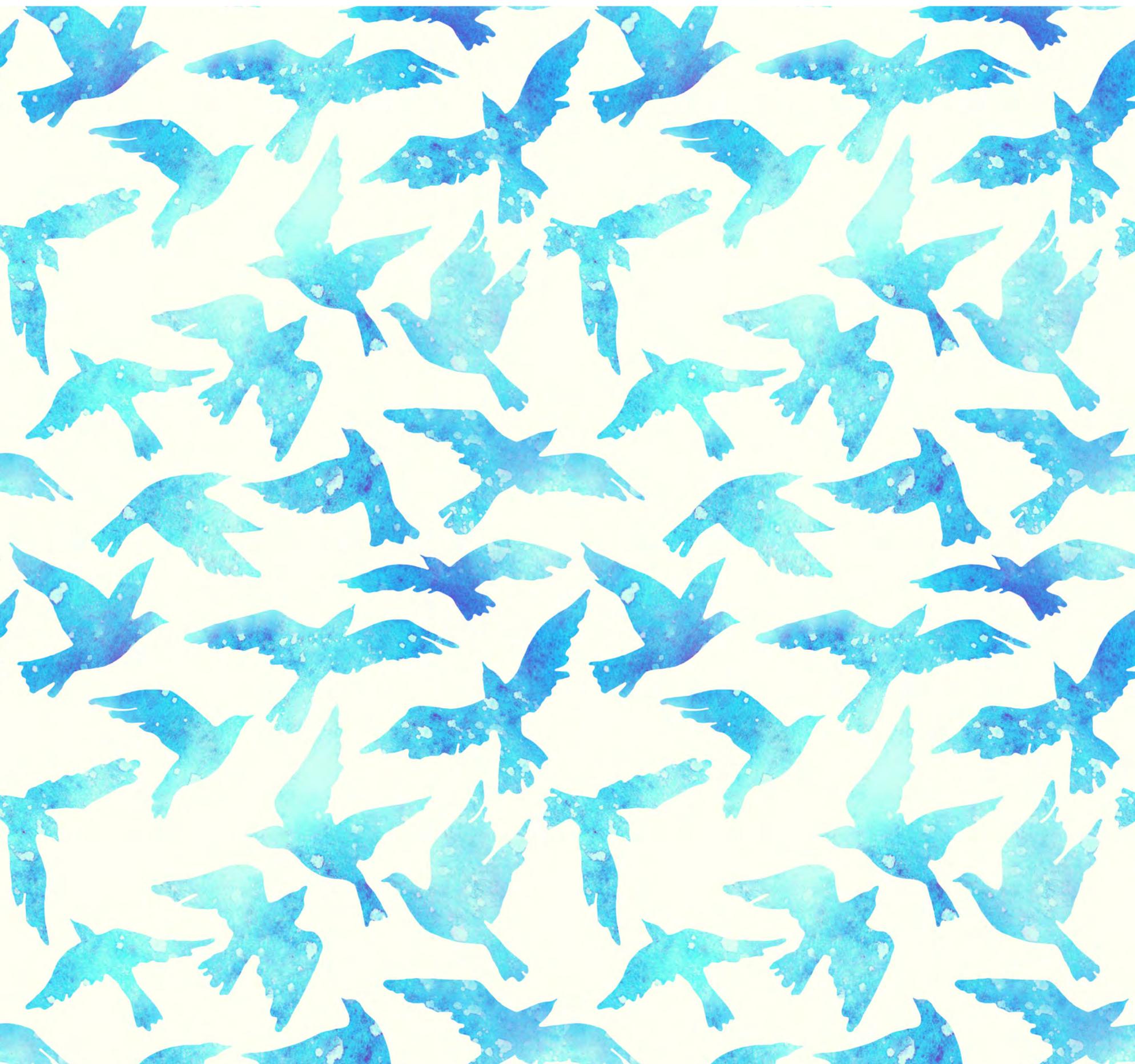


FROM AVIRTUOUSWOMAN.ORG

LETTING GO OF PERFECTION

And the truth sets you free.



MELISSA RINGSTAFF



But he said to me,
“My grace is sufficient for you, for my
power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly
about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power
may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV





EMBRACING IMPERFECTION



I've never been what I would consider a perfectionist. And yet, expectations were ruining my life.

