

*EMBRACING A GRACE-PACED LIFE
IN A WORLD OF ENDLESS DEMANDS*

ReFRESH

*SHONA &
DAVID MURRAY*

“We live in a culture that constantly demands more of women. Young women are not exempt from this pressure. In fact, this is the time—in our teens and twenties—when we’re just beginning to fall prey to the increasing stress of school, social media, smartphones, relationships, work, and busyness. We’re barely out of childhood and already feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, depressed, drowned, and burned out. That’s why we need the joyful refreshment of the gospel of grace. And that’s exactly what Shona and David Murray deliver in *Refresh*. They write warmly, empathetically, biblically, and practically. I will be applying the wisdom of this book to my own life and eagerly recommending it to the young women I know!”

Jaquelle Crowe, lead writer and editor in chief, *TheRebellion.com*;
contributor, *The Gospel Coalition*; author, *This Changes Everything*

“I have searched high and low for a book that helps me deal with stress-related illness in a God-honoring way. I have stacks of books that either overspiritualize depression and stress-induced illness or overmedicalize it. I struggle with balance, and I need help. To the rescue comes *Refresh*, a book that meets you where you are, preaching neither overspiritualized idealism nor worldly fatalism. Read this book and give it to friends. It will change the way you see God’s providence in your emotional suffering and physical weakness, and it will encourage you on a path of self-care that honors the Lord and enables you to serve your family of God for the long haul.”

Rosaria Butterfield, former professor of English, Syracuse University;
author, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*

“Shona’s transparency and gentle coaching throughout this book provide the perfect context for the encouragement that *Refresh* will be to many women who have experienced burnout or are on the verge of burnout. As a counselor and a woman who has experienced it, I appreciated the holistic approach to both the causes of burnout and its treatment. The Murrays fully address both body and soul in their book, which will leave you refreshed, renewed, and ready to lead others alongside streams of living water flowing from the Great Shepherd of our souls.”

Heather Nelson, biblical counselor; author, *Unashamed: Healing Our Brokenness and Finding Freedom from Shame*

“Burnout and exhaustion are not solely a female issue, but as a woman I can attest to experiencing these very things in recent years. The demands on our time are many and coming from all directions. How will we use our time? How will we find balance? How will we maintain our walk with the Lord in the midst of so much? Shona and David Murray understand these pressures and speak directly to them in this book. Drawing on her own experience of depression and burnout (and experience as a medical doctor), Shona has a winsome and practical approach to the balance and rest we all crave (yet struggle to find). If you are desperate for relief, you will find encouragement in *Refresh*.”

Courtney Reissig, author, *The Accidental Feminist* and *Glory in the Ordinary*

“Reading *Refresh* in a bone-weary season of my life was like having a life-giving conversation with a couple of grace-filled friends who have been there themselves and were able to encourage me with practical, biblical wisdom.”

Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth, author; Bible teacher; host, *Revive Our Hearts*

RcFRESH

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*Embracing a Grace-Paced Life in
a World of Endless Demands*

Shona Murray and David Murray

Refresh: Embracing a Grace-Paced Life in a World of Endless Demands

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To our beloved children,
Allan, Angus, Joni, Amy, and Scot

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Introduction

Overwhelmed. Exhausted. Depressed. Panicky. Stressed. Burned out. Broken. Paralyzed. Drowning. Empty. Recognize yourself in any of these words? Maybe in all of them?

You're not alone. These are the most common words I've heard Christian women using to describe themselves and their lives.

Whatever happened to the words *peaceful, calm, joyful, content, quiet, rested, refreshed, and fulfilled*? Wouldn't you like to exchange the second set of words for the first?

It seems impossible, doesn't it? Especially as the demands upon us keep multiplying: housework demands our energy, employers demand our hours, the church demands our commitment, friends demand our presence, kids demand our taxi-cab, credit cards demand our dollars, school sports demand our evenings and Saturdays, the yard demands our sweat, charities demand our donations, the sick demand our visits, marriage demands our time, relations demand our phone calls, email demands our replies, Pinterest demands our perfection, and on and on it incessantly goes.

