CONFESSIONS OF A PROVERBS 32 WOMAN

KERRI POMAROLLI

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Contents

Introduction: Confession Time 9

Quiz: Are You a Proverbs 31 or Proverbs 32 Woman? 19

1. Jazz Class Groupon 21
2. 22 Minutes 33
3. My Nine-Year-Old Is Way More Christian Than I Am 47
4. Fasting, Praying, and Captain Crunch 57
5. Africa Wrecked Me…Sort Of 65
6. In Defense of Martha 77
7. One Is the Loneliest Number 89
8. I'm Failing First Grade 101
9. Daddy Issues 119
10. Dear Diary, Oh Diary 131
11. The Grass Is Always Greener, Even When It's Fake 149
12. My Heart Is Breaking for Hollywood 169
13. Mean Girls 183

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Introduction

CONFESSION TIME

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With two girls and a career of traveling around the country making people laugh, my life is far from "Insta-perfect." I live in LA, where all of the ultra-skinny people ask me if I'm pregnant. I started saying yes, since I look "good for four months preggo" (which I'm not).

I love God with my whole heart, but I skipped church the other day to watch VeggieTales. My kids eat raw veggies because their mom doesn't know how to steam them. They think a snack is a dirty Tic Tac from my purse.

You get the picture.

The truth is, I'm not the Proverbs 31 woman. Remember her? She's the perfect early-rising, field-plowing woman who makes her own clothes and has three jobs. I'm more like the Proverbs 32 woman. You haven't heard of her? Well, let me tell you. It's definitely me…and it's probably you if you're reading this book. These are our mantras:

"I will submit to *not* going to work!"

"I never pay retail."

"It's not gossip if your head is bowed!"

"Nutella solves all your problems." (And so does Ben and Jerry's.)

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"We don't have issues. We have prayer requests."

However, if you're a type A, "got it together" girl, this book may send you into an OCD fit. You know who you are. Your boss loves you. If you have kids, they wear matching socks. You have Tupperware containers—with the lids on—neatly stacked and color coded in your kitchen. Good for you!

But if you are one of those women, then stop right now, slowly step away from the Kindle, and go make me some cookies in the shape of a rainbow. I need them for my kid's school tomorrow. And do you know how to make a fourth-grade science fair project by any chance?

But if you can relate to not being able to relate to that wonderful biblical woman of God that so few of us can actually measure up to, then buckle up! Because I'm about to convince you it is perfectly okay to be a #HotMess4Jesus.

Accepting that you are a Proverbs 32 Woman is the gift of being convinced that God is crazy about you. He completely understands you, loves you without complaint, passionately chases after you, and will never leave or forsake your hot-mess self for anything or anyone. You're loved. Safe. Accepted. Breathe deeply and smile. Get out that Nutella and eat some carbs! God created them. You can rest in the joy of being a Proverbs 32 Woman.

Accepting that you are a Proverbs 32 Woman is the gift of being convinced that God is crazy about you.

That is, if you can do two things.

First, you've got to be self-aware enough to admit who you are,

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where you are, and what you are. Really, this is the first key to loving your life and all the imperfections that seem to nag at your soul.

Second, you have to be God-aware enough to accept your Proverbs 32 Woman-ness with humility and grace. Embracing that it's okay not to have it all together—and not even caring whether you do or don't—brings a deep realization that Jesus is smiling over the very thought of you. When you can picture that love in His eyes, you can begin to grasp a firm and constant understanding of "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18)—especially for you.

Hot mess and all.

How do I know you can do this? I have the stories to prove it. And so do you, if you look deep enough. That's right: you can uncover the real you, look deep into your "hotmessness," and smile. You're just like the rest of the ladies at your church or at work—imperfect. Accept this gift of living in God's grace instead of condemnation, and then learn the secrets of giving this gift to your family, your friends, and perhaps even your mom! (Don't expect your mom to listen, though. I'm still working on mine.)

That's right: you can uncover the real you, look deep into your "hotmessness," and smile.

The chapters and stories that follow will take you on a wild ride through my very real life, no holds barred. They prove to me, and I hope they will prove to you, that this #hotmess4Jesus thing really can be the best possible life to live.

