



lifeline

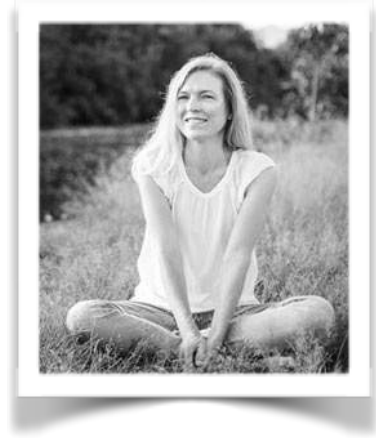
A PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO GETTING OUT OF
OVERWHELM & ANXIETY

BY ANGIE GIBBONS

INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Angie. I'm a wife and mother to three, and I used to live completely overwhelmed. This burden was my closest companion. And it was killing me, slowly - my peace of mind, my joy, my ability to be present with my children.

I justified it because I didn't want to think anything was wrong with me. *I have three kids. My husband travels. My job requires late hours.* There was always a reason to avoid the truth - that the overwhelm was really coming from inside of me, not from out there.



I read books and prayed and poured everything into getting out of this cycle and into a healthier emotional state. Over time, I learned that these overwhelming feelings couldn't be managed or squeezed out like a tube of toothpaste. I needed to uproot the causes of them and fill that space with things that were good and truthful.

If this sounds a little too woo-woo for you, hang on. It's going to get really practical.

Overwhelm doesn't have to be part of our lives.

We can easily take on more than we should. And sometimes life just deals us a very difficult hand for a time. But what I want to focus on is how we are coping *in this moment* - those gnawing feelings that everything is going wrong, the morning dread at approaching another hard day, and the stress of the hectic pace we are keeping.

Even when we can't change our circumstances in the slightest, we can change our reactions to them and live out of a place of peace.

Why is this change important?

Overwhelm does not tend to dissipate on its own. And it can grow into full-blown anxiety, severe fatigue, physical ailments. I don't say this to be dramatic but to propose that working on your sense of overwhelm is worthy of your precious time.

We all get overwhelmed sometimes. But we can be free of it.

This is a practical guide - a step-by-step process I created for myself over the years - from a variety of resources spiritual and secular. It has helped me uncover and process overwhelming and anxious thoughts, even through the sudden loss of my dad. Pair it with whatever you want - prayer, meditation, long walks, ugly crying. It's not a magic bullet but a way to get out of that stuck place. And I hope it does become part of your lifestyle.

What it requires is this - the courage to face what's really going on, and the willingness to take time to make it better. This doesn't replace bona fide therapy, so please see a medical professional if indicated.

Ready to get started?

Please send me an email (hello@angiegibbons.com) and let me know how it goes. I hope this helps you tremendously, step by step.

Angie

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SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Find a comfortable and quiet place where you can think.

Print and use the included worksheets.

The worksheets start on page 11 and will help you process through this guide. You may also want to journal, talk through it with a friend, or combine with relaxation techniques. Find what works for you. There is no right or wrong approach or length of time to go through it.

Take ownership, without guilt.

We are going to take responsibility for our overwhelm and anxiety because that brings us freedom. However, we won't give in to thoughts of guilt and condemnation. Instead we will choose grace for ourselves, present and past.

Complete every step in order, but only work on one source of overwhelm at a time.

Allow at least 30 minutes to go through the steps thoughtfully. You may be able to shorten the process in the future as you get comfortable with it. But choose one area of overwhelm to focus on each time you go through it.

Take breaks as needed.

If you start feeling even more overwhelmed or anxious, please take a break and then return to the process. You are doing something worthwhile and brave!

THE LIFELINE

STEP 1 *What am I feeling?*

What is the underlying feeling(s) robbing me of joy and causing overwhelming feelings? Name it specifically. This robs it of power over you. You know what it is. It's not hidden under the surface anymore. This might be difficult if you aren't used to thinking about your feelings and what you're experiencing in your body. That's ok. Practice, see which of the below examples comes closest, or maybe it's a combination of several.

Some feelings that might come up are fear, bitterness, anxiety, shame, sorrow, self-pity, depression, jealousy, despair, unforgiveness, judgment, self-rejection, hatred, or hurt.



Write it/them out in first person. I am feeling....

