

CONFESSIONS *of an*



ADOPTIVE PARENT



PRESENTS



THE
WEARY PARENT'S GUIDE
TO ESCAPING
EXHAUSTION



A REALISTIC 9 DAY PLAN
TO FINALLY GET THE REST YOU NEED

INTRODUCTION

EXHAUSTION

What is the word to describe this feeling? *Tired*, yes. *Worn out*, of course. *Exhausted*, without a doubt. But none of those words accurately describe this feeling. This is deeper than a missed night of sleep.

I feel it to my core. My legs feel heavy as if weighted by sand. I carry a burden in my heart that presses against my chest with each breath. My arms are braced as if for action but my hands are pressed firmly on the dashboard. With eyelids scrunched tight I allow my forehead to drop until it hits the steering wheel with a thud. Another shoe whizzes past my right ear and I quickly calculate how many objects are left for my son to throw. We're almost done, I think. I pulled alongside this country road 15 minutes ago. I'm afraid my tires might have sunk into this unseasonably wet grass. I don't care. If this tantrum ever ends, I'll just have to begin driving again and that means heading home to more laundry, more cooking, more parenting. My son's rage began after being told we weren't getting fast food for lunch and escalated until this moment. Driving had become unsafe, so here we are. My eyes have been closed so tightly I'm now seeing stars. *Weary*, that's the word I was looking for. I feel weary. I fear I'm unable to go on. When will I ever rest again? I think as I cautiously open one eye and then another. I breathe in and out, conscious of my own lungs. "I'm sorry Momma," I hear from the back seat. "I forgive you," I sigh as I unclench my fists and turn the key in the ignition.

As it turns out, my car is stuck. I rock back and forth, spraying mud all over the sides of my van, I realize I'm stuck too. Stuck in this weariness, spinning my figurative tires, spraying the mess of parenting all over the place. As the tread finally grips the earth and my van is freed from the ditch, I know it's time for me to free myself from this weary life. But how?



DAY 1: GRATITUDE

Sometimes this life can feel like it's pressing down on us. There are seasons of life when we come to expect an attack at every turn. With one wary eye watching each next step and the other looking over our shoulder at the past, we can feel exhausted. Each day is a compilation of failures. With lack of perceived success, thankfulness is the last thing on our minds.

It was during one such time, that I received some invaluable advice. I was in despair over one child's bad choice, another child's illness, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one. With each attack, my attitude turned restless and angry. I was unable to sleep at night, filled with the anxiety that the weight of the day's happenings would crush me. I was resistant to rise in the morning for fear of what lay beyond. In my weariness I dropped my youngest off at school and with my van blessedly empty I drove around for a while. I ended up at the local cemetery and found myself jealous of the eternal rest all around me. I called my mom and bawled like a baby. She imparted on me the first and most meaningful piece of advice to finding rest. Gratitude. "Be grateful Kristin, Satan really hates gratitude." She was right. This really was an attack and I was forgetting to use a very powerful weapon.

I SPENT THE NEXT 30 MINUTES LISTING OUT LOUD EVERYTHING I WAS GRATEFUL FOR.



The sun



My breath



The car is running



Our home



That tree over there, it really is pretty.

As my list grew, so did my sense of peace. I found that as I was grateful for the small things I became grateful for the larger things as well. My perspective turned. The lost job became an opportunity for something greater. The bad choice became an opportunity to learn integrity and on and on it went. What started in my car that day became a peaceful, restful action I take each day.



TODAY'S ACTION STEP

NAME 20 THINGS YOU ARE GRATEFUL FOR TODAY.

If you are in a season of weariness, start small. Do this right now before you finish this eBook. If you are a writer, write these in a notebook. If you are talker, say them out loud. If you are visual, picture them in your head. As the next few days progress, do this each day. Set a special place that you will make this list each day. Brushing your teeth, taking a shower, driving your car, folding laundry or as your head hits the pillow each night. As you return to that special spot each day, let your heart feel the peace and restfulness of gratitude.



