, order cannot be built in a day. It's taken me more than two decades of mothering and managing a household to incorporate these hacks into my home. With that in mind, don't try implementing all these tactics right this second. Doing so will only add more weight to your already heavy days. Through our time together, you'll learn to embrace what matters, shake off what doesn't, and mind your own business. Undergirded with Scripture, you'll establish some new habits, and in doing so, you'll reduce the friction you're feeling.

Together, we'll begin a revolution of peace. As Paul charges, we're going to make it our ambition to work with our hands, and we're going to do it in the unassuming corners of our everyday lives. We're going to swim against the cultural current of busy, striving for stability for ourselves and for our families. We won't be flashy, but we will be faithful.

The *quiet* starts now.