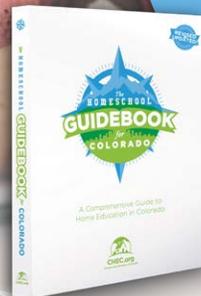


# Escaping *homeschool burnout*

By homeschool mom  
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*Defending your family's freedom and helping you homeschool with confidence*

## Do you suffer from burnout?

do you longingly reflect on your early days of homeschooling when you were bursting with energy and motivation? It was all a new and exciting adventure! You had your detailed day planner and your schedule nailed down in 15 minute increments. You had one baby napping, one on your hip (positioned carefully around your pregnant belly), a toddler pounding playdough in the high chair, another toddler playing with toys in the playpen, while you taught your kindergartner penmanship, your second grader math and supervised your fourth grader's science project in the kitchen — all at the same time! And dinner was simmering in the crock pot!

You seemingly had the capacity to do it all. And you thought it was fun! You had all your balls in the air, and you could keep them up there. But you are no longer the multi-tasking, breadmaking, exercising, baby-making, do-it-all homeschooling mom. You're tired. You're weary. You're getting older. And you wonder how you're going to finish well and continue homeschooling the remaining children you have at home.

Can you really keep going? Should you quit? Let online teachers take over? Fill your schedule with co-ops and tutors? Ask your friend to take over teaching duties for you? Go back to the public schools? Many are choosing these options, and they are not necessarily wrong. But before you decide to delegate the majority of your child's education to someone else, please consider a few thoughts from a fellow homeschool mom who has struggled with burnout herself, an older mom of 50 who is still in the trenches.

### Burnout is a good thing!

What? How can I say this? Because God is bringing us to a place where we are at the end of ourselves so that we will rely more heavily on Him. God is shaking our cups to show us what's really inside. God wants to take us and our families to a deeper level with Him.

The problem is not the circumstances — our health, our low energy levels, our hormones, our aging parents, our marriage challenges, our church conflicts, our impossibly complicated homeschool schedules. God is using these things to show us our deeper need: our need for more of Christ. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones asks in his book, *Spiritual Depression*, "Do you know God? Are you enjoying God? Is God the center of your life, the soul of your being, the source of your greatest joy?"<sup>1</sup> Are you living entirely for the glory of God? Are you homeschooling for the glory of God?

Consider finding a copy of Paul David Tripp's book, *Lost in the Middle*. In it, he encourages us to see our mid-life struggles as springboards to examine our deeper motivations and as catalysts to launch us into true intimacy and joy in our walk with God. As my dear friend said in the midst of a difficult life trial, "This is an

<sup>1</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 31.



opportunity for an upgrade!”

### Examine your motivations

How many of us, if we are honest, have been homeschooling, even in part, out of shame, fear, insecurity, or pride? Deep down do we really desire to just please God? Or are we at all concerned with impressing others? Wrong motivations can only fuel us for so long, and then we're destined for burnout.

Unless we, like Jesus, can empty ourselves before the cross and wholeheartedly say, “Not my will by Thine,” we will eventually lose heart. Isn't it interesting that Jesus was never stressed or overwhelmed, and He was homeless, despised, mocked, and overworked? He healed the sick, taught, preached, fought off Satan, calmed storms, and cast out demons. Likewise, we won't get burned out if we are doing only what God wants us to be doing. It is when we become double-minded, trying to please the world and the Lord, that we become overwhelmed.

Go back to the drawing board. Get some time alone with Jesus and ask Him what He wants your homeschool to look like. What does Jesus want you to be doing? Be a Mary and not a Martha. Sit at Jesus' feet, teach your children to sit at Jesus' feet, and He will carry your burden.

### Confess Your Sins Daily

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed* (James 5:16). Sin takes up more energy and time in our lives than anything else. Let's confess our sins each day, allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse and heal our hearts, and then watch our homeschools be transformed!

### Forgive Daily

If there is any unforgiveness in our hearts, it will sap our energy, occupy our minds, and eventually render us incapable of running a healthy home and homeschooling our children effectively. As wives and moms, we are the emotional centers of our homes. If we allow bitterness to grow in our hearts, we will undermine our own physical and spiritual health and that of our families. We must release it. Give it to God. God has mercifully forgiven you, so forgive your husband, your church, your parents, your friends, your children, your in-laws. Release the past to God, trusting that He sees all things and then live in freedom.

