



"I love Maggie Wallem Rowe so much
and am so thankful for what God has called her to do."

BETH MOORE

This Life We Share

52 reflections on journeying
well with God and others



MAGGIE WALLEM ROWE

Foreword by Sandra McCracken

Maggie Rowe has written a masterpiece—her magnum opus—and will guide you through evaluating your inner journey with all its anxiety, insecurity, and pain. She'll teach you how to live an intentional, purposeful life that's filled with relationships that matter. The focus of this book isn't becoming perfect—it's being God-focused and infusing your life with transformational truth. The writing is exquisite, and each reflection will challenge you to live a life that matters. You can read this book on your own, but if you want to grow a deeper spiritual relationship with a friend, ask her to join you on this journey.

CAROL KENT, speaker; author of *He Holds My Hand*

This Life We Share is a wonderfully comprehensive guide for those who want to live and love well with God, people, and the world. With wisdom born from a deep faith, a broad knowledge of Scripture, and a life well lived, Maggie serves the reader as a trusted life coach in these pages. Grab a few friends and journey together as you engage her words. You'll be glad that you did.

SCOTT SAULS, senior pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church; author of several books, including *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *Irresistible Faith*

The beauty of a book written by a wise older woman is that there is something for everyone—a lifetime of varied adventures and challenges which affirm the goodness of God. Every page of *This Life We Share* reminds me that life with God and others is indeed a treasure. Please savor Maggie Rowe's words slowly, that the rich truth might sink deeply into your soul, offering strength for your own journey.

LUCINDA SECREST McDOWELL, speaker; author of *Soul Strong* and *Life-Giving Choices*

Maggie Rowe has never steered me wrong, and her insights and great humor as well as spiritual compass on true north have always informed all her advice. As they do this book. Take it from me—follow Maggie’s direction, as it is based on Christ’s. Read this book.

HUGH HEWITT, author, journalist, syndicated Salem Radio Network host

The first time I met Maggie Rowe, I knew she was special. A woman of deep wisdom, unending kindness, seemingly effortless generosity, and a ten-mile-deep love for God and others. In this memoir of her spiritual journey, Maggie transforms her own life-lived-well into a map for the rest of us. Here are fifty-two devotional reflections filled with kindness, generosity, and the sort of wisdom that can transform you from your “everyday” self into the person you actually want to be. Buy this book, read it, and find in it some quiet space for your heart to soar.

SANDRA RICHTER, Robert H. Gundry Chair of Biblical Studies at Westmont College; author of *The Epic of Eden*

Bravo to Maggie Wallem Rowe! Maggie is honest, vulnerable, and exhibiting of grace. She provides fifty-two reflections through which all the biggies shine—womanhood, motherhood, pastor’s-wife-hood, Scripture studenthood, and writer/actress-hood. You will know Maggie. And that is a blessing because you may know yourself better.

DIKKON EBERHART, PHD, author of *The Time Mom Met Hitler*, *Frost Came to Dinner*, and *I Heard the Greatest Story Ever Told*

As I traveled through the pages of this book, I was enchanted by Maggie’s vivid descriptions, her honest longings to do life better, and her genuine love for all who read her words. I soon realized that Maggie’s story is my story, and most likely your story. *This Life We Share* is filled with time-honored truths for all generations. We, the readers, are the

beneficiaries as Maggie shares her life, connects us with biblical stories, and points us to the one who guides our every step. This is a book to read and reread, and most definitely to share with others.

CYNTHIA FANTASIA, DMIn, speaker; author of *In the Lingering Light*

Maggie has spent decades following Jesus—as a pastor’s wife, coworker, mother, daughter, and friend. Now she puts pen to page to share the wisdom she’s learned along the way. Maggie has a gift for seeing the world and finding meaning in ordinary days, capturing it in delightful prose. She also has the gift of insight, the ability to harness her own self-awareness for the good of others. In this book, you’ll find more than good advice; I expect you’ll find a new friend.

CARMEN JOY IMES, associate professor of Old Testament at Prairie College;
author of *Bearing God’s Name*

In *This Life We Share*, Maggie Rowe has provided weary Christian women with rich, soul-nourishing words that sink down deep. Engaging with these brief but substantive reflections feels like going on a road trip with a best friend.

