



MAKING TIME
for YOU



JESSICA N. TURNER


Revell

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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For Matthew,
who has always believed in my passions and me.
I love you more than the sun.

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You will never
**find
time**
for anything.
If you want time,
you must make it.

Charles Bixton

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Before We Begin



Wake up. Dress and feed the kids. Barely get makeup on. Leave. Drop the kids off at school. Stop at the bank. Work, work, work. Fill the gas tank. Pick up kids and rush home. Prepare dinner as quickly as possible to avoid the cries for snacks. Baths. Stories. Bedtime. Clean up the kitchen. Chat with my husband. Fill out that permission slip. Respond to email. Fall into bed.

Sound like a typical day in your life? Or at least a variation of it?

Let's face it. As women, we are really good at juggling a lot. Sometimes I get to the end of my day and when I look back over it I am amazed at all that was packed in.

But all too often, the one thing we *don't* make time for in our busy days is ourselves.

Do you ever crawl into bed and as you try to turn your mind off realize you did nothing for you? Instead of reading that book that has been on your nightstand for weeks or picking up a pen to write an overdue birthday card to a friend, your day was filled with meeting the needs of others.

And if you go days, even weeks, without that needed time, life can feel really hard.

I'm here to tell you that you not only *can* but *must* make time to do things that matter to you, no matter how busy life gets. It may seem like there aren't enough hours in a day—particularly if you are juggling a lot of responsibilities—but I promise you, it's possible. God created you uniquely with gifts and passions. You should use them well not just for others but to fill you up. It is all too common today to run on empty, but I have learned that life is so much better when you make yourself a priority. No matter how busy we are, we all can make time for ourselves.

Like you, I have a lot on my plate. I'm a wife, mom, full-time marketing professional, and blogger. Additionally, I love to travel, scrapbook, bake, and read. These aren't once-a-quarter hobbies either. I do something for me almost every day. Because these hobbies are incredibly fulfilling to me, I often talk about them—both on my blog, *The Mom Creative*, and in my personal life.

Consequently, not a week goes by without someone asking me, “What's your secret—how do you do it all?” Usually I just laugh and say that I *don't* do it all. I bring up my dusty mantel and my laundry piles. I point out that no woman, including me, does it all, and that any perception they have of me in that light is wrong. But still they press on, eager to know how I make so much time for myself. This book is the answer to that question.

I believe this book will resonate with you because it was written for every woman, regardless of lifestyle, career, or location. Single attorney? Married mother of five? College student? Grandmother? Yes, yes, yes, yes. *The Fringe Hours* was written for *you*—a woman who needs and deserves that time.

I surveyed more than two thousand women in the course of writing this book and interviewed dozens more. I asked them questions about how they spend their time, what their days are like, and what they wish they could spend more time doing. This research was incredibly important and helped me gain insight into how women spend their time, what they are passionate about, and what their

Before We Begin

struggles are on both a macro and a micro level. Their stories are woven throughout the chapters you are about to read. I'm sure that you will see yourself in many of them. I know I did.

It is my prayer that this book encourages you, right where you are. Whether you currently spend no time on yourself each week or more than ten hours, *The Fringe Hours* is for you.

God created you with a unique set of gifts and passions. May *The Fringe Hours* give you permission to pursue those desires.

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Part 1



EXPLORE

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Most of this book will focus on the importance of self-care and how to make time for you. But before we can dive into those topics, we need to explore some issues that keep many women from even pursuing self-care in the first place.

I'm going to be honest. It wasn't my intention to start here. I'm a "tell me what to do and I'll do it" kind of girl, but after wading through the research for this book, I realized I would be doing you a disservice if I jumped right in with how to find fringe hours. You see, as I interviewed women and pored over survey results, I saw over and over again evidence that many of us deal with the same struggles that prevent us from moving ahead in this journey. These

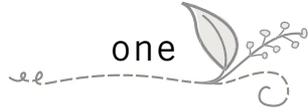
challenges are universal and impact all of us, regardless of age, income, ethnicity, or marital status.

My hope is that as you read through this section, the stories and information will resonate with you, and you'll think about changes you can make to overcome these hurdles in your own life. We'll get to the nuts and bolts of how to make time for yourself in later sections of the book. But we need to start here. So don't gloss over this section. Because if we don't deal with these things first, you will never truly be able to embrace all that the fringe hours can be for your life.

Together let's explore these challenges and discover some useful tips to overcome them.

