

As told by ordinary women

Is it possible to use your life to make an extraordinary difference? Yes! *Rocking Ordinary* is a wonderful reminder to moms who want to know that what they do matters. Even when there are piles of laundry and bills and dishes, what you do impacts all your relationships. Lea Ann offers inspiration and wonderful advice on how to walk through the struggles and find yourself in the arms of an amazing God. What you do matters because you matter to Jesus! This is a beautiful book to read and share with a friend.

-Tricia Goyer, author of 55 books, including Prayers that Changed History

Rocking Ordinary not only addresses insecurities I feel as “just a regular” woman, but also challenges me to reach out of my comfort zone to others.

Sarah Andrews, an ordinary wife, adoption advocate, and homeschool mom

Lea Ann Garfias urges readers to offer their imperfect pasts and presents to God and then allow God to use them to rock their ordinary worlds.

Cindy Pubek, homeschooling mom of 6, contributing columnist Home School Enrichment Magazine

Don't let the whimsical cover and title fool you! *Rocking Ordinary* reaches inside you, to those hidden places you don't discuss with other people. Lea Ann says, “Me, too,” and walks with you on a journey of grace and hope.

Jenny, recovering perfectionist, special needs mom, and writer, jennyherman.com

It doesn't matter who you are or where you came from — if you are a woman that loves Jesus, you need to read this book.

Jackie Card, homeschooling mom of 4 and writer at oneredeemedmom.com

Lea Ann Garfias' gifted teaching and storytelling abilities create a roadmap for those who “know their lives count but just want help and encouragement.”

Traci Matt, author of Don't Waste Your Time Homeschooling: 72 Things I Wish I'd Known

When a woman realizes the truth that the Lord uses her ordinary life to make an extraordinary impact on the world around her, she gets a little braver, stands a little taller, and finds the joy again in her day-to-day calling.

Carrie Lindquist, blogger at AnEverydayMom.com

After reading this book, I'm encouraged to rock my ordinary life and be a giver of grace just as Christ Jesus has given me grace.

Pattie Reitz, wife, mom, reader, writer, teacher, encourager, and friend

As a big dreamer with a budget, everyday responsibilities, and whose life does not look how she planned it to at this point, *Rocking Ordinary* reminded me that I am a difference maker, and I am needed exactly where I am. My new answer to "How are you doing?" is "I am rocking ordinary!"

Marie Williams, Writer gal at godpearlsandcoffee.com

This book takes the ordinary mundane reality of the mountains and valleys and brings it all crashing together. It's like sitting with your best friend over a cup of coffee and having those really good girl talks with some ugly cries that you walk away from knowing you're a better person, better prepared for all that the day brings because you both reveal that you are going through the same thing or you have.

Rebecca Brandt, homeschool mom and writer at momsmustardseeds.com

With her whimsical tone and fun anecdotes, Lea Ann masterfully challenges women to change perspective. By viewing our lives as service to God, the focus leaves our tiny selves and turns outward to the enormous world of women just like us.

Betsy Logeman, ordinary mom

Coming alongside you like a true friend, Lea Ann Garfias meets you where you are with raw honesty and shows you how an ordinary life is more extraordinary than you think.

Anne Campbell, homeschool mom of 3 and blogger at mylearningtable.com

Put down your cape, Supemom, and prepare to find God's love and acceptance and get off the treadmill of perfectionism. Those feelings of overwhelm and burnout end here. Prepare to exhale, laugh, and enjoy *Rocking Ordinary*.

Trisha Mugo, author at TrishaMugo.com

Rocking Ordinary is one of those books that needs to come with a "tissue alert." It should make you laugh, cry, and nod your head in agreement, often all at the same time. Lea Ann speaks from her heart to your heart with a type of encouragement that is too seldom heard. So get out your tissue box, make yourself comfortable, and prepare to be blessed.

Catherine Jaime, retired homeschool mom of 12, current historian and author

Lea Ann Garfias reminds readers that ordinary is beautiful and is God-ordained. If you find yourself feeling less than others in your circle or on your social media feed, this book is for you.

Lynley Baker Phillips, SaveThePhillipsFamily.com

Rocking Ordinary is a true handbook for Christian women that desire friendship and community on God's level and reminds us that we are in this thing called life together.

Alanna Thompson, jojoandjennsmom.wordpress.com

Our ordinary can be super extraordinary if we will let God lead us, and obey Him no matter what season we are in. You will learn to reach out, gain friendships, and lose the fear that has held you back.

Betty Eisenhour, farm wife, homeschool mom of 7 children, blogging at Peace Creek on the Prairie

Rocking Ordinary reveals how YOU and I have the power to make the ordinary EXTRAORDINARY every day when we keep our heart set on God and our hands raised in praise and worship!

