

RISE AND SHINE

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SHINE

LIZ CURTIS HIGGS

AN ENCOURAGER®



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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RISE AND SHINE
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS
2375 Telstar Drive, Suite 160
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80920
A division of Random House, Inc.

Material previously published in *"While Shepherds Washed Their Flocks" and Other Funny Things Kids Say and Do* (1998), *Help! I'm Laughing and I Can't Get Up* (1998), *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Have I Got News for You!* (1997), *Forty Reasons Why Life Is More Fun After the Big 40* (1997), *Reflecting His Image* (1996), *Only Angels Can Wing It, the Rest of Us Have to Practice* (1995), *"One Size Fits All" and Other Fables* (1993), *Does Dinner in a Bucket Count?* (1993). Portions previously appeared in *Today's Christian Woman*, a publication of CTI, Inc.

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ISBN 1-4000-7000-7

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Rise and Shine was originally published by Thomas Nelson in 2002.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Higgs, Liz Curtis.

Rise and shine / Liz Curtis Higgs.—1st WaterBrook Press ed.

p. cm.

Originally published: Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, c2002.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 1-4000-7000-7

1. Devotional literature, English. I. Title.

BV4832.3.H54 2004

242—dc22

2004013743

Printed in the United States of America

2004—First WaterBrook Press Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

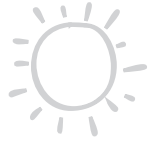
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RISE AND SHINE, SISTER MINE

Arise, shine;

For your light has come!

And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.

—ISAIAH 60:1

When you **rise** from your bed, rubbing the sleep out of your eyes and the tangles out of your disheveled hair, how many minutes does it take before you can truly **shine**?

Oh, dear. That long.

Might I have just two of those precious minutes each morning?

Two minutes to whisper a gentle word of encouragement, to brush a feather across your funny bone, to prove how beautiful and valuable you are to God.

Say yes, sis.

The most important part will be our first few seconds together, as you drink in the living water of God's Word. My own simple words will follow, closing with a prayer from my heart to yours. Only two or three pages, then you can put *Rise and Shine* aside and reach for your morning coffee.

Like the varied images on the cover of this book, the tone and subject of each day's message will be quite different—some are playful, some inspiring, others more serious. Promise me you'll only read one chapter a day, or you might suffer from spiritual whiplash!

You'll find occasional references to surveys or quotes from, say, "Nancy from New York." For years I gathered information and stories from readers, and so they're quoted here. Just think of them as friends you haven't met yet.

If you've already read several of my early nonfiction titles, from *Does Dinner in a Bucket Count?* to *"While Shepherds Washed Their Flocks" and Other Funny Things Kids Say and Do*, or some of my articles in *Today's Christian Woman*, then—bless your generous, supportive heart!—this may not be all-new material for you. But if you and I have met only recently across the printed page, then *Rise and Shine* will be the perfect way for us to catch up with one another.

Perhaps you are doing more than rising from the comfort of your bed. You may be rising from the depths of a disastrous lifestyle or a painful relationship, determined to start fresh. Arise, beloved sister. Strong hands await to hold you steady.

Perhaps you fear you've lost your shine. The glow of good health, the sparkle of young love, the shimmer of a new mother's tears—all have faded into a gray sort of daily grind. Fear not. Turn with me toward the radiant One and let his light be reflected in your countenance like the dawn of a summer day.

Two minutes. No calories, no squat thrusts, I promise.

Rise, sister mine. And shine.

Lord, what an honor it will be to start the day with you.

*Give me the strength to lift my head,
the courage to lift my heart,
the joy to lift my spirits,
and the confidence to lift my eyes and see you
rising and shining in me.*



MIRROR IMAGE

He has made everything beautiful in its time.

—ECCLESIASTES 3:11

Looked in the mirror yet this morning, babe? And did you like what you saw?

Most of us see double chins, tiny wrinkles, ugly blemishes, spreading crow's-feet, dark circles under our eyes—the list goes on and on.

Truth is, we seldom look in a mirror unless we're looking for a problem.

"Does my hair look okay?"

"Do I need more lipstick?"

"Is my slip showing?"

And the classic: "Does this dress make me look fat?"

What if this morning you saw a woman who is uniquely created by God in his image? A woman who isn't "better than" or "worse than" or in need of an overhaul. And one who is definitely happy! Because trust me, that's what I see.