Sometimes you want to run away, don't you? Or curl up in a ball and hide under the covers. Or jam your fingers in

your ears and silence the clamor. Or maybe lock the door and throw away the key, the phone, and the ever-lengthening to-do list. The demands are simply overwhelming. And there's little prospect of change, little hope of experiencing the second group of words again, until, well, maybe retirement.

I sympathize, because I've been there too. In fact, I've probably been in a deeper and darker place than many of you, a painful story that I'll be sharing with you in the coming pages. However, over many years, and through many struggles, the Lord has graciously delivered me from the first set of words and into a more regular experience of the second. In short, he has taught me, and is teaching me, how to live a grace-paced life in a world of overwhelming demands.

A Grace-Paced Life

A grace-paced life? What's that? It's a pace of life that's constantly refreshed by five different wells of divine grace. First, there's the *motivating* well of grace. We used to be driven by money, family perfection, beauty, careers, or earning God's favor. But instead of filling and fulfilling us, these motivations drained and dried us. Now though, we daily drop our buckets into the unsearchable depths of God's saving grace in Christ to freely receive his overflowing mercy and love. Filled to overflowing with gospel grace, we are now energized and enthused to serve him at home, at work, and at church, as our heart beats, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Second there's the *moderating* well of grace. Grace moderates our expectations of ourselves and others. At the foot of the cross we have seen our sin and our sinfulness. We have learned that we are not perfect and never will be. Therefore, when we fall and fail, we don't torment or torture ourselves.

Instead, we calmly take our sins to Calvary knowing that God's grace forgives us all our imperfections and lovingly accepts us as perfect in Christ. We don't need to serve, sacrifice, or suffer our way to human or divine approval, because Christ has already served, sacrificed, and suffered for us. His perfection moderates our perfectionism as we remind ourselves, "Accepted, accepted, accepted."

Third, we are refreshed by the *multiplying* well of grace. We no longer believe that everything depends on us and our efforts. Rather, we trust God to multiply our few loaves and fishes. We don't sit back and do nothing, but neither do we try to do everything. We sow and water, but we realize that it's God who gives the increase. God's blessing multiplies our work in a way that no amount of extra hours or effort can. How calming and soothing is this realization and the prayer it produces: "Multiply, multiply, multiply."

Fourth, the *releasing* well of grace helps us to hand control of our lives over to God. We trust his sovereignty not just in salvation but in every area of life. Yes, we still work diligently and carefully, but releasing grace humbly submits to setbacks, problems, and disappointments, accepting them as tests of our trust in God's control. When tempted to micromanage and dictate our lives and the lives of others, we drop our bucket into this refreshing well as we whisper to ourselves, "Release, release, release."

Finally, there's the *receiving* well of grace, which closer inspection reveals to be made up of a number of smaller wells. Each of them represents one of God's gracious gifts to his needy creatures: a weekly Sabbath, sleep, physical exercise, family and friends, Christian fellowship, and so on. In our fast-paced life we used to push these gifts away, thinking that

we didn't need them. But in the grace-paced life, we approach these wells saying, "Receive, receive, receive." The more and more we see that our heavenly Father designed and drilled these wells for our good, the more we receive and enjoy their renewing and refreshing waters.

In the course of this book we'll open up these wells of God's grace and learn how and when to drink from their refreshing waters.

Women Only?

But why write for women only? Do men not run too fast, overcommit, overstretch, and burn out too? Yes, they do, and that's why my husband, David, has written a book for men called *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*. But through personal experience and years of counseling we discovered that although there's much overlap between men's and women's experience of the stressed-to-depressed spectrum, there are also important gender-specific aspects in both causes and cures to warrant separate books. But I'd like men to read this book too, because an increased understanding of women's unique struggles will help them to serve and minister to their sisters in Christ and, together, run countercultural grace-paced lives.