DAY 2: RELATIONSHIP

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I have a son who is skinny-mini. Seriously, he's a little teeny tiny bit of nothing. All the kids around him are rising steadily up the growth chart, not my son. He finally made it on the growth chart just this year at 6 years old. This typically doesn't bother him, he loves to pretend to be the baby.

Recently, I noticed a different problem. Even in the muggy midwestern summer, my son would not wear shorts. He absolutely refused. Every day he would put a pair of winter jammies or jeans on and head out to sweat the day away.

I hid the jeans, I begged for change, I pleaded for him to wear the still quite functional hand-me-down shorts that had clothed his older three brothers well. To no avail.

Then one morning, I asked, "Why won't you just wear the shorts?" His answer surprised me, "Mom, they don't fit! When I walk they fall down and everyone is going to see my butt!" Rolling my eyes at his theatrics, I followed him to his room and tried on every last pair. He was right, and I felt remiss at my job as a mother. Feeling badly, I offered to buy him a belt. He was excited about the idea, so I loaded my 6 youngest children into the car and headed to the store.

The remedy to the situation proved to be more difficult than anticipated. My teenagers started fighting. My 8 year old threw up in his booster seat. My 7 year old stepped on his glasses. My 6 year old girl (who is nearly a foot taller than my 6 year old boy) lamented that she was not getting a new belt.

Eventually, we survived the trip and cinched my son's new belt around his waist. Proud of his newly realized wardrobe, he marched around the yard for a solid hour, thrilled that his pants were staying up. Until, he had to go to the bathroom. I heard the screaming from the guest bath, "I can't get my belt off!" and came running to find.... Well any parent reading this has their own potty story to share so I'll let you use your imagination on this one.

I soaked my son in the tub, cleaned every inch of the bathroom, started the washing machine filled with the towels, shorts, underwear and brand new belt from the previous incident. Then

I took my 8 year old a bucket, put my 6 year old girl in time out, broke up another argument



between my teenagers and duct taped my son's glasses together. That's when I sat down in the middle of the dining room floor and realized I felt completely alone. So I cried.

I sat there for a while before I realized that I'm the one with the power to change this situation. I tucked my little ones in for a nap, put my teenagers to work doing chores and called a friend. We talked for an hour and exchanged stories of times when the day just really didn't go as planned. When I got off the phone, I was ready to begin again. There is so much power in relationship.

TODAY'S ACTION STEP

BEFORE YOU FINISH THIS EBOOK, CONNECT WITH SOMEONE.

Call a friend. Send an email. Send a text. Set up a time for coffee or a family cook-out. During this next week be mindful of you relationships. Do you have someone who has been or is in your situation? Do you know of a group in your church or community that you can join? Make a connection with someone each day.



DAY 3: SOS

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Raise your hand and ask for help. Don't be afraid. You are not alone.

Did you hear what we just said? You are not alone. There are others in this trench who are fighting the same battles and feeling the same weariness that you are right now. Let that sink in for a moment. Think about each of those words slowly and meticulously. Say them individually to yourself: YOU. ARE. NOT. ALONE.



I (Mike) think that our weariness and exhaustion often come from this idea that we are alone and isolated. We believe that no one else feels the way we do, thinks the way we do, or fights the same battles that we do. It's a pretty desperate feeling, and it's one that all parents, but especially parents of difficult children, or children with special needs feel.

When you discover you are not alone, you find hope to face another day.

Sometimes as parents we shy away from asking for help. We tend to believe others are too busy with their own lives to give us an extra minute of their time. We may feel stupid asking for help, assuming that others are looking at our failure or judging our parenting.

We learned a valuable lesson several years ago: not sending out an SOS, when we need it the most, causes more failure than raising our hand and asking for help.