Audrey Elaine Wall, wife, mother, friend, Ph.D Candidate at Dallas Baptist University

Lea Ann's book has in turn made me cry and laugh. Consistently touching my heart and allowing the Holy Spirit to convict me! Thank you Lea Ann for helping me to see and feel "Me too"!

Laurie Banman, stay at home mamma to one amazing child and helpmeet to my loving husband

Lea Ann is an absolute breath of fresh air! So many times we as Christians think we have to be perfect and have it all together! Then when it doesn't work, we believe we have failed, which is so far from the truth! This book is so needed in today's "Pinterest"-perfect world.

Laura Prater, Army wife, and author at RaisingSoldiers4Christ.com

A quirky read that reminds us all to lift up our souls, reach out to others, and grow love within our families.

Diana Anderson, wife, momma, & friend, bluebirdsnest.org

This book is like sitting down with a cup of tea and a friend I didn't even realize I had been deeply missing. There is so much honesty and healing in the chapters of this book.

Debby Gerth, homeschooling mom of 3

Lea Ann wants to meet you exactly where you are, in the hustle, in the busy, in the ordinary, messy, busy, non-perfect, kids screaming, everyday life. She encourages you, loves you, and roots for you. She's been there, done that. And knows exactly how to encourage you.

Tina Evans, wife, mom, and soon-to-be Empowerment Coach for Women

Lea Ann goes far beyond a simple list of ways to "rock ordinary." Her words, along with the words of Scripture, go deep. They address the heart issues that keep us from following hard after God so that all of the daily ordinary becomes something God can use to shape us and minister His love to others.

Jennifer Janes, recovering people pleaser and special needs homeschooling mom, jenniferajanes.com

This book will bring laughter and tears and will help make you spiritually and emotionally stronger. We are NOT alone after all!

Patricia M. Dorsey, retired school teacher

This book is for ordinary women everywhere just trying to find their extraordinary. Lea Ann shows us through her wit and with grace how allowing the light of Christ to shine through, we all can be *Rocking Ordinary* everyday!

Kimberly Dewberry, kimberlydewberry.com

Lea Ann's words are a comforting balm to remind us that no matter what happens in life we are never truly alone.

Redonna Gochanour, wife to my BFF Greg, homeschooling mom of our two Amazing boys Big G. and Mr. W., & proud autism awareness advocate

Reading this book was like sitting down to have coffee with a real girlfriend. She shares her heart, some funny stories, and encourages you in your daily walk not only with God but with those around you and yourself.

Flora Pearce, stay-at-home mom, full-time student, and amateur hobby farmer

Reading this book is like talking with a good friend; she's personable, funny and above all else genuine. I'll read this again and again.

Cece Harbor, mom of 4, writer, special needs advocate, www.rethinkingmystory.com

Just like sitting down for a chat with a wise friend over a cup of coffee, you will realize you are not alone in your thoughts and emotions as a woman along this journey of life as you read.

Melissa Williamson, homeschool blogger and pastor's wife, gracefilledhomeschooling.blogspot.com

Rocking Ordinary is a wonderful encouraging book for all women. In a day where women wear many hats on a daily basis, this book offers grace and builds the bonds of sisterhood. You are not alone, but one of many rocking the ordinary every day!

Jennifer A. Chandler, wife and homeschooling mama of 4 soon to be 5

Thank you Lea Ann for writing a book full of godly wisdom, encouragement, and God's truth. Reminding me even though I feel like some days I don't do much, I am in fact *ROCKING ORDINARY*.

Jennie Woelpern, homeschooling mom and wife of a railroader

Lea Ann provides an on-time message for women running the race, to be all God has created us to be. What she so graciously reminds us is, the race is not about who crosses the finish line first or if we complete the race in record time, but instead that we NEVER stop pushing toward the finish line, NEVER stop seeking all that He has for us.

Lia Hasier, homeschool mom

As we sometimes (well, most times) lose sight as to what it is really all about, Lea Ann exposes it's okay to make mistakes and that we all have struggles and regrets. Most importantly, we have forgiveness, grace, and the unfailing love of God to help us to rise to our highest calling as women.

Deb Zorick, wife, mother and Registered Nurse

This book addresses real life ordinary issues moms tackle and offers grace, hope, love, and encouragement through an extraordinary God. If you live an ordinary life but have a spiritual yearning for so much more, this book is for you.

Victoria Richardson, homeschool mom

This book has really shed a new light on my ordinary life. I WILL have an extraordinary influence on the future, whether I see it or not. We shape the future!

Elizabeth Smith, homeschool mom of 7

Rocking Ordinary has shown me that my story, past, present, and future matter. Nothing is wasted. I matter to God.

