



CHAPTER I

An Invitation to Flourish

Homeschool moms are hurting.

In recent years, I've asked hundreds of homeschooling moms about the biggest challenges they face, and their responses have been surprisingly similar. These women are deeply committed to their families and to educating their children at home, but they often feel overwhelmed.

How many of these challenges have you encountered in your own life?

- Becoming paralyzed by a to-do list so long that you don't know where to start
- Feeling guilty that you don't meet someone else's Supermom standards

- Dragging through each day exhausted and discouraged
- Finding it difficult to spend one-on-one time with each child
- Never having any “me” time—and feeling selfish for needing it
- Feeling so overwhelmed that you can’t enjoy your family
- Neglecting your spiritual and physical health
- Saying yes when you really should say no
- Struggling to keep your house clean and your family’s meals healthy
- Never having enough time or money
- Getting distracted and losing your focus
- Drowning in clutter so you can never find what you need
- Participating in extracurricular activities without overdoing it
- Constantly worrying that you’re not getting enough done
- Having trouble setting priorities and staying motivated
- Feeling pulled in too many directions

You are not alone! Just like you, I’ve experienced every problem on this list. Yet through trial and error over many years, I’ve developed some powerful strategies to cut through the chaos and move toward

a more balanced life. Now I want to share these strategies with you so that you can stop “just getting by” and flourish!

My Story

One of my goals for this book is to give glory to God for His work in my life. I want to share my story as a testimony to His faithfulness so that it may inspire hope in you and others. I see this as a way to redeem the struggles I’ve faced in my life by sharing what I’ve learned through those challenges.

Back at the turn of the millennium, I was a typical homeschooling mom, married with four sons. When my husband left me in early 2001 to live with another woman, I was shocked, angry, and scared. I was embarrassed to be divorced. For a while I felt as if a scarlet *D* were emblazoned on my dress. My sons—then ages 9, 6, 4, and 6 months—were bewildered, and their world was turned upside down. I was deeply committed to remaining at home with my children and continuing to homeschool them, yet I had no idea how I could support us all financially.

But God proved faithful. “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling” (Psalm 68:5). He has provided for all our needs through work I can do at home, help from my parents, and the loving ministry of a godly church.

Still, those early days were hard. For the first year, I received enough child support and alimony for us to live on. But then the child support dropped to zero for six months, and at one point I had to visit a local food pantry for groceries and assistance with that month’s electric bill. That was the lowest point of my life.

It was clear that I was going to have to find a way to earn a living, so I turned to the skills I already had. I had written one book, *F. Scott Fitzgerald A to Z*, and I had done freelance editing off and

on since 1986. I reconnected with my mentor from graduate school, and he began sending me some editing work. I didn't know much about running a business, but God providentially led me to some conferences for entrepreneurs where I began learning principles that could help me grow a home business while continuing to teach my children.

Grow, Know, and Go

The first event that I attended was Rhea Perry's Entrepreneur Days, a home business conference for homeschooling families. That was where I first began to get a vision for what was possible, to learn the



There are two sure ways to fail: Think and never do, or do and never think.

ZIG ZIGLAR

things I needed to learn, and then eventually to take action. I call this process "Grow, know, and go." You *grow* by getting vision and seeing the possibilities for your life. You *know* by obtaining education, learning new things, and meeting people

who can help you. The last and most important step is *go*. You must take action on what you've learned and build on it. Only then will any real progress occur.

As I began applying what I learned, my freelance editing business gradually shifted from sporadic to steady to overflowing. Because of the upheaval in my life, I took several years to move through the steps of grow, know, and go.

It wasn't just about the money; it was also about our life as a family. I wanted *financial freedom*—to take care of the bills and rid myself of the terrible looming pressure of not knowing where the next bag of groceries was coming from—but I also wanted *time freedom*. I wanted time to spend with my boys. I wanted time to minister

to other people. I wanted time to take care of myself and my own health without collapsing physically and burning out emotionally.

Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

One of the most important strategies you can employ to achieve balance and gain financial freedom and time freedom is moving out of your comfort zone. Getting out of your comfort zone is, well, uncomfortable! But it's absolutely essential if you're going to experience growth and success. I learned this lesson in a rather surprising way.

