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I'M DYING HERE, LORD

I'm no Wonder Saint. You're not either? Good.

If you find yourself currently overwhelmed by your responsibilities, torn in two by the needs of others, or waking up begging for strength to get you through the next day, then we might be related. Do people count on you to be strong but your emotional tank was empty long ago? I bet you wonder why God gave you more than you could possibly accomplish in one day, maybe a lifetime? Ever want to quit?

I'm your queen. May I be honest?

I'm done in. Over the past eight or ten years, waves of heavy responsibility pounded my life. An exploding ministry workload already filled the calendar when suddenly



family members with serious chronic illness and disastrous problems began sucking up every moment of my time. Add to the mix my husband's outside ministry load, planning several weddings, plus a few irritating health issues of my own, and you've got a midlife woman wanting to run away in the middle of the night. You too?

I thought that was not supposed to happen to strong Christians. If we're in the Word every day and all "prayed up," aren't we supposed to suck it up and go on forever? Yes, we often do. Right to an early grave.

I heard a friend say once, "Beauty may be skin-deep, but stupid runs clear through!" But stupid can seem so right, so "spiritual," can't it? I only half listened to friends who cautioned me about overload, overwork, too much stress and responsibility. That's another name for pride.

If you're just the teensiest bit uncomfortable, stop a minute and look at yourself honestly in the mirror. Forget the wrinkles; look behind your eyes. Is the woman you see anxious? Are her lips pursed? Has she neglected her appearance? What do others see? Someone who's worn around the edges, fragile emotionally, sluggish mentally, just a tad nervous and critical of herself and others? I fit all of the above not that long ago.

People we really love, plus our responsibilities, can suck the life out of us when we're not looking. They can sap our joy, that energetic love for God that once leaped inside us just thinking about Him. Without it, life simply weighs more and discouragement and depression slither in uninvited. In no time, we feel like a hopeless mess.

Two summers ago I walked into my doctor's office with hives. Actually, I had chest pains too, and a jaw that was acting up. I was tired and feeling old. Just before I left the house, my wise husband, Steve, had said, "Tell Dr. Mastroianni I think you're depressed." I told the doctor, adding a weak chuckle.

"I knew it the minute you walked in the door." His gray mustache curled around a smile. "And it's about time!" he added.

"What on earth do you mean?" I asked as he pumped up the blood pressure cuff.

"Look at your life, Virelle," he said, and then listened quietly to the stethoscope for a moment. "Blood pressure's a little high too. Look at what you've been through the last few years. Did you think you were immune?" I guess I did.

This much-loved doctor knew our family well. It's true, we'd had a lot of "stuff" to deal with. I suppose it began many years earlier with a prodigal son (who's wonderful now, praise God!), then a child who struggled with regular bouts of mental illness, another daughter with lupus, a son with a heart problem, my own repeated surgeries, Steve's stressful job, financial challenges during and following the college years and five weddings, both our efforts at ministry, and now my mother's recent diagnosis with Alzheimer's and all that has accompanied it. I'd become so used to living with toxic levels of stress, I thought it was normal. You too?

"What do you do to relax?" my doctor probed gently. "Anything fun?"

"Well, I love to read." Come to think of it, I read only serious nonfiction books.

"Do you exercise?"

“Not enough really.” I used to walk and swim laps, but no time anymore, I’m ashamed to admit. “But I pray a lot!”

“That’s good, but it’s not helping much, is it?” He didn’t mean to hit below the belt, but he was right. Why wasn’t my prayer life helping much? Was my faith weak? Sitting in his office, now I felt like a failure as a Christian too.

How stupid. How many times have I counseled others to take care of themselves physically, mentally, spiritually? How often have I reassured women to let God use any means He chooses to lovingly care for them and make them whole again? That’s good advice for all but me, apparently.

“Too much stress, Virelle. You need to take care of yourself for a change.” Dr. Mastroianni handed me a prescription for an antidepressant “just to take the edge off,” he said gently. “See me again in a month or so. And get some rest.” He smiled reassuringly. I dragged myself back home to tell Steve he was right.

It’s not like God hadn’t prepared me ahead of time for this. Many years ago on the second day of a retreat I was giving in Vermont, the conference director showed up at my door just before breakfast.

“In my devotions this morning, God told me to give this to you,” she said, handing me a scrap of paper bearing a scribbled verse.

“Terrific! Let’s see what it is.” I read it out loud with interest. “As they make music they will sing, ‘All my fountains are in you.’ Psalm 87:7 Hmm.”

“Does it mean anything to you?”

“Well, nothing’s jumping out at me right now, but it’s a

very nice verse. I'll pray about it." And I did. For years. Watch out when you do that.

Today its message is the central focus of my life. It should have been a long time ago.

Wait! I hear someone clucking, *Weren't you having your quiet time every day? You can't dry up when you're in the Word daily!*

I used to think that too, but now I see that body, mind, and spirit are one complete package. When one part suffers, the whole person suffers.

While on earth, Jesus met alone with His Father daily to drink deeply of the Water of Life. He taught His funny band of twelve the rhythm of coming away to rest and leave the madness behind.

In the last few years, I've written a lot about hearing God's voice at the unexpected corners of our journey. I usually expect His voice to be "still and small." I didn't know God ever shouted. How had I missed it? In a fresh read through the book of the Revelation, I stopped short at chapter 21: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away'" (vv. 3–4).

When our heavenly Father lifts His voice magnificently down the centuries, it's best to listen well. He says, "'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him

come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Revelation 22:17).

I was beyond thirsty, friends. I was parched. Lifeless, dry as a bone.

But not anymore. I found the well. Come on. I’ll take you there.



LIVING WATER

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”



MATTHEW 11:28–30

Today's Replenishment
■

Are you feeling drained like I was? If you're not, just wait awhile. People's needs wear us out as they did Jesus. Take a moment and list in your personal prayer journal all the things that drain you. (If you don't have a journal, get a notebook to keep with your Bible.) Be honest.

Tell God what you are thirsty for. Is it rest? Comfort? Order in your chaotic world, wisdom to make tough decisions, grace to let go, acceptance of unwanted change in your life? Don't try to dress things up in church clothes. Pour out your complaint to God and cry or rail on His shoulder. He loves you and He will listen.

Now commit yourself to coming daily to the well with me for the next month. I'll share my journey with you and you can share yours with God alone, or with a small group of believers if you choose. At the end of the month, I'd love to hear from you. You can write to me at connect@virellekidder.com. Let me know what God has done in your life. God will sing with joy over you as He promises in Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."