When I look at you, dear one, sitting out there in the third row at one of my presentations, when I see your upturned face, full of life, ready to laugh, I do not see wrinkles, blemishes, or double

chins. I do not see figure flaws or flabby thighs. I see a beautiful woman. One who is radiantly alive, willing to learn, ready to grow, expectant, joy-filled, eager to embrace all that life has to offer.

You are something else!

That's not me, you may say. I'm not in your third row. I'm here at home, and I'm miserable, and I hate my lumpy body, and radiant is not what I feel.

Understood.

What I'm talking about transcends feelings and moves into the realm of faith in order to become fact. That radiant, alive woman is in you, even if you can't see her yet. She was hiding in me for decades before I realized it, and she is in you now. And she wants out!

The Lord created and defined beauty in our world. Surely he didn't make lovely butterflies, exquisite flowers, and gorgeous sunsets and leave out womankind, the crown of his creation? Not likely!

When we stop listening to what Madison Avenue and Hollywood tell us is beautiful and start listening to our hearts and God's Word, they will not steer us wrong. Even though we may never look like ultrathin models or movie stars, those famous women (poor things) will never get to look like *us*!

By God's design, women come in all shapes and sizes—large and small, short and tall. In every home, in every workplace, in every social setting, in every church, there are as many different sizes, shapes, colors, and characteristics as there are women.

Luci Swindoll says, "When you love yourself and accept yourself for who you are, you have nothing left to prove."¹ So right. Each one of us is different, beloved. And those differences are good.

*Lord Jesus, help me see myself as you do:
beautifully made according to your divine design.
Forgive me for comparing myself to others and wishing I were different.
Starting today, let me not only accept my own appearance
but also accept others exactly as they are,
knowing that they, too, were created in your image.*



GOOD GROOM-ING

*And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you.*

—ISAIAH 62:5B

Flying home from Atlanta one Saturday evening, I sat next to a young woman who was impeccably groomed in every way, except for the streaks on her cheeks where tears had washed away some of her rosy-red blush.

My heart went out to her, but my head said, *None of your business, Liz. Don't interfere.*

As usual, I ignored my head and went with my heart. "What brings you to Louisville?" I asked softly.

She turned my direction, and a fresh flow of tears began. "I don't know!"

Inside, a still, small voice got my attention: *Hush, Liz! Let her talk.* I pressed my lips together (for me, that's almost an aerobic exercise), assumed my most compassionate expression, and simply nodded.

"I'm g-g-getting married," she stammered, daintily blowing her perfectly powdered nose.

"How wonderful!" I exclaimed, my vow of silence forgotten.

"I'm not so sure." Her voice was high and strained. "My entire family and all my friends live in Florida, plus I have a great job there. I'm leaving my whole life behind." Another trickle of tears slipped out of the corner of her eye.

"I moved to Louisville from far away too," I explained, trying to comfort her. "It's a great place to live."

"I guess so," she murmured, sounding unconvinced.

Despite my efforts, I was not helping one bit. Until the perfect question suddenly presented itself. "Do you love him?"

Her expression changed instantly. "Oh, yes!" She blushed at her own enthusiasm, then stumbled over a rush of words. "He's very kind and considerate, really intelligent, and handsome too." As she brushed away the last of her tears, she told me about her beloved husband-to-be—how much fun they had together, how impressed her family was with him, and, yes, how much she loved him.

I nodded and listened, knowing no further questions would be needed.

When we landed and headed into the gate area, I picked him out of the crowd instantly. Even from a distance, he was obviously a fine young man. Tall and broad-shouldered, he was armed with a warm, welcoming grin and a dozen red roses that matched her red suit perfectly. When she ran into his embrace with a teary smile, I made myself look away (very difficult!) rather than invade their privacy. A few happy tears sneaked into my own eyes.

When you find the right One, it's easy to forsake all others and follow him.

*Lord, you are the best husband a woman could hope for.
Help me release my earthly cares and cleave to you,
knowing that your love is certain and your provision
is sufficient for all my needs.
No one loves me more than you do, Jesus.
And your love is enough.*



GUILT, GUILT, GO AWAY

*. . . casting all your care upon Him,
for He cares for you.*

—1 PETER 5:7

My audiences often ask me if I miss my children when I'm on the road speaking. Absolutely. (Although it *is* nice to look out on a room full of people who dressed themselves.)