### Do Family Worship

The last thing we need is one more thing on our to-do list. But this *one thing* cannot be overlooked. It is more important than academics. In fact, if you do this one thing, God will begin to transform your family's minds and hearts and fill your home with peace. It doesn't have to be fancy. Read the Bible. Discuss what you read. Sing a song or two and pray for the concerns of the day. Ask your husband if he'd be willing to lead. If he can't, then ask him if you can do it with the children during school time. C.H. Spurgeon said, “If you want to bring up a godly family who shall be a seed to serve God when our heads are under the clods of the valley, let us seek to train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship.”<sup>2</sup>



“ *How to ascertain the will of God: I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state as to have no will of my own in regard to a given matter.*”

—GEORGE MUELLER

<sup>2</sup> C.H. Spurgeon, “A Pastoral Visit,” sermon published July 30, 1908, spurgeongems.org, <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols52-54/chs3103.pdf>.

## Choose Joy

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again, Rejoice!* (Philippians 4:4).

Recently I experienced a difficult month — emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I found myself bitter and unable to even receive from God’s Word when I tried to read it. I was walking around in a sad state of mind when my husband reminded me of something he read in John Piper’s book, *Desiring God*. Piper said that joy is not just a blessing and privilege for the Christian, but also a command.<sup>3</sup> My husband encouraged me to just be joyful, act joyful, smile out of obedience to God, and then my feelings would eventually follow. Wow! What a simple concept this is. I was waiting for my feelings to kick in first, and they just weren’t. I am learning to choose joy, and it is making a big difference in my day and my homeschool.

## Go to Church

And don’t just go — be a “card-carrying” member! We need to be a part of a body of believers. We cannot run this race alone. We all need other Christians, even imperfect ones, to cheer us on, rebuke, teach, encourage, support, and keep us accountable. Our children need to see more than just our families. God never called us to isolate ourselves. We cannot wait to find the “perfect” church before joining, because we’ll never find it!

I’d encourage you to find the best one you can in your community and then get involved. Be a part of what God is doing beyond the walls of your home. Apart from the local church, we will not be able to go the distance homeschooling, and our families will not grow. As Pastor George Grant says, “The church is God’s plan A and there is no plan B.”<sup>4</sup>

## Revisit Your Initial Reasons for Homeschooling

Why did you embark on this homeschool journey in the first place? What led you here? Were the public schools dangerous? Too many bad influences? Not enough academic rigor? Maybe your child was bullied, or you didn’t want him to be bored with learning like you were growing up. Did you want your child to have an education centered on God’s Word? Did you desire your children to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you didn’t think the public schools were going to get them there?

Whatever your reasons were, revisit them. Has anything changed? Do your younger children need the same benefits of homeschooling as your older ones have had? If so, get excited about it again. Regaining your purpose will impress you once again with the important role of a homeschool mom in training up the next generation.

## Don’t Listen to Satan’s Lies

After homeschooling for 18 years and successfully graduating my oldest two children from homeschool high school and launching them into college, all of a sudden I began to be bombarded with discouraging thoughts. I would wake up in the middle of the night overwhelmed with thoughts of failure, of incompetence, of fear. I felt incapable to go on and finish homeschooling my other children — incapable of successfully managing my home and life.

My pastor encouraged me that whenever I had these thoughts to ask my husband if they were true and realistic or if they were from Satan. Remember we have an enemy. He tries to accuse us day and night, and he shoots his lying, discouraging arrows at us when we are weakest. When you have these discouraging thoughts and are having trouble discerning whether they are truthful or not, ask your spouse or a trusted friend for wisdom. If they are false, then reject these thoughts through the power of the Holy Spirit and replace them with the truth of God’s Word.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1986), 242.

<sup>4</sup> George Grant, “The Church Is Plan A — Acts 2:42-47” sermon preached April 14, 2013, Parish Presbyterian Church, [parishpres.libsyn.com/pastor-george-grant-the-church-is-plan-a-acts-242-47](http://parishpres.libsyn.com/pastor-george-grant-the-church-is-plan-a-acts-242-47).