I'm not writing this book to solve your problems. There are enough of those kinds of books out there already. But if reading about my life

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can give you some comfort that you are not alone on this hamster wheel, then I've done my job. I promise, by the end of this book, you'll learn at least one thing: you are not the most messed-up chick in the room. I own that title!

Letter to the Proverbs 31 Woman

From: Kerri@proverbs32woman.com
To: Proverbs31woman@heaven.org
Subject: Heart on my sleeve

Dear Proverbs 31 Woman,

Hello, my name is Kerri. I found this email address for you on Twitter. (Did you know you have a Twitter account? Maybe you got hacked! Just let me know. I'll report it.)

I hope this email address works and this gets to you in heaven. I'm sure you're quite busy with all the fun festivities, but I wanted to introduce myself because I'm writing a book about you. Well, it's actually about me...but you inspired it. I wish I knew your name. May I call you Pearl? I would assume you have a beautiful holy name like that. My name means Dark Horse, but I'm sure my mom forgot to look that up before she picked out my name.

I'm here on earth, and I wanted to inform you that you've been inspiring women—and stressing them out—for centuries. You are an icon, and you have your very own chapter in the Holy Bible. A lot of women read about you in the Bible and think they could never measure up to all you were.

I have the utmost respect for you and all that you represent. I just don't think I could be in your league. Nobody has ever called me a Proverbs 31 Woman. So I thought, *Why not embrace the reality that I'm more a Proverbs 32 Woman and see how we can support each other?* I hope we can bridge the gap for all women, whether they are Proverbs 31 or 32. We are

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all precious in His sight, created in His image. And when I say "precious," I don't mean it in a patronizing way, like, "Oh, your baby is so adorable even though he has no hair!" I mean God loves each and every one of us.

Why not embrace the reality that I'm more a Proverbs 32 Woman and see how we can support each other?

I'm writing this book to help the woman out there who isn't feeling so great about herself. I hope she will read it and realize the truth about how much God loves her, right where she is. He's not waiting for her to be ten pounds lighter, ten years younger, or ten dollars richer. He loves all His kids exactly where they are—we can't do anything to make Him love us any more, and we can't do anything to make Him love us any less.

Did you ever have early mornings when you lie in bed, afraid to open your eyes? I can get pretty overwhelmed thinking about the demands waiting for me as soon as my feet hit the floor, and in some cases, before my feet hit the floor. Right now it's 5:20 a.m. and I'm awake. At any given moment a child is going to come running into my room, insisting that I fetch things for her, as though I am her servant. You had kids, but you also had servants. That might be something I need to look into.

Some days…okay, *most* days lately…I want to be a kid again. I want to go back to the time when my mom would stick a thermometer in my mouth, put a hot compress on my head, and tell me to stay in bed for the rest of the day. She would let me watch *The Price Is Right* and *I Love Lucy* and she would feed me Ritz Crackers and Campbell's chicken noodle soup. (I'm pretty

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sure those cubes were not chicken.) Then in the afternoon I would lie on the couch while she did Jazzercise and watched her "stories" (*General Hospital*). Then she would make Stove Top Stuffing and some vegetable from a Green Giant for dinner, and I wouldn't have a care in the world. My dad would read a story to me and kiss me good night while I was snuggled under my covers wearing my pink flannel Precious Moments nightgown, and he would bring me a Coke to settle my stomach. Sometimes, if it was Friday night, I would get to fall asleep watching *The Golden Girls* in my mom's bed.

But now I'm the mom, and I don't have anyone to kiss me on the forehead and tuck me in at night. I'm expected to do all those things for other people. And how do they thank me? They pee in my bed!

I just don't want to do any adulting today! It's too hard. I can't believe I'm a grown-up. When did that happen? I mean, my friends and I own houses that look like the ones we grew up in. When I'm invited to a barbecue, it still boggles my mind that I'm the one who is supposed to take the food. Isn't that a grown-up's job? I can't work a grill!