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Pursuing Balance

Most of us have trouble juggling. The woman who says she doesn't is someone whom I admire but have never met.

Barbara Walters



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If you were to choose one word to describe your daily life, what would it be?

Busy?

Mundane?

Exciting?

Stressful?

Happy?

Mine would probably be busy. Occasionally stressful. Oftentimes happy. It's not necessarily a "bad busy" or "super stressful," but my days are definitely full and intense, with happiness throughout. With a full-time career, a husband, two kids, a new house (that needs a *lot* of work), friends I want to hang out with, and a variety of other commitments, life seems to move at warp speed. And most women I know seem to feel the same way—always juggling all the responsibilities of work and home, family and friends, ourselves and others. Always searching for balance.

One of my own times of struggle with this started pretty innocently when I decided to join a book club. It had been two years since I had last been actively involved in one, and my soul was craving the community.

The club was every Tuesday night, and my husband, Matthew, and I decided that it would be best if on those days, I would work a little later and go straight to the club from my office. What I didn't

realize when I signed up for the book club was that two weeks into it, our family was also supposed to start attending a new weekly community group through our church. I wanted to be part of both, and it seemed doable.

The first two weeks of the book club went great. I loved both the friend leading it and the new women I met. This addition to our weekly schedule seemed like it was going to work.

Well, I was wrong.

The first week we were supposed to go to community group, I was incredibly stressed. I had just come back from a business trip, my daughter was teething and going to bed earlier than normal, and rushing out the door to community group made little sense. So I sent an apologetic text to the group leader and secretly breathed a sigh of relief.

The next week was not much better, with my schedule overflowing with commitments and deadlines. I stood at the kitchen sink, washing dishes and crying. When my husband, Matthew, asked what was wrong, I said, “I’m doing too much. I’m overwhelmed. I’m tired. I’m stressed. I can’t do it all.”

The Balance Challenge

The book club and community group conundrum is just one of numerous times when I have wrestled with balance. My guess is that you too have had a similar wrestling match, trying to wrangle too many things into some sort of order, all in pursuit of this elusive goal of “balance.”

When I wrote the survey for this book, I asked participants, “What do you think is most challenging about being a woman today?” I suspected many would say, “Trying to balance everything,” and I was right. In the more than five hundred pages of responses I received, over and over women—regardless of location, age, marital and economic status—said things like this:¹

- Trying to balance everything since we tend to overextend our lives. We all want to have a work life that validates us as independent women. We want to be the best mom at creating moments for our children. And then throw in the family members and friends. It's a lot! —Mary
- So much to balance. Between kids, household duties, cooking, striving to have a healthy marriage, and all the things in between, it can be very difficult to find time for yourself. —Katie
- I think it is very difficult to find the perfect balance of being a good wife, mother, employee, friend, daughter, sister. —Katrina
- Having to work at the same time I have to be with my children as well as being there for my husband. On top of taking care of our finances and home and making sure I find time for my relationship with God. —Melissa
- Being a single mom is tough. I have to balance two worlds, and I have no one to help me carry the burden. —Andrea
- Balancing the home/work life. I feel that modern women are pulled in so many directions and held to a higher standard than ever before. It is so hard to balance it all and still find time for yourself. —Ashley
- Trying to find the balance between working and being an involved mother. From a working mother's perspective, it is such a challenge to organize and ensure that my kids are looked after when my husband and I can't be there and to allow them the chances to be involved in things without being limited by the fact that I work. —Melanie

I found myself nodding my head over and over again as I read the truth-filled, vulnerable words of these women of all ages proclaiming how balancing all that life brings is incredibly challenging. Even if you don't use the word "balance" to describe this issue, you can't deny the challenge. You might talk instead about "priorities," "fit,"

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or “organization.” However you define the act of having things in order and not being overwhelmed, that is what I want to dig into.

In my own life, the balancing act includes blogging first thing in the morning, getting two kids ready for day care and dropping them off on my way to the office, working all day, picking up the kids after work, getting dinner ready, putting the kids to bed, and spending time with my husband. On top of the everyday tasks are the one-offs—grocery shopping, Target runs, doctor appointments, birthday parties, soccer games, paying bills, and so on. Can you relate?



Take a minute to make a list of your average week's responsibilities:

When I see all of these things on paper, the idea of achieving balance seems ridiculous. We talk about needing it. Books are written about how to find it. But the reality is, for most women, it never happens in any sort of permanent way. Instead, we have moments of balance, maybe even days of it. But then something happens that causes things to become out of whack again.