After years of striving to be better, do better, live better, be the best mom, best wife, best friend, best pastor's wife, best church member, best everything I could possibly be and never measuring up to that invisible stick... I eventually began to crack under the pressure.

Now there's nothing inherently wrong with wanting to do your very best. I tell my kids to do their best. But I also tell them that mistakes are okay. I don't expect them to be perfect. I don't really expect anyone to be perfect. So why would I place that tremendous pressure on my own shoulders?

Why would I expect nothing short of perfection from myself?

I'm sure you've known someone – or read someone's blog – and thought, “Wow, she has the perfect life.” or “She's got it all together.” or “I wish I had some of her awesomeness.” or “I wish I was that amazing.”

What I've come to realize over the last few years – and especially over this past year – is that everyone has struggles. Everyone.

Everyone struggles with something. Maybe your something is different from my something – that's okay. You cannot live in this world for very long before you realize that life isn't fair. Bad things happen – a lot. Each one of us is a broken person in need of a Savior.

You see, we live in a sinful fallen world. This world is not perfect – obviously. No one is perfect. The only perfect human beings were Adam and Eve and they still messed that up. Jesus, is the only one who has ever lived here on Earth that can claim perfection.

He was perfect so that I don't have to be.



“But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV

I’ve never believed I could “work” my way to heaven, but for some reason... I still often feel the need to be able to do it all and do it well. Idealistic expectations of what my life should look like overwhelmed my soul. I looked at my failures as proof that I was not worthy of love.

I can never be good enough to earn my own salvation. That’s why I need Jesus. He loved me enough to die for me. He died so that I could have eternal life. Because He loves me.

He would have died on that cross if I was the only one to ever sin. He loves me that much. He loves you that much too.

It’s not that we shouldn’t live our best, make good choices, and walk in His footsteps each day – those things come naturally when you fall in love with Jesus! The Bible says that faith without works is dead. But when you love Jesus with all of your heart, mind, and soul, it’s easy to do what He asks!

A couple of weeks ago I heard a church elder use this illustration:

A mother raises a son and tells him over and over to brush his teeth, comb his hair, and put on clean clothes. Her son does the very minimum – always doing just enough so that he doesn’t get in trouble – but not more. Sometimes the mom wonders if her son will ever grow up to be a gentleman – or if he’ll always act like a Neanderthal.

And then one day, the son meets a girl and he’s in love. And suddenly he wants to comb his hair, put on nice clothes and he’s careful to brush his teeth really well so that when he kisses this girl, he doesn’t have bad breath.

Now, he’s still doing all those things his mother had told him to do – but the difference is he’s no longer just doing the minimum because he feels like he has to. He’s doing all those things with a willing heart – and cheerfully no less – because he’s in love.

I’m not sure I gave this story justice – Elder van Zyl told it much better – but I hope you got the idea. When we’re in love – it’s easy to please the one we’re in love with. We want to please the one we love.



I've loved God for a lot of years now. No matter what trials I've faced I've never stopped believing in God or professing love for Him. But what has changed? I've finally realized that it's okay to not be perfect.

And the truth sets you free.

And I am free. I am free from the bondage of unreasonable expectations. It's okay to not be perfect. And even more than that – my life doesn't have to be perfect for me to still have an amazing life. My day doesn't have to be perfect for me to still experience joy.

That was a problem for me. I can't count the holidays or other days where I had high expectations and wanted everything to be "just so." And when things went wrong I felt like somehow life was unfair or people were unfair. Why couldn't things just be perfect? I felt like everything was ruined.

Now, when something goes wrong – which I don't know if you can relate but it happens A LOT – I don't take it personally. If a member of my family has a bad day – it's okay. My life is not ruined by one day or one moment. I can still smile.

I am incredibly blessed! Why would I focus on one thing that was not as expected?

It's hard to describe this feeling of freedom in Christ. I still believe I have a responsibility as a follower of Christ to seek after him, to obey him, to daily align my will with His. But the day to day need to measure up to an impossible goal is no longer there.

I don't have to be perfect. And I'm not really even talking about just spiritual stuff here. I don't have to always have a spotless house to be an amazing wife and mom – {but tidy is good}. I don't have to do everything. Remember how I told you that just because something is good doesn't mean God wants me to do it? It's true!

