

workers @ home

Making The Most of Your Time

Erin Thiele

Eighth Revised Edition



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by Erin Thiele

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by Erin Thiele

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She looks well to the ways of her household,

And does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and bless her;

Her husband also,

and he praises her saying:

“Many daughters have done nobly,

But you excel them all.”

Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,

But a woman who fears the LORD,

she shall be praised.

Give her the product of her hands,

And let her works praise her in the gates.

—Prov. 31:27–31

Dedicated

This book is dedicated to the young women in my life, especially my married nieces. I now dedicate it to my daughter Tyler, who continues to proofread as she works through its pages every day, helping me with our large family. It is my prayer that the ideas, methods, and suggestions in this little book will help you as you partake in the most important career in this world—a homemaker! It is a job that I have found more rewarding, more challenging, and more fulfilling than being a public speaker or author. I am not a housekeeper, nor are you. We are homemakers. We are what makes a house a home.

Whether your house is clean and tidy, well organized and smooth-sailing, calm and tranquil, happy and joyful, will depend entirely on you. Most young women I talk to haven't a clue as to where to even begin. As I began the third revision of this book, I kept you in mind as you begin to tackle this wonderful and powerful position as a . . .

Worker at Home!

*. . . be sensible, pure, **workers at home**, kind,
being subject to their own husbands,
that the word of God may not be dishonored.*

—Titus 2:5

*She looks well to the **ways of her household**,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.*

—Prov. 31:27

*Give her the product of her hands,
And let **her works** praise her in the gates.*

—Prov. 31:31

Chapter 1

Making the Most of Your Life

Let Her Works Praise Her!

*Many daughters have done nobly,
But you excel them all . . .
Give her the product of her hands,
And let **her works praise her** in the gates.
—Prov. 31:29–31*

Knowing my background, it is kind of funny to think that I am known for organizing and keeping a home neat and tidy! It just shows that God does have a sense of humor, and that with God all things are possible!

When I married my husband, I could not cook, nor did I know how to keep a home! No one taught me, nor did I have an example to follow.

My mother, bless her heart, loved her children (all seven of them), but since she grew up in a wealthy home with servants and as an only child, she never learned how to **do anything**! She eloped with my father, who also came from a wealthy upbringing, when she was just 16 and still in Girl Scout camp!

Her mother (my grandmother), never allowed her to be in the kitchen or spend time around the servants. She never put away her clothes or even dressed herself! Her meals were served to her. My father had his meals in the dining room of a hotel where his family lived in the penthouse.

By the time I came along (I am the sixth), my mother had years of disorganization and burnt meals. My father hired help often, but they were soon dismissed because my mother felt they were an “intrusion” and only reminded her of her unhappy childhood.

Our laundry room, when I was growing up, was piled high with laundry

that was done “maybe” monthly. Meals were always late and always burnt. My mother could only cook about a dozen meals. Most of us tried to get invited to neighbors for dinner, or would eat a bowl of cereal!

However, my mother really loved us. We all knew that! It was because of her love that we all turned out more than all right. Maybe we were a bit traumatized by the home we grew up in, but thankfully most of us can laugh about it now! My sisters, unfortunately, never learned how to keep a home. All of them cook better than my mother, fortunately, for their husbands, but their homes—well, that’s another story.

My brothers married women who kept nice, clean homes (well, at least two of them did). As for me, it was a “God thing” that my home is clean and well organized with good home cooked meals—just as most things that God has done to bring me from tragedy to triumph. I should have followed in the curse that my mother set in place, but God redeemed me and He redeemed you too! Thankfully for my husband and my children, my home is always clean and tidy! We have meals on the table at the same time everyday, and thankfully, I have not burned anything in years!

I have trained my daughters, so that when they marry they will be well prepared. They all (even my sons) have learned to do laundry, to clean, and to cook.

I am sharing all of this with you to prove that no matter where you are or where you have come from, there is help and hope! This book will give you guidelines, but it will be GOD who will transform you and His Holy Spirit that will guide you!

Though my ministry is helping women restore their hopeless marriages, my mission is to share this one life-changing verse that will literally change your life, once you embrace it:

“Looking at them, Jesus said, ‘With people it *is* impossible, but **not with God**; for **all things are possible with God**’” (Mark 10:27).

If your problem is keeping a clean home, it may seem impossible with your busy schedule, but not *with* God—all things are possible *with* God!

If your problem is staying organized, it may seem impossible with your personality, but not *with* God—all things are possible *with* God!

If your problem is keeping up with the laundry, it may seem impossible with all the children you have, but not *with* God—all things are possible *with* God!

If your problem is cooking, it may seem impossible because you never liked being in the kitchen, but not *with* God—all things are possible *with* God!

Enter God

No matter what the problem area of your life, when God enters into your life, it will change! Most of us never rely on God or ask for His help, but instead struggle to do things in our own strength by leaning on to our own understanding of what we should do. It isn't until we are at the *end of ourselves* that we cry out to Him. Why wait?

No matter how big or how small your problem, the Lord *wants* to help **you**. He *longs* to be gracious to you and to me! The Bible says that He is actually looking for hearts that are totally sold out and seeking Him, so He can strongly support us in our efforts! He wants to give us all of the desires of our heart, from a clean house, to clean clothes, to a home that is running efficiently.

God loves to show Himself strong on our behalf, especially the most hopeless cases like mine (and maybe yours), so He can get ALL the glory!

So how did someone like me learn to be known for organization and keeping a well running home, *while having* seven children of my own and a ministry that operates from our home? **Seeking Him AND through humility.**

Seeking Him

When I was young (maybe twelve), I remembered the frustration of not being able to find my own clothes. My mother would hand us a huge pile of laundry (about once a month) and then we would just put it in *any* drawer where there was room. As I prayed through my frustration (I accepted the Lord as my Savior when I was seven, but I was raised in a Catholic home) the Lord gave me a wonderful idea! I thought, "Hey,

wouldn't it be a great idea if there was one drawer for tops, one for pants, one for underwear and socks, etc. . . .?" So I organized my drawers, always thinking I had invented a new idea! It was years later when I discovered that this is the way most people live!

When I married my husband, he told me that his mother cleaned the bathrooms regularly. I was astonished! "Really!" I said, "How often?" He replied, "I think once a week." Then he explained about vacuuming regularly and other daily, weekly, or monthly "chores" (a word I thought only applied to people living on a farm).

The knowledge was helpful, but since I didn't grow up in an environment like that, I didn't know how to incorporate working it into my everyday life. As I prayed, the Lord brought to mind a system my brother taught me about using 3x5 cards that helped me get straight "A's" in college. That's how my 3x5 card method began. (You will read about the method in a future chapter.)

Humility

Humility was how I learned to cook. During the two years when I was seeking God to restore my marriage, I did a LOT of fasting. It says in Scripture that fasting humbles the heart.

It was easy to begin learning to fast during this period of my life, because I really *couldn't* eat! I hurt too much from my husband being with another woman and being left with four little children in which to provide care. In our ministry, we call it the "infidelity diet."

So, since I "couldn't" eat, I thought I would make good use out of it and fast for a purpose. While fasting, I found myself excited for the first time about cooking and feeding my children. This had to also be a "God thing"—I found pleasure in watching them eat!

In addition, for the first time, I admitted that I was not a good cook. I had already begun my ministry to women, and during the meetings I would often say that I couldn't cook. The result is that so many women came to my aid to help me to learn! They gave me easy recipes and even stood next to me to show me how to do simple things like peel an apple to make an apple pie (I tried to use a peeler that you would use for peeling a potato instead of a small knife!).

By the time God restored my marriage, God had made me a good cook!! My husband returned home to a wife who could cook (and many other changes). God was even faithful to change my husband, who because of the many trials he had while living with the OW (other woman)—which God tells us will happen to a man in adultery—he learned to fix household things! Isn't God faithful?!

The lack of humility was not the only thing standing in my way in regard to cooking. The root cause was the belief and acceptance of a lie. I will tell you honestly that I never wanted to be a good cook, because I believed all good cooks were fat! My mother was a large woman, and I didn't want to add “being a good cook” to my genetics that leaned toward obesity.