What is it about balance that is so elusive today? Are we really able to balance it all? In short, no. I don't think true balance really exists. That said, I do think the word is helpful as a guiding principle for how we choose to live. Let's start by trying to understand what balance really means.

Defining Balance

Two of the many dictionary definitions for *balance* perfectly hit on what we are talking about:

- a stable mental or psychological state; emotional stability
- a harmonious or satisfying arrangement or proportion of parts or elements, as in a design²

I believe you need both of these definitions to really have balance in life. I would define it using this equation:

a satisfying arrangement of elements + emotional stability = balance

It's easy to define *balance* using just the first part of the equation. I often equate balance with everything in my life fitting together neatly and don't consider how my emotions play into that puzzle. I'll look at my overscheduled calendar and think, "Oh, that is totally doable." But then I get into the thick of it and I am drained, short-tempered, and an emotional wreck—like I was when I had overcommitted to the book club and community group. Clearly, the satisfying arrangement of the elements on my calendar is not enough by itself. We can't have balance if activities in our life are neatly scheduled but we are overwhelmed, exhausted, and emotional.

My friend Karen says that life is like a sound board. When music is mixed, the sound technician needs to adjust the levels to make the music sound its best. If one person or instrument needs to be really loud, everything else can't be loud too because the board can't handle it and, more importantly, the music won't sound its best.

The same is true in life. If one thing is dominating during a particular season, that's okay, as long as adjustments are made to other areas. Without those adjustments to "reduce the volume," distortion and chaos will result. But if you make those adjustments,

your life song will bring the most beauty and pleasure possible to your life.

Too Much of a Good Thing Is Still Too Much

The middle of December 2013 was a season that was incredibly out of balance for me. You probably know that time well: when the Christmas crazy sets in and you are *really* hoping you make it to Christmas Eve. The volume on my sound board was loud. I looked at my week, and it was almost laughable. My dad was visiting from out of state for the first part of the week, my two-year-old had started potty training, I had multiple meetings and deadlines at work, the kids were having Christmas parties and a program at school, and I had several sponsored blog posts due. My husband and I also had a work Christmas dinner to attend one evening.

And that was just the “required” stuff.

Meanwhile, stacked in the dining room was a pile of decorations that had never found their way to the right spot in our house. They really needed to be put in an empty Rubbermaid tub to go back in the garage. But that required seven minutes that I didn’t seem to have. Sitting near the decorations was an unopened box of our family’s annual Christmas cards that I had ordered before Thanksgiving (because I was *so* on the ball). Three weeks later, I was far from feeling on top of things.

Littering the dining room table was a mess of opened Christmas card envelopes from people who needed to be added to our card list, artwork from the kids’ school (I have such a hard time parting with painted card stock), and miscellaneous junk that needed a home (or to be thrown away with the envelopes). Again, the lack of seven free minutes meant it would all just need to wait a few more days. Surely the weekend would bring some open spaces to organize, reset, and bring some balance back to our life.

Surely.

The “problem,” for lack of a better word, is that many of these things that fill our schedules are good things, like Christmas festivities or the book club and community group I tried to start attending that fall.

We need to work to provide for our families, and we want to encourage our children to be involved in activities that they enjoy and are passionate about. And on it goes. Even the not-fun things like laundry and dusting are reminders that we are blessed with families that need to be clothed and a roof over our heads.

One of my survey respondents, Jessica (not me), described a vortex of good things draining her:

I think trying to balance everything is the biggest challenge I face. I feel run-down and tired sometimes, and then I look at our crazy schedule and think to myself, “Duh, no wonder you’re tired!”

I want to be a good mom and a good wife. I want to volunteer at our daughter’s school and at our church, and quite honestly I would feel guilty if I wasn’t involved in volunteering at these places. I also want my children to be involved in fulfilling, enriching activities that they enjoy. And we have been very blessed in all these ways to find places and opportunities to be involved in our church and in our girls’ education (my husband is the president of a nonprofit that supports our daughters’ language immersion schools) and extracurricular activities (I’m a coach at our daughter’s gym).

I could not have guessed that signing my girls up for gymnastics would have led to me coaching the team there. . . . But it comes at a cost, and for us, that cost has been family time at home in the evenings. I think we are busy with important things that will have a lasting impact on our girls. I just sometimes feel like we have taken on a little too much and we have committed too much of our time to being away from home.