You can also write out how it is manifesting in your life right now - tension, heart palpitations, insomnia, etc.

STEP 2 *Why am I feeling this way?*

What are these feelings really coming from? We often lose touch with what happened to trigger the emotional and physical response in the first place. It might have happened yesterday or the week before but now it's dictating our actions today. We have to go back and see if we can make a connection. What am I actually angry or sad about? What am I afraid will happen?

For example, “I am angry because of my friend’s lack of empathy for my problem. I wish she would offer help.” or “I am anxious about my boss’s disparaging remarks and hate that his words can send me spiraling.” It could be as simple as “I feel overwhelmed because I have more tasks to accomplish today than I feel I can manage.”



Write it out in first person. Be careful not to shift responsibility to someone else. While someone else may be creating difficulty or pain in your life, it’s important to make it an “I” statement. Because you are the only person that you can change or control.

STEP 3 *Is this problem legitimate, not legitimate, or exaggerated?*

This can be painful to consider, but it helps us get to the root of the issue. Sometimes I am overwhelmed because of something I’m imagining has happened or worrying will happen in the future. Consider the legitimacy of your concerns. There is no shame in exaggerating your current challenges, but it’s helpful to know so that you can put things back into proper perspective.

For example, if I had an argument with my spouse, I may be imagining he disapproves of me and I’m feeling anxious and hurt about it. But I haven’t asked and don’t know that for sure. Or maybe I am aware of changes happening at my company and I realize I am dwelling on the possibility of losing my job in the future, which is causing me anxiety.

If you find that you are worrying over things that haven't yet happened, speculating about others' feelings, or inflating current problems into bigger issues, you're in good company. Our minds are squirrely this way, but thankfully we are the masters over them. See Step 6.

If this problem is legitimate, what can I do about it myself?

What can I control? Is it something I can take off my plate if needed? Is it something I can adjust? Is it something I can manage? If so, what is one small thing I can do today or this week to make a measurable difference in the way I'm interacting with this situation?



Write out the practical things you can do about this problem yourself. If there is one healthy step you can take today or this week, write it in your calendar or your to-do list.

STEP 4 *What can I not do about this problem?*

Part of owning our sense of overwhelm is recognizing what we cannot control, what is outside our purview. List the things that feel like temptations for you to act on or focus on, but either will make the problem worse or not solve anything. We are going to mentally rid ourselves of these burdens.

For example, if my adult daughter is struggling with addiction and this causes me great stress, I can make myself available to her, provide practical support as needed or wanted, but I cannot control her with my words or actions. I cannot solve her physical, emotional, or financial issues. That is not mine to carry. So it's alright for me to feel pain and grief over her struggles but I have to separate that out from my own responsibilities.



Write out the things you cannot do about this problem. Take a moment to mentally take these off your plate. You are not responsible for them and don't need to waste energy on them. Say it out loud if that helps.

STEP 5 *What are the truths and untruths about my situation?*

Overwhelming thoughts tell us that everything is bad right now. It puts us into panic mode. It takes over our senses so we can't think straight. In my experience, trying to will it away isn't helpful. What is helpful is uncovering what is true and what isn't, and then replacing every untrue thing with its counterpart. Overwhelm largely happens in our mind, so we must give our minds something else to feast on. This is true whether or not our problem is legitimately terrible or somewhat contrived, whether we can change it or not.

And once our mind is lined up with what is true about our situation, our feelings usually follow. It might take time. But when we take the fuel away from the untruths, they tend to suffocate and die eventually.

For example, when my dad passed there was a tremendous amount of grief, as expected. But I also wrestled with negative thoughts that were untrue. They started as little seeds that piled onto the problem - "You are going to be so lonely now. You don't have anyone to turn to anymore. You will never get over this."

I had to replace each of these lies in my mind with truthful things. I wasn't stuffing my legitimate feelings of pain and grief, but I was denying space to the thoughts and feelings that weren't actually true, that were trying to sink me altogether when I was vulnerable.



Ask yourself - What is the truth about this situation? What are the untruthful things I am believing about it? Write them all down.

STEP 6 *How can I encourage peace to take root?*

This is where the self-care comes in. I am a big proponent of self-care but not as a replacement to Steps 1-5. When we circumvent what's really happening in our inner lives, we can't expect to maintain peace for more than a minute. There's too much under the surface begging for attention.

