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**Amelia Rhodes**, author of *Pray A to Z: A Practical Guide to Pray for Your Community*



# I Could Use a Nap and a Million Dollars

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Biblical Alternatives  
to Stressed-Out Living

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JESSIE CLEMENCE

 Kregel  
Publications

*I Could Use a Nap and a Million Dollars: Biblical Alternatives to Stressed-Out Living*

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*For Monday night small group:*

*I can't begin to explain how much joy you've brought to our lives.  
Thanks for teaching us that "authentic community" isn't just a phrase  
hipsters use to sound fancy. We love you, we love your children,  
and we can't wait to see what God has in store for you next.*



# Contents

- Dear Stressed-Out Woman with a Twitch in Her Eye—9  
Chopping Lettuce and Screeching a Little (Where It All Began)—10

## PART 1—THE RELENTLESS, ENDLESS MUCK OF ADULTHOOD

- The Stress of General Life—19  
Why We Have Dirty Socks in Every Room (On Housework)—21  
Cute New Shoes Will Not Fix This Mess, but It Can't Hurt to Try  
Them On (On Finances)—27  
When a Sandwich from the Gas Station Deli Begins to Look  
Delicious (On Health)—37  
I Demand an Explanation for All This Extra Skin (On Aging)—44  
Kissing and Other Mushy Problems (On Romance)—50  
I Have Signed All the Consent Forms. Now I Feel Sad. And Old.  
(On Responsibilities)—57  
No, No, No. Not Interested. (On Change)—63  
At Least a Monarchy Doesn't Have a Two-Year Pre-Election Season  
(On Politics)—70

## PART 2—OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR CHAOS STRESS ME OUT

- The Stress Others Cause Us—79  
Just Be Quiet and Agree with Me (On Arguing and Conflict)—81  
My Head Will Explode If I Hear One More Noise from You  
(On Chaos and Noise)—87  
I Never Said That (On Misunderstandings)—92  
Could You Just Wake Up and Be Normal for a Change?  
(On Drama)—98

- Please Note How Amazing I Am (On Competition)—104
- The Day My Daughter Asked for Her Own Bathroom  
(On Entitlement)—111
- This House Feels Mighty Small at the Moment (On Family  
Dynamics)—118
- When Thanksgiving Includes a Table for Ninety-Eight (On Family  
Dynamics, Extended Edition)—125
- The Cat and Other Things I Can't Get Rid Of (On Their  
Things)—133

### PART 3—SOMETIMES I STRESS MYSELF OUT

- The Stress We Cause Ourselves—143
- Maybe Tonight a Magic Fairy Will Appear (On Procrastination)—145
- You Know What Would Fix This? Doing It My Way.  
(On Micromanagement)—151
- Why We Love Our Plump, Forgetful, Messy Friends the Most  
(On Perfection)—160
- I Accidentally Just Destroyed Your Day. And Your Oldsmobile.  
(On Mistakes)—166
- Yes, I Can Do Three Hundred Things on Tuesday  
(On Overscheduling)—172
- Well, Someone Has to Be Fodder for the Evening News  
(On Restoration After a Sin)—178
- My White-Hot Hate for the Carpet (On Discontentment)—184
- A Dumpster and a Bulldozer Would Solve All This (On Clutter and  
Junk)—190
- So Many Ways This Could All Go Terribly Wrong (On Plans for the  
Future)—196
- It's Possible the World Does Not Revolve Around Me (On Pride)—202
- The End, Amen. (Conclusion)—208
- Epilogue—213
- Notes—215



## Dear Stressed-Out Woman with a Twitch in Her Eye

HEY, YOU THERE.

Pardon me for a moment, but I see you.

I see you in my small group, at Target, and across the street. I see you carrying a diaper bag and trying to grab little hands before they dart away, or maybe carrying a briefcase while your cell phone is smashed up against your ear. And I see you carefully choosing your words as you face off in another “heated conversation” with your husband, hoping you don’t accidentally say all the things building up inside.

I know your bank account is empty for the third time this month and the car is making a funny squealing sound every time you turn left. I can hear that kid in your back seat screaming *from here*, and I know you’re about to lose your mind.

You’re worried you’re a bad mom and a horrible wife and a lousy Christian too. Sanctified women don’t hide in the bathroom from their families, do they?

Why yes, ma’am. They do. They most surely do.

So even if you’re hiding in that bathroom right this little minute, I see you. And I’m glad you’re here. Together we can sort this all out. We’re going to get through this, I pinkie promise.

Just hang on for a few more pages, and we’ll find a way through this mess . . .

Jess

# Chopping Lettuce and Screeching a Little

## Where It All Began

THE MELTDOWN OCCURRED, as many meltdowns do, in the kitchen. One minute I was chopping lettuce, and the next minute I was screeching.