Emily Furda, blogger and rare disease warrior,
www.JesusInEveryMoment.Wordpress.com

This book is a powerful reminder of the impact we have on those around us. Thank you, Lea Ann for your authenticity and love for Jesus. A must read!

Jennifer Smith, inspiredbyjennifer.com

Our ordinary lives don't have to be perfect to be extraordinary. Reading this book has opened my eyes on ways that I can ROCK as a woman, wife, mother, Christian, friend, and leader.

Lindsey Ranger, wife, stay-at-home mom of three, author of sidebysidelearning.ca

In *Rocking Ordinary*, Lea Ann Garfias reminds us that even if we think our lives are ordinary we can do extraordinary things. It is a guide, full of advice and encouragement, showing us how to give and accept grace in our homes, relationships, and ministries.

Kerry Jordan, homeschooling mom, blogger at FishbowlFortune.com

Have you ever wondered if your ordinary, everyday life even makes a difference? Lea Ann addresses that in this book by reminding us that our Heavenly Father can and will use our day-to-day routines, past hurts, and even our mistakes for His glory, making our lives extraordinary in His eyes.

Jeri Morales, homeschooling special needs mom of 3

I laughed and cried with Lea Ann's humorous and gracious writing style. Her transparency to share the realities of motherhood and womanhood in general gave me a whole new perspective of the meanings of failure, success, and even perfectionism. I was left inspired to be a woman who motivates a fellow in need. This is THE uplifting book of the year. A must have in every woman's bookshelf.

*Maritza Johanna Antúnez, full-time homeschooling mom,
full-time medical laboratory scientist (ASCP)CM, www.HomeschoolEpiphany.com*

Lea Ann Garfias understands how ordinary lives matter every day and how moms like us keep on *Rocking Ordinary!* This book changed my way of thinking and it will surely change yours as well.

*Dana Lambert-Hodge, rockin' homeschool mom, epilepsy advocate and
blogger at Luv'N Lambert Life, luvnlambertlife.com*

The encouragement to ROCK who God created us to be, right where we are, is exactly the message we need to hear today as kingdom women. It took guts to write this book when so many tell us to do more, be more, have more. Get this book for yourself and for a gal pal.

Tiffany Harper, Beasizeyou.net

When the introduction to a book moves you to tears and has you lifting up a prayer of thanksgiving to God for using the author to encourage you and to let you know that you are not alone — you know it's going to be an amazing book. That is exactly what you will encounter when you read *Rocking Ordinary* by Lea Ann Garfias.

*Amanda Johnson, a former ordinary stay-at-home homeschooling mother
and wife, who is now Rocking Ordinary, faithfamilyfriendslove.wordpress.com*

When the first page grabs your attention and locks you in, you know you have a good read, and this is exactly what happens with Lea Ann Garfias' *Rocking Ordinary*. Lea Ann speaks from a place of passion and understanding, as if speaking to and encouraging a dear friend. Love her sister-girl realness!

*Khadijah RBz, wife, mommy to 3, self-imposed fitness fanatic, and a gut-checking,
oily, plant-based foodie who brings light and love to brighten the world*

Rocking Ordinary is a breath of fresh air. Lea Ann Garfias writes with honesty, sincerity and humor. Each chapter left me feeling like my own ordinary life is actually something extraordinary!

Kristin Berry, co-author of confessionsofanadoptiveparent.com



Rocking *ordinary*

Holding It Together with
Extraordinary Grace

LEA ANN GARFIAS

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Foreword

You hold in your hand: hope. You may be saddled with motherly stress, too much month left after the money's flown from your purse, or the crushing weight of expectations gone amuck. Even so, there is hope, and Lea Ann Garfias has authentically addressed this seemingly scarce commodity.

Because she's been there. She's walked the tightrope of marriage, parenting, providing, busyness, unrealistic expectations, and relational fallout. What I love about her is her resolve to turn to Jesus in all these circumstances. Not only that, she longs to shepherd you toward wholeness and a realistic view of yourself — you who are wildly loved by God.

Lea Ann and I share the same heartbeat, a similar faith DNA. When I reflect back to the days of my own *Rocking Ordinary*, I actually lived in the exact town she lives in today. I experienced many of the same heartaches and triumphs. And during that time, I wrote a book with echoes of the book you hold in your hands today. *Ordinary Mom, Extraordinary God* was my own testament to the faithfulness of God in the throes of rediscovering biblical womanhood.

Now that my children are nearly grown, I have a different perspective on that busy time of my life. I wish I would've slowed down more, listened more, and reflected more on the moment I stood in. I wish I would've taken more mental snapshots (these in the days before Instagram and Snapchat) of my family just enjoying each other's company. I would've reminded myself that simple family moments slip through your fingers, and you can't ever get them back. So stop there. Revel there. Remain there with joy.