As a kid, I hated school. I was an active child who craved hands on experience. I found myself lacking the focus necessary to learn as the teacher lectured. As my mind wandered, I found myself missing the important information. If there was anything I liked less than sitting in school, it was raising my hand and asking for help. I didn't like to call attention to myself or admit that I didn't understand something. I was afraid that other students, and the teacher, would think less of me for needing help. So, I kept my hand down, and quietly lived with my misunderstanding. The problem with doing this was that I was literally failing most of my subjects.

My fear of looking like an idiot in front of my class caused me to fail, when simply asking for help could have changed my circumstance for the better.



The truth is, we fail our children, our spouse and our family more so, when we are afraid to ask for help. If we simply raise our hand in our greatest time of need, we can find hope for the future. We don't fail our family at all when we ask for help. It's one of the healthiest things we can do for ourselves and for them. Asking for help can be a critical step to finding health and balance in our family.

*Accepting help can provide us with the rest we need
as a parent to press on another day.*

When a ship is in distress on the high seas, they call for help. They send out an SOS (Save Our Ship). What if they didn't do this, in the moment of their greatest need? What if they fear being an inconvenience to the Coast Guard or another ship nearby? They would face certain death. They would sink. The same is true for us when we have a need as a parent.

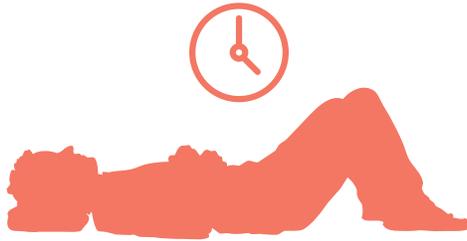
TODAY'S ACTION STEP	WRITE DOWN THE NAMES OF THREE PEOPLE WHO YOU TRUST.					
<p>These are those who understand what you're going through (or will understand), who are not judgmental or quick to criticize, and ask them for help. Simply call them, text them, or email them and say "I need help. I'm overwhelmed, tired, and ready to quit. Could you meet with me?" Be honest right out of the gate. Honesty is always the best policy when you need help. You don't need to call all three people at once, but call at least one person today!</p>						
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DAY 4: TIME-OUT

Stop, think it through, find calm, find peace.

One of the most important things you can do for your health as a parent is take a time out. For adults this looks a little different from the typical nose-in-the-corner punishment of pre-schoolers. Relaxation is a catalyst for peace. Don't confuse this with apathy, or laziness. As a parent, you have certain responsibilities and those are a fixture. However, it's critical that you build in some times of relaxation.



I (Mike) don't like to rush. Not at all! In fact, it stresses me out. Often times, however, I can't avoid it. It's just the way life is. Before I was a full-time blogger, author and public speaker I worked Sunday-Thursday in the church. I had Fridays and Saturdays off. But little by little, I began to notice a pattern. My supposed "days off" were slowly turning into extensions of the work week. It started subtle - I would put in an hour here, an hour there. I would grab my laptop and shoot off some emails when the kids were napping. Nothing major. Over time, however, an hour or two would turn into 4. A full day off, suddenly became a half day off. Two full days of rest, was whittled down to one until I was barely taking time to relax during the course of a week.

Fortunately, I clued in. My wife helped out with this a little! She "subtly" let me know that I was no longer taking the days off that I was given. Something needed to change. What I realized was that I needed a day or two during a hectic week of work to relax, turn my brain off, not check emails or social media, and not think about the normal stuff that I was consumed with Sunday through Thursday.

As parents who often find themselves tired, weary, overwhelmed and defeated by the difficulties and constant uphill climb of parenthood, we need a time out. It may mean laying your children down for a nap, not folding another basket of laundry, not worrying about your un-mowed lawn, laying down on the sofa, or curling up in a chair with a book for an hour or two and resting.



It may mean a weekend away with a friend or your spouse. It may mean calling on a relative or a trusted friend to take your kids for an afternoon or an evening so you can relax and unwind.

It's easy to stay busy. What's not easy, but completely necessary, is taking a time-out to relax and unwind.