I'd also encourage you to share the book with your daughters and your younger female friends, because it's not just middle-aged and older women who are feeling overwhelmed. The millennial generation (aged eighteen to thirty-three) have higher stress levels than the national average, with 39 percent saying that their stress levels have increased over the past year, 52 percent losing sleep each month due to various stresses, and 20 percent so depressed or stressed that they

need medication.¹ If that's you, I have good news for you. This book will show you biblical principles, practices, and patterns that will refresh your body and your soul so that you can start living a grace-filled and grace-paced life instead of joining the statistics.

Joint Authorship

Finally, some of you might be wondering how joint authorship works and how the content of *Reset* for men relates to *Refresh* for women. What bits did David write, what bits did I write, what bits did we write together, and how can you tell the difference? Having looked at various jointly authored books, we decided against writing *Refresh* as “we,” because it's for women and, well, David is not a woman! We also didn't like the idea of switching from “I (Shona)” to “I (David)” whenever we used material from *Reset*. That just seemed awkward. Therefore, although we wrote it together, “I” (Shona) is used throughout. So what are the differences and overlaps between the two books?

First, the overall structure of the two books, the chapter headings and most of the subjects covered, are the same in both books. As David explained in his book, so much of the wisdom we have gained has come through many years of us living this together, suffering together, studying together, and counseling people together, so that our thoughts are almost identical. This similarity in structure and subjects should help husbands and wives who want to work through the books together to be on the same page, as it were, and yet also be

1. Sharon Jayson, “The State of Stress in America,” *USA Today*, February 7, 2013, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/02/06/stress-psychology-millennials-depression/1878295/>.

able to identify important differences in the male and female experiences of stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression.

Second, in *Refresh* my story is substituted for David's story. In *Reset* David told of how burnout just about killed him—twice. Throughout *Refresh* I replace that with my own painful story of how I slipped into a deep hole of depression and anxiety and how God is graciously delivering me.

Third, I feminized the manly parts. Although we initially thought that we could write a book for women with just a few tweaks of the man's book, we soon realized that for all the significant similarities, there are multiple important differences in the female experience of burnout. That resulted in much more work than either of us expected, but we both agreed that it was important to make it as feminine as possible for maximum usefulness. The feminization also involved the addition of some sections that have no counterpart in *Reset*.

Although we were both a bit nervous about how to navigate a joint project such as this, as usual God surprised us and used the experience to draw us closer together and give us an ever-deeper appreciation for the beautiful complementarity of husband and wife in God's plan for marriage. Near the end of writing it, we celebrated twenty-five years of marriage and found that writing *Refresh* had been a wonderful reminder of God's goodness and mercy following us all the days of our lives. We hope and pray that you will benefit from the wisdom God has been pleased to teach us through the years and that what we have learned will refresh you, lead you into a grace-paced life in a world of overwhelming demands, and help you experience the healthy balance of grace motivation and grace moderation as exemplified by the apostle:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1–2)

Station 1

Reality Check



I was a crumpled heap. The billows of mental pain buffeted me, leaving me barely able to breathe. I agonized over how a life that had been so full of happiness, so full of God's blessing, could become so helpless and hopeless. For five months I had fought hard against the possibility of depression. After all, part of my job as a family doctor was to help patients recover from depression. Why was I now hearing my story in their stories? Why was I so afraid to see myself in their stories?

“Only the weak get overwhelmed and burn out. Only Christians who have bad genes or have experienced a real tragedy get depression. Ordinary Christians like me don't. I must be an apostate who is depressed because God has left me. There's no hope for me. No one and nothing can fix me. Even if they could, I don't want to live without God. Yet I don't know who he is anymore. I don't know where he is. I don't see him anywhere. Why did he leave me? Will he ever rescue me? Or will I die in despair?”

My mind spun like this, minute after minute, day after day,

tortured by terrifying thoughts of God and my own tragic destiny. Until one day in March 2003 I spoke these words to my husband David through waves of tears: “I am a ship smashed against the rocks. My life is over!” Something gripped him at that moment that set us both on a course that would change our lives, a course that would eventually refresh my life and teach me how to embrace a grace-paced life in a world of overwhelming demands.