STEVE WIENS, author of *Shining like the Sun*, *Beginnings*, and *Whole*

This Life We Share is an encouraging read about navigating life events in light of scriptural insight. As a cherished sister in Christ, Maggie takes the reader through her own circumstances, fusing her knowledge of God’s Word alongside essential wisdom, humor, and truth. Here, Maggie has created a work that is both challenging to the reader and reassuring—ever pointing toward Christ, who has gone before us.

REBECCA VAN DEN BRINK, pastor of ministries at North Sea Baptist Church,
Stavanger, Norway

Only a sensitive observer could have written this book. I have enjoyed Maggie's deep insights and ability to synthesize life's challenges and joys for over thirty years. She is a student of people, Scripture, biography, herself, and those she loves, and an eager friend. In short, wherever she is, Maggie is all there. It would be difficult to name a subject women might face that this book doesn't describe and handle with vulnerability, honesty, humor, and understanding. I can imagine a small group of women bonding very easily as they glean more about life from Maggie's wisdom and decades of experience. Hard questions? Bring them on!

GAIL MacDONALD, wife, mom, grandmother, friend; author of *High Call, High Privilege*

What if you had a mentor, a sister willing to share the wisdom she's learned along life's way? With her book *This Life We Share*, author Maggie Rowe is exactly that. From impostor syndrome to immigration to infertility, Maggie offers bite-size nuggets of wisdom to encourage you to keep walking forward on this shared journey of life.

CATHERINE McNIEL, author of *Long Days of Small Things* and *All Shall Be Well*



MAGGIE WALLEM ROWE

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To Michael

First reader, first everything.

You believed in me when I never believed in myself.

I am grateful beyond words for the life we share.







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Foreword



A COUPLE OF SUMMERS AGO, I stood on a bridge over a rushing section of the river on one of the branches of the Connecticut River in rural Vermont. There were rocks below, and the water was cascading toward me in wild motion below my feet. Had I been in the river, I would have been swept downstream in a moment. But I stood safely above, leaning over the railing that faced upstream. The water rushed beneath me and on past me with a steady chorus of white noise, and I thought of how fast life comes toward us like the river: circumstances, emotion, and decisions that need to be made in a hurry.

The bridge was about twenty-five feet wide from rail to rail. I strolled across to the other side and noticed a change. It was quiet on the south side of the bridge. I could hear over the ripples, and I felt stilled, reflecting and pondering.

Moments of pause are so important to help us see the big picture clearly. When life tumbles over us like rushing water, our substantive life, the good stuff of who we really are, rests beneath the changing currents. We are sturdy, like the rocks of the riverbed, weathering the elements in flood and drought.

Maggie Wallem Rowe leads us into those quiet places in deeper waters. She takes us back to what matters, like a trusted friend. Her

words read like a deep breath. Turning over the subjects of shame, calling, truth telling, fear, and friendship, she offers each reflection graciously, not as heavy-handed devotionals but thoughtful considerations. Though the passages may be brief, they stay with you, these moments of pause in a rushing-water life.

My songwriter friend says that every good song follows an invisible map of what it means to go out on a journey and to return home. As I write this, I have four more days of travel before I can rest at my home in Tennessee, but while I am away, I find that I am tethered by small, liturgical gestures of morning coffee, evening prayers from the prayer book, and a call to check in with my husband in the afternoon.

At the pace of our world, in the midst of the clamor of technology, there is a great need to cultivate reflection. Racing from one thing to another, we are hounded by advertisements and appointments. It's hard to tell what is most important in light of what is urgent.

Daily rhythms and slowness like the kind that Maggie Rowe offers here have been a saving grace for me when life is full to the brim. In the deep breaths overlooking the river, she gives us the space to recast a fresh vision for this shared life.

Sandra McCracken
singer-songwriter



Introduction



“LET’S TAKE A ROAD TRIP!”

These five words were the catalyst for some of the best experiences of my childhood. I grew up on a farm in north-central Illinois, and while I have sunny memories of rural life, the work never stopped for my hardworking parents. There were cows that needed milking twice daily; sheep, chickens, and pigs to tend; and hundreds of acres of soybeans and seed corn to be cultivated, planted, and harvested.