My second son, Andrew, went with me to a home business conference in Phoenix when he was ten. Just a year before, he had been uncomfortable shaking hands and looking an adult in the eye. He really grew at that conference, as I urged him (OK, I pushed him) to get out of his comfort zone. He gave a sales pitch with a handheld microphone in front of 200 people and won a contest to raise money for charity.

After the conference we visited the Grand Canyon. It was utterly glorious! Andrew is a bit more adventurous than I am, so he walked right up to the edge of the Grand Canyon and stood near the guide, who was dangling her legs over the side. But I kept further back because I don't particularly care for heights. Actually, I'm scared of heights. Terrified.

One must from time to time attempt things that are beyond one's capacity.
AUGUSTE RENOIR

So Andrew challenged me. "You know, Mom, if I could get out of my comfort zone enough to speak in front of two hundred strangers, I think you could get out of your comfort zone by moving a little closer to the edge of the Grand Canyon, couldn't you?"

That trip to Arizona triggered massive action and progress for me. The first thing that I did was to stop. I cut out several of my least profitable business endeavors, including some activities I enjoyed that were not the best use of my time. I also raised my rates to reflect the value of my experience and expertise and referred simpler projects to other editors. At one point, I even hired someone to edit the new material I wrote for an expanded



What you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.

JOHN ANSTER'S translation of Goethe's *Faust*

version of my own book—a huge step for a perfectionist like me! I gradually expanded my services to include book coaching and collaborative writing. Perhaps most importantly, I began to teach what I knew. People often ask me how to start their own freelance editing business, so I taught a class on

editing and developed it into a home-study course.

Over the next year, I doubled my income and won a contest for the most-improved business. I'm still enjoying the laptop computer I won, but the most valuable part of the contest was that it forced me to think seriously and strategically about where I wanted my business to go, where the money was going to come from, and what I wanted my family life to look like. That's when I began developing and refining the principles and strategies in this book.

I encourage you to think about how you can get outside your own comfort zone and begin to grow and flourish. This book will provide you with helpful guidance and encouragement along the way.

Flourish!

What exactly does it mean to flourish? It means to grow vigorously, luxuriate, be revived, or abound. It can also mean making dramatic

gestures or adding a creative touch, such as a trumpet fanfare or an embellishment in writing or decorating. The overarching ideas are thriving and abundance.

When we get bogged down in the difficulties and challenges of our busy lives, we start drooping like a wilted plant that hasn't been watered in a long time. But it's the flourishing plant—one that has been well tended, with the right balance of good soil, water, and light—that grows and offers beauty or nourishment. When you are flourishing, you can take better care of your family so that they too will flourish.

The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

ISAIAH 58:11 (NIV)

About This Book

This book first began to take shape with a teleseminar I taught called “How Do You Do It All? Proven Strategies for Balancing Family Life and Home Business in the Real World.” Since 2007, this seminar has been available as a downloadable home study course, and the feedback I've received from my students and coaching clients has helped me refine my system further.

One of the reasons I wanted to teach that class and write this book is that I couldn't find anybody who is really addressing the practical issues involved in balancing homeschooling, family life, and a home business. There are a lot of wonderful time-management and productivity systems for business people, but they generally ignore the existence of family responsibilities. Many are designed for people who spend most of their time in an office and don't have to

deal with fussy babies, hungry toddlers, energetic grade-schoolers, and busy teenagers. Books written for corporate jet-setters just don't speak to moms like me.

On the other hand, there are some wonderful homemaking guides and planners for moms at home—including some designed particularly for homeschoolers—but they usually don't accommodate a home business. Have you ever looked at a sample schedule in one of those books and thought, "Well, that looks great, but where do I find time to earn a living?" Even if you don't have a home business, some of those books can be intimidating because they seem to be promoting an unattainable standard.

Let's get this out of the way now: I am not Supermom. I've personally test-driven a lot of mistakes, so maybe you can learn from my experience. I'm going to tell it to you straight—the good, the bad, *and* the ugly. I always want to be realistic—I want to offer you an attainable standard while providing you encouragement, inspiration, and motivation.

Ultimately, everything depends on God. His strength is sufficient for me and you:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

The personal stories I'll be sharing in these pages are not really about me. They're about how God has worked in my life and the principles I've learned that I've been able to apply through His power. Don't just implement the strategies I'm teaching. I urge you to rely on God and on His power in your life.

