

SUSIE LARSON

# In Over Your Head



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## IN OVER YOUR HEAD

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# How to Use This Book

Look back over seasons when you found yourself feeling irritable, frustrated, tired, and out of whack. Consider that maybe—a little at a time—you let go of what you knew was good for you, and you filled your time with what cost you but didn't nourish you for the long run.

I've learned that if we're willing to put even a few hours a week into our physical and spiritual health, that discipline will carry us a long way. And we'll walk in an accumulative strength as a result. When we live a hit-and-miss lifestyle with something so important as our physical and spiritual health, we'll never quite hit our stride or enjoy the kind of life-rhythm God has for us.

If you're ready to incorporate some healthy habits with dividends, let's do this! Remember, you don't have to apply every idea in this book. I suggest you don't. Instead, as you prayerfully work through its pages, trust God to quicken your heart and speak to you about your next right choices. Ask Him to give you the grace and the “want-to” to stick with healthy habits and make them a normal part of your life.

The amazing thing is you could read this book again next year, be in a whole new place, and realize you're ready for more healthy habits. Give yourself grace, but also be willing to give yourself a little push. You know what you can handle, and Jesus cares deeply for you. He'll be with you every step of the way.

Each chapter concludes with the following components:

- *Prayer*—To encourage you
- *Steps Toward Health*—Say these out loud, because faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17), and when you hear yourself declare these truths and healthy determinations, it'll play a part in changing your mind-set and gaining a whole new momentum.

- *Try This*—Here you'll find advice on some potential next steps. Pick the ones that resonate with you and will work for you.
- *Balance Application*—This section summarizes the chapter, boiling it down for you. Hopefully these truths will begin to make a deep impact on your soul.
- *Study Time*—For those who want to take a deeper dive into Scripture, I've provided a handful of verses to look up and some questions to ponder. You'll need a journal or a notebook for this exercise. (Note: It'd be great if you wrote down some of your goals and expectations at the front of the journal and kept them before you daily. Remember, this isn't a fad diet or a once-and-done sort of thing. This is all about a lifestyle change so you can last long and finish strong.)
- *Personal Reflection*—I'd love to see you commit to working your way through these questions. I ask you to do some real soul-searching, and I think you're ready for it! Your journal is a great place to record your thoughts, prayers, and answers to these questions.
- *This Week's Goal*—Use this section to write down even the simplest goal. For example, *My goal is to quit the negative, berating self-talk.* Or, *My goal is to quit eating sweets during the week.* You get the idea. On one hand, be kind to yourself (don't set impossible goals and then beat yourself up for falling short), but on the other hand, remember that growth and forward progress always costs us something. Be willing to ask something of yourself. God is working in you, helping you to do what's good, and right, and true.
- *God's Promise to Me*—This section is also optional, but I think it's an important, powerful exercise. Based on your overall personal goals (or even your goal for that week), find a Bible promise to pray about and memorize. For instance, if you're constantly tempted to eat more than you should, write down 1 Corinthians 10:13 and own that promise. I've made the most

strides in my Christian journey through knowing, praying, and standing on the promises of God.

See this journey not as an obligation to shape up, but as an invitation to step up.

I'll be praying for you. And I'm proud of you.





# Do You Ever Wonder?

I wonder why we wander from what nourishes our souls. We wander from healthy eating, right thinking, and time with God. We wander from faithful friends, quality time, and the challenge to grow deeper. We lose the fight for what's best for us when we don't fight at all. Somehow, for some reason, our steps take us from our appointed road toward a less-than-best path for us. Do we really enjoy living a peripheral life? I don't think so. Is it easier? Perhaps it's more convenient, but I don't think it's easier. Living a life of second bests and stuck places wears on our soul and steals our joy.

On the other hand, in the moments when things line up for us, when we are doing what we care about, passion emerges and joy returns. We find ourselves wondering, *Why did I ever let this go?* And yet we do let it go—over and over again.

Is it that we don't care enough? I think we care a lot. But our priorities get skewed because we live in a fallen world where the currents of sin and defeat are strong, and if not resisted, will pull us under. *That's* when we feel in over our head. And that's when we feel at the mercy of our crazy lives. As long as we walk this earth, we will contend with the current. But this shouldn't shake us, because God has made a way for us. We're not at the mercy of our schedules, our culture, or even our weaknesses. *We're in the mercy of God*, which eclipses every lesser thing around us. Even our weaknesses become a thing of beauty and strength when we're hidden in Christ Jesus.