If that is your concern, then let the truth set you free—that is a lie from the pit of “you know where!” There is NO curse that can touch you because that was broken when the Lord died on the cross for you and me. If you are a child of God, the curse has no effect on you, unless you accept it! Here's proof:

A few years ago, actually right after my 40th birthday, I began to have trouble with my weight. When my seventh child was born, and after our eighth (whom I sadly lost), I was unable to lose the weight that I normally could lose after a birth or miscarriage. That is when my brother and sister began to insist I accept the curse that our family has with a metabolism and thyroid disorder. They were right, I did have ALL the symptoms, but I refused to accept it!

One day, I stood in front of the mirror and *cried out to God* to make me thin. I repented of all the times I did not have compassion on women who were overweight, and for not giving God the glory for being able to remain thin with so many children (I went over 200 pounds with each child!) but got down to a slim size by the time they were just a few months old. After I repented of everything the Lord brought to mind, I then gave my weight and size to Him!

The hardest part was not trying to *help* God do it. Thoughts of different kinds of diets, drinking more water, exercise, etc., etc. would run through my mind. For three to four months, I was “tempted” to try to help God. But then things just started to *happen*!

I began to crave different foods, and I started to feel that my pants were getting loose. I NEVER got on the scale again, so I wasn't tempted to get excited with my weight loss and celebrate with overeating. Nor did I want to feel depressed if I had gained weight. I left my size to the Lord, for Him to do it and give me the desires of my heart—which was to be a “*loose size 10.*”

Honestly, I cannot tell you how God did it. Things changed from day to day, but one thing is for sure—He was in control! There was no worrying, no fretting, no hard work. There was no counting carbohydrates or calories. There was no hunger and no denying myself, which usually resulted in an *obsession* for food.

Only four months later, I was a loose size 10. I started at a very tight size 16, which for my height of five nine/ten isn't *that* bad, but it wasn't me, nor was it the “desire of my heart”! But did you know that God LOVES to give us above and beyond what we could ever hope, think, or ask for? He does! I continued to shrink, and found myself at a size six! This was the wonderful weight that I was when I accompanied my husband to his high school reunion! Isn't God so good?!

I am telling you this to encourage you to TRUST God to do it! ***Cry out to Him***, and then stand back and let Him do it! That is probably the hardest part!! No matter what area of your life you are struggling with, if you cry out to God, resist trying to help Him (which usually last about four months of temptations and testings)—God will do it for you, and with no sweat! Instead, all and I mean ALL, the praise and glory will go to Him!

As I said earlier, this book will give you guidelines, wisdom, and knowledge; but it will be God who will do the changing. Then, give HIM the glory!! That's all that He wants for blessing you!!

However, did you happen to notice in the beginning of my weight loss testimony that the first step was repentance? God would not move in this area of my life until I first repented of lacking compassion for women who were heavy. Secondly, I needed to repent for not giving God the glory for what He had done by keeping me thin after each pregnancy.

In asking God “why” there are so many homes with chaos and untidy tendencies, God has brought one Scripture to mind as the root cause. It is

not only a lack of knowledge, or a lack of humility (or believing a lie as it was in my case), but it is also rooted in a common sin that is running rampant in our feminist and “me first” society!

Selfish Ambition

Is there really *anyone* who would not want to have a home that is clean and runs smoothly? However, most homes I see are not so blessed. As I said in the dedication, whether or not your house is clean and tidy, well organized and smooth-sailing, calm and tranquil, happy and joyful, will depend entirely on **you**.

Some of you have chosen a life that is much too busy with outside activities. Your home reflects the rat race with chaos and disorder!

The root cause for many of us can be found in James 3:16: “For where *jealousy* and *selfish ambition* exists, there is **disorder and every evil thing**.”

When “my agenda” is first and foremost in my life above God’s plan, my husband’s needs, my children’s needs, and my responsibility to keep my home clean and running efficiently—then that is selfish ambition. Anytime this creeps into my life (usually brought on by selfishness or self-pity), then my life and my home are disorderly and evil runs rampant!

Most women who work outside the home do not have a well running home, and usually it is filthy! But surprisingly, even stay-at-home moms can have a home that looks the same way: untidy, unclean, and unorganized.

It could also be the unconfessed sin of jealousy or envy that keeps your home and your life in constant disorder. Again, the verse says, “For where *jealousy* and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing” (James 3:1).

We see someone who has what we think they have, instead of what God wants to give us. This causes us to be involved in activities that will make our lives, our children’s lives, and our family’s life just too busy to keep up with!

Are you trying to keep up with your friends or impress your family, rather than trying to please God? If you are a man-pleaser, trying to gain the approval or praise of others, **you will be worn out**. Know WHO YOU ARE in Jesus. Know His unconditional love. You don't need to do ONE thing today to gain His love. It is there for you unconditionally!

God is NOT a God of *confusion*. We know God is not a God of confusion; therefore, He does not want us to live in confusion or disorder. First Corinthians 14:33 says, "For God is **NOT a God of *confusion*** but of peace . . ."

The most important thing you can do to be a happy and contented "worker at home" (whether you also work outside your home, or whether you are blessed to stay-at-home) is to find the peace in KNOWING that God is happy and pleased with you no matter what you do today. Find that peace, and allow Him to love you. Once you feel His love and His peace, then everything will begin to fall into place.

You will find that your life will begin to change. Some things will go and will be replaced with other things. Everything will begin to get into the proper order, and with it, PEACE will remain. Your joy will overflow to your children. Your contentedness will strengthen your husband when he is in his home and with his family.

As I conclude this first chapter, I pray that before you read any more, you will read and reread this foundational chapter. As you do . . .

Write Your Thoughts Down

At the end of many of the chapters, there is blank paper. I designated this area for your “notes.” While you are reading the following pages, write the thoughts or plans God gives you as He brings them to your mind. This will help you to work *with* God.

Also, you can use a crayon or colored pencil (neither one bleeds through the pages) as you read to highlight those things that quicken your spirit. Feel free to write in the margins, and make notes to yourself. Most importantly, enjoy!

Write down your thoughts from this chapter. What has the Lord been speaking to your life? Has He been gently trying to encourage you to let some things go? Write down the thoughts from your heart.

Notes:

Chapter 2

Making the Most of Your Space

Removing the Clutter

*The way of the sluggard
is as a hedge of thorns,
But the path of the upright is a highway.
—Prov. 15:19*

This used to be Chapter 7, but I moved it to the front of the book. God began prompting me to move it to the second chapter when I saw so many women, who began reading the *workers@home* book, **began** by removing the clutter from their homes. Though it wasn't originally written that way, this obviously is God's way—this is where *He* wants to begin in your life. Take time to read the chapter all the way through, and maybe even a second or third time, before you take any action. De-cluttering is a principle that you are going to learn, not merely a task to undertake.

I have been a student of organization for many, many years; yet, when I read my first book on de-cluttering my home, it took a few days for it to really sink in. That's when it all began to make sense. I thought to myself, "For all these years, I have really been organizing and reorganizing **clutter!**"

Clutter is an Encumbrance

What exactly is clutter? Clutter is the *stuff* that you hang onto that you *honestly* don't use. It might be things you *think* you might use in the future. However, stuff that you are really not using is nothing more than hoarding, which leads to selfishness. Clutter then, is made up of the things you really need to "let go" of. They are the things that are slowing down your race; they are the encumbrances that make you feel tired and overwhelmed. "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses

surrounding us, let us also lay aside every **encumbrance** and the sin which so easily *entangles* us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us . . .” (Heb. 12:1).

If you have things that you are not using, things that are nice and have some worth, then by giving them away (even away to someone you will never know or will ever meet when you give it to a thrift store), you are blessing someone that may never have what they *need* because you were not able to “let go,” simply because **you** still *want* it.

Not only will you be blessing someone else, but also the real thrill will come when you have more drawer space and more closet space! The greatest reward is how incredibly easy it will be for you and your family to keep your de-cluttered home clean! Our family has literally (after de-cluttering) been left with about *half* of what we owned, and we didn’t miss a thing! Each time we de-clutter (the last two times because of moving), a freedom set in and settled over our entire family. And if that were not enough, your house stays neat and tidy until you need to de-clutter again.

You may be more than willing to let go, but typically your children are not. Children are selfish by nature. (We will discuss husbands who can’t let go later.) Even though they may have outgrown the clothes or toys, they still want them! Also, when passing down items to siblings, it is wise to make sure that it will be worn, played with, or read. All your children are different, not all the clothes look equally good, and not all toys are as enjoyable to each child.