I'm dropping so many balls, I'm in danger of getting a concussion! Our friends call us dynamos, but we feel more like broken-down lawnmowers coughing and choking through the day and constantly having to be restarted. Or like somebody trying to put out a forest fire with a damp cloth. One of us, me or the fire, is going to get beaten to death! By bedtime, I'm thinking of a quote from *The Little Engine That Could*, "I must rest my weary wheels."

MELANIE YOUNG, North Carolina

Adjust These Strategies to Fit Your Life

Jesus taught in parables because stories convey truth in a powerful way. The principles are the skeleton, and the stories of how they work out in real life are the flesh on the bones. They work together to give us a complete picture. You'll find many stories and real-life examples in this book. In addition to my own experiences, I will share stories from moms who've taken the "How Do You Do It All?" course that provided the foundation for this book.

I'm going to be making lots of suggestions and telling you about strategies that work well for me and my family, as well as my students and coaching clients. *But there is no one right way to do most of these things.* Take what you read here and adjust the principles to fit your own lifestyle. Test them, tweak them, and refine them. Pray to discern which are important for your family's life.

For example, I talk a lot about home business because that's a big part of my family's life and the life of many other homeschooling families. Even if you don't have a home business, I encourage you not to skip these parts of the book. You'll find principles and strategies that you can apply to other areas of your life. Also, the recent

economy has forced a lot of people to figure out how to make money at home. If your financial circumstances change, you may someday consider starting a home business, in which case you'll have a head start. Joy Hubbard, a Mississippi mom, told me, "I know necessity creates motivation. I really don't have a burning desire to start my own knitting business because I have a very comfortable life now. But things could change, and you've provided me the steps to do it."

Likewise, I'm a single mom, and I have included some examples specifically meant to encourage single moms. Most of you are married, but I suggest you read these stories. You will find principles to apply to your own life, and you may find inspiration for helping the single moms you know. Take it from me: They need you!



The important thing is generally the "next step." We ought not to take it unless we are sure that it is advisable; but we should not hesitate to take it once we *are* sure; and we can safely join with others who also wish to take it, without both-ering our heads overmuch as to any fantastic theories they may have concerning, say, the two hundredth step, which is not yet in sight.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

I am also writing to moms as individuals, but those of you who are married will want to do some of the exercises in this book both individually and in partnership with your husband.

So if you read something in these pages that's not a perfect fit for where you are right now, find a different way to apply that principle in your own life.

Furthermore, you may notice what appear to be several contradictions as you read this book. For example, I am going to talk about multitasking, but I'm also going to talk about focusing. I'm going to talk about developing a routine, but

I'm also going to talk about being flexible. I'm going to talk about thinking big, but I'm also going to talk about being realistic. I'm going to urge you not to waste your time, but I'm also going to

encourage you to take time to stop and smell the roses. Such advice may appear contradictory at first glance, yet learning which strategy to apply in each situation is part of finding balance in a flourishing life.

Apply What You Learn

At the end of each chapter you will find one or more activities to help you take action and apply what you've learned in these pages. Write your reflections on these activities to record your growth and gain the most from this book.

Choose a journal, notebook, or three-ring binder just for these exercises. You might even use your creativity to decorate it. Customizable forms for some of the activities are provided at www.FlourishAtHome.com/book. If you choose to use these, a three-ring binder will probably work best.

Some of the activities will be challenging. I am going to encourage you to ask yourself some hard questions. I understand it's likely that the whole reason you're reading this book is that you need more time. You're not looking for *more* things to do to fill your time; you're hoping to streamline your life. But doing these exercises can have a profound impact on your life, family, productivity, and (if applicable) business that will more than repay the effort. If you were already satisfied with the way that everything is working for you now, you probably wouldn't be reading this book. If you're not completely satisfied with your life on a daily basis, then face it—you're going to have to make some changes. And that's what I hope to help you do.

Take Action!

- Before you move on to the next chapter, take some time to complete the Pre-Book Self-Evaluation in appendix B. This will help you identify the challenges you currently face and get the most benefit from the rest of the book. It will also give you a way to measure your progress after you finish the book and activities.