

A Woman Overwhelmed



Finding God in the Messes of Life

HAYLEY DIMARCO

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *GOD GIRL*

More Praise for *A Woman Overwhelmed*

“Hayley DiMarco invites us to join her on an adventure to know God more by seeking His heart in *A Woman Overwhelmed*. This book will lead you to laugh, learn, and lean in to the love of God in fresh, deep, and invigorating ways.”

—**Gwen Smith**

Author of *I Want It ALL* and *Broken into Beautiful*, cofounder of *Girlfriends in God*

“In her personality-infused, Scripture-centered style, Hayley provides help for any woman who wonders about her own circumstances, fears the unknown, or is overwhelmed with life. This book is a must.”

—**Alexandra Kuykendall**

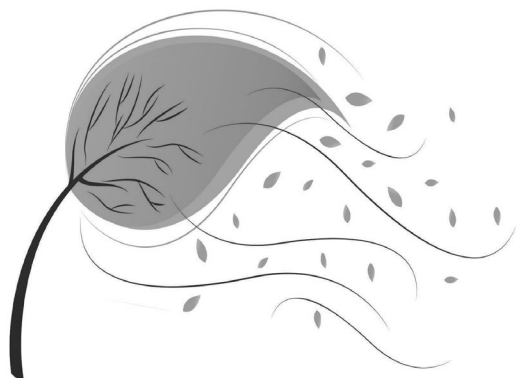
Author of *Loving My Actual Christmas: An Experiment in Relishing the Season* and co-hostess of *The Open Door Sisterhood* podcast

“Are you living in a constant state of being overwhelmed? You don’t have to live this way anymore! Allow Hayley DiMarco to come alongside you as a friend, sharing her struggles and what she’s learned about leaning on the overwhelming love of God.”

—**Arlene Pellicane**

Speaker and author of *31 Days to Becoming a Happy Wife*

A Woman Overwhelmed



Finding God in the Messes of Life

HAYLEY DIMARCO

Abingdon Press / Nashville

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED
FINDING GOD IN THE MESSES OF LIFE

Copyright © 2017 by Hayley DiMarco

All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2222 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., PO Box 280988, Nashville, TN, 37228-0988 or e-mailed to permissions@umpublishing.org.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
has been requested.**

ISBN 978-1-5018-4070-8

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



CONTENTS

My Overwhelming Introduction	vii
1. Elbow Deep in Birthday Cake.	1
2. Pregnant for Centuries	7
3. No Wonder Italian Women Throw Plates.	11

I. So Much to Do, So Little Time

4. It's All a Scam to Sell Us More Magazines!	19
5. If There Is No One to Impress, Then There Will Be a Mess.	25
6. The World Can't Handle My Ninja	31

II. Death by Comparison

7. Life Is Like an Etsy Shop	41
8. I See Perfect People and They Won't Shut Up.	47
9. He Put the Pun in Punishment.	53
10. I Don't Like to Bother People.	59

III. What I Can't Control, Controls Me

11. My Face Just Won't Shut Up.	67
12. I Have a Problem with Stupid People	73

CONTENTS

13. A Different Kind of Selfishness 79
14. I'm What Experts Call Weird. 85

IV. It's Hard Being Me

15. "Hubby, I Have a Date with Andrew Tonight" 93
16. I'm a Creep Looking for a BFF 99
17. I Make My Own Law, Thank You Very Much. 103
18. Walk a Mile in My Brain 109
19. This Is What It Sounds Like When Grass Cries 115

V. The Mission of Me

20. Maybe I Should Start Killing People 123
21. Enlarging My Goiter 129
22. The Glass Is Half-Full (of Toxins) 135
23. Deep Undercover in Mumbai 141
24. God's To-Do-Through-You List. 147

VI. Overwhelmed by God

25. Go Overwhelmed or Go Home 155
26. I'm Like the Fat in a Cheese Stick 161
27. The Year My Mom Moved Out 167
28. The Elevator Operator of Death 173
29. I Fought the Law and the Law Won 179
30. You're a Bad Girl, Wilma Jean. 185
31. An Overwhelming Conclusion 191



MY OVERWHELMING INTRODUCTION

I was introduced to a life overwhelmed when I was five years old. My neighbor Sabrina, who coveted my little metal tri-cycle, decided it had to be hers. So sometime during the night, she opened our adjoining backyard gate, put her dirty little fingers on the handlebars of my red Rocketrike, and yanked it over to her yard by the tassels. When I awoke the next morning, my ride was gone; lifted like a wallet from an unsuspecting tourist.