*“How much? He charged us how much?”*

“Ninety dollars,” Eric said calmly. He was peering out the window to see if the water heater repairman could hear my screeching. Of course the guy could hear me—the neighbors two houses down could probably hear me. I didn’t care. I *wanted* him to know how upset I was. (From a distance—I may have some issues with confrontation.) “I just wrote him a check and didn’t argue,” Eric finished.

I believe this is the point where I burst into hot, slobbery tears in front of my kitchen sink. The children watched with wide eyes, obviously intrigued but also worried. Mom was having a breakdown in the middle of chopping the vegetables. It was a terrible, novel experience for them both.

The repairman had been in our house for less than two hours to find out why our water heater, which was only two years old, was making popping noises. Through the magic of Google, we’d determined it probably had something to do with mineral buildup from hard water. We would have fixed the issue ourselves, but we were already armpit-deep

in maintenance issues with our rental house. Our tenant had recently moved out and we'd decided to put it on the market. The exit proceedings, the cleanup, and the expensive repairs had pushed us past our wits' end.

Also, a cold snap breezed into our Michigan February and the temperatures plummeted to seventeen below zero, which coincided with the exact time the rental house's furnace stopped igniting. Eric discovered this minutes before a real estate agent arrived for a showing. The house was about twenty degrees, the air was filled with the smell of gas overflowing from the non-working furnace, and the pipes had all frozen. Even the toilet. *The toilet was frozen.* The furnace repair cost hundreds of dollars, and of course that showing was a bust. Who was going to buy a house that was literally freezing and smelled like gas?

Honestly, it would have been a mercy if an errant spark had ignited all that gas and the house had exploded off the foundation.

But explode it did not, which meant we still owned two houses. When the water heater at our regular house started acting up, we were well past our capacity for dealing with stupid maintenance issues. Henceforth, we called the repairman.

He arrived in our basement and, for some reason I still don't understand, opened the water valve to refill the heater. It had taken us hours to drain the thing, which I'd explained to him when he walked in the door. He filled it back up and then started draining it. While he sat on a five-gallon bucket and waited for it to empty, he conferred over the phone with his boss.

I was obviously twitchy and out of sorts, because he looked at me like I might be mentally unstable and said, "You probably heard that conversation. My boss says you need a whole new heater. There's nothing we can do."

I blinked and summoned my most calm voice. "But it's only two years old. It heats water just fine. It's just making that *noise*."

"Yeah, well, we can't do anything about that mineral buildup. It'll be cheaper for you to just buy a whole new heater."

Luckily, my husband arrived home and I met him at the door. I hissed a summary of the situation and then went upstairs to deal with dinner, leaving Eric to handle the insanity in the utility room. I will never be as calm and steady as Eric, no matter what kind of prescription medications I'm ingesting, so this was the best situation for everyone in the house. Eric and the guy already knew each other from the aforementioned furnace problem, so they chatted while the man did, well, nothing. Nothing except drain the water *he put into the tank*. Eric refused the new heater, told the man we'd take it from there, and wrote him a check.

And now we're back where we started this story, with me shouting and blubbering in the kitchen.

Adulthood is just so hard. So mind-numbing and hard. How much pressure can one woman take before she starts screaming about the water heater? For the record, that evening we bought six gallons of white vinegar, poured it into the water heater, and then fired it back up. It works just fine. No more popping. The basement smelled like pickles for a few days, but that seemed like a fair price to pay.

The rental house sold soon after (thank you, Lord) and things quieted back down. We rebuilt our savings account and threaded our shredded nerves back together. But we know the next crazy mess is probably just around the corner, crouched and ready to spring. It'll hit us when we least expect it.

Maybe you've never had a screaming fit about a water heater while you chop lettuce. Even so, I bet you can relate. I'm certain you have your own stories of broken-down appliances, job problems, relationship stress, overburdened schedules, and some cranky person who keeps looking at you with disdain, wondering when you're going to get your life together.

Maybe it's Aunt Edna, who married well and doesn't understand why you can't afford private school for your children. Maybe it's your college roommate, who is getting her doctorate and thinks you should get a real job and stop baking cookies with your children all day. It could even be your sister, who does stay home to blissfully bake cookies all day

and thinks you should quit your job to focus on more important things. Well, things *she* thinks are more important.

Why does everyone have all these expectations of us? Why can't they just leave us alone? If we have a job, we feel pressure to work harder and climb the career ladder. If we have a career and a family, the head of the PTA makes us feel like we're sacrificing our family for the sake of our job. At the same time, we feel like our boss is unhappy when we need to make family time a priority. We can't win.