For moms who travel, airport card shops now feature colorful greeting cards to mail to your kids back home. They have warm thoughts inside like, "Can't wait to hug you again" or "Mama misses you s-o-o-o-o much." What they really mean is, "Help! I'm on a guilt trip."

If you ask women what they want more of in their lives, they never shout out, "Sex!" or "Money!" Their response is always the same: "Time!" (I know, I know—if you had more time, you also might have more of the other two.) A working mother in Lansing wrote, "There just isn't enough of me to go around." Yeah, we get that.

No matter what our station in life, there is a guilt message formulated just for us. Single women hear: "Why don't you get out

more? You'll never meet someone sitting at home." Married women hear: "So when are you going to start a family?" Mothers at home hear: "What do you do all day?" Working mothers hear: "But who cares for your children while you work?"

Ayeeee!

Some of us have an internal "guilt table" to determine how badly we should feel:

<i>Falling asleep during the 6:00 P.M. news</i>	2
<i>Sending store-bought cookies to school</i>	5
<i>Forgetting to pick up child (first time)</i>	9
<i>Forgetting to pick up child (second time)</i>	342

If too many tasks and not enough time sounds like life at your house, the solution is as close as Sesame Street. Just practice saying those two little letters in the middle of the alphabet: *N* and *O*!

*Teach me to say NO, Lord.
NO to too many activities.
NO to too much time apart from my family.
And NO to self-imposed guilt.
I welcome the conviction of your
Holy Spirit, Lord.
I long for your wisdom
and discernment, always.
But when it comes to guilt . . .
NO, thanks.*

BEAUTIFUL TO BEHOLD



*For the LORD takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation.*

—*PSALM 149:4*

When women kindly ask me to sign their copies of my books, I sometimes write, “To Susan the Beautiful!”

“Oh, no!” Susan (or Kathy or Linda) will protest, turning red. “I’m not beautiful.”

“Sure you are,” I insist, as I add my signature. “It says so right in the Bible.” As further proof, I jot down “Psalm 149:4” and encourage them to look it up. You see, it’s God’s gift of salvation that makes us truly beautiful, inside and out. Nothing transforms a woman’s appearance more than being covered from head to toe in the grace of God’s Son.

I know this beautifying process is legitimate because I’ve seen it happen again and again. When women come to know the Lord in a real and personal way, their frown lines begin to soften. A sparkle appears in their eyes, and a radiance falls over their countenance.

We have proven scientifically that such physical changes occur when we fall in love: glowing skin, sparkling eyes, increased heart rate. And for some of us, similar improvements take place when

we're expecting a child. Conventional wisdom says that "all brides are beautiful" and "pregnant women glow." It's chemical, hormonal, and very real.

Why not at the spiritual level too? When you allow the Lord to fill your heart with his boundless love, it shows on the outside. This beauty has nothing to do with cosmetics or plastic surgery. On the contrary, it's an inside job: A heart full of love produces a face full of joy.

When I stepped into a church for the first time as an adult, I was amazed to see pew after pew of attractive women. *Is this a requirement of membership?* I wondered. *Maybe they're all Mary Kay consultants . . .*

Soon I learned the happy truth: Such beauty is a gift from God. Unlike lipstick and blush, which seldom last longer than a few hours, spiritual beauty is timeless. It literally pours out of your pores and alters your appearance in a most appealing way. People will think you've had a face-lift, when in fact you've had a *faith-lift!*

*Lord, as I sit at my makeup mirror this morning,
help me see the subtle yet significant ways you are turning me
into your kind of beautiful woman.*

Shine through my eyes, Jesus. Pour out my pores.

Let your joy lift my lips into a hundred-watt smile.



DOOR-TO-DOOR SERVICE

*The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
The God of my strength, in whom I will trust.*

—2 SAMUEL 22:2B–3A

Have you always trusted God, my friend?

Or did you, like me, come to know him a bit farther down life's road?

Despite my parents' best efforts to raise a wholesome, small-town girl, I veered off track in my teens and started hanging out with a faster crowd. First it was sneaking a cigarette out of Mom's purse. Then it was cutting school for an hour, then an afternoon, then a whole day. I smoked my first joint on our senior class trip. Most of the kids rode the bus to New York City—I "flew," high as a kite in March. A decade-long love affair with pot began, ironically, on the steps of the Statue of Liberty.