I feel ill-equipped for so much in this life. I wish I could have been more prepared. Instead of learning Algebra 2, maybe my math teacher could have taught me how to do online banking. Or what about changing a flat tire or folding a fitted sheet? I have to do all the work, all the time, and it's a thankless job, let me tell you. And I get up each day and it starts all over again.

I'm tired, Pearl. I'm really, truly tired. No cream, ointment, pill, or anything else I've purchased online seems to help on days like this. Did you ever just want to pack up the camel and get out of town? By yourself? Did ever get any alone time?

What were your biggest worries? After you read my book, you might think I worry a lot. But I like to call it "verbal processing." I just like to rant about things to make myself feel better. What

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did you do to comfort yourself on hard days? I can only imagine how difficult your struggles were compared to my issues (I mean prayer requests). Though you did have servants to help. I'm kind of envious of that. I'd settle for a cleaning person once a month!

Did the servants tend to the children? Or did they do the water runs and plow the field? It seems you were quite crafty, making garments and selling them. You would do very well today on a thing called Etsy. We don't have a watering hole, but women gather on social media. It's not the same as connecting face-to-face—our faces are photoshopped anyway—and we feel more disconnected from the world than ever. I can tell you what my best friend had for dinner last night, but I haven't heard her voice on the phone, seen her face, or given her a hug in a very long time. I miss that. I miss talking to friends and doing life with my tribe. Now I just look at pictures of their lives. I miss having close friends who talk openly and honestly.

I'm sure you had good fellowship time. And I hear the men made it a point to sit at the city gate, including your husband. Was he working there or what? I mean, were you the breadwinner? Not that it's a bad thing. I'm a single mom and I'm responsible for myself and these two other humans who keep calling me mom. Sometimes I fear what would become of them if something happened to me. That fear keeps me up at night.

Did you sleep well? I bet you were exhausted. I don't sleep that well sometimes. Usually around one o'clock in the morning, my brain turns on a slide show of pictures of all the problems and ideas that demand my attention. Currently I'm working on building a weight-loss plan: how to lose ten pounds while eating bread but without doing any extra physical activity. I love bread. I could have lived on manna for 40 years if I had some avocados and lemon juice.

But if I'm really putting my heart on my sleeve, what I am hoping, maybe, even after reading about all my dysfunction, is that

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you will consider being my friend. No pressure. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Your friend (hopefully),
Kerri

P.S. Who is the best person you've met up there? Any surprises? Could you check and see if someone named Patrick Swayze is there? He'd probably be teaching the praise dance at the campgrounds with King David. Oh, and while you're at it, my mom wants you to look for a guy named Clark Gable. I don't think he'd be dancing.

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QUIZ: ARE YOU A PROVERBS 31 OR PROVERBS 32 WOMAN?

1. Do you rise early, and does anyone call you "blessed" before 8:00 a.m.?
2. Do you plow?
3. Do you avoid "the bread of idleness"? Have you ever taken a nap in the daytime?
4. Do you own a spindle? And do you use it on a regular basis to make clothes of scarlet?
5. Do you quilt or make your own bedding because you won't set foot in a TJ Maxx or HomeGoods?
6. Are you the owner of any fields or vineyards?
7. Do you have a Pinterest page of things you've actually made in real life? Do you sell linen garments on Etsy?
8. Does farm-to-table organic fermenting of foods sound fun to you?
9. Does it sound wrong for you to even think about serving produce out of a can with a Green Giant on the label? Or lasagna from an orange box?
10. Would you consider it a bad thing to eat Nutella in the shower, fully clothed, with a fork?

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Scoring

If you answered yes to 3 or more of the above questions, you are a Proverbs 31 Woman. You are definitely getting a mega mansion in heaven and a *huge* crown with massive jewels. A spot is waiting for you, and you will be on the kitchen committee with Martha. You are someone who can "laugh at days to come" and "be praised." I suggest you buy my Proverbs 32 Woman devotional, because you are going to need to learn how to help the rest of us.