After searching everywhere, I began to panic. I ran into the house to tell my mom, when I suddenly heard Sabrina yelling from the other side of the fence. “I’ve got your trike and you aren’t getting it back!”

I couldn’t believe my best friend in the whole duplex had done this to me. My first reaction was shock, then anger, and then tears. I was completely overwhelmed by this act of border aggression and my inability to open the gate and confront her. So I raced in to get President Mommy: she’d put some executive power behind opening the borders and starting the peace talks.

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

A few presidential mandates later and Sabrina finally opened the latch on her side of the fence. There she was, standing next to my trike, in the triumphant pose of a conquering hero, rake standing aggressively by her side.

Upon seeing this little barbarian grimace, I winced and hid behind my mother's legs. I couldn't advance on the enemy; it was too overwhelming. Smiling at the situation, my mother kindly said, "Sabrina, give her back the trike." And then Mom told me to go over and get it. I walked toward Sabrina like a kid reaching for the broccoli on her plate—nose turned away and eyes squinting in self-protection and disgust—and grabbed the trike.

That was my earliest recollection of being overwhelmed by life. Of course, that was nothing compared to all the other overwhelming things that have happened since then and continue to happen. But now I take comfort in knowing that I am not alone. As it happens, I've never met a woman who wasn't overwhelmed by something. It's a fact of life: us women are overwhelmed by the certainty that our work is never done and that if, by some outside chance it is, someone else's work will be right there begging us to fix it for them.

That's why, in the pages of this book, I have spilled the comical parts of my overwhelming life all over the place for you to laugh at and hopefully see some of yourself within. So don't spend too much time trying to clean things up for me; just relax and go with the flow, knowing that you aren't the only overwhelmed woman in the world. Maybe in seeing something of yourself in the mess of my life, you'll be able to give yourself a break and laugh instead of cry.

You have to know that many of the conditions of my heart are lifelong malfunctions that I have only recently dealt with, and many I am still fighting to this day. But, thankfully, all of them are covered by the redeeming power of the cross. And so

MY OVERWHELMING INTRODUCTION

I bring them to you in order to agree with God that I'm in need of a savior, and to thank Him for fulfilling that need.

As you put yourself into the mix with my bad examples and God's good ones, I hope that you will find a way to move from overwhelmed by life to overwhelmed by God—and to go from living the “mission of me” to embracing the mission of Him. I hope you will see that there actually isn't more to do than there is time, and realize that comparison is a deadly habit that makes you more overwhelmed than a woman with only fifty cents at an Everything's-a-Dollar sale.

In the end, I pray that you will find yourself so overwhelmed by the love of God that you won't have the time or desire to be overwhelmed by the circumstances of life. I want to encourage you to see everything through the filter of His love and to understand what that means for your to-do list and your relationships.

So join me in this journey into a life overwhelmed, as we laugh, cry, pray, and go from too much of a bad thing to so much of a good thing that we can't help jumping for joy!



1

ELBOW DEEP IN BIRTHDAY CAKE

There are a lot of things to be overwhelmed with.
I have been overwhelmed with...

- worry
- fear
- faith
- doubt
- loss
- gain
- failure
- rejection
- acceptance
- finances
- love
- hate
- regret
- responsibility

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

organization
mess
loneliness
hopelessness
inability
lack
abundance

... and the list could go on.

It's overwhelming how much I've been overwhelmed!

But if I'm honest with myself, I'm not so much overwhelmed with my life as I am with everyone else's. *I'm* doing what I want to do, but *they* aren't doing what *I* want them to do. If everyone would just do what I want them to do, I wouldn't be so overwhelmed. But from my husband and daughter to my friends and enemies, getting people to see that my ways are the best is like trying to convince my dog that he doesn't want to eat my dirty socks. It's a losing battle. Yeah, what I can't control worries me.