God is immovable; we are the ones who move. God is consistent; we have our moments. God is powerful; we are powerless without Him. All His thoughts are pure and holy; ours can be selfish and small. We need Jesus. Just as we need oxygen to breathe, we continually need

Jesus's input, His breath, and His Spirit in and through us. He is our Source. We must stay close to the Source.

Given that backdrop, how are you today? Read through the following questions:

1. Do you wish you had more energy?
2. Do you lack focus, passion, and direction?
3. Do you feel at the mercy of your schedule? Is life pulling you in too many directions?
4. Does the term "spiritual health" make you think of rigid rules and an *un-maintainable* level of holiness?
5. Would you like to be more physically fit?
6. Would you like to enjoy a greater awareness of God's love for you?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, join me as we explore the wonder of our physical and spiritual health. God has divinely woven them together. You must know at the outset that you are loved and accepted right where you are. But if you are interested, God has more for you!

If you're tired of halfhearted living, this book can help. Get ready to take a fearless inventory of your habits and choices. As you read, ask God to lead you out of the swirling current of imbalance to a place of stability and strength in both your physical and spiritual life.

You'll begin to feel relieved as you find yourself "off the hook" from having to achieve a certain picture of perfection. On the other hand, you'll feel "back on the hook" as you are challenged in every circumstance to find the most fruitful place amid your life's current season.

This book has two parts—physical health and spiritual health—and both will deal with essential components of health and holiness. At the end of each chapter, you'll find study and reflection questions for both individual and group use. Take your time and pray through every chapter. Allow God to speak to you, deal with you, heal you, and

set you free to powerfully affect the world around you. When you are at your best, the world around you is blessed!

My prayer is that, as you read, you'll accept God's forgiveness and leave your past behind. May you trust Jesus with your future so you'll be fully alive in the *present moment*. May your soul be awakened to all you have in Him today. May you be a living, breathing example of Christ's love for a lost world, so when others encounter you, they encounter Him.

Bless the day, my sister!

*Susie Larson*



*Part One*

# Physical Health



*I discipline my body like an athlete,  
training it to do what it should.  
Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others  
I myself might be disqualified.*

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27



## One

# How Did I Get Here?

*Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."*

MATTHEW 11:28-30

**M**y good intentions had gotten the best of me. I said yes to far too many opportunities, and now I was paying a costly price. I had no room in my life for red lights, wide-load trucks, or leaky dishwashers. Every minute had its place in my day as I whipped from one task to another, checking them off my list upon completion.

As my car sped around a bend, I chomped on a dry bagel. The trees went by in a blur. The thought *Savor the flavor* crossed my mind, but I waved it away as though it were a gnat circling my head. I made it to the bank, the library, and then reached the restaurant just in time for my lunch appointment. How did I end up on this fast track again? Where did that place of peace go? I shoveled down a salad as I listened intently to my friend. *Savor*. There it was again. My friend and I shared a wonderful time, but it was over before I knew it.

A glance at my watch reminded me I still had three stops to make before heading home in time to meet the kids as they got off the bus.

My friend and I embraced and promised not to let so much time pass before we met again. The gurgle sounds coming from my stomach made me realize that perhaps I had eaten a bit too fast. *Savor the flavor.*

I marched out to my car and got behind the wheel. I turned the key, revved the engine, and then took my foot off the gas pedal. I listened to the steady hum of the motor and marveled at the irony. The engine didn't drive itself; *I* was the one with the lead foot. And nobody pushed me to keep such a fast pace in life; my own drive pushed me.

I paused and prayed, *What is it You're trying to tell me, Lord?* I sensed His whisper in return: *You are living in the "next" moment and missing the present one. You are so focused on your destination that you're simply consumed with getting there. Did you happen to notice the beautiful sky I painted this morning? How about the trees? Did you notice how the tree-tops were blanketed with fresh snow? Take your salad today; you were so busy stabbing your next bite that you were totally unaware of the great morsel of food you already had in your mouth. That taste was history before it ever hit your lips. Wouldn't it be wonderful to savor the flavor of the bite in your mouth? Be thankful for the abundance of food in front of you and take a moment to enjoy it. You're missing so much of the journey because your mind is on the destination.*

I wasn't sure how long I sat there, but it didn't matter. My life needed some tweaking, and Jesus had just spiritually adjusted me. My life had subtly shifted out of whack to the point that I'd completely overlooked the significant gifts He'd sent my way throughout the day.