Panic Attacks

In the months leading up to my shipwreck, I had become utterly exhausted and had completely lost my appetite. I simply had no desire to eat. One evening I tried to rest and read a book when suddenly, from nowhere, I felt a terror within, as if something awful was about to happen. My heart was pounding for no apparent reason, and I couldn’t make it calm down. Over subsequent weeks I had several of these fearful episodes.

I was very sad and would cry for no obvious reason. Loneliness enveloped me even when I was surrounded by those who loved me. I became obsessional in my thoughts, sometimes inexplicably mulling over sad events for hours. The terror episodes came closer together so that I was constantly terrified. My heart would pound away, sometimes for hours. Distraction seemed the best policy, so I just kept myself busy in an attempt to run away from these strange and terrible sensations, but also because there was so much to be done.

By now my enthusiasm had gone. Diaper changes, meals, groceries, mothering two lively little boys, caring for a busy toddler, and another baby on the way became scary prospects. I dreaded the mornings, and I wanted to hide under the covers; but a strong sense of the needs of others kept me going

and going and going. Weeks went by when I could hardly sleep, and I cried a lot more. Nothing interested me. I felt I was a bad mother, a bad wife, a bad daughter, and a bad Christian. Guilt over a myriad of tasks not done—or poorly done by my standards—suffocated me. And despite running at top speed, the finish line was never in sight.

Despair Envelops

Concentrating on my devotions became increasingly difficult, and I felt that the Lord was far away. Mental exhaustion had me in its grip. One particular night as I tried to pray and kept losing track of what I was thinking or saying, I began to feel that I was falling off a cliff; I fell deeper and deeper, and there was no bottom. My whole emotional world fell apart. Through the night, I struggled between sleep and wakefulness. The most terrifying images and thoughts of God poured into my mind like an unstoppable fountain. I would respond with verses of well-known psalms, which I repeated over and over in a desperate attempt to hang on to God and his promises. I cried and cried to the Lord, but the darkness of despair descended. Like a tiny boat lost in a convulsing storm, having lost its rudder, my mind was broken, my emotions crippled, and the waves of despair plunged me down without mercy.

No Rest

During this dark season I would sleep with exhaustion, but then awaken in an instant several minutes later, unable to stop the rage of mental torment. I concluded that the Lord had given me over to the Devil, that I could not be a Christian, and all that remained was for me to fall into hell. Long before

my alarm clock went off each morning, I awoke suddenly like a startled bird. While the rest of the house slept, I had to get up, to get away from this pain. Waves of tormenting thoughts crashed on the shores of my heart: “What’s going to happen to my children on the way to eternity? Who will bring them up? What a tragedy of immeasurable consequences—a mother who lost her mind and her soul. They will have to live with that. What about David, my poor husband, who sees that something is terribly wrong with me but can’t fathom it? What will happen to the baby I am carrying, for whom I feel no emotional connection?”

Reality versus Unreality

I tried to focus on verses of comfort from my Bible, with a ferocious intensity, but in so doing I became more and more obsessive. I turned all the Bible’s encouragements against myself and applied all its condemnations to myself. Adding to my mental exhaustion, I scoured books that I thought might rescue me from these dark depths: books such as *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* by John Bunyan; *The Christian in Complete Armour* by William Gurnall; and *Spiritual Depression* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. I gleaned some truth from these books that kept some hope alive, but it was all too intense and exhausting.

There were glimpses of reality but only occasionally and momentarily. Surely the Lord said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). He stilled the storm for the disciples. He would never cast away any who truly seek him. What were the last twenty-five years of my Christian life all about? He never saves and then lets go. That was my daily debate.

Yet just as soon as I grabbed reality, delusional thoughts, subjective feelings, and deceitful unreality would crush all hope.

The beautiful sunshine and the singing of the spring birds were an agony. The beauty of the night sky and the array of stars, which testified of a faithful Creator, only served to break my heart yet further. I thought back to my childhood, when I would often sit outside my home in the Scottish Highlands looking heavenward and singing the words of Psalm 8:3–4:

When I look up unto the heavens,
which thine own fingers framed,
Unto the moon, and to the stars,
which were by thee ordained;
Then say I, What is man, that he
remembered is by thee?
Or what the son of man, that thou
so kind to him should'st be?¹

But now, instead of that free and happy childhood, life was over. I had lost the Lord—if I ever had him. He was gone forever. All hope was gone.