Now, I don’t know Jessica, but her story resonated with me because I think she is like a lot of us. She wants to do all the things

she is doing. She is making a positive impact on her family. But those things are coming at a cost—the cost of not just family time, as she states, but also time for herself. Just because they are good things doesn't mean that they are good for *you*, for right now (or even ever). To not allow the stress of too many “good” things to invade our lives and steal our joy, we have to learn to say no, prioritize, or eliminate things entirely.

Jennifer Dukes Lee took a drastic step to find balance in her life, and her story is one that many can learn from. In 2002, she left her job as a reporter to move with her family onto her husband's fourth-generation family farm in Iowa. Shortly after they moved, she took on a part-time professor gig at Dordt College, teaching journalism twenty hours a week. She loved her students and experiencing their excitement for reporting the news. Five years later, she also found herself leading worship and teaching Sunday school at church, volunteering, doing speaking engagements, and even signing a book contract. Jennifer's plate was now too full, as she had “over-yessed herself,” as she likes to put it.

When we spoke, she told me, “Things that I would really want to say yes to, I would have to say no to because I had so overextended myself. There was no other time for the things that make a life so full.”³

As the years went on, her job as a professor had gotten easier in terms of teaching, grading, and preparing lectures. But when it was combined with all of her other commitments, Jennifer knew she had to make a choice. She prayed about it, discussed options with her husband, and decided to quit teaching at the college in order to find some margin in her life.

It was a difficult decision because the job was a “good thing” in her life, but ultimately she sensed that she needed to end that chapter. After leaving, Jennifer flourished, using the open hours for a “come what may today” attitude, having the flexibility to say yes at a moment's notice.

Jennifer recalled, “People would say, ‘What are you going to do instead?’ I would hem and haw and stammer around. I could do this or that, but my answer was that I am not going to fill those hours with anything. I’m not going to. There’s such a high priority placed on busyness that our work, paid or unpaid, is filling our days, and I didn’t want to [have that anymore].”

Just because something is a good thing doesn’t mean it is good for this moment in your life. This truth has taken a long time for me to accept. But the more I embrace it, the better my life is. The lesson from Jennifer’s story is one many should learn. Sometimes too many good things can just be too much.



Is there something in your life that is a good thing but maybe isn’t good for this season of your life? Write it down and consider if you should eliminate it from your schedule.

Searching for Work-Life Balance

If you are one of the nearly seventy-five million women in America who are part of the paid workforce,⁴ then you also might struggle with work-life balance. With only 29 percent of American mothers staying at home,⁵ this is a common issue for women. As a working woman myself, I know the challenges of creating work-life balance.

I spent the first seven years of my career at one of Nashville’s top PR firms, and I literally was always “on.” When I woke up I would check my work email before doing anything else. Before bed I had the same routine. We worked by the mantra of saying yes to our clients, even if it meant early mornings and late nights at the office.

I would often travel on weekends for clients and was still expected to be at the office first thing Monday morning. The agency did not allow working from home or comp time. We were expected to bill as many hours as possible, and the lifestyle was always go, go, go. I flourished with the variety of projects and deadlines, but I was also exhausted.

When I became pregnant with my second child, a little girl, I knew that I would need to find another job after she was born. No one at the agency had more than one child, and I believed the culture of the agency would have made it very difficult to parent two children well. Moreover, while I loved what I did, I loved my children too much to continue living the all-consuming agency life.

In short, I needed a better work-life balance, so I decided to begin job hunting after my daughter was born. However, God had other plans and brought me a new job opportunity when I was six months pregnant. I interviewed for the position and received a job offer.

Upon receiving that offer, I was an emotional wreck. Despite the challenges of working for that agency, I loved my colleagues. The agency was where I had “grown up” professionally, having started there just weeks after college graduation.

But I knew the change was necessary—for my career, health, and family. I trusted that this new job was an opportunity God had brought into my life for a reason.

Accepting the new job was life changing for me because for the first time, I could truly leave my work at work. Nights and weekends were mine. I rarely traveled. My schedule and lifestyle were much healthier.

Change is often like that—hard, but good in the end. Making my job change forever altered my career trajectory, and that is okay. I discovered what I needed and what my family needed, and that impacted every other area of my life.

Figuring out what kind of work-life balance is best for you is a personal decision. What works for one woman is different from what will work for another.

Danielle Moss is a single woman with no children who runs a popular site called *The Everygirl*. Because she is accountable only to herself, Danielle is a self-admitted workaholic. When she and her business partner launched *The Everygirl* in 2012, she took only three days off the entire year.