I decided my other errands could wait, and I headed home. On the way I pulled back on the gas pedal and slowed way down as I rounded that same bend. I looked at the lofty pines that pointed to the heavens. I even put the window down several inches just to breathe in the crisp winter air. "Thank You, Jesus, for this beautiful day."

I arrived home in time to see my kids get off the bus. Instead of rushing to get that one extra load of dishes done before they burst through the door, I went to the living room window and watched them as they hoofed through the deep snow with rosy cheeks and thick winter garb. They lobbed a few snowballs across the street to their neighbor



buddies and then ducked behind a snow mound to dodge returning fire. They grow up so fast. I breathed a prayer:

*Help me to make the best of these days, Lord. Help me not to race through each one. I want to see the miracles in front of me. May I remember that each day is a special gift, wrapped in a supernatural bow. Oh, and by the way, thank You for that beautiful sky. It's going to be a glorious sunset.*

"Help me to make the best of these days, Lord. Help me not to race through each one. I want to see the miracles in front of me."

As I watched my kids make their way to the front door, my mind wandered back to a tougher time in our lives. We were on the cancer floor of the hospital with our little boy. He was having night sweats and had a large lump on his neck. We watched as they wheeled him away for various tests. But something was different during this trial. Because of the many crises we'd endured in previous years, we finally believed God to be who He said He was. We truly knew God was for us (Romans 8:31). We could take Him at His word, and we did. Even though we were nervous and on edge, we had an inner peace and stability.

We also had many people praying for us, visiting us, and taking care of our household duties. We received great blessings from family, our church, and the hospital. I felt so cared for that, even in the middle of our crisis, I had something to give away. I sat in a large rocking chair and watched all the precious, hairless children welcome my child into the fold. I found myself asking, *What does obedience look like here, Lord? How can I love, serve, and obey You in this setting?* The Lord whispered to my heart, *Watch the other moms and dads. Look at the fatigue in their eyes and pray for them. They live this every day. Listen to them and help to carry their load.* I looked around at some of the world's greatest unsung heroes.

Life moves so fast. We have appointments, luncheons, hockey games, videos, late fees, highways, skyways, hallways, and *my way*. Here

it was just the opposite: aches, pains, prayers, tears, hallways, dark ways, lost ways, slow days, and not my way. Wow. Nobody looked polished around here. They looked tired and weary. They didn't seem to notice, because this was not their focus; their children were.

I lost track of time as they shared their stories. I was thankful to have the opportunity to pray for a weary grandmother and grateful to receive comfort from her as well. I had an underlying strength that held fast. This was a powerful revelation to me—I found the eye of the storm, the axis in a very stressful situation. I saw myself fully as a child of God. I was under His care, but I was also under His charge. And since I had strength to give, He provided the opportunity to serve.

Somehow, I had found my place of balance in that crisis (thankfully, our son *didn't* have cancer). And yet here in this place and time, watching my healthy boys get off the bus, I realized that by overcoming myself, I gave too much away, and with it, my sense of wonder. God called me back once again, to find my peace with Him in the season I was in.

## Balance Is More Than Skin Deep

Now, granted, in times of crisis we need to receive far more than we're capable of giving. We also experience times of strength and grace when we can give much more than we're receiving. But we cannot for too long give at the expense of receiving without losing our health and perspective. And we must never let go of the fact that we are living, breathing creatures made for a heavenly kingdom. God always provides nourishment for our souls; He also sets up many divine appointments where we can offer a blessing, and He paints many beautiful skies that call us to lie down and look up.

True balance isn't defined by the appearance of having it all together. Some of the most together-looking women are the most out of balance—at least from a heavenly point of view. In the worldly sense, self-realization and self-ambition have become celebrated idols. Promoting ourselves, our gifts, and our abilities is an expected and acceptable road in the secular arena. But as women of faith who love our Savior, we are

called to a much different path. He is the point, He is the One who gets the credit, and He is the One we serve.

The irony is that as we embrace the God-given components of a healthy life, we *will* look more put together. We will *have* more together. But this won't be our highest aim, because we know better than anyone how quickly life can change. Our goal and our aim is to pursue the mind-set that we are *alive* in Christ. He wants to breathe life into us so we can serve Him by living a healthy, holy, and abundant life. Scripture promises we will encounter trials and troubles. Yet we are also promised access to the very power that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Since Christ has paid for and provided for every scenario, we have all we need to embrace life with a sense of purpose, power, and balance. This kind of balance goes with us and adjusts to the places God takes us and to whatever He allows to happen in our lives.