Spiritual Problem?

As a family doctor, I had treated many people in similar situations, and if I had heard my story in the consulting room, I would have objectively diagnosed: “Mentally broken and severely depressed.” However, the subjective side of me—much more persuasive and persistent—convinced me that my problem was spiritual, a lack of spiritual will or trust. If only I could have greater faith in God, then everything would be okay. After all, “I can do all things through Christ who

1. From *The Psalms of David in Metre*, 1650.

strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). But I was in the eye of the storm, weakened and disorientated, which is not the best place to make accurate assessments.

Eventually, when I finally crashed on the rocks in March 2003, David and I decided to call in my father, an experienced pastor of fifty years who would surely be able to find my spiritual problem. However, when he heard my story, he was convinced that it was not so much a spiritual problem as a mental and physical problem with spiritual consequences. He said that due to many factors, including burnout and long-term stress, my body was run-down and my mind was broken. The normal physical and mental processes were disrupted, and, as a result, the most precious thing in my life was profoundly affected—my relationship with the Lord. That was a massive turning point for David and me, and it led to God opening the door to a wonderful recovery and a beautiful refreshing of my life that I want to share with you in the rest of this book.

Although your story may not be as serious or severe as mine, my subsequent experience of meeting and counseling other women has convinced me that many Christian women are trying to do what almost destroyed me; that is, run overwhelming lives at an unsustainable and miserable pace. Although not all of you will end up crumpled on the ground, feeling close to death as I did, many of you are suffering somewhere on the spectrum:

stressed → anxious → overwhelmed → burned out
→ sad → depressed → suicidal

By God’s grace my race did not end there, and yours need not either. Come with me to Refresh Gym and learn with me

how to embrace a grace-paced life in a world of overwhelming demands.

Refresh Gym

Usually when we visit a new gym, we want to immediately jump on all the fancy machines and get pumping. But the first station in Refresh Gym has no fitness equipment. Rather, it is a detailed personal examination to identify our weaknesses. In the past, I didn't appreciate how important this was.

When I moved from Scotland to the US ten years ago, I came across the fitness-fanatic phenomenon on an entirely different scale. Every American town and city seemed to boast multiple fitness wonderlands with lycra-clad, ear-budded ladies pumping the iron, sweating buckets, and downing shakes—not yummy milkshakes, but protein shakes. Gym names like Elite Fitness and Planet Fitness conjured up in my mind some surreal world where everyone was Jillian Michaels—superhealthy, superslim, superpretty, and never tired.

But David and I eventually succumbed to the marketing hype and signed up for two beautiful bodies. We had one brief complimentary session with a personal trainer, which amounted to little more than getting a photocopied sheet of identical exercises. No questions, no examination, no analysis of where we were weak or had particular problems. And off we went, pumping the iron and looking forward to big muscles (David) and losing a little weight (me) in just a few easy sessions. But nothing happened—not one muscle gained, not one pound lost. Pretty soon it fizzled out—apart from that nasty two-year contract.

Six years later we tried again, this time in a different gym, and this time it began with a detailed question-and-answer

session and a test for injuries and weaknesses. David was even wired up to a computer that measured various physical factors and printed out a complicated bunch of graphs and tables to show him what he needed to work on. Recently, when I signed up my fourteen-year-old diabetic daughter, Joni, for an exercise program, the trainer spent the whole first session, and some of the second, just *talking*—asking multiple questions and making assessments—while everyone else in the gym was busy *doing*. I could see Joni’s frustration, but I now understood how important this was to help identify problems and weaknesses, with a view to producing a fitness plan uniquely tailored to each individual’s needs and for their maximum benefit.

