

WHEN LIFE IS A GAME OF
WHACK-A-MOLE



Celine Sparks

Publishing Designs, Inc.
Huntsville, Alabama

Publishing Designs, Inc.
P.O. Box 3241
Huntsville, Alabama 35810

© 2026 Celine Sparks

Unless noted, scriptures are from ESV® Bible

“Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”

Other scripture quotations are from: New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from Publishing Designs, Inc., except for the inclusion of quotations in a review.

Cover illustration: Phyllis Alexander

Editor: Peggy Coulter

Book design: Crosslin Creative

Printed in the United States of America

Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sparks, Celine, 1965—

When Life Is a Game of Whack-A-Mole / Celine Sparks.

192 pp.

ISBN 978-1-945127-46-5

1. Attitude. 2. Biblical motivation. 3. Humor 4. Unexpected problems.

Thirteen chapters.

I. Title.

248.8

To Miriam, who outgrew the Tinker Bell
costume but is still pretty magical



“Be ready!”

—1 Peter 3:15 NKJV



Mattianne Sparks

CONTENTS

Accolades 7

Introduction 11

1

Take Time to Cry 13

2

Don't Miss the Humor 23

3

Realize Your Limitations 37

4

Look Around 55

5

Get Your Priorities Straight 67

6

Don't Underestimate God's
Shoulders and Ears 81

7

Get Out of the Driver’s Seat 97

8

Let Go of Stress and
Embrace Acceptance 109

9

Stay in God’s Word 121

10

Take Care of Yourself 137

11

Bury the Dead Moles 149

12

Don’t Give Toxic People
More Fuel 163

13

Lose the Checklist 181

ACCOLADES

Celine's humorous approach in *Whackology* guides us to handle all the "moles" that pop up, sometimes daily! She helps us put the moles in perspective, using humor, service, knowing your limits, and so much more. To quote Celine, "We need a keen Christ-motivated awareness of another person's hurt, which is at the heart of Christian service, to help us overcome our moles." We will have these obstacles in our lives, but Celine helps us to handle them with godly wisdom, and most of all, humor.

Debbie Dupuy—Florence, Alabama, Author of *It's a Red-Letter Day*, *The Shepherd's Daughter*, *Dust Girl*, and *Run to the Great I AM*

Celine Spark's *Whack-a-Mole* is a fun, encouraging, and relatable Christian book for women who sometimes feel overwhelmed by the constant challenges of life. With humor, honesty, and biblical encouragement, Celine reminds us that when one challenge pops up after another, we can rely on God's strength, grace, and faithfulness. She has also authored several other Christian books written to encourage and strengthen women in their faith, and this one is going to be another great one.

Trey & Lea Morgan—Lubbock, Texas, "Trey & Lea's Stronger Marriages"

Celine Sparks has a unique ability to toss a Mama's wise words, a Southern lady's humor, and God's own revelation together, stir and offer up a can't-put-it-down read you won't forget. If you are whacking the moles of life, this book will help you wield the hammer, and maybe find the strength and peace to put it down for a while. What an excellent book.

Traci Sproule—Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, Church of Christ at Palm Beach Lakes

So many statements in this special book truly resonate with my heart. "We all need a good long cry!" "Don't forget humor!" Love this book and *love* the author!

Rhonda Zorn Fernandez—Montgomery Alabama, Lads to Leaders / Leaderettes

This book reminded me that in a world filled with stress and anxiety, we can be intentional about finding peace in the middle of the chaos. Celine has an incredible gift for making you laugh out loud one minute and then pause and examine your heart the next. I found myself encouraged to slow down, trust God more deeply, and embrace the peace He offers even in the midst of life's most overwhelming moments.

Pam Lenz—Florence, Alabama, Transform Ladies Conference Associate

I don't normally watch romantic comedies or read women's books but my friend Celine Sparks has written a delightful little book that not only contains practical biblical principles for living but makes fun of hallmark movies and holiday movies . . . my kind of lady. The book uses the concept of the Whack-A-Mole game-- a frenetic exercise in frustration and simulated violence. My first thought is that she used Solomon's advice to catch the little foxes that spoil the grapes...the numerous little things that creep in or pop up in our lives that cause us distress, frustration, or misery. Celine uses very practical approaches to emotional intelligence, reframing, and expressing our emotions. In the excerpt I read she balanced crying, humor, dancing, and accepting our limits as strategies for keeping the moles at bay, having enough energy to whack, and enough wisdom to know what to whack. It's a wacky book but I highly recommend you take a whack at it.

