

FRESH
START
for moms

A 31-DAY DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL TO
renew your joy

VALERIE WOERNER

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Fresh Start for Moms: A 31-Day Devotional Journal to Renew Your Joy

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IT'S TIME FOR A FRESH START

ARE YOU FEELING WEARY, grumpy, impatient, or just plain bored on this journey of motherhood? If so, I'm in the trenches with you right now. I know these feelings all too well:

- that ache that sets in before your eyes even open and your toes hit the floor
- that thought that the day will bring you more than you can possibly handle
- that dread that today holds nothing more than your mundane routine

In a split second, before you even get out of bed, you've decided whether you will conquer your day or simply surrender to it.

I'm a mom to two girls, Vivi (four) and Vana (two), so I'm still early on my journey of motherhood. I have a whole lot to learn and many trials ahead, but one thing I know for certain is that God has burdened me with a desire to face whatever is to come with a fresh perspective. This doesn't come naturally for me—I'm someone with a tendency toward melancholy—so this God-sized perspective is something I have to fight for.

My prayer is that over the next thirty-one days, you will be refreshed and empowered in the knowledge that motherhood is so much more than making it through the day or hobbling through on caffeine and chocolate. You can kneel in front of a tantrum-throwing two-year-old or stand firmly in front of a disengaged teen and patiently speak truth and love in a way that trains their hearts to look more like Jesus. You can feel satisfied when you notice the sweat on your brow that comes from loving your family well. You can snuggle a baby way past bedtime and be grateful for the blessing of the extra time instead of feeling like it's ruining your plans.

You can do all this not because I say so but because God does.

I wrote this devotional for every mom who is craving a fresh start—not just in her day but in her approach to motherhood. We don't have to wake up with that ache or already-exhausted feeling. We can wake up with contagious joy and a peace that will change our homes—and us.

Your fresh start is here, momma! Dive in with me!

HOW TO USE THIS JOURNAL

I know how busy you are, and I don't want to waste your time with fluff or things that won't really serve you. My goal is not to create another thing you must do or something that will overwhelm your already-full life. My desire is to create a habit of thinking differently. Sometimes just the thought of a long-term commitment can prompt us to give up before we start. So, momma, I've made this as practical as possible so that by the end of the month, you will find that your thinking has been transformed.

Each day consists of a devotional, an action step, a prayer, and several questions for each morning, as well as a few reflection questions to end your day. To get the most out of the next thirty-one days, here's what I recommend committing to:

1. Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes in the morning and five to ten minutes at night for the next thirty-one days.
2. Read the devotional, follow the action step, and pray the prayer at the end.
3. Go through the morning questions before your day gets started.
4. As you climb into bed, make a nightly ritual of answering the evening questions.
5. You can use the page called “My Prayer” to journal your reflections and prayers at the end of the day.

I know there are so many other demands and obligations on your plate, but you need to know that you are valuable and this is worth your time. Prioritize this, fit it into your schedule, and process each day’s reading fully so it can take root in your mind. This isn’t urgent like getting the kids to school or putting dinner on the table, but it’s important, so I’m challenging you to really make the most of this! If you do, you will start to see that you don’t have to live in overwhelmed mode. You will start to experience more moments that make you love motherhood instead of just trying to get through the day. I can’t promise you a quiet and pristine house (or kids!), but I can promise you a fresh start in the way you respond to the challenges, which fortunately makes all the difference in the world.



SPRING 2019

Day 1

GETTING A HEALTHY GLOW

AT THE RIPE AGE of thirty-three, I'm starting to notice the crater-sized pores on my face, the stray facial hairs, and the ruddy complexion. Yesterday I found a hair that was literally an inch long coming from my forehead! How? When I look in the mirror, I feel too young to feel this old. I get overwhelmed by the idea that this skin isn't getting any better, and the rate of deterioration is only going to accelerate over the next thirty-three-plus years. But before I take a nosedive into a sea of miracle creams, I'd like to spend some time in the book of Exodus, where we can learn an unexpected lesson in beauty from Moses. I know. It seems like I'm reaching on this one, but stay with me. That old guy with skin that was no doubt windburned and dry from decades in the desert knew a thing or two about getting a healthy glow.

I've always been captivated by Moses and his relationship with the Lord. The conversations he had with God and the things God said about him carry a lot of relevance for us today. I'm continually amazed by the intimacy he had with the Lord—something I

wouldn't typically expect for someone in the Old Testament. Over and over in Scripture we see Moses coming to the Lord in prayer, and we see God responding. God saved the Israelites time and time again, he healed Moses' sister Miriam, and he turned away his wrath—all because Moses asked him to.

Perhaps most amazing of all, Moses got to go on a mountain-top and speak face-to-face with God. Here's what happened afterward: "The Israelites would see the face of Moses, how his skin shone [with a unique radiance]. So Moses put the veil on his face again until he went in to speak with God" (Exodus 34:35, AMP).

Y'all, I just love this! I want that healthy glow—the kind that comes from spending time in the Lord's presence. I want to invest my time doing something that literally changes my countenance. I want to glow—not the glow that comes from too much time in front of my cell phone screen, but the one that comes from staring into the face of God as I read his Word and pray.

As much as I'd love smooth, porcelain skin, that desire starts to wane as I compare it to the potential for a heavenly glow that no manufactured product could create. And it's not just Moses who got to experience this: "The Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). As I read these words, my heart aches with excitement over the idea that this can be true of me—that I, too, could reflect the glory of the Lord.