I'm enjoying my life more and that was really my goal. To live life abundantly.

God knows your weary heart and he wants to give you peace. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 NIV.

It's okay to not be perfect. Repeat after me. **IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE PERFECT.**





SET FREE FROM THE BONDAGE OF GUILT



For so many years I carried shame and guilt around with me like it was the price of my sin. I'll never forget the morning Jesus spoke to me and laid it on my heart that He had forgiven me years before – the first time I asked! I felt such relief!

The Bible says, “You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” Mich 7:19

God does not remind us of our sins, our failures, over and over again to torment us. Satan does that! It's Satan who wants us to feel shame and guilt and unworthiness. He wants you to believe deep down inside that there is no real hope for you. He wants to hold your guilt over your head so that you feel shame every time you look in the mirror.

Christ doesn't do that. When we come to Him with a sincere and repentant heart, he casts our sins into the ocean and he doesn't go looking for them later.

That gift of salvation, freedom from my past, was given to me so many years ago, and yet, while I was set free from my past sin, I allowed my quest for the “perfect life” to again drown me in a sea of failures and regrets.

I needed to not only be set free from my past but set free from my present.

Because this present moment is the only moment I really have. This present moment is the life I'm living. I can make plans for the future, but only God knows if those plans will ever come into fruition. I really only have this moment.

And so, I've been set free. I am free to live in this moment with peace and wild joy. And like I said the other day:

My life is not ruined by one day or one moment. I can still smile.



And amazingly enough, I don't feel overwhelmed by life any more. That terrible burn out that I've gone through over the last few years – it's gone. Because I'm free. I've learned to say no to those things that do not add goodness to my life. And I don't feel guilty when I tell people I can't do something – however good – because I realize and fully accept that God does not expect me to do something just because it's good. I've learned to set boundaries.

I no longer have unrealistic expectation of myself – or my loved ones. I don't expect them to be perfect. I love them unconditionally. I accept with peace that sometimes people are grumpy and that's okay. Ideally no one would ever be grumpy – but it happens! And when it does, it's not a reflection on my life as a whole. It's just one moment in time – one small moment that when compared to all of the good things that happen day in and day out – doesn't really matter all that much.

I'm okay with not always having a neat home – because our home is where real life happens. It's where the things that matter have a purpose. It's where the people that matter have a place to share. It's where grief, sorrow, joy, and happiness have the most meaning and can be fully expressed.

I am still on a mission to get more organized and I do want to continue renovating our home so that it's a pleasant space for my family – but it's not the end of the world if it takes years to reach my goals instead of weeks or months. God loves me for me. I don't have to prove to Him or anyone else that I am worthy of love. I am worthy of love because I am His.





LETTING GO OF EXPECTATIONS



Life is a series of choices. Each day we wake up and choose to do what we do. Okay, so sometimes not everything that happens is within our ability to choose. No one chooses to have a flat tire or an overflowed toilet.

For a long time I was frustrated – and I’m not sure frustrated is a strong enough word – that my life was out of my control. It often seems like our family – because of extenuating circumstances beyond our control – moves from crisis to crisis. It’s one thing after another, after another.

We have a large extended family who often need my help or my husband’s help. And when I say often – I’m talking on a near daily basis. My husband and I are stable and able to take care of ourselves and others. We have family members who have struggled financially, who aren’t able to drive, who have major health problems, and more. And everyone of them 14 people to be exact} relies on us for something – and all those somethings require the one thing that is most important – our time.

Up until last year my husband and I were the sole caretakers for his 88 year old MIL, his 88 year old step father, his 87 year old Uncle, and his 61 year old brother who was terminally and mentally ill. Not one of these precious people could drive a car and everyone of them had doctor’s appointments – often two hours away on almost a weekly basis.

And every time Uncle Kenneth is home alone I would have to go and sit with him – 2 to 3 times a week for anywhere between 4 – 8 hours a day because he can’t be left alone.

Add on top of that two grown and married kids who live close to us who have struggled to make ends meet and only have one car each. I am often responsible for driving the wives to doctor’s appointments or helping with other needs including babysitting grand kids a few times a week.



Add on top of that, the crisis after crisis that some unnamed family members have gone through – sometimes because of just plain bad luck and other times because of just poor choices – which required either my husband or I to help in some way – sometimes on a weekly basis.

