

Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, can you save us from being hot messes?

## **We were no longer strong women facing messy situations. *We became the mess.***

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December 6, 2017



My daughter and I were watching “Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” when Midge Maisel pulled out her measuring tape and began to write down the size of her ankles, calves, and thighs. While she checked her proportions, we laughed at the ridiculousness of it.

Then my daughter said, “Actually. I kind of like that she’s vain *and* not shallow. She has substance. They don’t make characters like that.” I looked at the beautiful young woman next to me and smiled. She grew up with the train wrecks of Miley Cyrus and Lindsay Lohan. Now she inhabits the world of Lena Dunham and Amy Schumer—highly talented women who love to portray themselves as hot messes.

I’ve been having an ongoing conversation with [Cindy Wang Brandt](#) about this “hot mess” phenomenon in our world of religious writing. (Cindy sent [this](#) to me this

morning.) I first felt it when I was looking for agents. I had countless conversations about my marketability as a human. My brand. My hook. I was told, “Don’t write that you’re a pastor. Women pastors don’t sell.”

I looked around at all of the successful women spiritual writers and found prolific, talented “hot messes.” Then this amorphous discomfort became concrete when someone tweeted a [Kate Bowler](#) lecture about it.

Don’t get me wrong. I welcomed the “hot mess” thing. When I got married, Martha Stewart was our cultural icon. I remember a close friend almost had a nervous breakdown while making pecan garland from Martha’s magazine. Let that sink in. She was trying to drill holes through hard nuts for a string to put over her fireplace. Back then, we didn’t even have Instagram or Pinterest to show off those decorations. That’s how weird those days were.

Of course, then Martha spent some time in the slammer and started cooking with Snoop Dog. And everything became right with the world. We all took a deep breath and quit trying to present Christmas dinner like we live on a grand estate in Connecticut. White women became more relatable in general. Mostly because we were all screwed up.

Unfortunately, we were no longer strong women facing messy situations. *We became the mess*. Of course, I’m painting with a white-washed broad brush. I cannot ignore the glowing queens of this age—Beyonce and Meghan Markle—who have no time for this nonsense.

We turned back to the television. Midge Maisel has a waist the size of a dime and goes through ridiculous shenanigans so that her husband won’t ever see her without a full face of makeup. Then she tries to find her voice, persona, and even her name. She’s fighting back the social constraints of the 50’s, while she remains utterly reliant on them. She gets in a few great Jewish jokes about Methodists. By the end of the season, Midge manages to be ravenous and unkempt at the breakfast table. She becomes hungry, it seems, to stop pretending that she is something that she is not. Her imperfections show.

But this is the difference. **For Mrs. Maisel, the mess of life is something that happens to her. It is not her. She is resilient. She has depth.**

And now, I’m wondering, could Mrs. Maisel swing the pendulum again? Can women be smart, deep, funny—and even pastors—when life throws a whole lot of hot mess

at us?