I imagine how invigorating it would be if I could just give everyone a list and, without a peep, they would get to work checking things off. Can you imagine the serenity that would give me? I could have my own website with the ultimate master

*I'm doing what I want to do,
but they aren't doing what I
want them to do. If everyone
would just do what I want
them to do, I wouldn't be so
overwhelmed.*

to-do list on it—and every day, my husband could check that site instead of wasting his time on ESPN.com and do all the work on the list.

Hayleyslist.com my dream come true!

If I could, I would even give a list to

ELBOW DEEP IN BIRTHDAY CAKE

Hollywood producers and tell them which shows to cancel and which to keep. And why stop there? I could give God a list of appropriate weather patterns for my daily activities.

Oh, and I want all drivers to listen when I tell them how to drive!

Step one: *Always use your blinker!*

Step two: *GET OUT OF MY WAY!*

Step three: *And get off my tail!*

Yes, I'm overwhelmed simply because I'm not in charge.

When destiny is under *my* dominion, I feel like an air-traffic controller who hasn't killed anyone in a week. I'm keeping an eye on everyone's location, I'm finding the most efficient air routes, and I'm helping everyone take off and land. But when I'm out of control, planes are dropping out of the sky like flies, and I'm doing all I can just to save one 747 from splatting into the control tower. It's chaos! And it's because of this lack of control that I'm about to send myself to the hospital for psychiatric evaluation—just hoping they'll lock me up so I can finally get some rest! My stomach is aching and I'm popping antacids and diffusing Peace and Calming oil, saying, "Just breathe."

Yes, whatever is out of my control is overwhelming. So my goal in life is to find the best way to control—well, everything. Including my people. No, *especially* my people—at least *they* have to do what I tell them. But, boy, does the ulcer start to flare when they don't!

In a Stress Screener self-test I took online, saying yes to more than four symptoms suggested a real problem with having too much to handle. So no big surprise that I answered yes to eight of them.

Do you struggle with any of the following?

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

Emotional eating
Insomnia
Digestive problems
Ulcers
Anxiety
Tension headaches
Weight gain
Irritability

When life is more than I can handle—when just looking at it reveals my complete inadequacies and failures, and all I want to do is go back to bed—I know that I am overwhelmed, and not in a good way.

It's who we are simply because we are loved by Him, and that reality has to be the most overwhelming thing of all.

When my body is begging me for a straitjacket and a padded cell, and I'm starting to consider it, I know it's time to reassess my priorities and look for flaws in my logic and planning.

I'm tired of being overwhelmed by life. I want something more! Don't you?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

What overwhelms you? *I ask because I know it's got to be something. Every woman I've ever talked to self-identifies as a woman overwhelmed.*

What is it that makes us so susceptible to the deluge of delusions brought on by the world? *(There has got to be a better way, doesn't there?)*

If you could give up being consumed by two things that overwhelm you, what would they be?

Why do you think they consume you so much?

I'm sorry that you've been overwhelmed by the challenges of life, my friend, but I'm glad that you are here and that you are taking the first steps toward letting go of the crazy. In the pages of this book, I've opened up my life in order to remind you that you are not alone and, in fact, are probably not as crazy as you may think. I hope that as you experience *my* overwhelmed life from the outside in, you will begin to recognize not only yourself but also the truth that we are all so easily overwhelmed, because we were made to be so. It's who we are simply because we are loved by Him, and that reality has to be the most overwhelming thing of all. To be loved by the Creator and Sustainer of everything and everyone, the Great I Am, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords, the One who hung the moon and who knew you before you were born, the One who holds the future in His hands. This One who is irresistible to your heart longs to make you a woman overwhelmed with Him and with all the beauty He has placed within and without you.