If you answered no to 5 or more questions, there is no doubt: you are a Proverbs 32 Woman! Welcome to the club! You need to find a Proverbs 31 woman to mentor you. She will make your birthday cakes and joyfully decorate any of your tables for women's events. She can also help you sew your kids' costumes for the Christmas pageant, even at the last minute when you find out the night before that your child has been cast as a shepherd. You love variety in life, and you appreciate the value of Uber Eats delivery. You do your quiet time of reflection at HomeGoods. As a Proverbs 32 Woman, you should also get my new devotional because you will find our sisterhood is bigger than you think. You are not alone. We all need each other…and chocolate. There was definitely chocolate in the garden of Eden.

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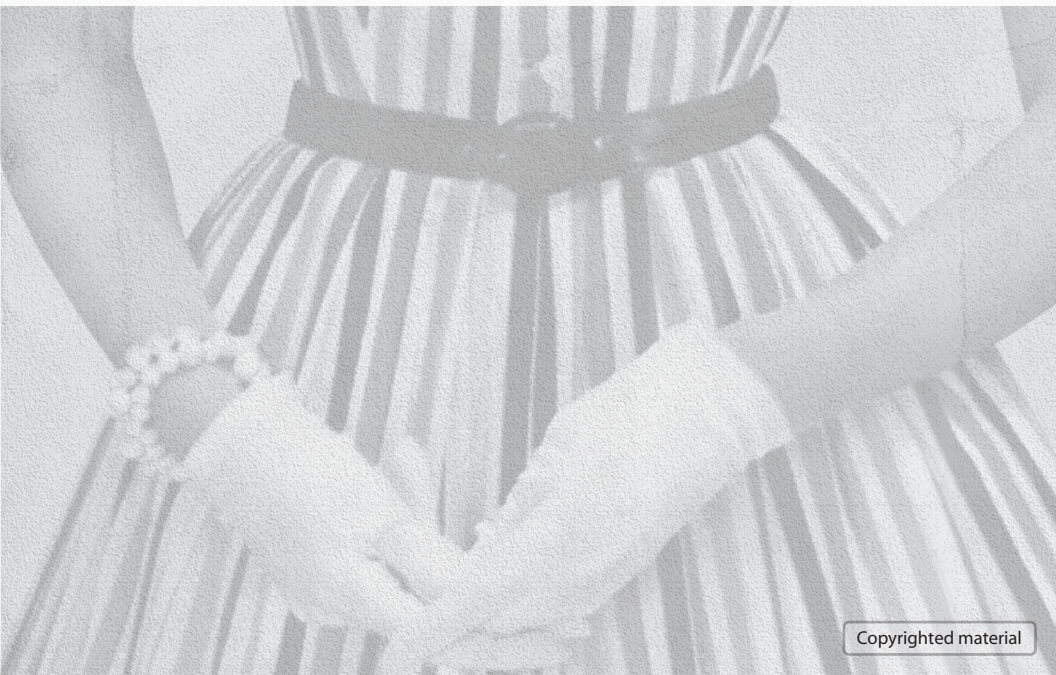
JAZZ CLASS GROUPON



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really did it this time. I blame Groupon.

In my infinite wisdom, I decided to take a jazz class last night. Jazz class is a happy part of my childhood, and I guess I signed up on a day when I was feeling rather good about myself, in that "I can fit into my skinny jeans so I can conquer the world" kind of way. I'd been dieting like a mad woman for this ridiculous high school reunion. I tried on the sequined outfit I wore to the last reunion…and it fit! I mean, it really fit. Not just in that way where you have to hold your breath.

But just because the jeans fit doesn't necessarily mean we should move on to the Lycra and the leg warmers that have been under the bed for ten years. But no one told me this, so I suited up and went to the dance studio. The sign should have been my first clue that this wasn't going to be exactly what I expected. The studio was called Celestial Expressions, and the girl on the billboard looked more like a Gumby rubber toy than a dancer.

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Just because the jeans fit doesn't necessarily mean we should move on to the Lycra and the leg warmers that have been under the bed for ten years.