On the rare occasions when my father felt we could get away, the five of us piled in our red four-door sedan with the 1960s fins, humming the jingle “See the USA in your Chevrolet!” My siblings and I were part of the postwar baby boom, but minivans hadn’t been invented yet. Or seat belts.

The three of us jostled for space in the back seat, my long-legged older sister next to one window and my easygoing little brother perched on a cushion by the other so he could see out. As the skinny middle child, I was wedged in between, straddling the hump on the floor while poking and provoking them with my sharp-elbowed peevishness. Maggie-in-the-middle was not anyone’s

idea of a preferred travel companion. We always got to our destination, but I'm sure I didn't make it fun.

Unless you're prone to motion sickness, restless legs, or cranky companions, most of us enjoy road trips. We don't always get to choose our travel mates, but we do get to decide how to behave ourselves. Sometimes we're still like kids on the journey, focusing more on our present discomfort ("Are we there yet?") than on our final destination.

Life has its epic adventures, but the dailiness of it doesn't consist of grand moments. Rather, we live in the everyday rhythms of the intentional choices we make. Paying attention to our mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Caring for others and being cared for in return. Loving God and receiving his unconditional love and fathomless grace.

I still love to travel, and I always will. But if there's one person I've occasionally wished I could leave behind at a rest stop, it hasn't been a sibling or my spouse, coworkers, or friends. It's myself. Dang, the times I would have liked to jettison the old, scrappy Maggie for a new, vastly improved edition! A girl who could be consistently kind and thoughtful. A teen confident enough in her own skin to reach out to others. A woman not beset by anxiety and insecurity about what others thought of her and whether she would ever measure up.

The words ahead of you have been birthed out of many soul struggles in my life—moments when I thought I had to be the only person still wrestling with fear and self-doubt, a propensity to worry rather than trust, or the temptation to measure my weaknesses against others' strengths. But God and his children met me in the midst of my questions. The chapters in my story have been punctuated with disjointed grammatical constructions: the comma

INTRODUCTION

experiences that forced me to wait; the period places that came to a full stop; and the exclamation points of pure, unexpected joy.

In the decades following those fractious childhood trips, I've written thousands of words in journals, diaries, and blog posts describing what I've been learning about myself, God, and traveling well with others on this shared journey called life. I've collected a lifetime of notes strewn like white pebbles on the paths I've taken. The book you hold is the result.

I'm now a seasoned life traveler in my third trimester of living on this side of eternity. Birth into new life might be a few decades or only years away. I feel the weight of it, the aching and longing for a future I can only imagine. But like any woman carrying something infinitely precious to her, I am fiercely passionate about birthing what God has given me over my life's gestation on this planet. The readings, questions, and LifeLines you'll find in these pages contain transformational stories and principles I've experienced in over a half century of knowing and loving God.

There are fifty-two reflections you can read in whatever order you choose. Just as a new element sometimes needs to be introduced into a situation to produce change, perhaps these readings can serve as a catalyst for your own growth, to forge fresh soul connections with your traveling companions and the God whose presence is infused in every moment of your journey.

If you are wondering what a mentor might say about growing spiritually when you have neither quiet nor time, sink into reflection 34. Or maybe you are wrestling with emotions that need validation or a loving confrontation; join me in reflection 28. If a day comes when you have questions about marriage, turn to reflections 31 or 32 for coaching. And in a season of sorrow, when you need to know that God is not unaware of your pain and your feelings

of sadness, find encouragement in reflection 6. You don't need to resign yourself to going it alone. This life is meant to be lived in community.

Because *This Life We Share* is designed to help you make new soul connections, consider finding someone to journey through these reflections with you. You might already be part of a small group or a book club, but if not, consider inviting a coworker or the neighbor down the hall or across the street to join you. Human relationships are richest and sweetest when grounded in spiritual realities: As each person's vertical dimension points toward God, robust horizontal connections form.

"Two people are better off than one," a well-known passage from Ecclesiastes reminds us, "for they can help each other succeed."¹ Whether we call it discipleship, mentoring, or simply friendship forged in faith, making soul connections with others who are journeying toward God will inevitably strengthen our own walk—and make the friendship stronger.