This is why I'm excited you're holding hope in your hands. Because you were made to rock the ordinary, to celebrate this

moment, to hold fast to what is true. You are well loved right now, just as you are, right in this place. Whether you meet your high expectations or not does not change the bedrock truth that your Heavenly Father stands in this moment to dote on you, cherishing you as His beloved daughter.

So shed the “supposed to’s.” Let go of the shoulds. Find freedom as you read. There are no perfect women out there, but a perfectly loving Father awaits you as you are. He will enable you to love your family, forgive the friends who break your heart, re-engage at church, lead with diligence and joy, hear from the Holy Spirit, and manage your life with rest and assurance. There is hope, and it’s my prayer that you will dance in that hope as you turn the last page.

— Mary DeMuth

Author of 31 books including *Worth Living:
How God’s Wild Love Makes You Worthy*



Your life makes an
extraordinary
difference.
You are rocking
ordinary.

Introduction

Let me get something off my chest: I'm not a celebrity. I have never written a *New York Times* bestseller, I don't have my own reality TV show, and I'm not a diet spokesmodel. I have never built a multimillion-dollar business, no one asked me to star in their luxury car commercial, and I don't own a trendy restaurant. I'm just your basic, run-of-the-mill, ordinary mom and wife.

Which is probably what you and I have in common. I'm guessing you don't introduce yourself as a *great woman* or *tremendous influencer* or *leader of many*. Because, quite frankly, most of us don't consider ourselves great. Stuck in an endless routine of cleaning, cooking, and caring for family members, we struggle to find meaning and worth in our daily lives. Exhausted at the end of another busy, chaotic day, we wonder if we have made any measurable progress, if it even matters, if our work even counts.

At least that's how I feel. My friends say they do, too. And I'm pretty sure you, new friend, agree. We don't have fancy titles or thousands of followers. We aren't CEOs or wildly successful entrepreneurs or mayors or beauty queens.

We're ordinary housewives, mothers, friends, church members, and citizens of a community. We drive minivans and shop at Target and wear jeans almost every day. We're feeling pretty insignificant, powerless, tired, undercaffeinated, underappreciated, and even discouraged most of the time.

But that's not the whole truth. We are much more than that.

You and I have probably never met, though I hope someday we do. I hope if you run into me at Starbucks, you grab me to tell me about how you are using your life to make an extraordinary difference — that you are rocking the ordinary.

I Believe in You

Unless you are a friend of mine here in Texas, we probably haven't met yet. If you *are* a local friend and I've already forgotten your name because I have inherited my mother's early-onset slowly-losing-my-mind, reintroduce yourself to me, and I'll be thrilled to know you all over again. But even though we haven't yet shared coffee, *I believe in you*. I believe you are amazing and talented and capable and living a life of tremendous influence.

You are. Do you believe it?

Maybe not yet. And that's ok. It is hard to believe that the omnipotent God, Creator of all the universe, wants to use everyday, ordinary women — your typical suburban housewives and mothers and working-hard-just-to-scarf-down-supper gals who are too tired to stand up straight without two pots of coffee, three chocolate bars, and insole support.

But that is, indeed, who He uses.

I only recently came to understand that. I'm still learning it, actually. Which is why I am writing this book. I need something, someone to explain to me what *really* matters, what the work and the laundry and the frustration and the late nights and the bills are all for, why I should keep caring and dreaming and loving. *I need to know this all matters*.

But I don't find an easy answer. At first, I thought maybe there would be a speaker or an expert or a book or something. Instead, God seemed to tell *me* to write this book. I can't wait until it's done so I can find out how it ends.

It's hard to get to the end some days, though. I feel like we work so hard and the laundry keeps piling up, almost as fast as the dishes in the sink and the appointments on the calendar. How do I get from the busy, crazy now with the crying babies and the minivan problems and the soccer snack schedule and the school papers and the bills (always the bills) to the end where we, along with all of God's love, *win*?

I used to think success was doing some big, giant service for God. As a child I read about those holy women who risked their lives to spread the gospel on the other side of the equator, telling

naked murderous tribes of God's love and winning the admiration of every Christian American teen girl along with jewel-encrusted crowns in heaven. That would be me, some day. Until God told me at the age of 20, "Absolutely not." So I failed at missions, apparently.

Then I thought maybe I would win by being Super Christian. So I spent my twenties working hard for grace (yep, you read that right), wearing all the right clothes and listening to all the right music and having all the right friends. I walked to church in the rain in high heels. I led ministries every day of the week. I sat in the front row every Sunday, my children's hair plastered down straight, and smoothed down my skirt under my Bible and sermon notebook and flashed my winning, holy smile. I even reached the epitome of American Holiness — *church staff member*. But God said, "Now, you're done." Done? At 30?