Also, in regard to passing down clothes, saving something for a year is fine, but any more than that and the style probably will be outdated.

When my babies were coming “fast and furiously” (not in regard to the speed at which I labored, but how close they were apart in years), I was given boxes and boxes of baby clothes from a lady who lost her husband. I added what she gave me to what I was already storing. I carefully put the boxes and rubber buckets to store, but to my horror, when I was pregnant and opened the box, they were mildewed and spoiled beyond being able to salvage.

I was ashamed, because I had heard the message of “letting go” of what I didn’t need, but hadn’t heeded the principle. All I could think about was

how many mothers, maybe even young unwed mothers, could have benefited by what was now destroyed. But God is good!! After I repented and shared my sins with many other women, when the subject came up, God blessed me with brand new clothes for my new baby! I “just happened” to walk into a store when things were more than 75 percent off!

The Objections

Now you (or your husband) may be thinking, “Well, I know what will happen. I’ll just run out and buy more stuff to fill up the empty space.” But I haven’t, the ladies that followed this book haven’t, and you won’t either when you experience the freedom from clutter. I also purchase about one-third to one-fourth of what I used to buy. When we de-cluttered, it was difficult watching all the stuff get thrown away or given away. I thought of how much money we had spent for all that stuff.

A lot of what we threw away or gave away was given to us as gifts. A lot of it was someone else’s stuff that people gave me that I guess I felt too guilty to get rid of. And the rest, or majority, of it were things that I purchased that I really didn’t need but wanted. No matter *how* I got it, it would be foolish to keep it when we didn’t really use it. Therefore, it was *very* good for me to get rid of it to bless someone else and to free up the space that we did have so we could keep it tidy.

Since my first de-clutter experience, I began avoiding a lot of stores where I used to just “browse” just to buy “something.” Because of de-cluttering my house, I finally began to buy *wisely*. When I pick up most things to look at, I ask myself, “Do I really need this?” and “How soon before this gets into one of the give-away bags?”

Just because something is a good buy doesn’t mean that you should buy it. I know it is hard to pass up a bargain, but if you don’t really need it, you won’t use it. And if you don’t use it, it will clutter your home, which is not worth the price. Instead, wait and pray for things you really need. I pray about every need I have. I cannot tell you how often, the very next day, I will just walk into a store, and there is what I prayed for at an incredible price. Just last Saturday, as I was searching for a sweater for my daughter to wear for church the next day, I noticed she just had one. So I prayed, and on Sunday walked right into a store where I was able to get four sweaters for the price of one!

And finally, most women feel they don't even have the time to de-clutter. Truthfully, you don't have time not to! The time you take will make you feel as if you lost 50 pounds! Your life feels skinny and free! You really feel like a new woman! You'll be happier, and your family will be happier too with the change!!

Once you are in the right frame of mind (you may need to pray and read this chapter again), you are ready to begin.

The Tools You'll Use to De-clutter

To De-clutter your home you will need:

1. About 12–24 boxes with tops.
2. A few pieces of notebook paper (if you have colored that would work better).
3. A black, felt tip marker.
4. 3x5 cards with box.
5. Large *black* trash bags (four to begin with).

Four signs. These signs will help you sort what you have into four categories:

1. Throw away.
2. Give away.
3. Put away.
4. Store away.

Make four signs with your paper and marker using the list above. I bring a trashcan in and tape “throw away” on it. Next to it, I use a laundry basket or box and put an opened black trash bag in it to lend the bag support and tape “give away.” Next to this, I put another laundry basket or box and tape “put away.” And finally, I put a box with a lid and tape “store away” on it.

Begin by *emptying* out *one* closet, *one* drawer, under *one* bed, or off *one* of your shelves. *Start with something you know you will finish.* (If you choose a closet, start with the floor.) Pick up an item and put it into one of the four containers. Your goal is to try to put the most in throw away, then the give away, and so on.

Determine what drawer, closet, or shelf is going to be kept in that space: What really belongs in that closet, in that drawer, or on that shelf? So when you come to an item that belongs in that closet, drawer, or on that shelf, **place it behind you.**

Just keep picking up each item and pray, asking the Lord for wisdom and discernment; ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and lead you as to which container each item should go into or if it belongs in that space. Listen for that *still, small voice*, and then respond to His leading. Trust that if you do put it in the wrong container, the Holy Spirit will prompt you to pull it out and place it where it belongs, when He sees that you are following His leading. However, make sure when you do go back to retrieve something, it is not because you began to lean onto your own understanding or began to reason why you might want to keep it instead of giving it or throwing it away.

Once everything in that closet, drawer, or shelf is empty, wipe it out, or sweep it out, and put back **only** what belongs there! If a plastic storage container, shelf, or hanging device would help to keep it organized, buy it *after* you see what you have left. This goes for buying more hangers. Once you have de-cluttered, you will find that you don't need them.

This is the method for de-cluttering anything and everything. Make your sheets (I started saving mine in the back of my shopping list and meal planner clipboard to use them again and again.).

Once that closet, drawer, or shelf is cleaned out, it will give you such a joyful feeling. But use that to follow through by going to another closet, drawer, or shelf if you have time, OR follow through by dealing with the containers.

The throw away should go right into the outside trashcan. The put away is brought through the house and put into the right room, the give away goes into your car to give it to the local thrift store. And finally, you organize the box to get everything to fit, and make a list on your 3x5 card of what you put into the box. Then mark the box (see below on **Store it**). Take *everything* out, vacuum it out, and wipe it down. Next, put back what belongs there. Put away those things that you, or someone else, put there by mistake or by convenience. Then sort what you have left. Should you pitch it (throw it away)? Is it broken or stained; then just

throw it away!

Should you “Give it” away? If someone IMMEDIATELY comes to mind, then put it in a bag labeled with their name. If not, then just give it to the poor. God really began to pour out His blessings on us, when I stopped trying to make a “buck” by bringing it to consignment shops or having a yard sale. When I simply blessed the poor with the things I didn’t have use or space for, God blessed me with things I needed and wanted at INCREDIBLE bargains!

Rules. Never go back into a bag. Give away and throw away all your bags as soon as you are done. Put the “throw away” out with the trash immediately; put the “give away” bag into your car along with a note on the driver’s seat to drive to the nearest drop box or thrift store. Once you, your children, or your husband begins to DIG through what is in there, it will undo all your hard work. This is why I recommend BLACK bags, because the white ones often showed a *glimpse* of something of interest, which inevitably would draw a person in for a second look.

On the subject of husbands and de-cluttering: this can be a touchy subject. Thankfully, this is the situation that I have with my husband. I am the one who wants to “let go,” and my husband is one that likes to keep things. So, I have become an authority on what *not* to do! My very first mistake (though there have been many others) is when I attempted to *help* him clean out his wallet, many, many, many years ago. When we were married less than a year, I thought I should rescue him, since it was so thick it was almost a square cube! What was the result of my helping him? Up until five years ago (when he began to lose a bit of his memory), if he was *ever* missing *anything* that he thought he had put in his wallet, it was something **that I had thrown away**. Mistake. Do not sort your husband’s stuff: not his wallet, “junk” drawer, or desk. You can sort it, but never throw anything out without his seeing it first. And if he says no, then box it up.

This is the method that professional organizers use for things that people have trouble parting with. They put it in a box, and then pull it out a year later. When you go through it after a year, it is much easier to get rid of. Since I don’t have a method like that in place, primarily because when a year was up and I tried to get to look at his old stuff, he didn’t want to do it. So instead, I wait until we move, when he knows he is going to have to pick those boxes up, load them in the truck, and unload them at the

new house. Then he is motivated, and I don't have to say a thing!

Does that mean that we don't have boxes of his stuff at this new house? No, my husband has lots of boxes filled with his stuff, but I don't let it bother me. I respect his position as the head of our household. I am teaching my children not only to respect their father by my actions, but to respect me. By undermining his authority, I would also be undermining mine. In addition, I am not perfect. I have quirks in my personality also, that I, some day, will overcome should Jesus tarry!

Now for things that are not directly your husband's personal items: some men want a handle on all the household issues, while some don't want to be bothered. But one thing is the same, which ever you have been *blessed* with, you wish you had the other! My husband is a man who wants to be in control of anything and everything. I always "wished" he would leave it up to me. At the same time, I have friends who complain and tell me how they had gone to their husbands to get their opinion, but he said to do "whatever they wanted"! Why is that?