By my twentieth birthday, I was spending four and five nights a week on a barstool, Southern Comfort in my glass and longing in my eyes. I found companionship in many but comfort in none.

As a radio personality, I traveled from town to town, up and down the dial through my twenties, including a stint at a hard rock station in Detroit, where the shock jock Howard Stern did mornings and I did the afternoon show. As a one-sentence summary of how low my

values had plummeted, even Howard once shook his head and said, “Liz, you’ve got to clean up your act!” It wasn’t my on-air act that was in trouble; it was my risky off-air escapades that needed changing.

By the fall of 1981, I found myself in Louisville, Kentucky, playing oldies at an AM station and playing dangerous games with marijuana, speed, cocaine, alcohol, and a promiscuous lifestyle. I’m one of those people who had to fall all the way down to the bottom of the pit before I was forced to look up for help.

Leaning over my pit of despair and extending a hand of friendship was a husband-and-wife team who’d just arrived in town to do the morning show at my radio station. Little did I know that the Lord would use these dear people as my “overnight delivery service.”

Although they’d enjoyed much worldly success, what these two talked about most was Jesus Christ. Even more amazing, they seemed to like and accept me, “as is.” (Can you imagine what they must have thought when we met? “Now, *here’s* a project!”)

But they didn’t treat me like a project, a package that needed to be delivered from sin to salvation. They treated me like a friend who needed to know that being delivered was an option. Simply put, they loved me with a love so compelling that I was powerless to resist it.

I remember February 21, 1982, like it was yesterday. It was my seventh Sunday to visit my friends’ church, and by then I was singing in the choir. When we closed the service singing “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus,” I did just that. Walked right out of the choir loft and down to the baptistry.

The whole alto section gasped. “We thought she was one of us!”

Finally, I was.

God had delivered me from the gates of hell to the gates of heaven—absolutely, positively overnight.

Where would I be without you, Lord?

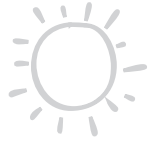
Thank you for waiting for me to look up.

For wooing me with your irresistible love.

For washing away my sins

and overwhelming me with your mercy and grace.

Help me never forget the price you paid for my delivery.



APPROACH THE THRONE

*He who is the blessed and only Potentate,
the King of kings and Lord of lords,
who alone has immortality,
dwelling in unapproachable light,
whom no man has seen or can see,
to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.*

—1 TIMOTHY 6:15–16

Take a second and read those two verses out loud.

Wow. Pretty obvious who's in charge, eh?

Of all the coffee mugs I've ever received, my favorite is a mug my husband gave me that features artwork by Mary Engelbreit and the words *The Queen of Everything*.

Is there some hidden message in this? I may be the Queen of Laughing Heart Farm, but 2.67 acres does not a kingdom make. (Or is that queendom?) In any case, I'm not in charge, and I know it.

The One who's King of everything is Jesus. He is the utmost authority in all the universe. No one is higher, period. No one. He is so powerful that he dwells in "unapproachable light"—light that would not only blind but also destroy mere mortals.

This is not Jesus the meek and mild, the gentle carpenter bent

over his woodworking bench. This is the King of kings, seated on the throne of Heaven, "and He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."²

You can go no higher than Jesus, the King of kings. He is Supreme. All the earth must obey his commands. He existed before creation, before the beginning of time, and he was in charge then, too.

In the business world, goal-minded sales professionals calling on a corporation are told to ask for the CEO. "Don't quit until you get to the top person," goes the standard advice.

When you call Jesus, not only have you reached the very top, he also answers his own phone! He will not put you on hold or transfer you into a voice-mail system. No one else's call matters more than yours. Though he is King, he is a loving sovereign, not a cruel tyrant. He always has time for you, his loyal subject.

Although you cannot see him with your eyes, you can see him with your heart. And although he has all the powers any despot could hope for, he reaches down to you as friend, brother, husband, savior, the lover of your soul.

So I'll drink from my Queen of Everything coffee mug this morning and laugh. Jesus is King, in charge of it all, and I know it very well.

*Lord, forgive me when I think for one minute that
I'm in control of anything. I'm not even in control of me.
Thank goodness you reign from the throne of my heart.
Have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way.*



JOY AT HAND

*In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

—*PSALM 16:11*

My wonderful Bill, first and only husband, is as sweet as honey and genuinely funny, as in ha-ha funny. Those who only see his quiet side never believe me, but it's true: Bill is much funnier than I am. His one-liners are a work of art; his spin on life is clever beyond measure. Blessed woman that I am, I get to bask in his good-natured humor every day of my life.

