



An interview with Hayley DiMarco, Author of *A Woman Overwhelmed*

Women are often overwhelmed by the demands and circumstances of life, resulting in stress, fear, worry, impatience, fatigue, frustration and even depression. The emotional tolls are great but result in physical symptoms, such as weight gain, insomnia, headaches, and anxiety. In *A Woman Overwhelmed: Finding God in the Messes of Life* (Abingdon Press), best-selling author Hayley DiMarco shows readers what would happen if they could see the insanity in their pace and turn to embrace an overwhelming God.

DiMarco shares biblical insights and personal stories to show we were created to be overwhelmed, not by life, but by God. She offers a glimpse at the comedy of an overwhelmed life while encouraging readers to discover the depths and heights of God's love and power.

Q: Is it true you have never met a woman who wasn't overwhelmed by life? Why are women easily overwhelmed?

Yes, it is true! I think it is simply because we were made to be overwhelmed by the goodness and grace of God. Because of that, our hearts search for something bigger than us, and when we see our to-do lists and plans as the biggest things in our lives, we naturally become overwhelmed with them. In fact, when our heart, soul, mind and strength are all focused on anything, it tends to overwhelm us. That is why Jesus says the most important commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind. We were meant to be overwhelmed by God.

Q: What are the things that overwhelm women most?

Women have a list of things to be overwhelmed with, but most women become overwhelmed with their schedules, which include working, nurturing, loving, exercising, cleaning, cooking and more. However, that's not all a woman can become overwhelmed with. We also use comparison as a way of determining our value and our success and as the grounds for too much to do and no way to do it all. With all that has to be done, it would be much easier if everyone would do what we want them to do, but alas, our lack of being able to control others ends up overwhelming us as well.

Q: Are you saying only women are overwhelmed? Aren't men just as overwhelmed by life?

I think men find themselves overwhelmed by life as much as women, but they are overwhelmed by different things and tend to manage it differently. Men struggle more with provision and protection and at the end of the day tend to react in one of two ways: by becoming workaholics or becoming paralyzed into complete inaction. They tend to struggle with anger and addiction as they attempt to deal with their stress while women often react differently to the stressors in their lives. God made men and women different, but He made us both to be overwhelmed.

Q: Do single women struggle with being overwhelmed as much as married women?

I don't think marital status has anything to do with being overwhelmed. Where a married woman might be overwhelmed with being a wife and mother, a single woman can be just as overwhelmed with her singleness. For example, she may struggle with loneliness or the financial restraints of a single income. No one is exempt because no one is righteous, not one.

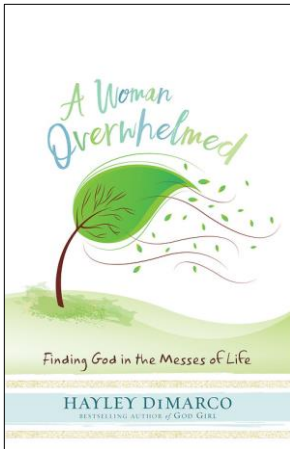
Q: What are some of the resulting emotions and reactions to the sense of being overwhelmed?

There are so many emotions and reactions when it comes to living life overwhelmed; some include stress, worry, self-doubt, impatience, inaction, frustration, anger, regret, desire for control, lack of self-control, depression, fighting, bossiness, condemnation, busyness and more. The list could go on and on because each of us deals with the stresses of life differently, but when we have any of the opposites of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, it is a good indication we are living life overwhelmed by the wrong thing. The fruit of the Spirit is abundant in a life

overwhelmed by God: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. If you find yourself with any of the opposites, such as selfishness, unthankfulness, impatience, harshness, immorality, unfaithfulness or a lack of self-control, then you have allowed yourself to become overwhelmed by the flesh rather than by the Spirit. The good news is the Spirit is willing and able to give you His fruit as you turn your eyes away from the cares of this world and onto the Father.

Q: You write, "If I'm honest with myself about it, I'm not so much overwhelmed with my life as I am with everyone else's." Explain how the lives of others contribute to your (and our own) sense of being overwhelmed.

Here's the thing: 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. From my husband and daughter to my friends and enemies, getting people to see my ways as the best ways is like trying to convince my dog he doesn't want my dirty socks. It's a losing battle. I'm overwhelmed simply because I'm not in charge of everyone. From my family and friends to the person driving in front of me, I want people to do things the way I want them done, and since they're not doing it my way, I'm overwhelmed.



Q: You also say an important part of escaping overwhelmedness is adopting "the Mission of God over the Mission of Me." Can you explain what that means?

When our mission in life is to accomplish our own plans, dreams, hopes and desires, we are fertile ground for too much to do and not enough time or resources to do it. The Mission of Me is not a road to emotional or spiritual success because there will be difficult times and devastating failures, but the Mission of God, though fraught with difficulty, sees success because God will not be frustrated. When we align our will and mission in life with His, we see life through different lenses, and suddenly everything that would have overwhelmed us is now a tool for our good.