TODAY'S ACTION STEP

CARVE OUT AN HOUR IN YOUR SCHEDULE TODAY OR TOMORROW.

Commit to shut off your cell phone, close your laptop, stop the household chores, and relax. Read a book, go for a walk, find the kids a sitter (refer to SOS) for an afternoon and unwind. If your children still take naps, nap at the same time. If you have a child with special needs or extreme behavioral issues like we do, lean into your support community for a few hours so you can find rest.



DAY 5: RECALIBRATION



In order to get back on course as a parent, you must take time to stop, reprioritize, refocus and hit the reset button.

Recently I (Mike) went for a jog early in the morning while I was out of town speaking at a conference in the mountains of Tennessee. The sun was barely peaking above the mountains, it had rained the night before so there was a cool mist in the air, and the usual July humidity that Tennessee is known for had not shown up. It was a beautiful morning. I had set my Nike+ app to 4 miles exactly. I know, I know, not exactly marathon quality but as I near 40, I exercise to stay alive longer not to look good!

With my run complete, I was feeling great! Really great, in fact. I'm usually not a huge fan of jogging, especially when it's hilly, but I couldn't wait to get back out and do the some course again the next morning. That's exactly what I did. I got up even earlier the next morning, pulled all of my running gear on and took off. However, I could tell that something wasn't right soon after starting the run. I felt great, but my Nike+ app was off. The longer I ran, the more irregular it became. Where I was supposed to hit a half mile the computer voice on the app told me I had completed one full mile. Nearly a mile and a half before I had reached my end goal of 4 miles she said I had made it. As I looked into the settings it was clear that I needed to recalibrate the app. Recalibration is the function you perform with any GPS-guided app to get it back on course. After all, no one wants to come up short of their goal, or be told false information. You literally have to stop your walk or run, and take the time to follow necessary steps to get the app back to its proper function.

When you think about it, this is something parents need to do as well. Sometimes life gets off course and we need to stop what we are doing and take the steps necessary to get back on course. When we are exhausted from the grind of life, the demands of family, and the seemingly unending pace of keeping up with our children, we need to hit reset.



We ignore the need, or we don't believe we have the time for recalibration.

Hitting the reset button looks different for lots of people, but for nearly everyone it involves doing three big things:

1. Stop your routine.
2. Seek a brief escape in order to refocus.
3. Create a new course.

Stop, seek, create. It's that simple. You must intentionally stop the pace you are moving at, escape to a quiet place for an hour or two, and map out a brand new course.

In order to get back on course in the midst of weariness and exhaustion, we must take time to recalibrate!

TODAY'S ACTION STEP

STOP YOUR NORMAL ROUTINE AND ESCAPE FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

Head out to a coffee shop, a quiet restaurant or a park (being outdoors always helps with recalibration). Create some think-space. Turn off your cell phone, close your eyes and breathe slowly. Then, create a new course. Determine what needs to change and how you're going to change it. Write it down, study it, meditate on it, and then set it in motion.



DAY 6: DO SOMETHING THAT BRINGS YOU JOY

I became a parent 13 1/2 years ago. Since then, I have felt great responsibility and a sense of duty in taking care of my children. I have loved almost every part of this incredible job.

Even in the late nights, early mornings, missed naps and blurry-eyed trips to the all night pharmacy, I've felt pride. At the commencement of the 2 year-old tantrums and sassy mouthed teenage arguments, I've felt achievement. In the coo of the newborn at the 2 am feeding, I've felt contentment. In the first word spoken, the 'A' on the spelling test, the shared smile, the giddy giggle, the graduation of the high-school senior, the wedding of my child, I have felt utter and deep *JOY!*



In the deepness of my parenting joy, I've realized something. I don't know how to have joy outside of my children and my husband. In the midst of my role as a parent, I have lost a little something of myself. For me, writing has always brought me joy. I have loved to write since Ms. Neiler sent me to the young author's conference in 4th grade. There is something so invigorating about telling a story, hearing the words in my mind as I feel my fingers write them on paper. For a long time I viewed my parenting as a full and complete role, lacking room for a hobby or a past time. For years I stopped writing.