But perhaps you've just relocated or are entering a new season of life where you don't know a soul to confide in. I've been there, too, many times. Whether you're feeling alone or surrounded by traveling companions, I'd love to come alongside you in this life we share.

You are dearly loved, and *you are not alone*.

Maggie Wallem Rowe

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PART I

The Inner Journey



*A great traveler . . . is a kind of introspective;
as he covers the ground outwardly,
so he advances fresh interpretations of himself inwardly.*

LAWRENCE DURRELL, QUOTED IN DAVID YEADON,
The Way of the Wanderer

DURING THE YEARS MY HUSBAND, Mike, served as a youth pastor, he often asked the students he worked with to memorize the second chapter of Philippians. When the teens were preparing for short-term mission trips or service projects, committing Philippians 2 to heart was a requirement.

Mike's reasoning was simple. In this particular passage of Scripture, the apostle Paul is exhorting the people of Philippi to agree wholeheartedly with each other, love one another, and work together with one mind and purpose. In our teenage years, many of us are not yet mature enough to consistently do these things. Learning Paul's instructions before departing on a mission trip was a key step in these teens' spiritual and emotional development.

There's a fundamental phrase, though, embedded within Paul's instruction: "Don't look out *only* for your own interests."¹ While reminding his readers to take a genuine interest in others, the apostle naturally assumes we'll tend to our own needs too.

In order to live well with others, we need to pay close attention to our own mental and emotional health first. Our feelings do matter, deeply. They are us: “Emotion is not the Cinderella of our inner life, to be kept in her place among the cinders in the kitchen. Our emotional life is *us* in a way our intellectual life cannot be.”² A woman or man who deeply desires to be useful to others must build from the inside out. The life hidden within each of us determines our responses to the daily complexities of life.

Some may disagree, but I don’t believe that happiness—or any other emotional state, for that matter—is a choice. We can no more legislate how we feel at any given moment than we can control the waves of the ocean. But while we can’t choose our feelings, we *can* choose what to do with those feelings. The unseen weather of the heart makes a dramatic impact when it comes ashore in other people’s lives. Social commentator Andy Rooney once observed, “When you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere.”³ The same can be said of most negativity. God has given us the agency to respond to what is in our hearts, and he’s not left us to manage either the marvels or the messes of our lives alone.

In the pages ahead, we’ll look at some of the twists and turns of our inner journey. The Word of God will serve as our map as we navigate the uncertain terrain of seeking peace amid suffering, dealing with fears about the future, and managing anxiety and worry. We’ll identify ways we can elect to respond with hope even when joy seems elusive or when we despair of God ever using our broken stories.

You are the only one who can traverse all the hidden pathways of your inner journey. But in this beautiful life we share, I’m here to offer you a walking stick, a water bottle, and warm companionship along the way. Your heart, like a compass, is already pointed toward Home.

REFLECTION 1

TOO MUCH TO DO

The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, “Come off by yourselves; let’s take a break and get a little rest.” For there was constant coming and going. They didn’t even have time to eat.

MARK 6:30-31, MSG



DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU’RE LIVING your life inside a blender with the button stuck on Pulse?

When my husband, Mike, and I started out in ministry over forty years ago, advice for clergy families focused on surviving life in the fishbowl. Those were the days when pastors’ families usually lived in a parsonage or manse that was either attached to the church or located nearby.

Mike’s aunt Alice recalls the time she and her pastor-husband, Russ, lived in an apartment in the back of a Methodist church in rural Pennsylvania. A door behind the organ in the back of the sanctuary led directly into their quarters. Early one Sunday morning, Russ forgot to relock it after he left early to prepare for the service. Alice was ironing in their kitchen, wearing nothing but her slip, when a parishioner walked in, looking to borrow utensils.

“I didn’t mind living in a fishbowl,” Alice says, laughing, “but I preferred to do it with my clothes on!”

Family life today resembles more a blender than a fishbowl. The problem is not so much that others are watching us but that we’re barely keeping up with ourselves. We are exhausted from the continual whirl of family, volunteer, and work responsibilities. Our lives are running on high speed, and we have little hope of either slowing down or catching up.