It is because God gives you exactly what you need!! For me, who was born with an independent spirit, I want to make my own decisions. I want to seek God and move in that direction without obstacles. But obstacles are what make us strong. When there is an obstacle, I really have to pray for wisdom, and often I have to wait, which strengthens me spiritually.

For other women, who are meek and indecisive or maybe just need assurance, they have the husbands who tell them to do whatever they want, which forces them to seek God for strength, boldness, and assurance.

All of us need God, so He gives us different ways to force us to seek Him *continually*! Isn't God good?!

Now that I am in the midst of humbling myself, which is always good to gain spiritually, some of my problem was that I went to my husband when I should have just gone to God. Some husbands who "appear" controlling are that way, because we have gone to our husbands when we should have gone to God. When I first learned about submission, I went to my husband for everything! Soon, I was feeling "oppressed," when it was really my fault. To add to this, I was raised with a mother who

thrived, it seemed, on rebellion and sneakiness with my father.

Often, when things are out of balance in our youth, in the homes we grew up in, we tend to go to the other extreme, which is what I did. Certainly, not following in this pattern of keeping things from my spouse was a very good thing; however, one extreme can be just as bad as the other. How do you know when to ask your husband and when to just proceed with how the Lord is leading you? Pray. Pray and ask God to give you discernment. If He prompts you to ask your husband, then go and ask. If your husband stops your decision, then trust God to open the door if it is what you are really suppose to do; even if it is a matter of de-cluttering (what to keep and what to throw away).

If you are the timid type, who wants reassurance, then seek God. If He tells you to do something, then go ahead with God's assurance, if your husband has complained that you are too needy.

Our goal is to be able to live this verse in Proverbs 31:11: **“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.”**

And how is this accomplished when it is so out of whack right now? With the next verse: “She does him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:12). Doing what is right, concerning your husband, begins with respecting and not challenging his authority, and extends to not speaking about him negatively with friends or family (not revealing his weaknesses in any area of his life). When you begin to be the wife he can “safely trust” in (that's from the KJV), then he will allow you to make decisions without his permission.

(Funny, but I was trying to leave this chapter without sharing my other fault, but the Lord led me to read what I just wrote, so that He could bring it to my mind again!) Another of my faults, which kept our marriage out of balance, is when I went to my husband to tell him my plan in order to get his praise. I grew up with two parents, who unashamedly, thought I was wonderful! This was a good thing, but again if it is out of balance, which it was, then trouble follows. The result was, that instead of getting praise, which is what I would have gotten from my parents, my husband would find some fault or error in it.

This would also happen when I went to “bounce an idea off” my husband. Dear sister, girlfriends were created for this purpose! They love

to hear each and every detail, but when you share your ideas, just to talk or to bounce the idea off your husband, he thinks you want him to tell you what to do.

It took me a long time to learn this. But then the Lord removed those kind of friends, and I was left with only Him. Wow! What a difference!! Not only does He love to hear every detail, He is honest when it isn't a good idea at all. And whenever He convicts me or shows me it is not a good plan, He is so gentle and compassionate.

If you have the same problem of wanting approval or acceptance, talk to God and ask Him to help you. There is no greater set up for deep hurts. The enemy really has a hold on your life. People are the best tool the devil has to manipulate you. Look to God to fill your need of being loved, accepted, and honored. His spirit will fill you. No matter how many people you have praising you, you will fill empty. Just look at the celebrities' lives to see that truth played out.

Now, back to our chapter . . .

Store it. The “store away” will be put into the first box—but as you do this, write down *every* item on the first 3x5 card. It doesn't matter what is in each box. Of course, most of us have our Christmas things together, but sometime in January we find an item that has missed the box. Go ahead and put it into *any* storage box, because you will mark on the card where that item is located. Next Christmas, your cards will remind you where the missing items can be found. I put a sticky on a Christmas 3x5 card, to remind me that there are missing items stored elsewhere. Then you can remove them from one box and put them back in the original box at the end of that Christmas.

Storage 3x5 card. Number each 3x5 card in the *upper left* corner, and number the corresponding box on several sides—i.e., “C-1” for your first Christmas box, maternity clothes would be “M-1,” etc. For miscellaneous storage I write “S-1,” and homeschool curriculum that I am not using this year “HS-1.”

Next, write down where you will store it in the *upper right* corner—i.e., garage-west side, attic over the living room, or under my bed. This will help you, your husband, or son find the box more easily.

If your box is a leftover VCR box or a stroller box, indicate that on the card under where it is located. Again, it helps you to find the right box easily. The most important point with this principle of storing items is to *write down EVERY item you place in the box*.

If possible, before you put more into your storage areas (especially if you are storing under a bed or in a closet), it would be wise to open up previously stored boxes (stored before this system), and make a 3x5 card for each. Of course, you would also throw or give away anything that you do not need. Stay away from the Christmas boxes or baby clothes for the moment! Wait until Christmas and “clean sweep” your stuff. I got my Christmas decorations down to half, right after I got motivated writing this updated portion of the book. Praise God! This year, I will go through our Christmas boxes again. For the past two years, no one felt like putting up anything except the tree and a wreath on the door (we kept our Nativity set up since I wanted to remember our Savior’s birth all year long). Therefore, it is time to de-clutter and bless others with our unneeded items.

Finally, if you ever move a box or remove an item, adjust your card. Your cards should be kept up to date by pulling out the cards, when you pull out a box. The “storage” cards should be kept in the *back* of your 3x5 card file with a section divider that you mark STORAGE. I have had this method for YEARS. Just like everything, it is something that you learn and practice until it becomes habit: the way you do it. Not only will you have order and peace in your home, with more room in your closets and drawers of things you use, you will be teaching your daughters how to be a keeper of her home!

This method of de-cluttering and eliminating stuff (things you do not need or use regularly) should be done throughout your home as you move through your house one drawer in one room, one at a time. Start in one designated room, and then continue to move through the entire house. Just spend a few minutes to an hour a day and soon you will be left with only what you need and use regularly.

Maintenance. Once you have the entire house: closets, shelves, and drawers cleaned (even your garage)—you can maintain this with the “clean sweep” method daily. The clean sweep is the exciting and life-changing chapter just ahead. But before you run ahead, remember, this book is a book of action. It won’t change your life unless you take action. So, take the next few days or weeks to de-clutter your home before reading any more. It will also de-clutter your mind, your spirit, and your life!

Notes:

Chapter 3

Making the Most of **Picking Up**

Clean your “messy house” in minutes!

I will make a clean sweep of the house . . .
—1 Kings 14:10

I guarantee that this method will save you so much time, and give you such a boost, that you will never want to go back to the way you used to pick up your house. So often, we feel like we are picking up things all day long and still not getting anywhere. Though I still tidy when I go into a room, I do not spend my time or energy running back and forth to pick up or tidy the house.

“The Clean Sweep”

This method is so good, it can even be used even when you are lying on the couch with morning sickness, by using your toddlers and young children to pick up for you just before “Daddy gets home.” I know from experience—I’ve done it hundreds of times! You just move from room to room, sometimes crawling to get there, and then lie down on any available bed or couch in the room (floors work too!) then apply the Clean Sweep! Here is my fool proof method that is simple yet works:

You will need: one to several laundry baskets for collecting, a trash bag for trash, and a large brown paper bag (or smaller baskets)—one for each room of your house for sorting. With a black marker, label the bag or basket for sorting with the names of the rooms (i.e. “Mom and Dad’s room, laundry room, kitchen, Axel’s room, etc.).

Gather. Now, use your laundry baskets, and pick up everything in each room that **doesn’t belong** in *that* room. Begin in one room, and systematically work through the entire house. The best place to start is at

the front door (or back door if your husband comes in that way). Put shoes by the door in the basket, old newspapers in the trash, and toys in the basket.

Tidy. Once you have picked up all the stuff (everything that doesn't belong in that room) and put it in the basket or trash, then pick up or straighten pillows, wipe down tables, make any unmade beds in each bedroom, then sweep or vacuum the room (By the way, *young* children love to vacuum). Your first room is clean, now you're ready to go to the next room!

Rules. Make sure that you NEVER put anything liquid or wet in the basket. Make sure you NEVER put Daddy's wallet, checkbook, or other important items in the basket, but instead, send a child (or go yourself) to put it on *his* dresser or on *his* home desk.