If you have trouble sleeping during this season of life, open the Word in the middle of the night and fill your mind with it. The Psalms have been a lifeline for me during these times. I find Satan attacks me most in the night hours. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:11, “We are not unaware of his [Satan’s] schemes.” And Ephesians 6 gives a detailed account of the armor and weapons we must have to fight this formidable foe. I have found that speaking the truth out loud to myself and forcing myself to think on God’s promises and who I am in Christ have helped me tremendously. We really are nothing without Christ, and in reality, we can’t even homeschool without Him. But in Christ we can do all things.

Ask your husband to pray with you or find a friend to be a prayer partner. Consider reading D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ amazing book *Spiritual Depression*. Other than the Bible, this one book has helped me more than anything else to continue on in my homeschool journey.

### Read The Word Daily

Proverbs 13:20 says, *He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.* Our children are walking with us. What are they learning from observing us? We need to make sure we are continually growing in wisdom. Once in awhile, do an XTAWG time: Extended Time Alone With God. Get away for a half day or whole day and spend the time just with Jesus. Your soul will be refreshed!

### Pray! Pray! Pray!

I’ve found it crucial to continually ask God for healing, for strength, for renewed motivation, for ideas, for solutions. Ask Him if He wants you to continue homeschooling. And if so, ask what He wants your homeschool to look like. Pray. Pray. Pray. We cannot do it enough. We must cry out to the Lord, unload all our burdens on our friend, Jesus. Talk to Him about everything. He desires us to be specific in our requests to Him, giving us the opportunity to watch Him delight in answering us abundantly in ways we never thought possible. Instead of thinking our options are limited to what we see others doing or what we’ve researched on the internet or the supplemental programs offered in our communities, let’s ask God to bring opportunities for our children or to fill in the gaps where we don’t have energy. Then we can wait in anticipation to see God delight in meeting our needs and our children’s needs in ways we never could have thought up ourselves.

### Recommended Reading

*Lost in the Middle*  
Paul David Tripp

*Spiritual Depression*  
D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

*Family Life: A Simple Guide to the Biblical Family*  
Kevin Swanson

*The Joyful Homeschooler*  
Mary Hood

*Lord, I Want to be Whole*  
Stormie O’Martian

*Running On Empty*  
Fil Anderson

## Practical Ways to Combat Burnout

Certain temperaments tend to struggle more with anxiety, stress, worry, burnout, and depression. If you are in this category, I urge you to read D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book *Spiritual Depression*. And some of the following tips may be of help to you as well:

### Nurture Your Marriage

Get help if need be. If there is dissension in the leadership of any organization, it is doomed to ineffectiveness at best and failure at worst. Our families are no exception. If your marriage is struggling, it will sap the life out of your home and drain your energy. Everyone has marital challenges from time to time and in different seasons of life. Don't be afraid to get help. Don't allow the problems to go unaddressed for long. Seeking unity, forgiving daily, learning to communicate in love, praying for your husband and praying together are key links in the chain of unity.

We must take specific problems to the Lord in prayer and wait in faith for Him to give us solutions and wisdom. We can't expect our husbands to be perfect and meet all our needs. And we must not compare our husbands or marriages to anyone else's. Homeschooling takes a lot of time and commitment and sacrifice for our children — but let's not make the mistake of putting our children ahead of our husbands.

Whatever the struggles are, the best resource we have are the elders of our churches. Let's not overlook God's plan of protection and guidance for us provided in our elders.

### Give Thanks!

*In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 5:18).*

If you are an introvert like me, you may tend to wake up in the mornings, and as soon as your mind begins to function, you are bombarded with negative thoughts. So I have begun to make it a habit first thing when I wake up to intentionally rehearse in my mind (sometimes out loud) every single thing I can think of that I have to be thankful for: "Thank you that I have a husband, thank you for my house, for my bed, for my neighborhood, my children, for food to eat" and on and on. Then I make sure and read God's Word, usually starting with a Psalm. Why do this? Well, how important is gratitude to God?

Listen to what Psalm 50:23 has to say, *He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.* Gratitude actually prepares the way for God to show us His salvation. Wow! And earlier in this Psalm, God says He would rather have a sacrifice of thanksgiving than a sacrifice of a bull on the altar. So give thanks!