Considering how long I looked for my life partner, it's only fair that I found a true Prince Charming after such a l-o-n-g line of toads. (If you meet a toad sitting on a barstool, would that make it a *toadstool*?!)

When you and I were seventeen years young, men and marriage were a thrilling, frightening prospect in the distant future. We planned, we prepared, we made lists of all the qualities our mate-for-life was required to have before we'd even give him a second glance. At seventeen, the list was very long indeed. It filled a legal pad, which we happily covered with ink during study hall.

Everything mattered at seventeen.

When I reached twenty-one, still single, I crossed a few things

off my list. My dream man no longer needed long, curly eyelashes. I could skip that. He didn't have to drive a Camaro, either. A Nova would do. A Pinto, even.

At twenty-five, I went back to my list and ripped off the bottom half. Stick with the core stuff, I told myself.

By thirty I was working with a Post-it note.

By thirty-two I had one word left—*breathing*.

Bill breathes well. He also has everything I had on my list, except hair. Who cares about such trivialities? I love his slippery scalp and the humorous outlook on life that lives under it.

We've realized that one of the secrets to a happy marriage is remembering the source of our joy, which is not one another. The source of our joy is the Lord. Yes, we share tons of joyous moments, but we don't expect, let alone demand, endless joy-filled moments from each other. Lots of pressure there.

Instead, we turn, hand in hand, toward the same heavenly source, knowing that in the presence of our Savior there's enough joy and pleasure to last a lifetime.

*Father, if I made a list
of all the qualities I long to find in a partner
for this life and the next,
you would surpass my every want,
my every need, my every desire.
Bless you for providing my Bill, Father God.
But most of all,
bless you for providing your Son.*

LOVABLE YOU



*As the Father loved Me,
I also have loved you;
abide in My love.*

—JOHN 15:9

Sometimes when we're grumpy and utterly unlovable, it's because we desperately need to *know* we're loved and are unconsciously hoping someone will notice and fix things. Quick.

On a family vacation to New England one summer, Bill found a remarkable way to keep me in good spirits. When I got the least bit cranky or tired, he purred, "Have I told you I love you today?" Ninety-nine percent of the time I would sigh, smile, and say, "Thanks, I needed that." The other one percent, I'd stick out my tongue and say, "Yes, you've told me five times!"

It got so laughable that by the end of the week, if I even felt like getting out of sorts, I'd say, "I know, I know, you love me, you love me!"

When we boarded the plane for our trip home, Bill finally confessed his strategy to me. With some trepidation I asked, "So, how many times did you—"

"At last count, 135."

“Oh.” Some of us just can’t hear “I love you” enough.

In the same way, God reveals his love for us when we are feeling the least lovable. In my single years, I would sometimes ache with loneliness—genuine, physical pain—and cry out to the walls of my empty little house, “Nobody loves me, Lord; nobody loves me!”

He always responded immediately, not in words for my ears, but in words my heart heard very clearly: *I love you, Liz. I love you.*

Maybe the human love you’ve received from parents, partners, and/or children has never been enough, never filled you up inside, never seemed to satisfy completely. And no wonder. It’s flawed, it’s fickle, it’s fleeting. Yes, it’s also fine—but it’s not forever.

God’s love is forever love. It’s the kind you can abide in and not wonder if it will still be there when you wake up tomorrow. God’s love is as solid as the wooden cross that was set into the ground of Golgotha, as solid as the nails that were driven into the flesh of his hands, as solid as the rock that was rolled away from his tomb.

You are loved. Stick that in your heart and abide in it.

*Lord, to know that you love me,
even on those days when I am unable to love myself,
is comforting beyond description.*

*As you have loved me,
help me love others.*

Oh, and, Lord?

Have I told you I love you today?



PALM PILOT

Yet I will not forget you.

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands.

—ISAIAH 49:15B–16A

One evening a woman came up to me after a presentation and cordially extended her hand. As I greeted her, I couldn't help noticing that clearly written on the palm of her hand were the letters T-A-P-E.

What in the world was that all about? Maybe she was a warden, and it was a reminder to "treat all prisoners equally." Maybe she was taking flying lessons and needed to remember to check "time, altitude, pressure, energy." Wait!! She was a waitress, and that day's special desserts were "tapioca, apple pie, peach cobbler, and éclairs . . ."