Confession: I have, in an emergency clean sweep (see below), put some of my husband's important items in the basket. Because it was an emergency, we didn't have time to sort the basket either. DAYS later (I had hidden the basket in our laundry room), when he was running out of the house, my husband asked if I had seen the checkbook. I sent up a "flare prayer," and God brought the unsorted basket to my memory. I ran in, put my hand deep in "stuff," and pulled out the lost checkbook. God is good! Amen?

I don't think I need to give you an example of when something wet or liquid got into the basket. Even a "drop" from a finished coffee cup can cause you to have a real mess on your hands (see below for a tip on coffee-to-go mugs). Make sure you and your children are completely clear with the "rules" *before* running ahead with this wonderful method. Like anything else, it can be a blessing or a curse, depending on your obedience to following the rules.

Tip: *When we used to live over an hour from our church, some of us would bring a "to go" coffee. After I experienced what a mess "just a drop" would make, I developed this method that I taught to all my coffee drinkers. Once you have finished your coffee (or you pour it out), then put a napkin in the bottom of the cup and put the lid back on. This will soak up the "last drop" and eliminate a mess waiting to happen.*

Sort. Once you have picked up each room, and then cleaned and tidied

what remained in that room, bring all the baskets to one location. Now, sort the collected “stuff” for each of your rooms: each bedroom, each bathroom, the kitchen, living room, laundry room, etc. When you have the items collected, take that bag or small basket back to each room (that is already neat) to merely put the items away! If you use young children, you would not want them to put the item away (since you may never find it again). I simply had them put the bag or basket right inside the door, until I could get there myself (walking or crawling).

More Info on the Clean Sweep

Sidetracked! Do not get sidetracked by attempting to de-clutter a drawer or a closet (from Chapter 3). If you have not yet de-cluttered your house, I would highly recommend you set a specific time each day to do so (it will make keeping everything neat and clean easy to achieve). Then, to maintain those “unseen areas” regularly, we have a method in which you have them as one of your weekly or monthly cards (We will cover this in Chapter 7 “The Method.”). Once again, finish what you started—“clean sweep the entire house!”

Handling Emergencies. Also, if an emergency arises (like your husband arriving home early), employ the “Clean Sweep,” but wait to sort the baskets until after things have calmed down or the children are in bed. Just don’t wait any longer—you or your husband may not be able to find the checkbook or something, because it’s in the bottom of a basket hidden in the closet! Once again, I know, because it’s happened to me once too often!

Schedules and routines. Also, get yourself and your children on some sort of schedule or routine. Use your husband’s schedule as a starting place. (We will talk about this in more depth in an upcoming chapter.) But in case you are working through this book methodically, starting a schedule is simply to work into your life: waking times, sleeping times, eating times, schooling times, and cleaning times. Even babies are easier to care for, when you have encouraged them to eat and sleep at regular times (though I do not promote the rigorous schedule of the book *Baby Wise*. See Lesson 15 “Your Mother’s Teaching” in *A Wise Woman* for more information).

My husband and I have a scheduled “date night” once a week. If you don’t have older children yet, or family members to watch your young

children, “date night” can be accomplished by trading children with a friend or by putting the children to bed early and planning a late dinner and movie (video or DVD) alone.

Keep moving. I heard Elisabeth Elliot tell her listeners to just “do the next thing,” whether it is doing the dishes or making the bed. Remember, “She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness” (Prov. 31:27). If the phone rings, or some other interruption occurs, stop and take care of it, but then get back to doing “the next thing.” If you’re the type that simply cannot get off the phone once you start, don’t answer it, or use an answering machine, and return the call when it is convenient for you (unless it is your husband calling). This is a major weakness of mine; therefore, I NEVER answer our telephone. As a matter of fact, I basically do not talk on the phone.

In Chapter 7, you will have a *foolproof* method of knowing what the next thing is for you and your children to do!

How to Get More Done

Our main problem with getting a lot accomplished is stated in the following three verses:

“Her feet do not remain at home; she is now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner” (Prov. 7:11–12).

“Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor’s house, lest he become weary of you and hate you” (Prov. 25:17).

“I will set no worthless thing before my eyes” (Ps. 101:3).

Stay home more! *“Her feet do not remain at home; she is now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner” (Prov. 7:11–12).* I know that if I find that I am unable to “keep up” with my home, then it is usually because I have been “out and about” too much. I need to look at my priorities and stay home, to bring peace and stability to my family. If you do have errands, try to do them all on one day a week you set aside. Since my oldest daughter now drives, I have her do a lot of errands that I used to do. It is good for her to learn how to do the grocery shopping and how to return things. Even making a list of where she is to go on errand day is a valuable learning experience (which we will cover

in an upcoming chapter).

Stop talking to your friends. *“Let your foot rarely be in your neighbor’s house, lest he become weary of you and hate you” (Prov. 25:17).* Whether you go visiting or call a friend (or family member) on the phone, if you do it too often, you and your friend will eventually become a nuisance to each other. Set a time to get together on a regular basis, rather than being “home in body” but continually “out to lunch” in your mind and your focus while you are chitchatting on the phone.

You would be surprised that most of the distress in your life and home is caused by how often you neglect your home and children through telephone calls and other interruptions. I stopped accepting calls during my home school hours, because inevitably, it would cause me to lose control over the children. If they did “just keep working” as I asked them to do, they would do something wrong that had to be redone. People who call can always be called back at a more convenient time for you and your family. As I said, use an answering machine or an older child to screen your calls. Everyone will be happier for it!

Whether you are the one who calls, or the one who is called, the telephone can be a tremendous curse on a well run home.

Turn it off! *“I will set no worthless thing (perfect example: your television set!) before my eyes” (Ps. 101:3).* To me, there is nothing more worthless than the TV. We use to have just one television that my husband plugged in on occasion to watch sports (that I would have loved to throw in the trash!) And we had one that was connected only to a VCR that was good for educational tapes, spiritual tapes, and for “family night” (when we watched a good black and white classic movie, ate pizza, and had candy for dessert on Fridays).

These were the “good old days!” God is putting me through another refining and “dying to myself,” since moving from the farm and into the city. I am learning a new level of submission; this time, with a more willing heart and “cheerful” response when my husband announced that we were getting “dish” (connecting our television set to the entire world!), a huge plasma (flat screen), along with another very large television for upstairs in our living room!!

If you are trying to pressure your husband to remove the television, stop

and pray; avoid the strife! (See “Won Without a Word” in *A Wise Woman*.)

I used to think that somehow, or in some way, I needed to make sure that my husband knew and understood my concerns and displeasure of things I believed were worldly or evil. I was wrong. I concluded making sure that my husband was keenly aware of how I felt, when I realized that I had based my decision on my fear (never base anything on fear) that if I didn't tell him I disapproved of having television that I would end up like Ananias and Sapphira. (See Acts 5:1–11.)

In the past, I was equally incorrect in telling my husband of my displeasure because of my pride and spiritual arrogance. I believed my husband needed to be taught, from me, things that were right and wrong. This type of “mothering” your husband will end up in his tuning you out completely and not asking your opinion on *anything*. But true to this type, a woman like myself either doesn't realize this or really doesn't care. We believe that it is *our responsibility* to lead our family if “he won't.” Dear reader, there is no better way to drive your husband from the things of God and doing the right thing than to usurp your husband's position and authority. (To gain more information, get and read *A Wise Woman* because you are tearing down your own house!)

This time around, the Lord encouraged me to grow up; He showed me that HE knew my heart to have a television again. He always knew when it was something I was concerned about and not wholeheartedly for. I didn't need to make sure my husband knew it! My job, as a respectful helpmeet, was to smile and AGREE. Then take my concerns to the Lord so He could deal with it (if need be). The self-righteous Pharisee always wants to come back, so I need to be careful to not judge what my husband is doing or not doing, but instead to ask the Lord to give us the same heart.

Maybe it's me who needs to lighten up! But if it is my husband who needs to see the danger in something that is coming in or going on in our home, then I can trust that God will bring it about while I stay joyful, rather than stressed or worried.

Ladies, give it all to God to work it out. Remember, “His yoke is easy and His burden is light”!