Add on top of that the three churches my husband pastors... and the fact that I am a homeschooling mom with three horses, three dogs, and two cats {and numerous other animals over the years}. Add onto all of that – I'm responsible for maintaining the household chores, laundry, cooking, and day to day cleaning.

And then there's A Virtuous Woman which I've been running since 2001 – that alone is just about a full time job!

Not to mention the fact that all of the holidays and any other special occasion is held at my house... and I cook for 20 family members on a regular basis.

I don't think any of that description of my life really does it justice! I'm telling you – I've been exhausted caring for so many people for so many years with no real relief in sight.

Mykal's brother died two years ago. And last year his step father passed away. Things changed a little since then. I no longer have to take care of his brother Steve's medication daily. And Mykal no longer has to drive the two of them to doctor's appointments each week among other things – and we think about them everyday. We miss them! But we are still soooo busy caring for everyone else.

So... maybe you're wondering where I'm going with all of this.

About a year ago I began telling people I could no longer do certain things. And I've learned to say no to a lot. Not because I don't want to help or that I don't care – but my plate has been too full for too long. I went through some serious burn out. And I lost my joy.

Sometimes it's hard to know what's important when everything seems important.

One day last summer I got out my journal and I wrote down a list of boundaries. It was a detailed list. By writing that list I learned what was important to me and where I drew the line. You see, sometimes because I'm nice and I love people – I allow them to take advantage of me. It was a real problem.



I read an article last summer that changed my life. I can't remember now where, but it said something to this effect:

People take advantage of us when we fail to tell the truth in love.

So for instance, maybe someone would ask me to do something, but I honestly did not have time, but because I'm nice and because I love these people, I would panic in my head, put a smile on my face, and agree.

What I should have done was lovingly explain that I honestly did not have time in my already overflowing schedule. Because by doing more and more and more – I just felt more stress and more unhappiness.

So, back to my point: Sometimes it's hard to know what's important when everything seems important.

So I had to make some decisions – what was really important to me. What was it God wanted me to do with my time?

I decided that my home, my husband, and my children were my top priorities. Everything else was secondary.

Now obviously, I still have a 89 year old MIL who has not been doing well at all over the last few months. I still have my husband's uncle who needs care and I have to cook for everyday. And I still have grand kids who I have to babysit several times a week all day long so their parents can make some money – and they cannot afford a babysitter.

I still have kids I have to homeschool and a house I have to take care of. And really a million other things that come up on a weekly basis that need my attention.

But I say no when I need to. To whatever needs come up.

I give myself permission to have days where I do nothing more than snuggle in the bed with my kids or read a book when I feel I need rest. And I don't feel guilty for resting.

And probably the biggest relief to me has been that I let go of my expectations. One of my biggest – and I mean this was HUGE – frustrations was that I homeschool and there was so much chaos – that I did not create – from other family members pulling on my time – that the last several years I could not have my kids on a schedule for school and we couldn't get into a good routine.



like routine. I really, really, like routine. It helps me plan and organize my day.

So, we would do school whenever we could find time during the day – often in the evenings. And it drove me crazy because in my mind that’s not what our homeschool {our life} was supposed to look like.

I wanted the perfect life and none of this stuff that was beyond my control fit into that ideal image.

Since I let go of my expectations – I’ve learned to live. Live fully in the moment. Embracing imperfection. Finding joy in the moment instead of the culminations of days, weeks, months, and years. I’ve been set free.

I’ve let go of the stress. Really, I’ve stopped trying to control things. I don’t stress over when we do school. We get it done – just not in a traditional way. I don’t stress over the house cleaning schedule because it eventually gets done – just to need doing again tomorrow. I don’t stress over grumpy days. I don’t stress over busy days.

At least most of the time.

I only have this one life. ONE LIFE. I don’t get a do over! So it’s my choice to live THIS LIFE full of joy in the moment.





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ABOUT MELISSA



Melissa Ringstaff has been blogging at A Virtuous Woman since 2001. She's a busy pastor's wife and homeschooling mom living in the beautiful Appalachian Mountains of Southeastern KY. Her greatest joy is raising her family and helping women find peace and calm where chaos used to reign.

Melissa believes in finding freedom from perfection and living life with purpose. That's why she created the Purpose 31 Planners for Christian women.

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Have you ever felt this way?

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