### Learn to Say "NO"

*Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16).* Busyness can be our worst enemy. And it can be the very tool Satan uses to keep us from being effective and productive in our homes and schooling. Learn to say "No!" I am learning to never say "Yes" to anyone until I have first looked carefully at my schedule, prayed

about it, and asked my husband. I'm having to weed out unnecessary activities from this season of my life and determine to focus completely on my husband, home, and shepherding/teaching my children. There will be a season for other things. I have to tell myself: "If I'm going to teach my children, then I must teach them!" Set aside time for it and say "No" to other things.

If I had a job teaching in a school, I would have to say "No" to things that conflicted. Why should it be any different teaching our children at home? Turn off the phone/email/texts for a few hours a day so you can focus on your priorities. Figure out how much time you need to stay at home (without running around) in order to be an effective teacher and home manager. If you are an introvert, figure out how much alone/quiet time you need away from people and, if possible, schedule those times into your week.

I have found that for every day that I'm outside my home, I need at least a day at home. And once I reach four hours interacting with people (other than my family), I do best to call it a day and have some quiet time or I become drained. Most importantly, if our daily time alone with God is crowded out by our activities, we need to say "No." We must make sure we fill our cups with the Living Water every day so we are giving to our families and others out of a heart of abundance. If time does not permit us to do this, it's time to take out some activities. Our souls, our health, our families, and our homeschools will all benefit if we learn to say that simple two letter word, "No."

### Don't Use the Word "Burnout"

Our words shape our thinking, so don't use the words "burnout, depressed, overwhelmed" to describe your feelings. Instead take your weariness to Jesus and, like Elijah, allow God to replenish you (1 Kings 19).

### Get Sufficient Sleep and Eat Wisely

When I was in high school, I was so driven that I only got four hours of sleep a night. My schedule was chock full of productive, positive activities, but I soon began to experience depression. I mistakenly thought that my problem was a spiritual one and so added an extended prayer time onto my already overloaded schedule. Eventually I learned some common sense principles. I basically just needed sleep. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit."<sup>5</sup> Learning to go to sleep at a decent hour is one habit that will bring emotional, physical, and spiritual health to you, and peace and productivity to your home. Figure out how much sleep your body needs and make it a priority to get it. Maybe your family can help you turn off the computer, put the book down, or say no to evening activities in order for you to get to bed earlier. Remember that when Elijah was discouraged, God refreshed him through plenty of sleep and food (1 Kings 19)!

### Live Simply

Debt causes a huge strain on a marriage and a family. Live simply. Make a budget with your spouse and stick to it. The bottom line is this: don't spend more than you bring in. We don't need a fancy curriculum to homeschool. As we live within our means, we can then trust God to provide the opportunities and resources our children need.

### Get Out of Bed as Soon as You Wake Up

*This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it* (Psalm 118:24). Or better yet, set an alarm and get out of bed as soon as it goes off. Remind yourself that you have a significant purpose. What a privilege to homeschool your own children! This is our calling in life, at least for this season. Isn't this better than having to get up and trudge off to work somewhere to build someone else's corporation or business?

We get to use our time and energy to invest in our own children for eternity! Sometimes after we have been homeschooling for a number of years, we lose sight of the tremendous significance of what it is that we are doing. It's time to get excited about it again! Let's remind ourselves and expect God to do great things each day!

<sup>5</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 19.

## Make a God Box

My mentor, a dear godly woman in her 80s, shared this with me. She has a little box on her desk that she wrote the word “God” on. Every day she writes down all of her problems and concerns — both big and small. She prays over them, and then she gives them to God, symbolically placing the paper in the little box. Throughout the day, when she begins to worry about one of her problems, she reminds herself that she gave that problem to God, and He is taking care of it! There will be many problems in teaching and shepherding our children. Let’s give each of these to God to take care of.

## Enlist the Help of Your Older Children

As I write, I am preparing for my 19th year of homeschooling. I have about six more years to go with a daughter in middle school and a daughter just entering high school. Each of these daughters are significantly different in the giftings and strengths that the Lord has given them. This is wonderful, but in this season it has made it a challenge for me to homeschool them by myself. So I have enlisted my 19-year-old daughter to teach one of my daughters full-time while I will focus on the other. Some subjects we will all do together.

Your older children are blessings from God. Pray for how God would have you include them more in your life and school. If they can’t help full time, could they teach just one subject to a younger sibling or tutor them weekly? Not only is it a blessing to you, but it strengthens sibling relationships and is an opportunity packed full of lessons for the older child.