Lonnie Jones—Huntsville, Alabama, Licensed Counselor, Host of "Keeping Up With Jones" Podcast

Life has a way of surprising us. Just when we think we've conquered one challenge, another pops up—unexpected, inconvenient, and demanding our attention. It's a little like a game of Whack-A-Mole. The targets keep appearing, and sometimes we wonder if we'll ever catch our breath. That's why this book feels so refreshing.

From the very first pages, Celine gives her readers something we desperately need: permission. Permission to laugh. Permission to cry. Permission to admit that life is sometimes messy, confusing, and downright exhausting. She doesn't pretend that faith eliminates heartache.

Instead, she reminds us that God meets us in the middle of it.

One of Celine's greatest gifts is her ability to tell a story. You'll find yourself smiling—sometimes even laughing out loud—as she shares moments that are delightfully honest and wonderfully relatable. Her humor doesn't diminish the hard things; it makes them easier to approach. Somehow, she manages to make us laugh while gently leading us toward healing.

Don't mistake this book's conversational style for shallow reading. Its pages are filled with profound biblical truth. Celine has a remarkable way of weaving Scripture into everyday life, showing that God's Word isn't reserved for Sunday mornings or Bible classes. It is living, active, and exactly what we need when life's unexpected "moles" keep popping up. Every chapter offers practical, biblical wisdom that points readers back to the One who gives hope, strength, and peace.

Perhaps what I appreciate most is that Celine writes as a fellow traveler. She doesn't lecture from the sidelines; she walks beside us. She understands disappointment, frustration, and grief, yet she continually points us toward God's faithfulness. Her honesty invites us to lower our defenses, and her faith encourages us to lift our eyes.

The truth is, every one of us will have moles to whack. Some will be small annoyances. Others will shake us to our core. None of us gets through life without facing unexpected trials. But if I had to choose someone to stand beside me with a hammer in hand, I'd choose Celine. Her steady faith, contagious humor, compassionate heart, and unwavering confidence in God's promises make her exactly the kind of companion we all need.

So settle into your favorite chair, open these pages, and prepare to laugh, reflect, perhaps shed a few tears, and most importantly, draw closer to the God who never leaves us to fight life's battles alone.

I have no doubt that when you finish this book, you'll be grateful Celine picked up the hammer—and even more grateful that she pointed you to the One whose strength never fails.

J.J. Davenport—Florence, Alabama, Dean of Arts, Mars Hill Bible School

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." I was alone on the ground on the see-saw and you came over and helped me out.



Lee Holder "Pie-daddy" and Miriam Sparks

INTRODUCTION

It's fun in the kid's pizza place which is a real misnomer. It should be called Expensive Tokens for Ridiculous Games, Inc. But they have to have the pizza gig so it looks like you're doing something sensible.

Yeah, it's fun to go up to that one game where the moles keep coming out of holes, and you whack them on the head with a hammer. It just feels good. The goal is to whack all of them, but as you know, the goal is pretty impossible to achieve. As soon as you think you've whacked the last mole standing, three more pop up to take his place.

Once you exit the pizza place, the game doesn't let up. We feel like we're running around with a hammer whacking all the moles that pop up—the ones with appointments and the surprise ones. (You didn't even see the hole, much less what was about to bound out of it.) The little moles can get to us. They're just little things—unexpected expenses, stomach bugs, company you forgot was coming. They're just little, but they can wear us down because we're still exerting the force of a hammer whack to tackle them.

And then the big ones, the ginormous ones, and the stop-dead-in-your-tracks ugly ones rear their fuzzy heads as if in slo-mo—marriage struggles, foreclosure, life-changing phone calls, and bad news bearers that resemble the informants of Job 1. We can feel defeated before we even get the arm strength to lift the mallet.

Truth be told, we're not good mole whackers, but we keep trying anyway as if time is running out on the arcade game, and we'll forfeit the prize if we don't keep whacking harder and faster. Well, time *is* running out. Psalm 90:12 says, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." That's why we need to lay down the hammer and choose what matters most.

And there *is* a prize (Phil. 3:14), but we don't attain it by running around in a chaotic frenzy (oh, there will be days). Rather, the Christian consistently presses on toward the crown that is already won (2 Tim. 4:8) through the mercy of God.

The moles will come, and we can spend all of life chasing them with a hammer, or we can choose trust, reliance, rest, and assurance. We don't know how we're going to get past next Friday, but we're going to hold tight to the hand of the one who's already there. We're going to "press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).

When life is a game of Whack-A-Mole, there is still a God in heaven. There is still a heaven as our ultimate goal and hope, and the Bible is still right there on the nightstand. Pick it up. It might have more to say than you think on this subject. You might find that God, our "very present help in time of trouble," told us how to deal with the pop-ups before the arcade people ever thought about them. You don't need a hammer attached to the lawn with a curly cord. You need a heart attached to your heavenly Father with an unbreakable bond.

"Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind" (Ps. 26:2).

Bring on the moles.



 **I** don't even know how I got him in the Hallmark store. But amidst looking at ornaments celebrating everything but baby's first spit-up, admiring figurines without faces, and smelling candles you wanted to eat, I spotted something new. "Oh look!" I said, "A Hallmark movie monopoly game."

"Oh great," my husband said, not nearly as enthused. "Roll a three, and cry."

He probably wasn't too far off the game strategy. It just may be why the movies with redundant themes, poor scripts, mediocre acting, but beautiful scenery are so popular. We women are whacking so many moles, and when we should be processing some of the hard things in our lives, we're doing a flyover (usually by the seat of our pants), which is easier at the time. So when we settle on the couch for a dose of the sweater-town snow scene, fall-in-love-with-the-wrong-good-looking-guy-before-marrying-the-prince channel, our tear ducts, which have been waiting for us to trigger them with soul searching, explode with a substitute catalyst that doesn't get nearly as personal.

It's okay to be sad. It may seem strange for me to start a book with those five words when the entirety of my last book was on being happy.

But there comes a time, when we are juggling so many pins, we are whacking so many moles, that God wants us to lay the hammer down, sit down, and have a good cry. Scripture doesn't put it in those exact words, but Ecclesiastes 3:4 tells us there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. Notice the weeping comes first.

We see it time and again with our spiritual ancestors. Job, Joshua, Elijah, Peter—the weeping came before the joy just like Psalm 30:5 tells us. I believe Job was juggling a lot of heavy pins; I believe Joshua had been whacking quite a few moles; Elijah had a famine, a contest, a marathon, and a collapse in a cave by the time he dropped into a period of depression, if not despondency; and Peter's night had been packed with a roller coaster of events, emotions, and inward struggles by the time he “wept bitterly.”

JOY AT THE END OF THE SADNESS TUNNEL

The moles come on strong, but we just can't whack them all. Sit down. Have a good cry. Release the pressure. What I'm about to say may seem counter to the goal, but embrace the sadness. It is the only tunnel to the joy.

The movie *Inside Out* (Pixar, 2015) is a pretty thorough treatise on the emotions that run through our minds and settle in our guts. The character *Joy*, while exuberant herself, doesn't really know what to do with her sidekick *Sadness*. *Joy* just wishes *Sadness* would get it together and not always be so—well, sad. From the memory bank, there comes a flood of flashbacks in the mind of the child where *Joy* and *Sadness* exist. These memories blend into the realization that the times when Joy was the central emotion always seemed to follow times of grueling events that brought tears of sadness.

Should we be surprised? Is this really a Pixar revelation? Scripture told us thousands of years ago: “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5).

Some of our loved sisters have clinical depression, and we are thankful there are professionals equipped to deal with this. What I’m about to say does not negate the importance or necessity of medication or prescribed treatment in such cases.

But not all sadness falls into the realm of needing medical remedy. Sadness is good. It’s a God-given emotion that helps shape our perspective. It shares the bedroom with empathy and compassion. Those who lack a working conscience cannot bring sadness from the reservoir. If you cry tears, it’s a symptom of a healthy heart.

SOMETHING TO CRY ABOUT

You may have heard big girls don’t cry. Sometimes as a child, my mama would say she’d give me a nickel if she could see a real tear. And like yours and all true mamas, she said, “Quit crying or I’ll give you something to cry about!” She was probably right in not allowing us to choose to ruin our own day, or to get in the habit of sniffing our way into getting what we wanted. But some things are things to cry about. We just need to learn, through life and scripture, the difference between the two. And some Sunday mornings, we need to clear the babies out of the cry room, and let the mamas use it instead.

Big boys don’t cry for sure, right? That’s what we hear, but we all know that Jesus did. It’s not a sign of weakness to shed tears. In fact, can you think of a time when you saw an elder shed tears while trying to grapple with the aftermath of sin or crisis in a member’s life? Have you ever seen a faithful member sit in the pew and cry over the story of Jesus, as though she had never heard it before? Tell me; did this make them seem small in your

eyes? I think it probably shot their stature up to the “Giant” bar on the chart. Big boys (and girls) cry!