Here's how it went:

> **Tammy, the Perky Desk Clerk:** Hello, can I help you? (So, obviously she thought I was a Mary Kay salesperson and in no way was I there to take a jazz class.)
>
> **Me:** I'm here for the class.
>
> **Tammy:** What class?
>
> **Me:** The jazz class at 7:00 p.m.
>
> **Tammy (with a look of terror on her face as she tried to hide her horror at my parachute pants):** "Ohhhhh, I'm sorry. Studio A. Right down the hall. Tiffany Amber Jasmine will be with you in five minutes as soon as she's done with her charcoal ice cream."

Since the teacher's name was Tiffany Amber Jasmine, I could assume she'd just graduated from twelfth grade, at best. If the teacher was named Madame Olga, Dawn, or Jennifer, then there was a fighting chance she would be close to my age. But not Tiffany. Tiffanies are cute and perky. They wear bouncing ponytails, chew pink bubble gum, eat pasta for dinner, and never gain an ounce.

I walked into the studio, and there were *literally* three girls there. When I say girls, I mean girls…as in high school. They were in a huddle discussing the trauma of their school's new policy on uniforms, and they were very worried about how tenth grade was going to be much

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more demanding than ninth. The tall girl in the middle looked my way with an expression that seemed to say, "Haven't I babysat for one of your kids?"

They continued their conversation without including me, so I sat down on the floor and searched for my phone so I could look popular. Thankfully I hadn't yet deleted Facebook from my phone (yes, I eventually did that, but more on that later), and I immediately went to my safe place, since I'm very well-liked on Facebook. That is why I carry my phone with me everywhere, in case of moments like these.

I heard one of them say to the others, "I know, it's, like, um, so on point 'cause I, like, um, get to do the thing, like, every day." The other girls who spoke her language nodded in total agreement, understanding every word she said.

After nine unbearably long minutes, Tiffany ("I'm so beautiful and skinny and I eat cupcakes for breakfast with my organic kale açai smoothie and weigh 104") walked in. She was clearly old. And by old, I mean 20. She said, "Okay, guys, welcome to jazz basic. I'm Tiff, and we're going to do a lot of floor work and turns and leaps tonight. Let's start our warm-up with an oldie but goodie."

I was thinking she'd play Michael Jackson, or maybe my man Prince. But then she turned on a Beyoncé song. (So apparently Beyoncé is really old now. If you come out with a hit song and then you have a baby, you are put out into pop culture oblivion. Unless your name is Madonna.)

The music was playing and all four of us jazz divas were doing the warm-up. Except that my muscles hadn't done any warm-ups like those in literally ten years. I used to dance. I used to be somebody! I used to be a contender! When I took classes back in the day, I'd see these moms sneaking into my classes, all with their Fosse jazz hands, trying to keep up. Back then, in NYC at Steps Studio, I'd say to myself, "May I never be like one of those old ladies in their (gasp!) thirties." Then I'd laugh with my six-pack abs flexing in my dish towel of a top!

My mom was a Jazzercise diva in her day, and I remember judging her too. "May I never be like my mother, Barbara, who dragged me

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to her Jazzercise classes where I sat on the floor eating Cheerios and watching middle-aged women run in place singing 'Maniac' on the dance floor." And in case that's not enough of a mental picture, it gets worse. You should have seen them wagging their hips and marching in place, singing, "I Will Survive!" by Donna Summer. These images are burned into the memories of my childhood.

So there I was, now the mom doing my best to look cool. As I looked at these tenth graders wearing the same rainbow leg warmers I had in high school, it hit me that the new dancewear styles are throwbacks to the '80s and '90s, so I actually did fit right in, at least in the wardrobe department. (So here's a tip for you: never throw anything away; just put it under the bed for at least ten years. It will come back in style.)

The warm-up was difficult. It's hard to explain, but let me try to give you a visual. Tiffany was lifting one leg up high by her ear while standing. I imagined she was a Twister national champion. She then asked us to show her our center splits. Center splits? That is not natural. My legs hadn't been in that position since the last time I gave birth. And as the mother of two daughters, I knew that if I attempted this position, I just might pee on myself. Still, I couldn't be shown up by the young'uns. So I spread my legs as far as they would go…and then I got stuck. I was not in the splits, but I was not standing up either. I was exactly smack-dab in the middle, forming some kind of crooked V with my legs, and I couldn't move. I couldn't get up or roll over. My hamstrings were cramping with the worst charley horse pain you can imagine.