This part is personal; it is specific to you. It takes practice and finding what works for you. First, consider this - What has worked for me in the past? What activities have helped me reset my mind and encouraged peace?

For example: Going on a long walk, taking a bath, reading scriptures or meditations, journaling my thoughts, talking to a close friend, running, gardening.



Write them all down. Then, immediately pull out your calendar or your to-do list and figure out when you will do 2-3 of these activities this week.

When you do these activities, make good use of the time. If worry and overwhelm tries to creep into the silence of your long walk, tell it to get out of there. Don't worry if people think you're crazy for talking to yourself, I do it all the time. Focus on the positive things, the truths that are replacing those untruths about your life. Choose gratitude for all of the good, even if it seems very small right now.

STEP 7 *Two minutes of rest.*

Spend 2 minutes in quiet prayer or meditation. Set a timer. As best as possible clear your mind, breathe deeply, sit still and quietly. If you're a spiritual person you might pray the serenity prayer (included). If you prefer to meditate, you can meditate on the positive change you will be making. Focus on the truths about you and your situation.



Write this prayer or meditation down and revisit it as needed throughout the day.

LAST NOTE

Fighting overwhelming and anxious thoughts is like peeling layers of an onion. You're likely to cry. No, that's not what I mean. I mean, it's going to take time and practice. Give yourself *much* grace. You are undoing a pattern that's likely been lifelong. Over time, you will start approaching life and its challenges differently, more freely. You will make this guide your own and go through it automatically. Instead of being ruled by hidden thoughts and desires and fears, you will uncover them and be free of their control.

I have included a bookmark version you can put in a prominent place to help you process through this more conveniently.

If you have questions or feedback I would love to hear from you at hello@angiegibbons.com.

THE LIFELINE WORKSHEETS

1 *What am I feeling?*

What is the underlying feeling(s) robbing me of joy and causing overwhelm?

2 *Why am I feeling this way?*

What incident or thoughts triggered me? What am I afraid will happen?

3 *Is this problem legitimate, not legitimate, or exaggerated?*

If this problem is legitimate, what can I do about it myself?

4 *What can I not do about this problem?*

What can I not control because it's outside of my responsibility?

5 *What is the truth about this situation?*

What are the untruthful thoughts I am believing about it?

6 *What practical things can I do to encourage peace to take root in place of overwhelm?*

7 *Spend 2 minutes in quiet prayer or meditation.*

Write down your prayers and truthful thoughts and revisit them as needed throughout the day.

PRAYER FOR SERENITY

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking, as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.

- Reinhold Niebuhr

SCRIPTURES FOR CALM & COURAGE

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

~ *Philippians 4: 8*

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

~ *Psalms 139: 23-24*

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

~ *Matthew 6: 25-27*

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

~ *1 John 4: 18*

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

~ *Psalms 23: 4*

“For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”

~ *Isaiah 41: 13*

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

~ *Matthew 11: 28-30*

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

~ *2 Corinthians 10: 5*

LIFELINE BOOKMARKS

lifeline

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO GETTING
OUT OF OVERWHELM & ANXIETY

- 1 What feelings are stealing my joy?
- 2 Why am I feeling this way?
- 3 Is this problem legitimate? If so, what can I do about it?
- 4 What can I *not* do about it?
- 5 What is the truth about this situation?
- 6 What practical things can I do to encourage peace?
- 7 Spend two minutes in prayer or meditation.

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RESOURCES

Stress Symptoms: Effects on your body and behavior, Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987>

The Work, Byron Katie

I have borrowed from Byron Katie's work, which helped me think differently about anxiety years ago. I cannot recommend all of her teachings, but want to give credit where credit is due.

<https://thework.com>

More Scriptures for the Journey, The Humbled Homemaker

<https://thehumbledhomemaker.com/25-scriptures-for-when-youre-overwhelmed/>

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality; Peter Scazzero

This is a wonderful faith-based book on growing in emotional health.

<https://amzn.to/2VsbTBg> (affiliate link)

About Angie - <https://www.angiegibbons.com/about/>

Disclaimer: I am not a mental healthcare practitioner. This guide was created from my own experiences and resources I've found helpful. If you think you may have clinical depression or anxiety, or are struggling with suicidal thoughts, please seek help from a medical professional.

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Date _____

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Date _____