I pray that God will give you insight into the depths of His love and maybe even a glimpse of the comedy of it all as

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

seen from the rearview mirror, or from the passenger seat of my car. And I pray that, in those things, you will discover freedom. I also hope that you will find the grace to begin to close your worldly eyes to the messiness of life as you open your spiritual eyes to the beauty surrounding that mess. There is a reason that a father takes cute pictures of his baby at those magical moments when she is covered in chocolate pudding or elbow-deep in birthday cake—because in them he sees the joy of his child not only relishing what he’s given her, but also diving into it, to the top of her head and the tips of her fingers; covering herself with the goodness that he has supplied. She’s not worrying about how to clean it up or thinking, *What a waste!* She’s just basking in the abundance.

Today, let us bask in the abundance of the Father. His unfathomable depths can surely replace our fathomable mess.

Can you find out the deep things of God?

Can you find out the limit of the Almighty?

It is higher than heaven—what can you do?

Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

Its measure is longer than the earth

and broader than the sea. (Job 11:7-9)



2

PREGNANT FOR CENTURIES

My husband, Michael, is the youngest of six kids, who were all born three years apart. I did the math, and figured out that his mother had a baby in diapers for twenty years! Talk about overwhelming!

When we had our daughter, I was so overwhelmed with caring for this creature I knew nothing about, that one night while trying to nurse her in the rocking chair with Michael cheering for me gently at my feet, I said, in all seriousness, “Can we take her back? Do you think it’s too late for them to take her back?” He held back a snicker and whispered, “No honey, we cannot take her back. She’s ours now.” I was deflated. Engulfed in dread and doubt, I was certain this was the worst idea we had ever had.

Then I started to think seriously about the *first* woman overwhelmed, Eve. Can you imagine how overwhelming her future would have looked? “Welcome to the world! This is your

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

husband. He's going to be naming all the animals ever created. And you? You're going to be making all the humans! But don't worry—you've got a lifetime to get it all done. Let's see, at one kid for every year you live, you'll easily pop out eight hundred kids in your lifetime. Piece of cake! Which you'll also need to learn to make and bake, but you can pick that up later. So yeah, you can be pregnant for centuries. But who would be overwhelmed by that?"

Eight hundred years? I remember when I thought thirty-seven years was a long time—a long time to be single! Because that's how long I waited until I finally got my man. I remember thinking, "You've got to be kidding me! My life is almost half over and still nothin'! What are the odds?" I was tired of eating the entire carton of ice cream alone. I wanted someone to watch me, because I wasn't thinking of sharing. I really wanted someone to shop with, because it's not really therapy unless someone else can tell me how cute I look. I wanted a partner to help me pick out furniture, or maybe I should say to just tell me how cute my furniture choices were. (Who am I kidding? Again, a problem with control, but anywhozit...) I wanted someone to go on weekend trips to bed and breakfasts with me. Put plain and simply, I wanted a partner. Or maybe I just wanted a BFF—but I wanted her to be a man. I was overwhelmed with loneliness. I was man-hungry and starving to death.

So I opened up the smorgasbord of hot Christian men (that is, Christianmingle.com) and got my scooping hand ready! I loaded up on all kinds of profiles, searching for the perfect one, and it wasn't long before I found him! The ideal guy for me was making a monkey face next to a statue of Rafiki from *The Lion King*, as opposed to all the other guys who were posed next to their sports cars, fighter jets, or ex-girlfriends. (I kid you not!) Reading his profile was like digging out from under

the quagmire of loneliness one perfect bio line at a time. The youngest of six kids? Great! There's the perfect ready-made family for this lonely only child. A writer? A speaker? Everything I ever dreamt of in one man! He was the answer to my love needs *and* business needs. I'd marry him and make him my manager (or husband), thus filling two voids with one man. Good-bye overwhelmedness!

And, hello... *overwhelmedness!*

Yes, one excess was replaced by yet another. Isn't it funny how that works? My mind went from being consumed with finding a man to being consumed with the man I had found. I can remember being unable to take my eyes off of him. As we drove down the road, I'd put my elbow on the middle console and lovingly balance my chin in my hand (of course, I wasn't driving) as I devoured him with my love-hungry eyes, à la Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey. We'd go to a restaurant and I'd jump into his side of the booth so I could touch him, smell him, and stare at him all at once. I was the adoring stalker girlfriend in love with everything about him—even his occasional misstep, or stupid idea. I loved it all. Who wouldn't? He was perfect and he was mine!