Do you have more than one email account to monitor? How about a status to update, networking requests to approve, and social-media posts to keep current? Even email doesn’t move fast enough for some. Want to stay in touch with your kids? Better text or use their favorite app.

Technology has blurred the boundaries between night and day, work and home. Think you’re caught up when you leave the office at 5 or 6 p.m.? Not when colleagues desperate to empty their own inboxes dump documents and dilemmas on your virtual desk all night long.

When we live life at blender speed, is there any Off button? With so many needs to care for, how do we connect with the needs of our own souls? I use a “3-D” concept that works well much of the time: decide, delegate, and delete.

Decide what’s really important. Sounds obvious, doesn’t it?

Greek, the language of the New Testament, uses two distinct words for our English concept of time. *Chronos*, from which we derive the word *chronology*, is clock time. Each of us has the same amount: twenty-four hours in a day. *Kairos* is human time, the time we make and take for our purposes. *Chronos* is a given determined by God, but *kairos* is a moral choice we make every hour of the day.

When our kids were young and I worked out of our home on

Cape Cod, I gladly relinquished their care to their dad as soon as he arrived home each evening. While Mike and the kids read or played, I hopped on the computer to prepare talks or plan conferences for the regional ministry I directed. Nothing guilt-inducing there. Our family functioned as a team, and teams make trade-offs.

One evening, I was about to return a long list of calls when I glanced out the kitchen window, arrested by the sight of snow drifting down as the kids lobbed snowballs at their dad. They were shrieking with joy, but I was missing out. Dropping the phone, I pulled on boots and a jacket and hurried outside. Later that night, as Mike tucked our eight-year-old into bed, Adam looked up with shining eyes and said, “Dad, we had the *bestest* time when Mom came out!”

How easily I could have missed that moment. How often have I missed others?

Delegate. I know—easy to say and hard to do. We feel like we’re imposing when we ask others to handle responsibilities, or we fear the task won’t be done right—if it’s done at all. When we’re living life at blender speed, it seems easier to just do things ourselves.

But we trust toddlers with certain tasks—picking up their toys, putting on their shoes. We should be able to trust big people too. Delegation is key to mentoring and mothering, both. How do we do it? By providing others the opportunity to do a task, the authority to carry it out, the skills or training necessary, and the accountability that comes with faithful follow-up.

Delete. Remember the old clunker about home organization: “If in doubt, throw it out”? Those words apply to more than possessions. A schedule crowded with morning-to-midnight commitments leaves no room for the spiritual formation that needs to take place in our inner being. In her description of living for a time among

the Amish, writer Sue Bender commented, “The Amish often leave a space, a seeming mistake in the midst of their well-thought-out plans, to serve as an opening to let the spirit come in.”¹

Is living life at blender speed making you nauseated? Even blenders have different settings and slower speeds. Decide what God would have you and *only* you do in this season of your life. Delete other activities; delegate the rest. In *Lean In*, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg’s bestselling book on women in leadership, Sandberg writes that the coining of the phrase “having it all” is perhaps “the greatest trap ever set for women. . . . These three little words are intended to be aspirational but instead make all of us feel like we have fallen short.”²

Life pulses with opportunities, but we don’t have to embrace them all at one time. There’s more to life than increasing its speed.

Points of Connection

1. Can you identify with the Mark 6:30-31 account of the apostles, who were dealing with so much coming and going that they didn’t even have time to eat? How can Jesus’ advice to his followers apply to the pace of your life today? Consider some practical ways you can carve out five minutes of quiet a day, an hour each week, or a day each month.
2. When she’s out of the office, my friend Robin sometimes leaves an out-of-office message indicating she won’t be answering calls or emails while on vacation: “Know phone, no peace. No phone, know peace.” If you’re not in a position to totally unplug, what measures can you take to guard the margins in your life?

TOO MUCH TO DO

3. A simple prayer based on Ephesians 5:15 that has helped me might become yours, as well: “Lord, show me how to use my time wisely and well.”

Life Line

Life pulses with opportunities,
but we don't have to embrace them all at the same time.