That’s why the first station in Refresh Gym is called “Reality Check”—it strips away our defenses and pretenses and makes us face up to reality. This examination will reveal our needs, highlight danger signs, help us identify problems and weaknesses, connect issues that we had not realized were related, and motivate us to tackle the other nine stations in the gym. So let’s stop, get wired up to some diagnostics, and assess the damage our pace has been causing to various aspects of our lives. Not all of them will apply to you, but take note of the ones that do, and I’ll tell you how to interpret them later.

Examination

Many women find it helpful to actually write out or tick off these signs and symptoms. Not only can it be personally cathartic; it makes it more objective and gives a baseline for comparing changes for better or worse in the future. Another way to get the most out of the following checklist is to go

through it with your husband or a close friend, as it can be difficult to accurately assess ourselves. As my friend Sarah explained:

I have struggled off and on with depression/anxiety to varying degrees in my life, and in the darker times there was a part of me that *knew* objectively that it was what it was, but the lies in your head are so strong when the darkness is there, even if you can see it, you don't believe it.

Physical Warning Signs

Just as running too fast round the track will eventually result in physical problems, so running the race of life at too fast a pace will have physical consequences. Over 70 percent of Americans experience stress-induced symptoms such as headaches, stomach cramps, sore joints, back pain, ulcers, breathlessness, bad skin, an irritable bowel, chest pain, and palpitations.² I certainly had some of these symptoms, and I also remember many female patients who came to me with multiple and varied bodily pains for which no physical explanation could be found, no matter how many tests and scans they had. Their lives were simply too fast and full for their bodies and minds. It's called "burnout" for a reason: all the stress causes chronic inflammation, a sort of fire in our cells that burns all the hotter, further, and longer the more fuel we add to it with our hectic lifestyles.

Feeling tired, exhausted, and lethargic all the time are early warning signs that should be heeded. Although sleep would seem to be the obvious cure, I found that I had difficulty

2. "Stress Statistics," Statistic Brain website, October 19, 2015, <http://www.statisticbrain.com/stress-statistics/>.

getting to sleep. I woke up frequently. I was unable to get back to sleep, and, therefore, no matter how many hours I spent in bed, I was never rested or refreshed. Others may find that they can do nothing but sleep. As one woman told me, “Generally, when I’m stressed or anxious, I feel like I can’t get enough sleep. I think it can be both physical need and emotional—as in, I’d rather stay in bed than face the day.”

Weight gain through overeating, irregular eating, unhealthy eating, constant snacking, and lack of vigorous exercise should also concern us. For others it may be weight loss through loss of appetite and skipping meals.

Mental Warning Signs

The next area to examine is our thought life. Remember how difficult I found it to concentrate on anything? Maybe you too are reading the same verses over and over during your devotional time but struggling to remember what you read. It’s hard even to write your grocery list or prioritize your to-do list. You end up just staring at your iPad or notebook. Or perhaps you have a plan, but you let yourself be constantly sidetracked by interruptions and indecision and never get to the store or to the first item on your to-do list. The clinic appointment you wanted to change now has to wait till tomorrow because the office is closed. The chicken is still in the freezer, so it’s Plan B for supper. You are late again for that coffee date with your friend and having to rush in the car. You can’t decide what to do next—empty the trash, make your bed, start supper, feed the dog, check email, or go to the shop. You are forgetting things you used to remember easily. Appointments, birthdays, anniversaries, phone numbers, names, and deadlines are now slipping your

mind with scary regularity. You write your grocery list, then leave it at home. You spend endless hours second-guessing your choices and decisions.

Or perhaps, like me, you spend hours and hours obsessing about the same thing. It's like a repeating voicemail that you simply can't switch off. Most of your thoughts are negative. You dwell on the bad, the sad, and can't see the glad. Bad news, bad people, and always, "I'm a bad Christian." You are pessimistic about your church, your family, your job, and the nation. You are becoming hypercritical of yourself and others. One young mother told me her nightmare with obsessive thoughts:

My family got sick right after our recent move. After that, I had obsessive thoughts about my children throwing up. I couldn't get it out of my head. *Was somebody about to throw up? What was that weird noise the baby made? Is he about to throw up?* I'd go in to get the kids after naps, half expecting to find them sick even though there was no reason to think that would be so. And I couldn't get the image out of my head. Multiple times a day I either pictured my children throwing up or a part of me expected them to start throwing up.