The real glow is found in the presence of the Lord, so keep running back to him. Wake up each morning with him so that when you close your Bible or say "Amen," you walk out fresh faced and ready to tackle the day.

I want my kids to notice a difference in me after I pray and read the Word, not just when I slap on a little lipstick and mascara. I want to walk away different. Spending time with God has the power to do that. I just have to apply his Word to my life.

Here's one final encouragement as you ponder what it means to glow as you spend time in God's Word and in prayer: "Don't assume that you know it all. Run to GOD! Run from evil! Your body will glow with health, your very bones will vibrate with life!" (Proverbs 3:7-8, MSG).

The presence of the Lord changes us. It brings life to our aching bones and aging faces, and it can change our countenance more than any magical elixir.

ACTION STEP

Commit to meeting with the Lord each morning, even if it's just for a few minutes, before you meet with anyone else. Let him shine on you so that you can walk out of your room or your house different than you were before.

PRAYER

Father, I want beautiful skin, but I want you more. This is my prayer: that I would clamor for time with you more than I strive to perfect my outside. The radiance that shines in me when I am in your presence is more beautiful than anything I could imagine. Help me to remember that. In Jesus' name, amen.



MORNING QUESTIONS

TAKEAWAY TODAY | *Who in your life has a glow about them from spending time with Jesus?*

How can you spend some time today basking in the Lord's presence? You could put on worship music in the car or listen to Scripture while you're running errands.

DREADING TODAY | *Is there anything you're dreading today?*

REDEFINING TODAY | *If so, what is another way you can view that thing you're dreading?*

ASKING GOD TODAY | *What request are you bringing before the Lord today?*



EVENING QUESTIONS

REFLECTION | *Were there any moments today when you sensed that you had a “glow” as a result of spending time in God’s presence?*

LITTLE VICTORIES | *Where did you see God show up even in small ways, reminding you that you aren’t alone?*

WHITE FLAG MOMENTS | *When did you want to hide or escape today? It helps to recognize your toughest moments so you can figure out what’s driving you there and conquer the temptation to check out.*

MEMORY OF THE DAY | *What do you want to relish and thank God for?*

Day 2

OUR THREE ENEMIES

WE HAVE THREE ENEMIES, Tim Keller says. And contrary to what I sometimes assume, they don't go by the names of Tyler (my husband), Vivi, or Vana (my girls). Nope. My enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil. Today, momma, we are suiting up so we can learn how to respond to the real enemies instead of devoting energy to battling those who are, in fact, on our teams.

Maybe you've had days when you feel like you are taking on the greatest evil that ever lived: a toddler who hasn't napped and is demanding dinner. Or maybe you've teamed up with your kids to feel like the victims of your husband, who got home late again.

Even the idea that we could see our kids or spouse as the enemy reveals that we have another enemy who is working aggressively to convince us that ripping our teammates apart is the way to feel better or get what we want. It isn't.

Let's talk specifics. Being aware of our real enemies and their usual tactics is the first step to defeating them.

Enemy #1: The world. Our world constantly lies to us about motherhood, and those lies can hold us back from enjoying the life God has graciously given us. We are currently living in enemy territory, and we can't get so comfortable that we start thinking this place is our home. When we do, the lies can seep in and defeat us. As it says in 1 John 5:19-20, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ" (NIV).

Enemy #2: The flesh. We were born sinners, and because of this, we don't have a natural bent toward holiness. We are constantly fighting against our flesh, which is wired to choose evil. As hopeless as that sounds, as believers we are overflowing with hope because the Holy Spirit is at work in us. But we have to know our natural bent so we don't trust every thought that comes to mind. Instead of going along with our natural tendencies, we need to set our minds on something better. Romans 8:5-6 says, "Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (ESV).

Enemy #3: The devil. The devil has not a single good plan for our lives. He is out to destroy us. If he's missed the chance to keep us enemies of God, he will at the very least try to keep us so busy and distracted that we won't recruit anyone to the Lord's side. Those distractions might come in the form of thinking of ourselves too much or even in the form of something good, like establishing our kids' healthy physical habits, but at the expense of neglecting their hearts. John 10:10 says, "The

thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (NIV).

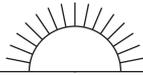
The ally: God. Sometimes, as crazy as this might sound at first, we can treat God like the enemy. We balk at his direction. We assume we have a better plan. We get upset because life isn’t going the way we’d hoped, and we assume it’s because God has forgotten us or, worse, that he sees us but just doesn’t care. That’s when we need to remember that God sent his Son to die so that we could have life. Did you catch that? A *full* life. When our days get crazy, we have to run into the arms of God in full assurance that we are safe there, instead of running into the arms of the enemy.

ACTION STEP

The next time you feel like you are bracing for a fight, identify the real enemy. Is the enemy really your kid who is fighting bedtime, or is it the lie of the world that your comfort is most important and your demands should be met perfectly? Meditate on these verses today: Romans 8:1-11; Ephesians 6:12; and 1 Peter 5:8.

PRAYER

Father, I’ve been fighting the wrong enemies—and it’s exhausting. Arm me with your truth. Help me to identify my real enemies, and help me to create a strong alliance in my family and with you. In Jesus’ name, amen.



MORNING QUESTIONS

TAKEAWAY TODAY | *Who do you tend to assume your enemies are?*

Which real enemy (the world, the flesh, or the devil) trips you up the most?

DREADING TODAY | *Is there anything you're dreading today?*

REDEFINING TODAY | *If so, what is another way you can view that thing you're dreading?*

ASKING GOD TODAY | *What request are you bringing before the Lord today?*



EVENING QUESTIONS

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