## Enlist the Grandparents’ Help

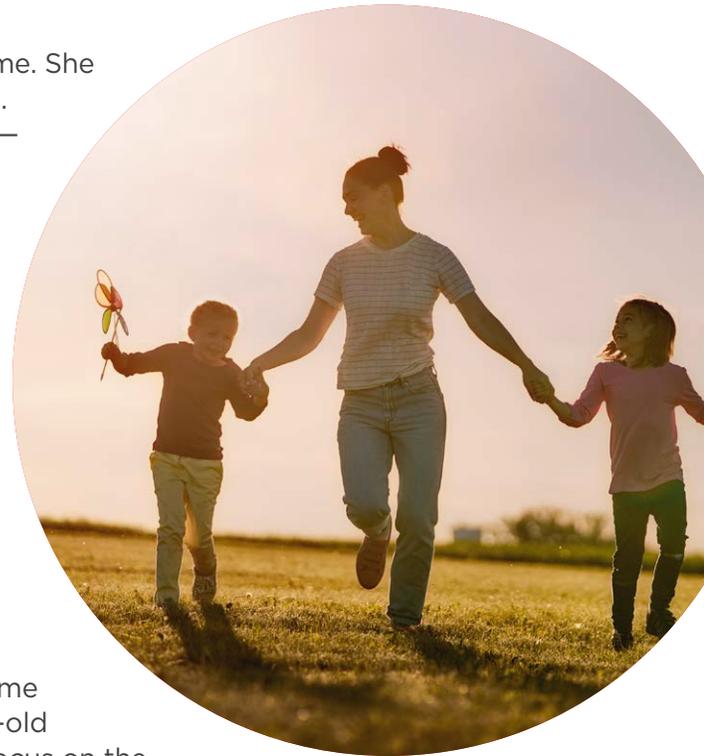
Most elderly people have accumulated a lifetime of experience and learning that no one cares to access. How sad! The older generation is our greatest untapped resource. And they are a valuable asset for you as a homeschool mom. Consider enlisting the grandparents’ help. Tap into their wisdom. It will encourage them, it will enrich your children, and it will lighten your load.

My father, over the course of the years, has taught my children geometry, art, and driver’s ed. He read through *Calvin’s Institutes* with one of my daughters, and this year will be teaching the Summit worldview curriculum to all my children. What a blessing! When my parents lived out of state, they taught subjects over the phone. Now we can do it in person. If your parents are not into academics, could they teach practical life skills like sewing, cooking, knitting, or woodworking? The possibilities are endless. Be creative! If your parents are unable to help, seek out an elderly person in your church. This is a vast resource for you, and I believe it is God’s plan for the older generations to teach the younger.

## Regain the Joy of Learning

After all, isn’t that what we want our children to walk away with? A lifelong love of learning. Do they see that love in me? Am I continually learning? The best way to do this is to be always reading a book. It is amazing how many books you can get through by just reading a little here and there. Why not keep a book with you in the car and a book in the bathroom? Or read a few paragraphs while waiting in line at the grocery store or while waiting at the doctor’s office? Reading good books will enrich our lives. Let’s turn off the computer and read a book!

Make homeschooling about life again. School and life can’t be separate. Are our kids burned out on school? Then it’s time to step back. Take a break from the textbooks and start to love learning again.



Garden together, cook, sew, go on field trips, read aloud. Figure out their interests and let them pursue it full time. When you see that they have that twinkle back in their eyes, then you can slip a textbook or two back in.

Consider watching the YouTube video about Francis Collins, a scientist who was homeschooled and later headed up the human genome project. Here he speaks of his love for learning that was ignited by his father and mother's untraditional homeschooling methods. (Internet engine search: Francis Collins' Personal Story — Learning to Love Learning.)

## Enjoy Your Children

They won't be with us forever. They are the crown of our old age, our blessings. In the midst of the mundane routines and challenges and trials of daily life, have we forgotten this? Now is the opportunity to have fun with our kids — to laugh, to play games together. Try to find things you enjoy doing together especially as they get older. Sit and listen to them. Build relationships.

## Cover Your Children in Prayer

Surround your children with constant prayers of protection. Have we forgotten that, as we homeschool each day, we enter into battle? We can't afford to underestimate the attacks of Satan and his demons who don't want our children educated in the fear of the Lord. Don't be deceived or lulled into apathy. Just because our children are home with us does not mean they are safe. Satan wants our children's hearts. Homeschooling without prayer and the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit will in the end prove to be an unfruitful pursuit.