I sure wasn't done trying. I tried Perfect Suzy Homemaker. Perfect Happy Homeschooler. Super Mom, Super Wife, Super Woman. When it came right down to it, I was as good at perfection as I was at squeezing my super rear into a leotard. Not pretty, and only my husband would love it.

My man did love me through each and every attempt to super-awesomize myself, shaking his head and murmuring calming, affirming love over my crazy attempts to make myself matter. Ironically, the most important man in my life taught me the most about how to be a woman.

But meanwhile, a young lady was growing up right there beside me. Overnight, this little girl in pigtails, pink T-shirts, and plastic purses matured into a young woman. I suddenly found myself biting my tongue, checking my grumblings, and watching my words because someone was examining *my* womanhood, and I wasn't sure what kind of pattern I was demonstrating.

How can I give her, my favorite representative of the next generation, the keys to female success? What secrets for greatness can I bestow, when I struggle myself every single day to find the meaning in the madness? The stakes rose suddenly higher, now that it wasn't just my own life but hers, as well.

So I started looking around at you, friends. Some of you seem like you have it so together that I try hard not to mutter unkind

things (it's easier to love someone whose kitchen sink is dirtier than yours). But when I started to really pay attention, I noticed a pattern.

Everybody Struggles

Some are straining through marriage. Others are frustrated with children. One with a dying husband. Another with a crummy job. Special needs, difficult in-laws, sickness, divorce, natural disasters, tragedy. We all bear our own burdens; some just reveal more about their problems than others do.

Does this mean we don't matter, that we aren't making a difference, that all we can do is just exist for this season or this year or this life in hopes that we don't make things worse?

Perhaps that's what the enemy wants us to do. It's the biggest lie that Satan uses against us — that we are not like God. He told this to Eve in the garden, whispering to her that she needed to grasp more, do more, become more to be anything like the Creator, to have any kind of power or understanding.

But in reality, she was already created in His image. *She was already like God* in so many, many ways. When she stopped recognizing that, stopped praising Him that she was fearfully and wonderfully made, stopped boldly obeying Him by using her gifts and abilities to their fullest, she lost it. She lost the radiance, the presence, the power of God in her person.

I sin the same way.

Marianne Williamson could have been talking about my innermost thoughts when she penned her famous paragraph.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make

manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.¹

So how do we recapture that radiance? How do we shine forth the image of God, powerfully reflecting His presence and His purpose in our lives? How does this ordinary, everyday life create extraordinary changes in our homes, our churches, our communities?

This is true success. And that's what I want to achieve for myself, for my daughter, for my neighbor, and for you, friend. I believe that God who called us to glorify Himself will do it through us (1 Thessalonians 5:24). We can, indeed, rock our ordinary lives when we reach out and change our world, one ordinary day at a time.

This book is just the start. You and I and our friends and daughters are going to look hard at what it means to be a real-life woman of influence today. We're going to look at the reality of our lives right now and find meaning, hope, and ministry within our own everyday routines. We're going to study what Scripture commands us to do with the power God has given us. We're going to get out our private journals to scratch out our innermost thoughts and fears and longings. We're going to reach out and form book clubs and Bible studies and prayer groups to wrestle with these truths alongside our friends and even help them make greater impact right where they are. We're going to change the conversations we have with our daughters and their friends, giving them a greater perspective than what they hear on TV and social media and at school.

To get started, go to lagarfias.com/rockingdownloads to get your journal pages, action plans, and more.

We're going to start rocking ordinary. Right now. Join me?

1. Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love*, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Marianne_Williamson, accessed June 25, 2015.

Success
and
Failure

Part I



God uses our
ordinary lives in
extraordinary ways
if we have the
courage and the
faith to simply obey
wherever we are.

Run with Patience

I have a fear of failure. It goes all the way back to childhood. I cannot remember a time I was not afraid of failing.

But fail I do, every day, and always have. Failure seems to be a constant companion, an albatross, really, the decaying reminder that I am all too flawed and corrupted. Everywhere I look, I see evidence of my organization failures, decorating failures, and house-keeping failures. I serve failed recipes. I throw out failed projects. Don't even get me started on fashion fails, diet fails, gardening fails, and scheduling fails.

When I was six and seven, failure's name was *spelling*. Actually, *spelling* is still defined as my failure. To read me is to understand my thin hold on the conventions of English letters. They seem to come and go as they please within my words. I don't understand why everyone else seems to be offended by that.

And my teachers have always been offended by my lackadaisical attitude toward spelling. They got all wrapped up in their shorts and broke out the red pens if my *i* was not always before my *e* or what have you. I got perfect grades in elementary, except for spelling. And maps. My sense of direction is as great as my possibility of winning the National Spelling Bee.