I didn't want anyone to know. The other girls were fully and comfortably stretched into their split positions. (I'd like to see them go through the births of two kids and give it a try then.) I used my arms to try to push my legs harder and wider apart, and that's when I audibly heard the tendons in my thighs ripping to shreds. I realized at this point that I was not going any farther down. So I used my arms to grab on to each thigh and pull myself up to safety, all while waving my jazz hands and sparkle fingers.

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I used my arms to grab on to each thigh and pull myself up to safety, all while waving my jazz hands and sparkle fingers.

Tiffany was very clued into my difficulty and tried not to draw any attention to me, for which I was grateful. The question on her face seemed to ask, "Do we need an ambulance?" But she just nodded at me and said, "Um…do as much as you can!"

Do as much as you can? *Do as much as you can?* Do you know what that means? It means, "Don't overdo it, old lady, because when you fall and break a hip, I don't want to get sued. And I don't know why you're even here in the first place. You should probably go to Jazzercise."

I just smiled and kept my hips moving from side to side, like I was working on a new move.

I wasn't about to be outdone by the Teen Squad. It was time for leaps and turns across the floor. Here was my chance. I used to rock this! I knew I had it in me, and the first round wasn't half bad. I did some leaping and turning, and I didn't even fall down. Did I experience extreme vertigo? Yes, of course. Did the room seem to spin in 14 directions, causing me to feel like I had just ridden Space Mountain at Disneyland? Yes, absolutely. Did I have to focus with great intensity just to walk in a straight line back to my spot? Yes, but I did it! Mission accomplished! No falling! And no blood!

Unfortunately, for the next go across the floor, I was feeling overly confident. Have you ever heard of Mikhail Baryshnikov? I think, in that moment, I thought I was him. I thought I'd add a little split into my leaps, so I geared up like an Olympic athlete. With jazz fingers spread and eyes focused, I did a few runs. I thrust my legs into the air and attempted a scissors-type motion before landing. *Attempted* is the

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key word in this sentence. I know I should give myself an A for effort, but I also know my legs hadn't tried to do anything like this maneuver, um, ever. And so, instead of scissor-kicking, my muscles rebelled. They decided to set their own personal boundary. I stopped mid-air and landed on the ground with a loud *thud*.

Luckily, Lady Gaga was loud enough on the boom box to drown out the sound of my elephant landing. I just smiled and sashayed back to my place. With each additional run across the floor, I gave it my all. I was a maniac on that dance floor for sure! *Flashdance* had nothing on me.

I looked at the clock, and it was time for class to be over. Our lovely, energetic teacher said, "You guys are so awesome. Let's go another 15 minutes, okay?" Well, of course I had to stay and torture myself. She put us through some more combinations and across-the-floor moves. I did every single one without bleeding. It was like an out-of-body experience. My mind was saying, "Yes, you can do this!" and my body was saying, "Please don't make me do this!"

When class was over I collected my things and what was left of my dignity, and I hobbled to the car. As I walked into the house that night, I said to my family, "Kids, tonight Mommy was a rock star dancer!"

And then I fell onto the couch and said, "Can somebody get me the Bengay?"

Okay, I'm not sure I have found some deep spiritual lesson in the whole dance class experience, but it definitely showed me how big God's sense of humor is. I could hear Him laughing at me from heaven! He gave me my love of dancing when I was three years old, so He must have a perfect place for me to express it. Maybe the perfect place is in the privacy of my own home, doing dance parties in my living room with my girls.

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I wonder if they had dance parties in Bible times. I mean, from what I hear, King David was a dancing maniac too. Did you hear about the time his wife bawled him out after he was literally "Dancin' in the Streets"? Can you blame her? I heard he was naked!

I also wonder if the Proverbs 31 Woman worked out. Maybe she didn't have to, since her whole life was physical labor. I think she had to walk six miles each way, just to get water. Anyway, all the clothes in the Bible sound pretty baggy, so maybe it didn't matter to her if she was fat or thin. Funny, God never talks much about fitness in the Bible. He just says that our body is a temple. And, as one of my comedian friends used to deadpan, "I'm building a megachurch!"