## Balance Is Worth Pursuing

Where are you right now? It doesn't matter if your road is rough or smooth; there is balance to be found and greater health to be realized. Even in the valley, there is higher ground—the place of greatest fruitfulness—and it is *that* place we seek in every situation. As we move along in our journey toward balance, you will receive practical tips to help you both physically and spiritually. You will be challenged to go just a bit further than you may feel like going. If you apply the principles in this book, you will get healthier, but more importantly, you will begin to see yourself as Christ sees you. Your perspective will change. Your tastes will change. And before you know it, you'll lose your taste for what weakens you, and you'll more consistently hunger and thirst for what nourishes you both physically and spiritually. I pray this book will help you find your place with Jesus no matter where life finds you.

*Father God,*

*You have done so much for me, and I thank You with all my heart. I don't know why I sometimes choose the*

*less-than-best path when I know there is a better way. Motivate me to start anew today. Help me to find my way to the peace You provide. I want to take what You have given and give You a great return on Your investment. Create in me an excitement to live a healthier life. I love You. In Jesus's mighty name, I pray, amen.*

## Steps Toward Health

- If my life is currently caught in the swirling current, I will come before God today and find my place of peace with Him. I will ask Him to show me what needs to go from my schedule.
- If my life is currently a peaceful, balanced place, I will thank God today for blessing me in this way. I will ask the Lord to show me practical ways to guard the balance I'm enjoying right now while looking for opportunities to stretch, grow, and be a blessing to the world around me.
- I will be mindful of the fine line between a healthy protection of my balance and a selfish protection of my personal comforts. I will ask the Lord to heighten my conviction so I will instantly notice when I begin to approach the "selfish line."
- I will ask the Lord to prepare me to take this journey toward health and holiness. I will stand in faith, knowing He will come through for me.
- I will prayerfully consider the idea that God has someone in mind right now, someone with whom I'm supposed to take this journey, someone I can bless and encourage and who will do the same for me.

## Try This

- If you feel hopelessly overcommitted while looking at this month's calendar, sit down and pray. Ask the Lord to show you

- what can be rescheduled or taken off your schedule. Make the phone calls and the necessary adjustments.
- Look at your calendar and “X” off a day or two each week when you plan not to have plans, especially those days that fall right before or right after an event or a commitment that may deplete you.
  - Write down a list of five high-priority items you want to accomplish this month (for example, go on a date with your child, catch up on paperwork, visit a grandparent). Post that short list next to your monthly calendar. When you receive calls and requests for commitments, measure those requests against what you felt convicted to accomplish at the beginning of your month. Guard your time, and accomplish what you know you should.

## Balance Application

If life is too busy, make the adjustments necessary to find your place of peace again. If you are in a crisis, whether or not it feels natural, seek after God and find your place with Him so you are not swept away with your fears. Some crises are so intense that the Lord Himself carries us through without any pressing in on our part. If you are on a smooth path, guard it and look for ways to be a blessing to others.

## Study Time

1. Read Ruth 2:8-22.
2. Do you see a parallel between Boaz’s care for Ruth and your heavenly Father’s care for you? Explain.
3. In what tangible ways did Boaz equip and care for Ruth?
4. Why was it important for Ruth to stay within the boundaries set for her?
5. Why is it important for you to do the same?

6. Ruth was a woman of honor, diligence, humility, and gratitude. In what ways do you see God establishing these virtues in you?
7. Pause and pray. Ask the Lord to draw you closer to Him.

### Personal Reflection

1. In what ways have you missed God's provision and goodness because of your current pace? Write out a prayer and express your thoughts to Him.
2. Someone once asked, "If I woke up tomorrow with only what I thanked God for today, what would I still possess?" Spend some extended time surveying your life, and count every blessing you'd miss tomorrow if it went away.
3. Given the current immovables in your life (what you cannot change), what would a life of rhythm and balance look like for you? Spend some time with Jesus. Ask Him for a fresh vision for this season of life and for wisdom and clarity around your next steps.

### This Week's Goal:

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### God's Promise to Me:

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### *What Keeps You Balanced, Grounded?*

I think when it comes to balancing out my life, I've found that I need to go to the Living Water that gives life first. I need to stop the comparison game and I need to listen to God's calling on my life, because when I listen to God and hear Him speak, then He is the one who balances out all the details.

Life can be a beautiful, messy balance, but God loves when the mess is blessed by Him.

*—Heather*