

The Retailer's Real Life in Overwhelm City

By Dianne Barker

Yikes! Where am I? Did I misread the map? Overlook the road sign? Experience total GPS failure?

Oh, now I recognize the neighborhood. I've spent time here before—Overwhelm City—the home of over-commitment and complicated circumstances.

The only fix for over-commitment is saying “no.” A hard choice—but a choice.

There's no easy fix for beyond-our-control, complicated circumstances: crumbling marriages, prodigal children, financial difficulties, relationship issues, care-giving responsibilities, health concerns, assorted calamities, grief, terrorism, and fear—in addition to a wavering economy creating career challenges. Retailers are not exempt.

How do you respond when real life interferes with tidy work plans, weaving around day-to-day business affairs and sapping energy—even draining hope? What do you do when you find yourself among the desperate in Overwhelm City crying, “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck...the flood sweeps over me” (Psalm 69:1-2 ESV).

I'm familiar with that place. After leaving a successful journalism career to be a stay-at-home mom, I continued writing. My 1986 book, *Twice Pardoned* (first book for Focus on the Family Publishing), soared to number-one on the national Christian best-sellers list. But the ink had barely dried when God led me from my public life as an author and speaker to a secluded life, caring for my parents and parents-in-love as their health declined. I spent the next fifteen years in Overwhelm City, struggling to keep my head above water.

When your professional life meshes with your personal life, pushing you to the outskirts of Overwhelm City, a few tools from my Survival Kit will help make the most of the experience and sweeten the stay.

- *Simplify life.* Decide what has priority and do the “gottas,” the things you've *gotta* do. If you've invited an author for a book signing or another special event requires extra planning, give your attention to arrangements and promotion. Eliminate non-essentials. Then consider adding one low-priority task per week as your schedule allows. Top priority: “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).
- *Ask for help.* Delegate as much as possible. Enlist volunteers. Pay for temporary help. And don't stay angry with yourself because you can't do it all. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10).
- *Keep a realistic perspective.* Your complicated circumstances may be temporary, but expect and prepare for another detour. God gave us a program for carefree living. “Cast

your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22).

- *Draw near to Jesus.* Immerse yourself in his Word, and lean on him for every step and breath. He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).
- *Accept that you are here by God’s design.* He’s in absolute control, and nothing touches our lives without his knowledge and permission. Although Job didn’t understand, he proclaimed, “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold” (Job 23:10).
- *Believe God has a purpose.* We don’t have to see it to believe it. If nothing else, he’s developing endurance. “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Hebrews 10:36).
- *Keep a teachable heart.* Ask the Lord what he wants you to learn, and expect him to answer. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you” (Psalm 32:8).
- *Encourage yourself.* Discouragement paralyzes. Live in truth and move forward in confidence. “Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you” (Jeremiah 32:17).
- *Rejoice by choice.* If I rejoice today, I rejoice in these circumstances. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances...” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Overwhelm City is a sweet community of struggling people. Didn’t I just see you moving in next door? Come on over. I can’t wait to get acquainted!

Dianne Barker is a conference speaker, freelance journalist, radio host, and author of eleven books, including the 1986 Christian best seller, *Twice Pardoned*. This article is adapted from *I Don’t Chase the Garbage Truck Down the Street in My Bathrobe Anymore! Organizing for the Maximum Life*, which won the Christian Authors Network Golden Scrolls 2014 third-place award for non-fiction book of the year. Her forthcoming book is *Help! I’m Stuck and I Can’t Get Out! The Maximum Marriage Maintenance and Repair Kit*.

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