If I thought teachers obsessed over my spelling problem, they could not compare to my parents. It didn't matter if I got all As on

my papers in every other subject. Those Fs in spelling sent steam out their ears. They reprimanded me. They punished me. They forced me to copy words dozens of times every day and quizzed me for hours on end. To no avail. I still can't spell.

So after one year of this humiliation by spelling test, I took matters into my own hands and did what any bright young girl in bobby socks and brown oxfords would have done. I hid my spelling papers. One school desk will hold an amazingly large number of spelling tests, no matter what the grade, and it never so much as whispered a word of condemnation. Why air my dirty laundry before the world? No one needed to know my secret shame.

Until my teacher looked in my desk. You can't have any privacy anymore, especially not in a school classroom. She not only invaded the sanctity of my desk stash, but she also removed my property and handed it over to my mother.

I remember the words that came next, the vengeance on my mother's face, the anger amplified by raised voice and stinging paddle. The bruises on my bare backside and legs would eventually heal, but the cutting words etched *failure* deep within my spirit where the scars tightened and hardened with repetition. For years I could neither spell nor repeat what she told me that afternoon, but that was one lesson I would not forget. Do not get an F, do not hide your school papers, do not let the teacher give a bad report.

So at the ripe old age of seven, I learned a valuable lesson — *you cannot hide your failure*. It took me two more decades to learn the more potent reason why — *everyone fails*. Parents fail to prevent their child's failures. Women fail to conceal their fears. The angry fail to hide their temper. The stronger fail to care for the weak. The addicted fail to fix themselves. The hurting fail to heal themselves.

Christians Fail to Live Sinlessly

I grew up in an environment that liked to deny that fundamental truth of humanity, that all are sinners, that we all fall short, that we are all flawed failures. We were good people, in good homes, in good churches, singing good music and reading good books and raising good children in good schools and good neighborhoods. We were so good, you wouldn't believe it.

We shouldn't have believed it.

Because once the real failures come — when the job is lost, the child strays, the marriage ends, the addiction is revealed — no one knows how to handle it. We gasp and look away, unable to help, unable to cope, unable to carry on. Everything is ruined.

If success is perfection, though, no one ever achieves it. We know that truth somehow, way deep inside ourselves; and sometimes the reality of it keeps us up at night or causes us to stare blankly out the kitchen window in despair. Why do we behave, then, as if perfection is a real possibility?

Why do we define our worth, our impact, our success, on the impossible prospect that we can have it all and we can do it all?

I don't know, but I know we do. We think we will be a success if we check off all the good things:

- Perfect, loving, harmonious, romantic marriage to a heart-throb who quotes the Bible and makes good money
- Perfect, respectful, obedient, smart, talented, healthy children who quote the Bible and make good grades
- The right church
- The right job
- The right zip code
- Good clothes
- Good food
- Good friends
- Popularity
- Position
- Fame
- Recognition

We think we can have all that and more if we try harder, live better, and manage our time and our finances.

But it doesn't work. We fail every single day, and then we finally give up on ever being a success. Because in the real world, we look around ourselves and see the laundry hidden under the bed and the baby screaming instead of sleeping and the husband we just had words with and the bills and the leaky roof and the dirty minivan and the garden of weeds and the ill-fitting clothes

and say, *Enough! I'll just stuff it all in the back of the closet and live in the closet with it and hope no one knows the truth about me because I'm a big FAILURE.*

That's the lie Satan wants us to believe. When we listen to the lie about *what success is* then we also believe the lie that *we will never be successful.*

It's a lie. The truth is much more powerful and much more intimidating; success grows within our failure, because of our failure, through our failure.

How do we find success, then?

Someone once said, "Success is finding God's will and doing it." God defined success to the young leader Joshua as knowing God's Word and obeying it (see Joshua chapter 1). And though that can encompass so many, many parts of Joshua's life — and mine — I can't help but notice what God *didn't* say was true success:

- His marriage
- His children
- His job
- His wealth
- His health
- His decorating
- His clothing choices
- His diet

You can likely list more things. It feels good, doesn't it? So many things, things we have little control over, do *not* define our success. This list includes many aspects of our lives, even obstacles to overcome, but they don't determine our impact.

Joshua had a clear blueprint from God — follow His plan and be successful. He did, and he was. It seems pretty simplistic for us moms now, but it was not easy for Joshua at the time. Remember, he was saddled with relocating and leading into battle over a million people who had just led Moses to the grave and had tried the patience of the Almighty until even He wanted to wipe them off the face of history.

I wonder if that's why God took the time to talk to Joshua about what success really means. It didn't mean sinless perfection, it meant

following God. It meant living and saying His truths no matter the consequences, no matter the obstacles. It meant glorifying Him by courageously living out all God commanded him. It was trusting God to take one life and to make it extraordinary.