Maybe you can tell that when I feel something deeply, I give it a hundred and ten percent. That just means I give it more than I have, which I guess could be the definition of being overwhelmed. Listen, if my heart is a factory of overwhelmedness, it's just because I care so much. But it's true, isn't it? Whether we feel terribly bad or terribly good, both can be overwhelming simply because it's more than we have the mental capacity to bear. And when life is full, so is our ability to live it.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

We once gave a ridiculous present to our then five-year-old, who was so excited to get her very first iPad that she held it tightly to her chest and ran to her room screaming with joy.

“You’re welcome!” we both said to her backside as the door slammed shut. She was more excited about the gift than she was about the giver—typical human! (What am I saying? I should say *typical child of mine*. She does have my DNA and, as Winston Churchill said, “I’m easily satisfied with the best.”) But the best can be just as overwhelming as the worst. It can consume you, take up all of your waking thoughts, and pepper all of your sleeping ones as well. You don’t have to be too busy to be overwhelmed—just too excited to sleep.

It can be hard to find God in the midst of too much of a thing. In fact, too much, by definition, fills every nook and cranny, like my meat and veggies bowl at Mongolian Grill: there ain’t no room for another thing! But perhaps we could imitate the apostle Paul who determined in his life that, whatever gain he had, he counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, he counted everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. For the sake of Jesus, Paul suffered the loss of all things and counted them as rubbish in order that he might gain Christ (see Philippians 3:7-8). If we count it all, the good and the bad, as rubbish in comparison to the value of knowing Christ more, then what used to overwhelm can now be put onto the Mongolian grill of life and be made into a sumptuous spread rather than an overwhelming pile of unprepared repast.

Are you willing to lay your goodies down in order to pick up the “goodest” of all—your Savior Jesus Christ?



3

NO WONDER ITALIAN WOMEN THROW PLATES

Yes, I was overwhelmed with hearts and roses and all that is romance—until we said, “I do.” Then I took the highway of overwhelmedness that had delivered me from the Land of Isolation to the Kingdom of Love, and exited abruptly into the realm of Are You Kidding Me? That’s where I promptly realized that sometimes being overwhelmed makes us blind to everything except that which overwhelms us. When we were dating, those minor differences between us were no big deal but once we were married they

We like to live in the shallow water, where we can't drown in our emotions. We want life to be easy, not messy.

Emotions: messy.

Fun: easy.

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

became like that tiny grain of sand caught in your eye—annoying and overwhelming beyond its size.

Our first year of *mirage*, as I like to call it, since it was a romance that appeared possible *but was not*, was a disaster: nothing like I thought marriage would be.

Let's just say the seventy-four years of singleness between us had turned us into marital curmudgeons. We were, as you can imagine, "set in our ways" (said in an old grandpa voice), and living together in the same house was like putting metal in a microwave: loud and potentially dangerous.

It was the mix of backgrounds that really got us in trouble. See, I am of Norwegian descent and come from a family that is easygoing and unemotional—we prefer fun over substance. In other words, we like to live in the shallow water, where we can't drown in our emotions. We want life to be easy, not messy. Emotions: messy. Fun: easy.

Michael, on the other hand, is Italian and Irish, which means he's the opposite of Norwegian. He is comfortable with an emotional mess. He loves to talk, even shout, about the messy side of life—you know, about things like love and regret. He wants to analyze problems and conceive of solutions. I prefer a broom and a nice area rug to sweep all my junk under.

So, our first year of marriage went something like this:

Michael: You just stepped on my foot! Don't you want to say anything?

Hayley: Yeah! What was your foot doing there, right where people walk?

In fact, anytime I hurt him, he wanted me to say "I'm sorry," but I had *never* spoken those words in my life. Speaking them would mean I was wrong, and I don't purposely do things wrong. So technically it was an *accident*, and we don't

say sorry for *accidents* over which we have no control. Duh! We are not guilty; therefore, we do not say sorry.