Q: Can you share the story of the first time you felt overwhelmed by God?

I tend to find myself overwhelmed by God when I am in nature. Just walking around in the midst of His glorious creation overwhelms me — it is a sight and a sense of His love that is more than I can imagine. When I feel overwhelmed by life, I have to remind myself to go or look outside and remember the lengths to which God has gone to show us His love. When life seems overwhelmingly impossible and I see how He cares for everything — the birds of the air, the flowers of the field — and supplies us with all we need for life, I am overwhelmed by His goodness and His power.

The key for me is to remind myself of who He is. Whether it's in nature or in His Word, when I see the true character of God, when I study His attributes and see who He is, I cannot help but be overwhelmed by the notion He is truly all I need.

Q: Christian women feel a pressure and responsibility to live up to the description of the Proverbs 31 woman. How do women often misunderstand that passage of scripture?

First of all, we misunderstand Proverbs 31 when we think we should do as much as she is seen doing. This passage is most likely exemplifying six different women, not one super woman. For women who try to compare themselves to the perfect woman to see if they are doing everything right, looking at Proverbs 31 as representation of how to plan your day and to-do list is a disaster. When we do this, we can quickly forget it isn't by works we are saved, but by His grace.

In fact, when Jesus came, He introduced to us His to-do-through-you list, and it is significantly shorter than Proverbs 31; it is simply to love, to love God and to love your neighbor. That is the summary of all God wants us to do. This means if your to-do list can't be done in love, then your to-do list needs some changing because God's command to love should color every aspect of our lives, like an Instagram filter covers your favorite photo.

Q: Tell us about a time where you became so stressed you simply shut down. What lessons have you learned about moderation?

I naturally shy away from moderation. I find it lukewarm. I prefer to give everything 110%, which means I give more than I have, the very definition of overwhelmedness. Moderation seems to me like I'm not doing my best, so I've had to practice telling myself that moderation, while it doesn't promise to do it all, will allow me to do more in the end than I could if I was going to extremes.

The most obvious place where I stress myself into inaction is in housekeeping. I have what professional organizers call "nowhere to put anything." I move my stuff from surface to surface in an attempt to rearrange my mess, but it all just gets me down until I say, "I just don't know what to do." I'm paralyzed by the fact there is just too much stuff and nowhere to put it.

Q: How does comparison and competition fuel our state of being overwhelmed?

The way I look at it, there are two possible results of comparing ourselves with another human being: pride and depression. Comparison promises to help us to stay on top, out-do others and be accepted, but the result is ultimately pride when we measure up or depression when we don't. When we see ourselves as better or worse than everyone else, we have taken our eyes off the Father and placed them squarely on ourselves.

Competition is a symptom of comparison; it's the yardstick by which we measure our success. At the root of comparison is our stubborn need to feel superior and bolster our pride. On the flip side, the foundation of righteousness is humility, a self-proclaimed neutrality in the competition of life. When we humble ourselves, we are no longer overwhelmed by life but by the love of a God who loves us in spite of our sinful nature and repeated failure. We see comparison and competition stand in direct contrast to the humble life God calls His children to in James 4:10, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you" (James 4:10, ESV).

Q: What are some of the physical symptoms of stress women may shrug off, but should pay attention to?

Everyone experiences differing symptoms, but most of the time any of these things might signal you have become overwhelmed by life:

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

Q: What lessons has God taught you about patience, especially when it seems like there is so much to do in so little time?

The biggest lesson He has taught me is I'm not in control of circumstances, and when circumstances don't go the way I want (when I am interrupted or plans are changed), I can trust Him to work it all for good. In fact, the good starts the moment I am patient in these instances because then I am listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, producing His fruit in my life and able to feed those around me. Patience is impossible in the flesh. However, when I put everything that happens to me into His hands, I can be patient and can trust His hands are big enough and good enough to change what needs to be changed and to make happen what needs to happen. I have learned His ways are better than my ways and time is in His hands.

Q: Can you tell us more about the companion Bible study? What tools do you provide for readers?

The companion Bible study takes a look at the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and shows readers how overwhelmed with God she remained in the midst of incredible trials. This six-week study has a DVD that helps participants get the most out of their time together, as well as a workbook that walks them through the overwhelming things in their own lives, in light of the Word of God.

Learn more about *A Woman Overwhelmed* and Hayley DiMarco at www.HayleyDiMarco.com. Readers can also follow her [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/hayley.dimarco) ([hayley.dimarco](https://www.facebook.com/hayley.dimarco)) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/hayleydimarco) ([@hayleydimarco](https://twitter.com/hayleydimarco)).