We can do that. We can be successful. We can be influential. We can change our world if we do just that — live and say His truths no matter the consequences, no matter the obstacles. We can see God use our ordinary lives in extraordinary ways if we have the courage and the faith to simply obey wherever we are.

So what does success actually look like? That, my friend, is the million-dollar question. That's what all the self-help books in Barnes & Noble are all about — promises of new definitions, new formulas of success.

The problem is that all those books are written by and for 40-year-old men running successful companies or women CEOs who want us to lean in and take charge and make millions. That's not the kind of success you and I are about, though, right?

But since that's the only measurement of leadership or of success we are presented with, it's easy to characterize ourselves as failures. We think our influence is too small, our lives too insignificant. The day-in-day-out drudgery of chores, children, family, and finances takes it all out of us, leaving us with little or no hope for lives of influence.

But we're wrong.

Our View of Success Is Wrong

This morning I'm typing in between rubbing my sore left leg. I pulled a ligament or tendon or something on the back of my ankle a few days ago running my first 5K race.

If you have ever been a slightly overweight mother of four with arthritis and asthma, you would find a way to mention that you had just run your first 5K, too. (Don't judge me, you know it's true.)

I had a great time, though. Other than that entire last mile, when I was sure I would die right there in front of everybody. Other than that, it was a blast.

You see, I live in a really great town in Texas. It has been voted "Best Small Town to Live In" and "Most Boring City in the Coun-

try” and “Playful Town USA” for good reason. It’s just a safe, family-friendly suburb in arguably the best state in the union. I am so grateful to live here.

I say that to explain the atypical attitude of the runners here during our Freedom 5K down Main Street. As one should expect in a town with over 35 churches, most of the residents are Christians. So after the first mile, when the sweat ran into my eyes and my shoes grew suddenly several pounds heavier, strangers racing past me would call back encouragement over their shoulder. “They that wait on the Lord will mount up with wings as eagles!” and “You can do all things through Christ!”

My favorite running passage is from Hebrews 12:1–2. The New Testament is full of sports analogies, and Paul the Very Fit Apostle seems to be particularly fond of fighting and triumphant wins. But this passage by the unknown writer of Hebrews was clearly written for us middle-aged, flabby-bellied, plodding mothers who question why they even bother tying on ugly running shoes just to lose.

“Let us run with patience the race set before us,” the author writes. He doesn’t chide or command or rebuke, just invites me to join him on the marathon. It’s a finisher’s medal we’re after, not first place or even age-category winner. Just complete the race we’re on.

With Patience

When I started off my Epic First 5K, I found myself running faster than usual. Carried along by the tide of runners, buoyed by the adrenaline of the moment, I exalted in the pound of my feet on the pavement at the brisk, new pace. It was attainable. I was keeping up with “real runners” and feeling oh, so proud of myself.

That feeling lasted through the first mile and even into the second. But somewhere along the last mile my real self caught up with me, stumbled, and gasped for oxygen. What in the world did I think I was doing? Who did I think I was, anyway, a real athlete? For crying out loud, I couldn’t run as a child; what made me think I could do so now?

So there I was on the last mile, the winners and my young son having crossed the finish line five minutes ago. Wouldn’t it feel so

good to just sit down? Sit, then lie down, then sleep, then forget this ever happened.

But I wanted that finisher's medal so badly. I wanted to wear it, to hang it up on my mirror at home, to take that Instagram selfie at the finish line and declare, "I ran it! I did it!"

Yet God simply asked me to continue going at my own pace, to patiently continue putting one ordinary foot in front of the other patiently.

That's all we wives, mothers, friends, and coworkers are asked to do. God wants us to keep putting one foot in front of the other until we get the finisher's crown.

I was thinking about that during the race when I passed my town's iconic clock tower and rounded the corner to face the finish line. Only one block and I was done; the agony would be past. On both sides of the street, citizens were waving flags and cheering us on, among them racers who had just crossed the line. I squinted through that womanly glow dripping down my brow and saw my husband just beyond the finish line, holding his phone at the ready to snap a picture of my victory. And then I heard, above the crowd, the sweetest voice. "Mommy! Mom, keep going! You are almost there!"

Running toward me up the right side of the street was my 12-year-old son. I didn't know it then, but he had just completed his best running time ever — a full ten minutes faster than his previous best — to win second place in his age group, running the entire time looking back over his shoulder, hoping I would catch up (optimism runs strong in that one).

He broke through the crowd to hand me my inhaler (I told you I was your coolest friend ever) and to jog beside me that last leg. My spirit soared, my steps flew, my fatigue vanished as he brought me the rest of the way over the finish line. If you see a picture of me in that moment, I have this crazy grin on my face. You'd swear something was wrong with me. It was the euphoria of the moment, I think. I knew that I had made it to the end only by God's grace and the help of my family and community.