Emotional Warning Signs

Moving on to the emotions, you feel sad most of the time, often on the verge of tears, and sometimes cry for no obvious reason. Minor things make you cry. I remember crying in the car when another driver got into a parking spot before me when I was poised to get in there. I cried if the kids fought or acted foolishly, as I figured I was to blame. Laughter seems

like a distant memory, faking it is becoming harder, and hearing others laugh is painful. Emotional numbness is the norm.

You wake with worry, live with worry, and go to sleep with worry. Your heart pounds and your stomach churns when you think of the day's decisions and people's expectations. You fear your children are going to turn away from God and end up in immoral and ungodly lives. The future looks hopeless, and you feel worthless. Maybe it would be better if you were not here, you think.

As if this emotional overload wasn't enough, we find ourselves taking on additional emotional burdens that God has not called us to carry. Stories of pain and need on social media and other media outlets capture our minds and our hearts, and every request for prayer seems to be addressed personally to us.

Relational Warning Signs

Frustration, irritability, and impatience are boiling inside you and often erupting. You're angry at your husband, your children, the pastor, the shop assistant, and that other driver.

Socializing is too much bother, and friendships are all in the past tense. You think about organizing babysitters and getting your house in order, but it's all too much hassle. Or you come home exhausted from work and would rather curl up in front of the TV or sleep than connect with any of your friends. Though you used to love interacting with people, you now avoid them because you haven't got the energy to talk or listen, and "they probably don't really like me anyway." You become increasingly isolated and lonely. As one of my friends said, "I felt lonely even when surrounded by people."

Vocational Warning Signs

You are overwhelmed in your calling. If you are a mother, you have little joy in your children and even wonder if they are worth all the effort. You feel trapped in an endless circuit of seemingly menial diaper changes, meals, lunches, dirty floors, crying kids, laundry, and generally being everybody's gofer. There is no clocking-off time, and you fall into bed at night exhausted, weary, with no sense of accomplishment, and dreading the next day. You hold yourself responsible for every accident, mess, crying fit, episode of bickering, and every failure of character in your children.

If you work outside the home, you're probably falling behind there too, feeling constantly overwhelmed. You are cutting corners and making more and more mistakes. Wrong decisions are easy and frequent. Indecision breeds procrastination, which breeds indecision. Instead of motivation and drive, there's apathy and passivity.

Despite all this, you find it difficult to say no, and you agree to every request that comes your way: school fundraising, making meals for needy families in the church, leading the women's Bible study, taking on nursery duty, driving your kids to multiple sports events, sitting on multiple committees, and saying yes to work that you know you can't possibly finish on time. You feel guilty or anxious when you are not running yourself ragged and consider yourself lazy if you take even five minutes to sit and have a break.

Moral Warning Signs

You are reading books and watching shows and movies with language and images you'd never have tolerated in the past.

You are fantasizing about close relationships with men to whom you are not married, or perhaps beginning to flirt with them at work or at church. You are shading the truth in conversations, exaggerating or editing as appropriate. You are medicating yourself (and your conscience) by overspending, overdrinking, overeating, or over-Facebooking. Most of your conversations are taken up with running down other people.

Spiritual Warning Signs

Are your personal devotions becoming shorter and shorter? Or are they nonexistent? Do you find yourself checking email and social media before your quiet time or even during it? Are you spending more time chatting with strangers on Facebook than time in conversation with God? Are you beginning to skip church for any reason you can think up? Are you finding church boring, sermons sleep-inducing, and Christian fellowship a drudge? Multiple yeses here should be ringing multiple alarm bells.

Another spiritual warning sign is gnawing discontentment. Lindsay, a young Christian, told me she has learned to be on the lookout for evidences of dissatisfaction in her life, often stemming from what she calls her “idealistic mind-set.” “In a relationship,” for example, “if things are not going the way I had imagined or wanted, I am often dissatisfied. This results in anxiety, a bad attitude, and ingratitude.”