My daddy did all the things that were categorized as “man” things back when the categories were solid. He worked a garden and drove a truck, built things with power tools, wore overalls and drank R.C. His Y chromosome never had an identity crisis. But that man’s lip quivered at the hint of a sentimental word spoken. We cried together over children who did the right thing at school today and men who did the right thing in the book of Daniel in 500 BC. One time we cried when I told him the boy in the movie we were watching was washing out his clothes in the sink so he could wear them the next day. Daddy’s heart was soft, and his skin calloused, but he wasn’t the best tough man who ever cried easily.

Jesus cried in John 11:35 as he was surrounded by a grieving family broadsided by a tomb. He cried tears of compassion as he looked over the city of Jerusalem and knew what was in store for its future (Luke 19:41). Hebrews 5:7 says he prayed with loud cries and tears as he faced that unbearable hour he came for. It looks like real big boys do cry.

SEEING THROUGH TEARS

In fact, all of us just need a good loud cry with tears at times. Believe it or not, it’s connected to the joy. While Hebrews 5 gives us this hard-to-look-at image of Jesus’ face, a mess and wet with sorrow—I mean, I’m crying as I write this—Hebrews 12 tells us why. Verse 2 says, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Through sobbing eyes, Jesus could see clearly something he had waited for since creation. The hour had finally come. Celine’s sins would be put on the cross, and his blood, flowing from the most painful and cruel abuse imaginable, would

make her okay again. She could be in heaven with him because of that day. What sorrow resulting in what joy!

It reflects our hardest days. Sometimes the yard is filled with so many little moles it drags us down and exhausts our energy. Time to cry. Oh, but sometimes the big moles surface, and hurt us more than we even realized we had the potential to hurt. Time to cry.

And then through the mess of tears and streaks of mascara, we see more clearly than we did before. We see the Savior on the cross, and gradually, if not suddenly, the thought triumphs, “She’s going to be okay.” I’m going to make it because there is nothing that can pop up in this life that can rob me of eternal salvation provided by my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:38–39). This is the joy that is set before me.

As much trouble as this world deals out, and it gives us a full hand sometimes, we can laugh in the midst of calamity because we sat down and cried first. One of my favorite hymn lyrics comes to mind, “Sometimes we laugh together; Sometimes we cry,” (*God’s Family*, 1974), and I always want to sing out, “And sometimes it’s at the same time!”

We cry ourselves into laughing. Trust me; it’s better than laughing ourselves into crying. James 4:9 gives us the heads up on that.

Health professionals tell us there is value in emotional crying. It is soothing, it signals others to rally, it reduces stress, and releases feel-good hormones.

Notice that after Ecclesiastes 3 says there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh,” it continues with “a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

Mourning is tough, but the dance part conjures memories of kicking up our heels in response to good news. We have good news! *Gospel* means “good news.” The “despising the shame” part has already happened, and now there is nothing but “joy set before us.”

I was babysitting a four-year-old a while back. A trademark of my house is that we ring the dinner bell, even at lunch. I threw the grilled cheese sandwiches on the table that day, and turned

around out of habit, and pulled the strap on that bell. The child looked surprised, and whispered, “What was that?” I assured her, “Oh, it was just the bell.”

She looked a little comforted, but still confused, and said, “So . . . It’s time to . . . dance?”

I can’t argue with scripture. After a good cry, yes! I believe it’s time.



- 1** Which do you think scripture emphasizes most, the importance of being sad, or the importance of joy? Do a word search on forms of the words *mourn* and *joy*. What did you come up with, and what observations do you make about their occurrence?

- 2** What events, between Jesus and Peter, happened after Peter wept bitterly? What conclusions can you draw about what is needed to turn our lives from sorrow to joy?

- 3** “Weeping [mourning] may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” is only the last half of Psalm 30:5. Check out the first part. Take a moment to let that sink in. Think of a Bible character whose story resounds with that truth. Have you done something to warrant God’s anger? How has the truth of this wonderful verse resonated through the years following that?

- 4 What little moles have you dealt with today that you weren't expecting? Lay down your hammer and ask God to help you with them. Thank him for specific blessings you can see, even in the mole-whacking.
-
-

- 5 Look at Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. Of these contrasting pairs, which one grabs your attention the most? What has perhaps been out of balance for you? Write that: “a time to _____ and a time to _____,” and tape it to your mirror to remind you that sometimes you need to do that one thing you may be ignoring or neglecting. What will you do this week?
-

Tears and Joy: God loves them both.



Celine's niece Song, daughter Mattianne,
with great nieces Laurel and Julia



WHACKOLOGY 101

And speaking of low-budget, no-plot movies

Is this the way life's meant to be? I've had it all wrong, but they get it right every single time. I mean, they get it right the exact same way every single time. Of course, I'm speaking of that channel called, I think, "Sappy Christmas Movies by the Drones." They literally show them in April, which is ridiculous, but at least they're sensible enough not to stream them non-stop 24/7 until the brink of full legal submersion into Christmas festivities which is, as everyone knows, September 1.