Seeing we are "surrounded by so great a crowd of witnesses . . . let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Hebrews chapter 11 lists a few of those in our cheerleading

crowd — saints and martyrs who have made it across the finish line and are looking for us to follow them. But on race day, I realized that you and I have our own crowd surrounding us regularly. Friends, family, and church members who are passing by, calling back verses of encouragement and smiles of love, reminding us to keep putting one foot in front of the other. I want to be that message of hope for those around me, and I know you do, too.

I want to be like my young son. If I race ahead and make it to a milestone before my friend or neighbor, can I wait around for her, cheer her forward, even come alongside while I'm aching and tired to make sure she crosses the line at her best? I don't want to become so myopic about my own course that I can't see those around me who really just need a word of encouragement or a paper cup of water or a friendly hand of help.

My son remembered that day what I often forget: we aren't competing against each other. We ran in the same race on the same day, starting at the same time and passing the same checkpoints. But he was not competing with me, nor I with him. We each finished at our own pace, doing our own best. He can't compare his time with mine. We have different abilities, different challenges to overcome, different bodies, and different backgrounds. We ran the same course, but it was a completely different event for him than it was for me. He knew that, and that's why he could be just as happy for me with my mediocre time as I was for him with that silver medal around his neck. He was ecstatic I had achieved my goal; I was overjoyed he had won. We shared each other's success so completely.

Different Races

This is why success and failure, winning and losing, running and finishing, look so different for each of us women in our daily lives. *We are all running different races.* We pass each other on the same course, and we call back to one another words of encouragement and verses of hope. We help each other over the rough spots, give a hand up the hills, and pass back cold water or hot coffee to drink. But still we go on, each of us at our own pace, dealing with our own unique difficulties and circumstances.

We have different marriages. Some of us married young; some waited awhile. Some seem to fit together like a glove; others have faced innumerable trials. We overcome different backgrounds, cultures, struggles, health issues, family members, and financial difficulties. Even the seemingly picture-perfect fairy-tale romances like mine have times of despair and turmoil. Marriage is hard.

Some of us are single and at different places of contentment or expectation. I have friends who have always known they would be single, while others truly struggle to know God's will for their marital status. My single friends face their own battles with loneliness, finances, safety, career, church involvement, and significance. Their race looks much different than mine.

Those of us with children are running very different races with each of them. While I was plodding along behind my son in the 5K, a friend of mine was racing with her little boy. She sped past me early in the race, then I passed her up when she slowed for her little guy on the hills. I had the joy of cheering her on and giving her a big high five when she crossed the finish line a couple minutes after me. And then I learned that her older son had just beaten mine in the young runner group.

That made me think about all the mothers I know racing with me in the childrearing marathon. Some of my friends have exceptional children and their Facebook feeds are filled with gold medals, scholarships, and other awards. I can struggle with envy when I see the pictures of my friend's children who consistently win medals weekly. Yet a couple of times a year when I cross paths with Valerie, she reminds me with a smile how tired she is and how worth it the race is to her. Then I walk away encouraged to do my best for my children.

Other moms in my Facebook news feed are at different stages of their race with difficult obstacles to overcome. Some are working hard to adopt, facing issues with the foster system and finances and courts and family members as they take on that herculean ministry of love. I cry when I pray for them.

Others are battling special needs, hanging back in the race to lift their child up and to give him the best support possible so that he can finish at his very best. I have so little concept of what the race

looks like for them every single day. I can only pass a cup of water in silence.

We have so many differences in our races. Where we live, whether we work, our finances, our health, our family size, our ministries, our extended community — so many factors make the race completely altered for each one of us.

The truth is, though, that we are all in it, we are all running it at the same time, and we are all commanded to continue moving forward with patience.

We aren't looking at each other, except for encouragement. Never comparison. We are looking to the finish line, to Christ who started it all and will hand out our finisher medal at the end. He ran it ahead of us, and we will enjoy the celebration with Him at the end.

So, my friend, let's tie our sneakers and get back in the race. Just put one foot in front of the other and do your very best. Look ahead, encourage those you pass, and keep going with patience.

What does the Bible say?

Read Joshua 1 and Hebrews 11:1–12:3.

What does it mean to you?

Journal your answers and discuss with a friend.

1. Where do you imagine yourself to be on your race?
2. What is your pace? Are you running or resting?
3. What unique obstacles do you face that make your race different from that of your friends?
4. How can you encourage those you pass or who pass you on the way?
5. What kinds of failure do you fear? How do you overcome that fear?
6. On those weary stretches of the race, how can you continue on in patience?
7. In your own words, what is *success*?