We'll never feel thin enough, pretty enough, or fashionable enough. Our cars will never be new enough and our bathtubs will always have that ring. We lie awake at night, worried we'll die in our sleep and our mother will arrive at our house and see that scummy ring in the tub.

This is why we eat too much chocolate and cry in the shower. This is why we need a nap and a million dollars to fall out of the sky. We've had enough. Life is just too much.

| This is why we eat too much chocolate and  
| cry in the shower. . . . Life is just too much.

But—this is exciting, my friend—what if there is another way? Are we here on earth to fall victim to our stress? What if life doesn't have to be about pinched, strained existences? What if we can refocus our attention from our stress to the abundant life Jesus came to bring us? I think it's possible, and I think it's necessary. We need to stop worrying so much about Aunt Edna's expectations and look for God's expectations instead.

Does God command us to have our kids in an expensive private school? No. Did Jesus tell his disciples to work their way up the career ladder? No. Does the Holy Spirit whisper that we must keep our family and our boss perfectly happy at every moment, risking our mental health in the process?

No, ma'am. The Bible does not teach us any of these things. But the Bible does teach us a lot about God's grace-filled expectations and

standards. It speaks a lot about having our hearts in the right place so our actions follow. It talks about rest and peace and finding God's provision in the middle of messy, unexpected, and chaotic life.

I wish I could have remembered all this in the middle of my kitchen that day. I wish I'd thought of the beautiful sign my friend Jen painted for my office. It has a silhouette of a little bird on a branch, with the phrase "act justly, love mercy, walk humbly" lettered in the corner. Taken from Micah 6:8, these are the standards God sets for his people. "O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

What a sweet, blessed relief. What grace, written right there in the middle of Micah and hanging on my office wall. I can do those things! I can choose justice and mercy and walk humbly with my Father. But I also need this written on the walls of my heart, so the next time the water heater starts popping and Aunt Edna posts another article to Facebook about the deplorable state of public education, I can be ready with the right perspective. My heart needs to know God's expectations, but it also needs to know that he is able and willing to help me meet every challenge. The pressure is off me. It's off you too. We don't have to handle this all on our own.

Further along in the book, Micah 7:7 says, "As for me, I look to the LORD for help. I wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me." I want Micah's approach. I want to be confident that God will help, that he hears, and that he saves. The entire Bible is full of examples when God stepped in to take the burdens off his people. He sent manna in the wilderness. He sent Jesus as the sacrifice for our sins so we could live in communion with him. He sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and teach us day by day.

And I also believe it's possible he sent ice cream so we could hide in our closets with a hot fudge sundae when the days get really, really rough. Not that I know this from personal experience, of course. (I

usually drive someplace to get my ice cream and then eat it right in the van before anyone sees. Thank you for not judging me.)

So the expectations and the pressures can do their worst. They can hound and attack us and make us feel like we're pitiful wrecks who can't do anything right. But that doesn't mean we have to pay them any attention. God's Word tells another story, one we'd be wise to seek.

We're going to be looking for his story and perspective in response to all the different kinds of stress life throws at us. When I was first gathering ideas for this book, I turned to my friends. Thanks to the magic of the internet, I can interview more than five hundred people simultaneously, so I threw out this question on my Facebook page:

Dear Lady Friends,

I need your help. What stresses you out the most? I need one-word answers.

Thanks,  
Your Weird Writer Friend

Within a few minutes I had ten answers, which I dutifully noted on my yellow ledger. By bedtime I had dozens of responses, and more than eighty suggestions by the end of the next day. (Two male friends who decided to be smart alecks answered, and I threw their ideas right out. Even though they were pretty hilarious answers.) When I grouped the women's responses I found three categories: the stress of general life, the stress others cause us, and the stress we cause ourselves. These three kinds of stress have turned us into sleep-deprived zombies with churning stomachs and to-do lists three feet long. Many of my friends' suggestions make up the topics that follow, and I thank them for sharing.

As you read, I hope your spirits will lift. I pray you'll laugh out loud, possibly shooting some sort of beverage out your nose at least once. I

want you to realize every other woman has her own set of angst, and God is bigger than any stress we may face.

We are not alone. We have each other as we muddle through this messy life, and our God is with us.

Our God is with us! I feel better already; do you?

### Make It Personal

1. What is stressing you out right now?
2. How have you been handling the problems?
3. What changes do you want to see in yourself and in the situation?

### Scripture Focus

“And as God’s grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory. That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever” (2 Cor. 4:15–18).

### A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, I’m not sure how much more stress I can take. I know these problems are small and temporary in the eternal scheme of things, but they feel enormous and permanent. I want to fix my gaze on what you find important, but I don’t know how to do that. Please help me to find your peace in the midst of my circumstances. I seek your perspective instead of my own. Amen.