The *Morning Clean-Sweep*

The “clean sweep” is a wonderful tool for getting your home ready before your husband comes up, or just to have a clean home to enjoy at the end of your day. But prior to really training my children, before they were old enough to help, I used a type of clean sweep in the morning.

After we would all wave goodbye to daddy in the morning, I would immediately set out a set of toys for my children to occupy themselves (more about this in chapter 9 “Toy Mania) and then head upstairs for a *morning* “clean sweep.” I would head to my room, make my bed, pick up or tidy around, and throw things that didn’t belong in that room into a laundry basket, including dirty clothes or towels. Then I headed to the master bath, then the children’s room. I would also empty the trash baskets into a brown bag that I would have with me.

If it needed it and it was still quiet downstairs, I would give the upstairs a quick vacuum. Then I would head downstairs, check on the children, and sort the basket in the laundry room. I would start a load of laundry, head to the kitchen to load the dishwasher, and wipe down the counters.

Ladies, with this kind of method, you feel wonderful! You also find that doing it every morning helps it stay clean! Novel idea! I kept the upstairs off limits, except for naptime, which is easy to do if you don’t store toys in the children’s room. Even living in a single story house can benefit from this by going from room to room with a clean sweep. And if they are very young or seem to want to gravitate to the clean rooms, get a small gate to deter them from returning to their rooms.

Conclusion

Ladies, I guarantee that the “clean sweep” will revolutionize your life, and make you happy. It will also make your husband happy to come home again, whether he lives with you now, or when he does return home.

When you know he is headed home (or when he used to come home), take just a few minutes to “clean sweep” your home, beginning at the front or back door and working toward the master bedroom or kitchen, whichever direction your husband usually takes (or took).

If your husband has a job that doesn't have set hours and you don't always know when he is coming, ask him, if he can, to give you a quick call an hour, half of an hour, or even fifteen minutes before he will arrive so you will be ready for him. For those whose husband has gone, just set a time each day to do this. Do it in faith and your faith will be rewarded!

Once again, the "clean sweep" is simply taking a large laundry basket or two and beginning in one area of the house, picking everything up off the floors, tables, shelves, etc. as you "sweep" through the house. Once the house is completely clean, sort what you collected into bags or baskets for each room.

And as I said earlier, I found the easiest way to sort your baskets is to label brown paper shopping bags. Label one bag for each room in the house, and label another one for "trash" or pull the trashcan in to where you are sorting. Sort and fill up the bags for each room. Once everything is sorted, take the bags to each room (that is now already clean) and put the items away. Save the bags by folding them, putting them all into one brown bag, and storing it in your laundry room by your laundry baskets.

This method is, by far, the fastest way to clean a house, because it is so efficient in saving you so many steps! A tidy home keeps the stress down in the life of your family. I have used this method (and every method in this book) for years and have taught hundreds of women to do the same. I pray it will be the answer to your prayer (or maybe your husband's prayer!) or draw him home if he is gone.

Notes:

Chapter 4

Making the Most of Your Day

Establishing a Routine

*Instead, you ought to say,
'If the Lord wills,
we shall live and also do this or that.'*
—James 4:15

Having a plan and setting a routine for going about your day is important in every home. The more children, outside activities, or responsibilities that you and/or your children have, the more a routine is necessary. If you set certain times for getting up, going to bed, meal times, and do the **same** tasks in the **same** order **every day**; you will spend less time giving directions, you will have well-trained and well-behaved children, and accomplish much more every day. We will cover this more specifically in the next chapter.

She rises! Proverbs 31:15 tells us, “She rises while it is yet night, and gives food to her household and a portion to her maidens.” Though the “Proverbs 31 woman” was actually the guidelines a mother was giving her son to find a precious wife, not a measuring stick to see if we are making it as a wife, we can glean much from the wisdom that is found in these verses.

Just recently, we moved to a neighborhood, and one of our pastors lives around the corner. To my shock, my young children came back one day from visiting to exclaim that they had a maid! This couple is much younger than we are, with their oldest being the same age as my youngest. When I went up to visit one day, I told the wife how from the first day I read that verse in Proverbs 31 about “giving a portion to her maidens,” I had been praying and believing that some day, I would have just one to wake up and feed! Now here she was with one, and she couldn’t possibly have prayed as long as I had!

After our laugh, I told her that I guess the Lord is not going to give me one so that I can encourage women who also will never have one. God did give me lots of children though, and I would rather have them around than any hired help.

As you read through this, you may be saying, “Well, my children are too young to help” or “I only have two children.” First, I too, at one time, only had young children. But if you take time by investing in their future by training them to do whatever they can at a young age, you will reap great rewards later. I also had just two at one time, but I trusted God, and He blessed me with more. Even if you are no longer able to have children yourself, or your husband doesn’t have the heart for more, God is the God of the impossible (read “Fruit of the Womb” in *A Wise Woman* for more information).

With that said, let me also explain that with a home that is de-cluttered and run well, if you have just a few children or if they are young, you will have less mess to deal with. In our home of nine, we have more dishes, more laundry, and more people to leave things lying around. But also, we have that much help to do everything.

With young children who are trained properly with some sort of routine, you will find that there really is not that much other than the toy mess. But that is one method coming up that, if followed, will basically eliminate the problem from your life!

Routines

Every morning, I check my menu for the day. I prepare breakfast and begin preparing or laying out the ingredients for lunch and dinner. However, when we lived so far from a grocery store, when we lived on a farm, most of our meat and other items were stored in one of our deep freezers. So if I waited, even until morning to check my menu, the meat would not be thawed, especially during the winter months. So I started checking my menu the night before.

Let me take a detour here in our sample routines to teach you a couple of things that will help you. If you use frozen meat, make sure you work it into your routine to check your menu (basically, what you will have for meals the next day) the night before. If you use fresh meat, then making

your meal plan must be made in the morning.

Don't do what most women do and wait until when you should be making dinner to figure out what you are going to have, then find out that you are missing ingredients, and then run out to get that one ingredient (picking up a few more things that you don't need because you are hungry) only to have dinner late—again!

Instead, just begin by figuring out what you are having for dinner either that morning, or the night before, if you freeze your meats. In an upcoming chapter, I will help you to create a month's menu (not cook ahead for a month, but just a menu so you "know" what you are going to have and to "know" that you have the ingredients *before* you start making it) by also creating a shopping list to match your menu. This little investment of your time, I promise, will radically change your life and take the dread out of meals and shopping! Everything I do is simple. Each method just takes a little bit of invested time, but lasts from one to five years to create a smooth running home and life!! Now, back to our routines.

After I check my menu, I write the menu for the day on a marker board for my family to view. My husband and sons like to know what is on the menu. It also cuts down on all the questions we hate to answer, such as, "What's for dinner?" It also helps my older daughter to know whether she and her younger sisters will make up some cookie batter for dessert, or make bread in the early afternoon.

I like to use a crock-pot as much as I can, so my dinner is ready on time. In addition, the house smells wonderful all day! I used to set the table for dinner after breakfast (put on a 3x5 card). Then we started home schooling at the table, so I set it after school. Most recently, we have a formal dining room; so, the table is set immediately after we eat dinner so it is ready for the next day. We used to home school at the table in the library. Now, in our new home, we are blessed to have a kitchen table to work on. Do what works for *your* family.

The point to this principle is to set the table immediately after clearing the dinner dishes (as we do since we have a formal dining room), after your breakfast or lunch dishes, or after you finish home schooling if you home school at your table. Don't wait until you are trying to get the meal prepared, as most people do, to clear and set your table.

Food from afar. I “bring food from afar” about once a week for fresh ingredients (where you will find around the perimeter of the grocery store). My big shopping has been only once a month, since I was first blessed with a deep freeze. This helps with storing meats, frozen vegetables, and baked goods. (If you are on a budget, shop the discount bakery stores. There used to be several discount bakeries on my once a month shopping day route, each had its own specialties.)

Also, watch for a double discounted day when you’ll find more savings. Most meat departments discount all their meats late at night and you can snatch them up very early the next morning (about 6 am). Do not fear getting too little sleep—God only warns us about getting too much sleep! I used to plan early morning shopping once a month for meat. It was wonderful to slip out **all alone** since my husband was there with the children.

Then, when we moved to the farm, almost all our meat was raised on our land and butchered. We had several months of meat in our meat freezer to choose from and to work our menu around. The rest of our once a month shopping needs were done in “the big city” at Sam’s, which was an hour away and “in town” at Wal-Mart, which was about half an hour away.