She worked so much without rest that in 2013, Danielle got shingles. When she went to her doctor, the doctor did not mince words, saying to her (in Danielle's words): "This is your body hitting rock bottom. If you don't slow down, you are going to keep getting sick. This is your wake-up call. You will eventually be on medication for stress. You have to change your life."

Getting shingles was a big turning point in Danielle's life, and though she still works a lot, she has also learned to take time for herself. She exercises regularly and goes out with friends. "I was work, work, work all the time, and I am not like that anymore," she says. "You have to have balance, and you have to enjoy your life. I'm still trying to learn that I can't do everything."⁶

While the idea of work-life balance may not be perfect, your balance should be healthy. Author Cali Yost uses the term "work-life fit" to describe a life that fits what you need, since she believes that true work-life balance isn't possible. On her website, she says that each person has "your own unique work+life 'fit,' or the 'fit' between your work and personal realities that changes day-to-day and at major life transitions, like when you go back to school, start a business, have a baby, care for an aging relative or work in retirement."⁷

However you define it—fit or balance—you need to be your own advocate to ensure you have the balance that you need. That might mean committing to leaving the office at a certain time, talking with your supervisor about flex time or working from home one day a week, or even looking for a new job.

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Do you feel like overall you have work-life balance? If not, what changes at work would be most beneficial for your life?

Ways to Cultivate Balance

In today's busy world, the only way to have balance is to fight for it. A woman's "normal" schedule should not be overwhelming. Your schedule should be manageable, with open space. When you make room in your schedule to breathe, you make room for you—and that is key to discovering fringe hours.

Some time ago I spoke with creative entrepreneur Becky Higgins, who runs a successful business from her home while being a wife and the mother of three children. Becky is dedicated to pursuing balance and making time for herself. "When I do have that balance and that time for me, I feel more alive," she told me. "I feel rejuvenated, which results in me being a better wife, a better mother, and a better worker."⁸

I have discovered several ways to cultivate balance within your commitments and yourself. While some of these tips may be easier to say than do, they all can make a huge impact on your life.

To cultivate balance in your commitments, you must:

1. **Say no.** For balance to exist, you must say no to some things, even things that are good. Remember, saying no is not a bad thing because ultimately it means you are saying yes to something else. (We will discuss saying no more in chapter 7.)
2. **Learn from your mistakes.** Sometimes you are going to overbook yourself and life is going to be too full, like my crazy

Christmas season. Learn from those seasons. Once you come out on the other side, ask yourself what you could have done differently. Could you have said no to something or scheduled an activity for another month?

3. **Evaluate what matters.** Continuously review your schedule and make sure everything is necessary. A quote I have on my desk reads, “If what you do doesn’t matter to you, it’s really not going to matter to anyone else.” Work to fill your life with things that matter.
4. **Reduce distractions.** Sometimes balance can be achieved just by turning off your phone, computer, or other technological devices. Or you might need to find a quiet place in your home or out in nature to be less distracted.

To cultivate balance within yourself, you must:

1. **Extend grace to others and to yourself.** Some days are going to be challenging. On those days, give yourself grace. And if you encounter others who need grace, show it to them. Don’t let them suck you into the quicksand of negativity. Instead, extend your hand and offer kindness.
2. **Take care of your health.** Oftentimes when we run ourselves ragged, our health suffers. Our energy levels drop. The sniffles hit. Our bodies aren’t able to function at 100 percent. To live a balanced life, you must take care of your body. Eat well, go to the doctor for checkups, exercise, and get enough sleep.
3. **Give and receive love.** We were created for relationships. Love well each day.
4. **Pray.** Make time each day to pray and be with the Lord. He is your comfort and your rock. You do not have to go through a single day without him.
5. **Express gratitude.** Take time each day to write down what you are thankful for. Research shows that people who keep a gratitude list are happier people.

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6. **Make time for yourself.** Your reading of this book demonstrates that you want this! It's incredibly important to make time for self-care and your passions.

It's also important to remember that certain seasons are going to be busier and that balance may look different during those seasons. As Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." Just because a season is busy doesn't mean you can't still use these balance principles to help yourself avoid becoming overwhelmed.

Motivation

Balance isn't easy, but fighting for it is always worth it. While life is busy, it shouldn't get to the point of being overwhelming. Make balance a priority in your life. By doing so, you are saying that your time is valuable and that you are in control.