My husband found compartments for each of his roles long before I allowed myself to do the same. I felt that in each situation I am all or nothing. He set a goal for himself to write one hour a day and he did it. He woke up early and wrote before the house began to stir. My friend found this margin when she learned to crochet. She set aside the time while watching TV, waiting in doctors' offices, sitting at a little league game. My mom began painting. I was watching those around me use their creativity. I watched their faces light up with joy at their accomplishment and their light was contagious. One day, I sat in my dining room wearing the scarf lovingly woven. I gazed at the painting meticulously illustrated.



Then I opened a blog post, thoughtfully penned. At first I felt jealousy that they had found the time to do something that brings such joy. Then I realized I had the power to change my circumstance.

I began to write each day. Blog posts, journal entries, letters to family. It felt so good. I was using a part of me that had lain dormant for a long time. I began to feel a new kind of joy. I discovered that I could bring joy to others through my writing as well. Finding something that brings joy is not wasted time.

TODAY'S ACTION STEP	ASK YOURSELF WHAT BRINGS ME JOY?
<p>Close your eyes and picture the thing that makes your heart feel at peace. This week, commit to a time set aside just for this activity.</p> 	



DAY 7: BREATHE

I know, I know. This is something you do without thinking. Now I want you to think about it. A few years ago our son was struggling to regulate himself. He absolutely could not calm himself in even the tiniest stressful situation. We eventually saw a therapist who specialized in dialectic behavioral therapy (DBT). Some of the ideas she used with our son were great. They were actually ideas that he could take into every day life. Years have gone by and there is one skill that we still use daily. It's called 4-square-breathing. It's simple.

4-Square-Breathing

Breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, breathe out for 4 counts and repeat 4 times.

Simple and effective, especially for a kiddo with special needs...and his over stressed momma.

I have found myself using this method for myself as much as recommending it to others. In the midst of a worrisome doctor's visit, as my teenage daughter rolls her eyes at me, while waiting behind a crabby customer in line at the grocery, I try to remember to take time to breathe.

Learning this one specific skill has caused me to think about how I breathe all the time. Just the consciousness of our breath can help our bodies to go from anxious to calm. I occasionally go for a run (typically only when I'm about to have a melt down). As I'm running my breath is rapid. It matches the pounding of my heart in my chest. As I slow down and return to a normal heart rate, my breathing resumes a calm and steady rate as well. I fill my lungs fully, gauge the air as it empties my chest, slowly steadily.

I can't feel rest, when my breath is ragged. My breathing is an indication of what I'm feeling. When my breathing is erratic, it's difficult to calm my mind and body in order to come to a place of restfulness.

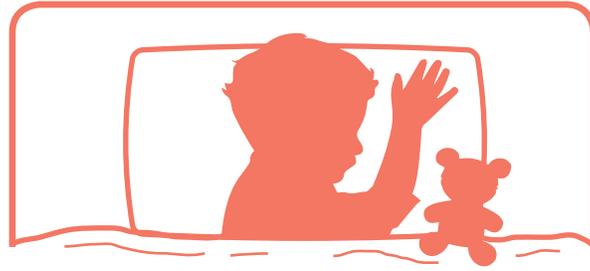


1. As you breathe in, fill your lungs to capacity. Breathe in the day's anxieties as you count to four. Pause as you count with lungs filled. Think only of the fullness of your lungs. As you count to four again, release the air completely from your lungs. With it, release the anxieties of the day.
2. As you breathe in, allow yourself only to think of the air you are breathing in. Slow and steady fill your lungs. As you hold your breath, fill your mind with the peace of your beating heart. Exhale slowly, concentrating only on your breath.
3. Inhale the peacefulness. Hold while keeping your mind blank. Exhale peace.
4. Inhale, hold, exhale.