My curious mind was on tilt as I debated. *Should I say something or not?* Finally, I couldn't stand it. "What do you mean by 'TAPE'?" I asked.

She looked at her hand, slapped her palm on her forehead, and moaned. "Before I left the house, I was supposed to start the VCR to tape a program for my kids!"

I never would have thought of that, and apparently, she didn't either. Our memories are not always what we want them to be, even when we write things down in the handiest places we can

think of. The good news is, God remembers to read his holy hands, and that's precisely where he has written your name.

It isn't cheating for him to write it there, as it was when I scribbled $X+Y=Z$ on my palm before a high school algebra test. The Lord writes your name there for *your* sake, not for his, so he can show you absolute proof: "See, I didn't forget you. Your name is right here on the palms of my hands." So personal, so visual, such an unforgettable image.

Those same palms were pierced with nails on Calvary, leaving scars to prove once again that he has not forgotten you. He said to the doubting apostle Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands. . . . Do not be unbelieving, but believing."³

Believe, beloved.

Read it in his hands. Read it in his Word.

He will never forget you, always forgive you, never forsake you.

*Lord, that you would be willing to write my name, not only
in the Book of Life but also on your own nail-
scarred hands . . . such knowledge is too much for me!*



RUNNING . . . AND RUNNING . . . AND RUNNING . . .

*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run,
but one receives the prize?*

Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

—1 CORINTHIANS 9:24

At a weekend conference, a Houston woman tucked a colorful child's block in my hand. "I know it must be hard to find time to exercise on the road. Maybe this will help."

I glanced down at the note attached to the little toy:

1. *Place block on floor.*
2. *Run around it two times.*
3. *Sit down and relax. After all, you just ran
around the block twice!*

Tee-hee. My kind of exercise, to be sure.

Some women really get into working out, like my friend Audrey

from New York, a fifty-plus fox. For years I suspected healthy eating and good genes, until she admitted to me, "I have a personal trainer over twice weekly. He's thirty-seven and *fine*." (Hey, why not have a workout room with a view?)

For the rest of us, though, we'd really like to find a trainer who would run around the block *for* us. Sign *him* up for all those aerobics classes. Make *her* sweat to the oldies. Oh, our spirits are willing, even eager, but our bodies are merely amused.

Lately I've noticed that mornings aren't so much "rise and shine" as they are "cries and whine." Dale admits, "I used to leap out of bed. Now I roll to the edge and push myself up to a sitting position. The next big challenge is to stand up and walk to the bathroom without all my bones creaking and snapping so loud that I wake up my husband!"

I do wish I'd started some kind of regular fitness routine sooner. I keep telling my children, "Start walking now! Make exercise a habit!"

"But, Mom!" they whine in unison. "Exercise isn't a habit for you!"
Guilty as charged.

I really am trying. Every single day, I tell myself, "Go for a walk! Go for a walk! Take a break for twenty minutes and do it!" Then when I do, I'm so worn out, I can't walk back. I start looking for neighbors to flag down and drive me home. Pitiful.

I'm grateful to be married to a man who understands. Bill strapped on his old running shoes one evening, reminding me, "Before we married, I used to jog five miles every night." (I fought the urge to remind him that was also the *last* time he'd gone

jogging.) Mere minutes later Bill came panting back through the doorway, bug-eyed and bleeding.

His story, told between deep gulps of air, was much more dramatic than the novel I was reading. He'd made it two blocks, tripped over a tree root sticking out of the sidewalk, flown through the air in middle-aged disgrace, and landed on his bum knee (all men have a bum knee, even if they never played contact sports). Dogs nearby started barking, porch lights were flicked on, and Bill hobbled home a bloody mess.

Bless him, the man really was in pain. I squirted some Bactine on his knee and sent him off to bed grumbling about cracks in the sidewalk and dim street lighting.

We're both grateful that when the Lord asked us to run toward the prize, it wasn't a blue ribbon or a gold medal he had in mind. Rather it was "an imperishable crown,"⁴ the ultimate prize of eternal life.

Lord Jesus, you know I'm a poor excuse for an athlete.

Yet I promise to run with all my heart toward you.

When I stumble, help me rise to run again.

When I skin my knees, clean me up and put me back on track.

Thank you for standing at the finish line, cheering me on.