## Be Focused

*Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like flint and I will not be put to shame (Isaiah 50:7).* This passage speaks of Christ's "setting his face like flint." This is the ultimate in determination. We must follow in our Master's footsteps and, once we know the will of God, set our face like flint. Be determined to follow through with all your might. So set your face like flint as you seek each day to educate your children, knowing that despite the obstacles, Christ has gone before us and through Him we will overcome. With His example, we can focus on the task God has given us to do and not be distracted.

You are a homeschooling parent. Don't allow yourself to be wooed into dozens of extraneous activities. Even a text or phone call can distract our minds from the priority of training our children. Be determined to homeschool the best you can and finish well. Embrace this season. As Jim Elliot, a missionary and martyr, said, "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."<sup>6</sup>

## Read Aloud

We've all had days where we wake up and a dark cloud is hanging over us. Whether it's hormones, illness, or the Mexican food we ate the night before, there's no shaking it off. Get up, pray for strength, grab a good book, sit in a sunny window, and read all day to your children. When my sister was homeschooling her high school son, they once spent the entire day reading aloud the book *Johnny Tremain*. Yes, six hours of reading! At the end of the day, they finished the book. My sister had lost her voice, and her son had been infused once again with the delight of books and learning.



<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers), 20.

So grab a book and start to read. I'm not talking about *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*! Grab a great story! Your children will be delighted that they don't have to do math for the day, and no one will even know how down you felt all morning. Becoming absorbed together in an engaging story will lift all of your spirits. This is the joy of flexible homeschooling!

## Play Uplifting Music in the Home

Music has a significant impact on our emotions. Play calm instrumental praise music or hymns in the background of your home all day. It will lift your spirits. While your children do subjects requiring intense focus, try softly playing Bach or Handel in the background. There has been research that shows that some genres of orchestral music actually enhance learning.

## Remember What True Education Is

What does it mean to educate our children? Academics, textbooks, SAT scores, sitting at a desk, getting into college ...? In Kevin Swanson's book, *Family Life*, he defines education as "preparation of a child intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually for life and eternity."<sup>7</sup> It is shepherding the whole child, integrating all of life. I think that more burnout could be avoided if we ditched the public school paradigm and embraced God's plan for education instead.

## Shepherd Your Children Through the Teen and Young Adult Years

*My son, observe the commandment of your Father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother* (Proverbs 6:20). Many parents mistakenly think that their "job" is done once their child hits the teen and young adult years. They think that because their child looks like an adult, they no longer need shepherding.

The opposite is true. Yes, they will have more freedom and privileges in this season. But young adults need more shepherding, mentoring, and prayer as they launch out into the world and are faced with a myriad of new temptations and influences. They will be faced with intense spiritual battles and choices, the consequences of which will impact them for the rest of their lives. You may feel burned out, but your children need you now more than ever.

## Allow God to Work Through Your Physical Ailments

Our weakness is the perfect opportunity for God to make His strength known. Our infirmity is not a limit for God, but an avenue through which His power can flow. Isaiah 40:29 says, *He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.*

In conclusion, homeschool burnout is simply God bringing us to a place where He wants us to examine ourselves — what our motives are, what our hope is in, where our treasure really lies. As we age, we get tired, and we can lack the energy, drive, and optimism we had in our younger years. Often we experience disappointment. We have placed our hopes and dreams in the wrong things, and they haven't delivered. So God shakes our cup. God reveals the true condition of our hearts.

Burnout is an opportunity, a microscope revealing the misdirected goals and motives of our hearts and a much needed occasion for realignment. We have trusted in broken cisterns (Jeremiah 2:13); now we can turn to the Living Water and drink deeply.

So don't view burnout as a reason to quit, as a sad end to your homeschool journey. See it as a sweet companion pointing you toward more freedom in Christ! Push through the trial, weary friend, and seek God's strength to enable you to keep plodding down this significant homeschooling path. Pray for eyes of faith to grasp that the power of God can work through your feeble mind and frame, and drink of the refreshing, satisfying, inexhaustible well of Jesus Christ!

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Swanson, *Family Life: A Simple Guide to the Biblical Family* (Parker, CO: Generations, 2016), 158.