But I only get one go-around in this life, and as long as God gives me a healthy body, I'm gonna work it. It's good to challenge ourselves and do things that scare us. We get busy with life, jobs, relationships, and kids, but there's no time like the present to do the things we've been meaning to do. I had been meaning to go to a class like that for a long time and I finally did it. I'm glad I tried.

It's good to challenge ourselves and do things that scare us.

Maybe I'll take another dance class in the future, since I found one called "Dance It Out—for Baby Boomers." It sounds like it's just my speed and style. There is only one problem…it's at the Senior Citizen Center, and I'll have to get a fake ID that says I'm 55 to get in. Now, you probably think I'm joking about that. But they literally told me I couldn't come to the boomers' class because I'm not old enough. So I'm too old for hip-hop jazz, and now I'm too young for boomers. Once again I feel like a square peg in a round hole. I suppose you could say that's been the theme of my life—never fitting in.

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I used to make fun of comedians who did age jokes. I promised myself I'd never become one of those "old ladies" longing for yesteryear. But here I am…Pot…Kettle...Black. And maybe it's a question I need to ask myself. Am I okay with the age I am and the body I have? Okay, probably every woman reading this just shouted, "Noooooooo!"

I get you. I'm with you. I live in LA where no one ages. They just get Botox—and fillers and liposuction and face lifts. I mean, seriously, even Betty White's forehead is smooth. So it's strange that I never thought about aging until this recent experience. Most of the time I don't feel like I'm a day over 25 (although at this precise moment my body feels like I could check myself into an assisted living facility and they'd take me, no questions asked). I still sometimes feel as though I should be able to do everything I could do when I was 20, with the same amount of ease. After all, we see celebrities every single day who are fighting a battle against Father Time quite splendidly—and winning! And they also promise us that we can look exactly like them if we buy their skincare products and workout equipment. We also forget they are mostly airbrushed in the photographs of them doing their "yogalates" and "cardio barre." The only exceptions are Cindy Crawford, Sophia Loren, and of course Robert Downey Jr. But they are immortal.

The question I have for myself and for you is: How can I find balance between being okay with who I am right now and still wanting to take on new challenges? I mean, it doesn't sound as if the women in the Bible worried about aging. They mostly lived to be over 100, and some of them were even bearing children in those years. (When my daughter asked me for a little brother years ago, I told her I was too old. She replied, "No way, Mom! Sarah was 80 when she had her first kid!" All that Bible school backfires on me every so often.)

I want to learn from the women in the Bible, but I also realize we are living in a totally different society. They were worried about literal survival in the face of famines and boils and plagues. They were happy to live to see another birthday. I'm worried about getting thinner thighs and trying to do a center split to impress girls I could have given birth to.

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And speaking of the girls I actually did give birth to, my two daughters seem to like me just fine the way I am. They crawl in bed with me, and they tell me I'm the most cuddly mama in the world. I don't think I would be so cuddly if I were as thin as the models in magazines. They just look angry and hungry.

Whose approval am I really searching for? Mine? God's? My family's and friends'? All of the above, I suppose. I need to pare that list down to the basics. God gave me this body that, by His grace, gets up and walks and talks and drives and dances and functions, for the most part quite nicely. He also gave me the desire to bust a move every once in a while.

So I think I'm going to continue the tradition in my house that we like to call "Holy Spirit Dance Party." We put on some Kirk Franklin praise music and jam out in my living room. It burns calories and teaches my kids that Christian music can be cool and funky too. (Oh, snap! Did I just actually write the word *funky*? As in Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch? Yes, it's official—I am 105. But I look gooood for that age, girl!)

Hey, that reminds me of what my mother always told me: "The older we say we are, the better we look for our age!"

So what about you? Got any secret desire to try something crazy and fun? (Did I inspire or scare you? Maybe both?) Have you ever wanted to do something crazy but were too afraid of what others would think?

No matter how you feel, I hope you will think of me the next time you get out there and "Jam on It"!

And now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go ice my thighs.

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