Throughout this week, be conscious of your breathing. What does it say about your feelings? Practice ways to bring your breathing back to a restful place.



DAY 8: BEDTIME ROUTINE



Every pediatrician, grandmother and well-meaning church lady told you to establish a bedtime routine before you even opened the last baby shower gift. I (Kristin) grew up in a home with parents who tucked me in each night following a bath, a bedtime story and a prayer. I really took to heart the importance of the bedtime routine. My husband and I read up on baby massage and essential oils. We carefully crafted the bedtime routine of our first little one. When we brought home our 2nd and 3rd child, the routine expanded and grew to accommodate the winding down of each little personality.

To this day, we value the time we spend helping each child unwind.

However, my bedtime routine looks a little less like my child's and a little more like that of a college freshman. I fix a snack, then decide that it wasn't the snack I wanted. Then I fix another snack. I sprawl out on my family room couch, surrounded by bills, or work, or homework that needs to be checked. Finally I become engrossed in a Netflix series and stop watching only when the screensaver pops up. I finally shuffle up the stairs and climb into bed and check my Facebook one more time on my phone. Eventually, I toss and turn restlessly as I check off the list of things I didn't accomplish that day, add to my running list of things to work on tomorrow and stress about the future of my family if I don't make it to the grocery store immediately the next morning.

Recently I have become more mindful of my own bedtime routine. I mentally set a time that the television will be off. I change into my favorite PJ's and do a quick check through the house to put my mind at ease that everyone is sleeping safely. I pray for my children and husband. Finally, I allow myself to read by my book light until I'm drowsy.



I do not allow my mind to make lists and I do not check my phone again once the light is off. I have also become more aware of the feel of my bedroom. I've stopped allowing my children's laundry to pile up around my bed.

TODAY'S ACTION STEP

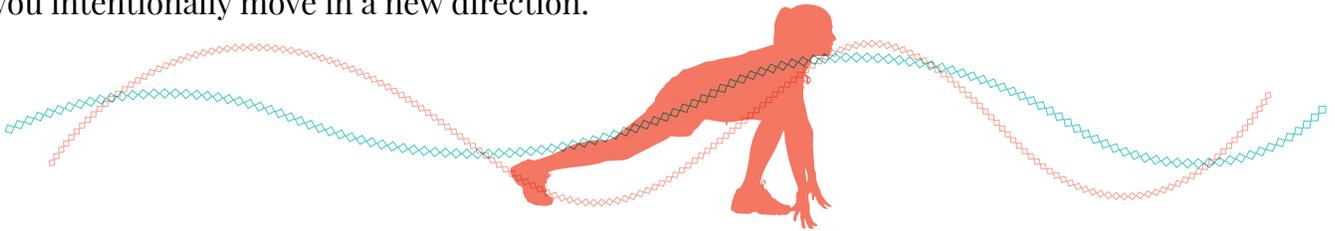
BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS BOOK, DECIDE ON A BEDTIME TONIGHT.

Do your best to stick to it. Choose a restful, screen-free activity to do in your last waking hour. Over the next few weeks create a peaceful environment in your bedroom.



DAY 9: GET MOVING

Sitting idle will get you nowhere. We know you are tired, and defeated, and overwhelmed. We know because we have been there many times in the past. We understand exactly what you are going through. We know that your marriage has taken a toll. We get how defeating it is to deal with your child's special need or out of control behavior. We have been through the regret of an adoption or a temporary placement and the weight of guilt that you carry over feeling like that. But you must get moving. Become proactive and start taking action steps toward regaining health, perspective, peace, and change. Your circumstances will never change until you intentionally move in a new direction.