Evaluation

That was a painful examination, wasn't it? But what does all the information add up to? Perhaps you got the all-clear, you're good to go and ready to run again. But if you're read-

ing this book, it's more likely that you noted some worrying signs—probably many of them. What do you do now? The worst thing you can do is ignore these warnings and soldier on. Instead, you need to stop and take a serious look at them, evaluating them using three dimensions.

1. *How wide?* Given this broad range of symptoms, how many are you experiencing? Everybody will have some ticks—that's normal life in an abnormal world. But what should really get your attention is having more than half of them. Even if you have only a few, you should pay attention lest they multiply. In that case, you can use this book more as a preventative measure.

2. *How deep?* Try to gauge the seriousness of each tick by rating the intensity of each symptom from one to five, with five being the most serious. Obviously alarm bells should be ringing if more than a few are at three or four and above.

3. *How long?* We all go through down times; we have blue days or even a blue week. Again, that's just life in a fallen world. However, if these symptoms have been going on for a few weeks or more, then you really need to take urgent action and begin to address them.

So you've got your printout, and the measurements are concerning, the graphs are worrying, the evaluation is alarming. If you don't make adjustments to your life, you could move along the spectrum from stressed to anxious and overwhelmed, or even to sad, depressed, and ultimately suicidal. You are in real danger of crashing, and you must slow down. Refresh Gym is here to help you. Yes, some difficult decisions will have to be made if you sign up, but on the other side is a much better-paced and much more enjoyable life.

Or maybe you are tempted to despair. You shouldn't give

in to it. Just as God stopped me in my tracks to teach me some precious, lifelong lessons for which I will be eternally grateful, the fact that God has brought this book into your life and alerted you to the danger you are in should give you great hope. If he rescued me, he can rescue you, refresh your life, and get you back on track with greater physical, emotional, relational, moral, and spiritual health and with a good hope for a glorious finish.

As we move around the stations in Refresh Gym, remember that God owns the gym and is himself the trainer. His athletes are handpicked and very dear to him. His ultimate aim is to get you to the last station, Resurrection, which is not just an end-of-life experience; it can become a daily experience in your life. Yes, there is pain along the way, but God's tender, guiding hand will lead you through the process, and perhaps you will take others with you to this gym in the days ahead. "He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). He's not just proving us but improving us.

“I FEEL SO OVERWHELMED.”

Do you race from one thing to the next, unable to keep up with all the demands of your ever-growing to-do list? Are you overcommitted and overstretched, but don't know how to slow down when the world just says to speed up? Is there any hope for rest in a world of never-ending demands?

Many women don't realize they're running at an unsustainable pace until it hurts them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Drawing on many years of counseling and their own experiences of burnout, wife and husband team Shona and David Murray want to help you slow down to a more grace-paced life—enabling you to avoid the pitfall of burnout, cultivate sustainable habits for the future, and experience the rest of body and soul that God intends for you.

“I have searched high and low for a book that helps me deal with stress-related illness in a God-honoring way. To the rescue comes *Refresh*, a book that meets you where you are. Read this book, and give it to friends.”

Rosaria Butterfield, author, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*

“The Murrays fully address both body and soul in their book that will leave you refreshed, renewed, and ready to lead others alongside streams of living water flowing from the Great Shepherd of our souls.”

Heather Nelson, biblical counselor; author, *Unashamed*

“We live in a culture that constantly demands more of women. Young women are not exempt from this pressure. That's why we need the joyful refreshment of the gospel of grace. And that's exactly what Shona and David Murray deliver in *Refresh*.”

Jaquelle Crowe, lead writer and editor in chief, *TheRebelution.com*; author, *This Changes Everything*

SHONA AND DAVID MURRAY live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with their five children, and are part of Grand Rapids Free Reformed Church, where David serves as a pastor. David also serves as a professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. Shona is a medical doctor and worked as a family practitioner in Scotland until she moved to the United States.

CHRISTIAN LIVING / WOMEN'S ISSUES