I tried several times to do it all on one day, but not even our 15-passenger van could hold all the food, only one helper, and me. I also was exhausted from the two hours of driving, the shopping, and then having to put it all away. After much prayer, I divided the shopping into two days once a month. We were also blessed with three pantries on our farm, but even if you don’t have this blessing, you can store a lot in the garage where we store our overflow like paper products. Oh, the toilet paper we go through with nine of us at home 24/7.

Then the cloud moved, and so did we! As many of you know, we now live back close to the city, just 5 minutes from a huge super Wal-Mart and 15 minutes to Sam’s. We also have a larger home, a much smaller kitchen, and no pantry. This meant that we reverted back to shopping once a week, and now my daughters do that for me! I guess that God just needed many examples to make this book helpful to all of you, so He keeps the cloud moving!

Family meals. One of the most important tasks as a wife or mother is to prepare a nice evening meal that is not hurried or “fast food.” It should be a time that the family looks forward to, and a time set aside each day to talk about the day. Have a dessert also written on your list, from a piece of fruit to a little mint to something bigger like pudding, cake, or cookies from scratch. My husband comes from a line of Swedes, so dessert is really more important to him than the meal! Make sure you are not trying to play “mother” with your husband’s eating habits, or he will probably find himself a new wife!

Even if his doctor has given you strict orders, your husband is not your patient. I honestly would rather live with my husband peacefully and in submission to him to reap the blessings of calling him lord (See 1 Peter 3:6 if you find this concept horrifying) for a short time, then to live a long and bitter life, which is what will happen if you usurp his authority! If his doctor, his parents, or his boss tries to push you to get above your husband’s authority, smile and tell them that they are talking to the wrong person and to talk to your husband. Now back to the lesson:

To ensure a happy husband, I incorporated “baking lessons” into my daughters’ education. I taught my oldest at about nine years, and now she teaches her younger sisters to bake. This should be taught and mastered before learning to cook.

The men in our family LOVE having fresh, hot cookies or another baked goody for dessert! It is also wonderful training for your daughters’ future. What a happy husband that has a wife who still bakes from scratch! Truly, baking is a special and lost ministry to the church. My daughter bakes cookies and pies for the many pastors in our church. Most of their wives do not bake, so it is a treat and blessing for their entire family.

Look ahead! Once again, don’t wait until four in the evening when everything is in a crazy state to wonder, “What should we have for dinner?” (The house is a disaster and the baby is just waking up from his nap.) Check your menu just after breakfast, or if you use frozen meat, the night before.

Make it easy! Plan your special big meals only occasionally. For years and years we only had a big breakfast on Saturdays. Most recently, it has been necessary to fix a big, hot breakfast two to three other mornings.

But God is good; my oldest daughter loves to receive the praise of the family, and hurries to make these extra hot meals for me!

However, with this said, remember; never be afraid of simplicity to balance your life. I use paper plates on color-coded plate holders for lunches—Oh yes, I believe in energy conservation—mine. And I do care about the environment: our home environment of peace and less strife!

Who's First in the Home?

If you have things your husband has asked you to do, put it at the top of your "To Do List," and write *his* requests first. Now, if possible, do these first! (This will save a lot of anger or resentment on his side and a lot of hurt feelings on your side!) Our example, Sarah, even called Abraham lord! (See Lesson 8 "Wives, Be Subject" in *A Wise Woman* if you have trouble with this concept!) Therefore, we should make it our main goal to put our husband's request as top priority!

If you have neglected this all important principle of putting your husband's requests first, then ask the Lord to remind you of the things your husband has asked you to do, and do them (even if they take all day or all week!) God blesses OBEDIENCE and punishes REBELLION! If you have a rebellious or disrespectful son or daughter that you feel you have been cursed with, then I would check to see if it is being bred by *your* rebellion, because you have been ignoring your husband's requests.

Conclusion

Establishing a routine in your life will keep your life running smoothly, efficiently, and will result in much less instruction and disciplining your children. Your stress level will fade into joy, which will accompany a happier home, husband, and children. Take the time to establish a workable routine in your life!

If you are wondering how this will work in your life, with all the variables that go on each week, then the next chapter will give you some suggestions as I share some of my varied schedules with you.

Notes:

Chapter 5

Making the Most of **Each Day**

How You Get Started!

In the beginning God created . . .
—Gen. 1:1

Whenever I speak to a younger woman, who is obviously overwhelmed with the task of homemaking, I quickly find certain distinct areas of neglect. The very first area of neglect very often is creating a daily routine for them and their children, which we spoke about briefly in the previous chapter.

With that said, let me clarify my statement. I didn't say to set a routine for yourself, *your husband*, and your children—no, no. Do not attempt, think, suggest, or imply that your husband needs to be set into *your*, nor your children's, routine!! On the contrary, you and your children are to fit into *your husband's* routine.

“The heart of her husband trusts in her [his wife], and *he will have no lack of gain*” (Prov. 31:11). Can your husband trust that he will have no lack of gain?

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a *helper suitable for him*’” (Gen. 2:18). If being a helper to your husband is a new concept to you, or if you are still struggling with this frame of mind, please read (or reread) Lesson 9, “Helper Suitable,” in *A Wise Woman* available through our ministry's online store. Go to RestoreMinistries.net for more information.

Now you might want to tell me your husband's life has no rhyme or reason to it, but that is where you are wrong. All human beings are creatures of habit. If you think your husband doesn't have a morning routine, I will tell you that you haven't been watching! Remember, “An

excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels” (Prov. 31:10). It was very difficult to find a virtuous woman back when Proverbs was written—now it is nearly impossible!

So what caused a virtuous woman to be harder to find in today’s world? The new feminist idea has warped our minds, and now our thinking has been distorted. This verse of Scripture should set us straight. “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake” (1 Cor. 11:8–9). This principle is at the very foundation of our homes, and without a godly foundation, our houses will fall as we unknowingly tear them down with our very own hands! “The wise woman *builds* her house, but the foolish *tears it down* with her *own* hands” (Prov. 14:1).

Once again, the very first step you must make is to set yourself and your children up in a **ROUTINE**, adapting yourself to your *husband’s* schedule. You may think the terms “schedule” and “routine” are interchangeable, but they are not. A schedule denotes “time,” whereas a routine is a pattern of doing something. Now, certainly *time* will be a factor in your routine; however, I have found that when I use time to set my routine, I soon become stressed, anxious, and eventually frantic!

Once again, a routine is simply a way of doing things in a particular order, every day. Your present routine may be to get up, get coffee, yell at your children to “stop! . . .,” then to sit down in front of the television watching a morning show until lunch.

Or your routine may be to get up late, run to your children’s room, yell “get up we’re late!,” throw cereal in a bowl, pitch something into their lunch box, and spend ten minutes in panic as you desperately search for homework, a shoe, or something else you can’t find. Everyone has a routine. What I propose is that you establish your routine; don’t let it establish you.

When you set out with an idea for your routine, don’t make it lofty and unattainable. How many times have you decided to take control of your day, and you give up before lunch? You are not a failure if this has happened to you. You simply did not have the right mind-set when you began.

Wake Up

The first thing you'll do in the morning is to wake up, so let's begin there. Do you set an alarm, or do you rise when you hear your children fighting? Or, do you open one eye when your husband kisses you good-bye? Does he slip out hoping he won't have to confront your weary face, mangled hair, and offensive breath?

How would you *like* to begin your day? *Be careful and don't get lofty here, girls.* Set a time that you can easily (or at least might be able to) achieve. It may be nice to consider getting up ahead of, or at least when your husband gets up. Wouldn't you agree? Let me suggest that you go in and splash some warm or cool water on your face, maybe even brush your teeth. Do you like coffee, hot tea, or maybe juice in the morning? Even a nice, cool glass of water will help get you going. Why not find out what your husband likes to drink, and bring it to him with a good morning kiss?

If it's also time for your children to get up, awaken them with a kiss, or a back rub if they are grown-up boys. My youngest daughter loves coffee (terrible, but true). When I sit down on her bed holding my cup of coffee, I offer her a sip, which brings a smile, a long stretch, and she is no longer lying down.

