

The Mystery of Living Life Overwhelmed—And How to Stop

I don't like to bother people. I like to assume they are too busy to help me and go from there.

Rather than ask for help, I just make a lot of noise in their direction until they volunteer to help. Like if the garbage is full and Michael doesn't seem to notice it, I'll say to the dogs, "No, don't get in that garbage. I know it's full, but stay out of it." If my daughter has left her shoes on the living room floor, I'll growl my disapproval and say something about having to "do all the work around here" as I reach down to put them away.

I don't like to impose on people, and I resent that, so I make it known that I am peeved at them for appearing too busy to help me do what I never asked them to do.

I have mastered the art of assuming nobody cares. Let me educate you in this overwhelming skill.

First, you have to believe your schedule takes priority over everyone else's. In other words, if *you* think it's time for something to be done, then no matter what anyone else is doing, it *is* time for it to be done.

Second, you have to lay the foundation in your mind that because they haven't committed your plans to memory, they don't care about you.

Third, with this negative outlook firmly in hand, you can now presume they will *never* help you because if they were going to, they already would have.

Finally, you can begin the gentle and kind process of alerting them to their oversight while making some type of discontented

sigh or side remark, until they finally see the error of their ways.

May you have better luck than I in this passive-aggressive but ever-so-sweet monologue of disgust. It has served me nothing but frustration, bitterness and resentment for decades and continues to be my instinctual invitation for intimate interactions—with myself. I guess I'm just an optimist who believes the old adage that doing something over and over again while expecting a different outcome is the definition of progress.

Bet you wish we could be friends.

It's true, though. I'm forever bemoaning how difficult it is being much more advanced than others that I can assume their intentions and capacity for failing me very effortlessly.

I can walk into a roomful of women and know before they do that they aren't going to notice or care about me. I know this is just because of what they are thinking about me. It's funny how discerning I am.

In fact, an acquaintance of mine once said, "You just always seem so sad." Well, you would be too if no one noticed or talked to you! Knowing what others are thinking all the time is overwhelming! When I'm overwhelmed by their obvious disregard for me, I'm sad-faced, so sue me. I figure, *Why pretend to be happy when I know you're just going to make me sad?* I cut out the middle woman that way.

Yes, the weeds growing in my overwhelmed garden are fertilized by the droppings of my imagination, as I assume things about others to prove their failure at doing what I want them to do.

U-G-L-Y!

The truth is that most of what overwhelms me is fictional fantasy rather than total truth. It happens when I base all of

my thoughts about others on loving myself first instead of loving them. There's a word for that; it's "selfishness," and I'm the poster child for it. It's not because I don't care about others. It's because of my fear of them and my certainty they couldn't possibly love a fool like me. This negative self-image undergirds my self-obsession, self-condemnation and self-preoccupation. The more of me in my mind, the less I'm able to see the good in others. It's an ugly truth that I'm not only willing to confess but passionate to change.

But how? That's the eternal question: How can I love well?

The first clue to this mystery is God's sovereignty. Just knowing God allows not only the big things in my life but the mundane things as gifts, not to destroy me but to make me more like His Son, helps me to let go of the focus on failure and instead to embrace the ever-present hand of God in the messes of life. Somehow knowing He is there and can be trusted allows me to trust those who fail me, too, not to be perfect but to be a tool in the hand of a loving God. When that's my focus, even interruption, disappointment and disrespect serve the purpose of leading me to the cross, causing me not only to trust my God but to seek Him instead of reparation.

If you see yourself in my crazy, welcome! I'm glad I'm not alone. Now join me in trusting that God works all things, even the failure of others, together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose. May you see God today in the messes of life and be overwhelmed by His goodness. {eoa}

Hayley DiMarco is the best-selling author of more than 40 books, including her latest release is *A Woman Overwhelmed: Finding God in the Messes of Life* (Abingdon Press) and its companion Bible study. As the founder of Hungry Planet, DiMarco speaks regularly for women's groups and events. Hayley, her pastor husband, Michael, and their daughter live outside Nashville.

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