I've often used a driving illustration when I (Mike) talk about moving in the right direction. I live in Indianapolis, Indiana. Suppose I want to drive to Columbus, Ohio to see my beloved Ohio State Buckeyes play a Saturday afternoon football game. Sounds like a great plan, right? It's a simple drive, really. Interstate 70 East right into the heart of Columbus. However, instead of entering I-70 East out of Indianapolis, I enter onto I-70 West toward St. Louis, Missouri. It's a direction all right, just the wrong one. I could wish I was moving in the right direction. I could hope and long for the day my life starts moving in a different direction. Heck, I could even pray that I start moving in a new direction. But unless I stop, exit the highway, turn my car around, and re-enter the interstate, I will never reach my intended destination.

The same is true for your life. You must get moving in order to experience the change you need in your parenting and your life. But you must make sure you're moving in the right direction at the same time. Sometimes, the path you need to walk down in your life is right in front of you and it's pretty clearly marked. Sometimes, it's not and you need the advice of others to point you in the right direction. Or, you simply need a kick in the backside to get you moving in a new, right direction.

Last year, I was unexpectedly fired from the church I had served with for 2 years. It hurt. It was embarrassing. And frankly, it was unwarranted.



I had done nothing wrong but as you can imagine, I was still reeling with this abrupt life-change. In fact, I had gotten off course in my personal life until I found myself in the mountains of Colorado on a men's retreat. We were each assigned to a mentor throughout our stay. On the last morning mine sat down with me, looked me in the eye, and bluntly said, "Get your butt in gear Mike. You're out of shape, you don't look healthy, you don't look happy and you need to get your life back on track! It sucked that you were fired, but God has something bigger in store for you. You'll never find it if you stay defeated!"

Ouch. To be honest, it stung a little. After all, no one wants to be called out like that. But sometimes that's exactly what we need to jump start us on a new path. The right path for ultimate healing and restoration. A day after my plane landed back in Indianapolis I started exercising again. I set attainable goals for myself. I mapped out a new life plan and started following it. You know what? It felt great. It wasn't an easy change, especially the exercising, but it was worth it. Change is never free of pain, but it's filled with reward! Keep that in mind when you want to quit.

Change will only happen through pro-active living. So, what are you waiting for? In order to find rest, first you must get moving.

TODAY'S ACTION STEP

THIS MAY BE THE HARDEST ACTION STEP OF ALL.

You need to stop moving in the direction you've been moving in. This may require some big decisions, big life-change, maybe even a change in address. Determine what needs to come to a halt in your life and begin moving in a new, healthy direction. It may be the relationship you have with your children. It may be you and your spouse's relationship. It may even be the unhealthy pattern you've been living your life with. Write down the direction you have been moving in, and all of the repercussions from this. Then, intentionally write down the new direction you need to move in, and map out a course for doing so. The new direction may say something like, "Get in shape," and the course for doing so may say, "Exercise three days a week." It may say "Create a new routine for my children," with the course saying, "No television or playing with friends in the neighborhood until X, Y & Z chores are completed." You may need to enforce a stricter bedtime in order to build in alone time with your spouse. Whatever the direction is, write it down, map out the course, then get moving!



CONCLUSION

Dear Friends,

In your weariness, we wish you rest. In your frustration, we wish you peace. In your confusion, we wish you clarity.

Just this morning, I (Kristin) woke up with the most restful spirit. I gazed out of my bedroom window and greeted the sun with a smile. I slid my dresser drawer open to find my favorite pair of jeans folded neatly, waiting to spend the day with me. I trotted swiftly down the stairs, and didn't even step on one lego. A fresh pot of coffee was brewing and my favorite mug was sitting next to the carafe. My day has been a series of peaceful and productive encounters with my children, co-workers and my spouse.

Let's face it, most days aren't like this. Parenting is messy, perplexing and downright exhausting. When the weariness of life takes hold, we encourage you to take some time to allow yourself to rest. It won't be easy, but if you commit to implementing these changes on a regular basis, in no time you'll find the rest you've longed for. This means you can offer your best to your family & discover just how awesome the parenting journey can be!

With Peace,

Mike & Kristin