Did I say movies? I didn't mean to use the plural; I meant one movie—singular. There is one movie on this channel, but what they do is name it something different, but still with the word *wish* in the title, and then they mix up their small pool—a kiddie pool at that—of actors and actresses with the best teeth on the planet, and say, "Let's film that again, but you stand over there this time, and we'll hang a sign on the doll shop that says 'Gingerbread Lattes' and we'll change your nosey interfering aunt's name from Gertrude to Philamena. Oh, and can you say your parents died when you were, oh, nine instead of seven for this one?"

I look at my daughter when the snow is softly falling on the letters of the opening credits and say, "Have you seen this?" And she says, "Pretty sure," but there's no real way of knowing. Same actresses, same plot, same snow, same gingerbread brownies.

And is that the same apron even in the first scene? Yep. Same. Wait for it. And . . . there it is. Someone inadvertently drops a stack of Christmas cards or a box of ornaments or a ukulele, and in bending down to pick it up comes face to face with the adversary, also known as the love interest. They both stumble over their words exactly three times before trying to

calmly walk away before they look back over their shoulder, and they look so confused, you're pretty sure they're about to call, "Line!"

The setting is a quaint little upstate town with fiberoptic holiday decor in every nook and cranberry corner. I admit I get confused about which scenes are the shopping network commercials and which ones are part of the movie, and I have literally picked up my phone to order the luminescent candy canes on the hearth. (I mean, it's no secret that they spend more on the wreaths than they do on the salaries for the cast.)

No one seems to think it strange that the townspeople have reindeer names. They just say, "Donner's gone to pick up the gingerbread pastries," and everyone thinks it's just as normal as if they had said Bill or Fred had a flat tire on the way. They also have never picked up on the fact that when they're in their own houses, they can take off the jewelry and the scarves. You don't have to dress up in a dazzling sweater and contrasting pleated skirt to pick up gingerbread pound cake at the grocery store. This is the 21st century; we have T-shirts and loafers now. Come on, who—*who* has a snowball fight in heels? Skinny, tall heels!

Okay, I consistently buy that most single women must have at least three gorgeous males vying for their attention. I buy that the fluffy orphaned dog can communicate full sentences with a tilt of his head and a whine. I even buy that the kind gentleman in the corner with a beard and the first name of Chris has a barn full of cattle that strongly resemble reindeer. What I can't buy into is that real people, while making ornaments of lace and blue satin sashes, are sitting in red and green upscale business attire in their own den, and Aunt Philamena rounds the corner looking like she just finished a photo shoot for Magnificent Maturity Magazine, with a round of hot cider complete with holly stems.

It's Christmas Eve, people. There should be wrapping paper everywhere, burnt cookies, an overflowing kitchen garbage can, and a backed-up commode. And should we ever make it to the pajama stage, they won't be matching!

WHACKOLOGY 101

But everything on the “Sappy Christmas Movies by the Doves” channel is picture perfect—so much so that they’re never sure exactly how to end a scene, so most of them end with a close-up on a shiny package while a jazzed-up version of Fa la la la grows in intensity. The tension is so thick you feel like at any moment the old fiancé could round the corner, which is exactly what happens.

You’d think, after the same girl has experienced this plot in a number of movies since 2006, she’d skip the roller coaster, and immediately pick bachelor number three since he has the biggest Harry Connick Jr. Christmas record collection. We find that our voices are trying to leap the screen barrier as we’re yelling, “You’re in love with the wrong one. That one goes with your lonely friend. Yours is the green scarf guy. The green one!” But it’s useless. They have to go through all the antics first. Not just the tears and the fight and what she sees through the window, but the twirling in the snow, the revelation with a horse somewhere in the scene, the caroling, and if they haven’t ice skated yet, you can take a potty break—you’ve got plenty of time before the final scene in which, appearing in the far distance among the stars, you catch a glimpse of Chris and his full herd of magical cattle.

Merry Christmas. I hope all your wishes come true in exactly one hour and thirty-six minutes’ time. I hope your gingerbread is the gingeriest, your candy-cane pajamas match, and your fingers fit cozily in your just-knitted mittens. As you peruse the quaint little shops, I hope you find what we did the other night.

“Oh look,” I said, “It’s Christmas-Movies-by-the-Doves-Opoly.”

“Great,” my husband said, “You roll a three, and then cry.”

Originally published in Christian Woman Magazine, November/December 2020