Yes, this little battle took place on a daily basis. He wanted me to confess my mistakes and I wanted him to get over it. He wanted to talk about things of substance and I wanted to go shopping. His fingernails scratching down the chalkboard of my life was nothing like the romance I believed was marriage.

*There is just no way to
be overwhelmed without
acting on it.*

Where were the bubble baths and candles? Where were the bedtime foot rubs and the romantic mix tapes?

I jest, but if I had been an atheist, I would have asked for a do-over. We were drowning in our differences and not in a good way. We had made a big mistake! We weren't in love; we didn't even like each other. We raised our voices and slammed our doors as we walked through them.

We were miserable.

And so I was done; done being the quiet Nordic woman who never saw a problem. I was an Italian woman now, with an Italian last name to prove it. So I decided to own my new life and to shout and throw things just like I'd seen Italian women do on TV.

To prepare for my transformation, I went to the local thrift store and bought a bunch of cheap plates. I carried them downstairs to our subterranean garage and piled them on the floor. Then I picked them up, one by one, and threw them at the stone wall. And with each crash, I rose closer to the surface of the ocean of emotion I was drowning in. No wonder Italian women threw plates; it's the only way they could live with Italian men!

Face it: there is just no way to be overwhelmed without

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

acting on it. In fact, being overwhelmed is like running through the house flipping on all the switches—the lights, the blender, the food processor, the garbage disposal—all at once. Whether you are overwhelmed into silent inaction, loud reaction, or just running in circles like a chicken who just tripped over its own head, your body's systems are all working hard for the money—so hard for it, honey—and one day they're gonna up and quit!

If I had to keep up that stalker love thing I had for Michael in the beginning for more than a year, I would have died. I was too happy to eat and too excited to sleep. My body couldn't keep up at that pace. And later, though the marital trips to the basement let off some steam, my anger engine was still working overtime!

When we are overwhelmed by life, our bodies pay the price. Adrenal exhaustion, chronic fatigue, thyroid problems, ulcers, headaches, body ache, and irritable bowels—all brought to you by an extreme focus on the problem of “too much to do and too little time to do it.”

Though the world says we can and should have it all, we just physically cannot, which anyone who's tried to maintain the perfect adrenaline-rushing excitement of new love while building a career and raising a strong and well-bonded family knows. When giving it your all means giving it three hundred percent, it just isn't mathematically possible. And I know the maths, so trust me.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER

I don't recommend you go out and buy old plates. Though I know many women have taken my story as advice, that's not what you should do. It is far better to address the issue than to let off the steam of the symptom. And I pray that's what we can do before this book is over: address the issues that lead to those emotions of anger, bitterness, resentment, and frustration, and rewire your overwhelmed mind to focus on the One who makes this life possible, with all of its emotional lows and rocky mountain highs.

How is it different when you are overwhelmed with the lows than with the highs?

Which emotion do you struggle with the most in relationship to those closest to you?

How is your health suffering from the things that you allow to overwhelm you? (Trust me—it is!)

How is being overwhelmed getting in the way of your relationships, with family, friends, and our Heavenly Father?

One of the most amazing things that God gives us is the ability to grow fruit (the fruit of the Spirit), which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (See Galatians 5:22-23.)

These are the products of a life lived in the Spirit and are the very things that can dig us out of our overwhelmedness. Imagine if, in those relationships that overwhelm you, you could respond not with anger, depression, impatience, meanness, and—well, you fill in the blank—but could instead, with

A WOMAN OVERWHELMED

only a gentle look toward heaven, offer up the opposite: the fruit of His presence in your life. How would your life be different then?

Let me tell you—hugely!

Yep, the fruit of the Spirit not only gives others a taste of the Savior, but also gives us the sustenance we need to reject those things that feed our overflow of badness, and instead accept those things that fill us with His goodness. But in order to find baskets of Holy Spirit fruit in our lives, we have to want it; and in order to want it, we have to know what *it* is. God's ideas on love, joy, peace, and the rest is oftentimes different than the world's.

Ask God today to begin to teach you about His fruit and how He wants to grow it in your life and relationships. The more abundant His fruit, the less abundant your worries.