If your children don't "have to" get up yet, let them sleep just a bit so you can fulfill this wonderful proverbial suggestion: "She rises also while it is still night, and gives food to her household, and portions to her maidens" (Prov. 31:15). When I first read this, I thought, "Well, once I get some maidens (just one maid would be great) then I'll get up when it's still dark!" Years ago, the way I rationalized this verse was to tell myself that even though it wasn't dark outside, I *felt* like it was!

I know many women who do this sort of thing (get up when it's still dark). I just recently got a book from a woman who scheduled her entire day (every minute of every day) and individually scheduled her eight children's every minute too. When she sat down to write everything she needed to do every day, she found she couldn't do it all in 24 hours! (I can relate!) So, she concluded that she could make it on less sleep! As soon as I read that, without even considering it for a moment, I said, "No way!"

Now, I will admit, I don't always get a nice eight hours of sleep, because things happen. Company may linger, too often we are out late on date night, we may (and usually do) stay up visiting with our older children, or there are times when a child is sick—but for heaven's sake, I am not going to *plan* to get less sleep on purpose!

I prefer to claim this Scripture to guide me in this all-important decision: "It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep" (Ps. 127:2). Did you notice the verse said we shouldn't "retire late"? I pad my designated bedtime by half an hour so I can get to bed at a decent hour every night when possible.

However, since I am getting older and used to live on a farm, it became more difficult to sleep in. I am often up at four or five in the morning. It makes me laugh to read the above paragraphs, with a little bit of longing for how things used to be! However, I never knew that I was missing the most beautiful sunrises, or the precious solitude of the morning hours spent with the Lord, until we moved to our farm. And even though we no longer live on a farm, God faithfully wakes me before dawn to spend time and coffee with Him!

Can't Get Up

If you have trouble (or you have trouble with your children) getting up, I have the solution. The problem is most people do this backwards. They keep trying to go to bed earlier so they can get up in the morning. This will never work. Instead, get up (or get your children up) just one morning when you said you would—no matter when you went to bed. Then, don't take a nap (keep your children's regular nap short or miss it if they still take one) and then everyone will be begging to go to bed on time. Whenever you begin to go to bed late, which makes you get up too late, use this method to roll your sleep pattern back.

Are you a person who battles guilt because you feel you should get up earlier? Are you the type of person who thinks they should have at least an hour with the Lord—even if it means your "quiet time" would begin at 3:30 a.m.? Let me give you the verse the Lord gave me when I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown (well, maybe my breakdown was in full swing when He gave it to me): "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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 SHALL FIND **REST** FOR YOUR SOULS. For **My** yoke is *easy*, and **My** load is *light*” (Matt. 11:28–30).

For almost six years, I barely slept. It began when my husband was gone, and I was seeking the Lord for marriage restoration; I just couldn’t sleep because he wasn’t beside me in bed. Many nights I *thought* I heard him on the balcony of our townhouse. (I have always been a positive thinker!) I was sure at any moment he was going to come to his senses and come bounding up the fence, onto the balcony, and tap gently on my sliding glass door. And, of course, I certainly didn’t want to miss his coming home! (See Song of Solomon 5:6 if you missed the picture.)

After he came home (which, by the way, was through a phone call, NOT climbing up my townhouse balcony), I became almost obsessed with making sure I was the perfect wife. I had one baby after another. These three sweet babies would inevitably wake up to nurse, and I wouldn’t be able to get back to sleep. I would go to my computer, and write until dawn. This went on for four years. The entire *Wise Woman* was written between the hours of three and seven in the morning and with one hand, as I nursed a baby at my breast!

Did you know that there is such a thing as “sleep deprivation”? Well, I had it. You get loony! Actually, it begins with becoming “wired.” You can’t sleep; you can’t rest. Then you become loony tunes, and you’re headed for a breakdown. It’s taken me a long time to recover; or have I recovered?

I am now convinced that we women have been duped to believe that we have to be super-human. We have believed the song “I am woman, I am strong . . .” But, that is a lie (I can attest to that!). The Bible says (and His Word is truth), “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a **weaker vessel**, since she is a woman . . .” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Being weaker is nothing to be ashamed of; it’s the way we were made. It was no mistake; it’s not a flaw. God made us this way for a purpose—His purpose. And believe me when I tell you, whenever you try and change His purpose for your life, there’s trouble.

So relax, get to bed early if you can, and get up at a reasonable hour.

Now, we've spent over three pages on getting up. Let's see if we can get down to business.

Now You're Up!

Create your routine based on what you want to do, or what you need to do next. You will fall into one of two categories: the "need to do" or the "want to do" category. If your husband has not left for work, it is a "need to do." You *need to do* certain things as a wife.

If your children have a time they must get off to school, it's also a "need to do" decision. You *need to do* certain things as a mother.

I fall into the "want to do" category (praise the Lord). Neither my husband nor I go to work, and our children don't go to school.

(If you are interested in being set FREE from sending your children to school, you can find out about the BEST decision that my husband and I have ever made in the last lesson of *A Wise Woman*, and more specific information in *Enter by the Narrow Gate: Homeschooling with Conviction!*)

There is such freedom in living in the "want to do" category. If you are in this category because you still have only small children, then you are blessed to be at home—you have freedom! So hold onto it by keeping your children home and teaching them yourself.

Now, freedom is being free to do "not just what you *want*" but "what you *ought*." "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Gal. 5:17).

"Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you *ought to walk* and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more" (1 Thess. 4:1).

Freedom that is ungoverned or not controlled is really bondage. Your flesh will begin to rule your life. You may sit around in a lethargic stupor:

“How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?” (Prov. 6:9)

“As the door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed” (Prov. 26:14).

“The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, for his [or her] hands refuse to work . . .” (Prov. 21:25).

Or, you are busy getting nowhere:

“She is boisterous and rebellious; her feet do not remain at home; she is now in the streets, now in the squares, and lurks by every corner” (Prov. 7:11–12).

“She does not ponder the path of life; her ways are unstable, she does not know it” (Prov. 5:6).

Do you run around from place to place, from project to project, from house to house, from store to store, and get nothing done in your home?

The second set of verses describes the adulterous woman. Have you been unfaithful to your husband, because you have neglected your responsibility as a homemaker, wife, and mother? This is why many men leave their wives, and why many young men are choosing *not* to marry. Why should they? Even the church is filled with harlots to sleep with. If he were to marry, would she be at home caring for their home and their children?

Would she be out working, while his children are raised in daycare? Would she see her responsibilities at home and with their children as her career, and work at it accordingly? Or would she simply stay at home neglecting her duties?

Our older sons are now reaching the age to marry, and finding a “virtuous” wife almost seems impossible. A young woman who is not interested in a career is like finding a needle in a haystack! Even those who claim to want to be homemakers are going to college and seeking a degree to have something to “fall back on.” Unfortunately, when you prepare for a “Plan B,” it usually happens. (For more information on training young women versus young men, and more information on the

dangers of being a working woman, look into *A Wise Woman*.)

How long would your husband keep his job if he sat in the coffee room reading a magazine? How long would he keep his job if he went to run an errand for his boss and stayed out until dusk? How long would he keep his job if he didn't do his job?

Girls, don't come crying to me pretending you didn't know. This is why men leave their wives. What man wants to come home to a woman with an attitude, who neglects her duties, yet has the nerve to tell him off?

Not too many years ago, men used to be frantic to find a wife and get married. A woman was a hot commodity, when her desire was to have children for her husband, train well-behaved children, keep a nice home, fix delicious meals, and be his lover at night. If this repulses you, then your mind is fixed on the evils of this world and you are ignorant of God's Word. If I'm wrong, then how did Proverbs 31 and Titus 2 get into the Bible?

Again I ask, have you been an unfaithful wife to your husband? If you have, repent before the Lord and ask Him to change you. Now that you're motivated, let's get back to the business at hand.

What's Next?

After you're up, the next step would be to get dressed, have breakfast, or make the beds. To make this decision, ask yourself, "What should I do?" if you're in the "need to do" category. If you are a "want to do," ask yourself, "What would make me feel motivated? What will keep me moving in order to conquer the next task? What will get me over the next hump?"

Some women feel a hundred times better if they can just get out of their bathrobe. Other women just need to get something in their stomachs, or get their children fed. Some must make their beds before they leave their room to feel better. *If you are tempted to climb back into bed, I'd suggest you make up your bed first!* And some women like to walk or exercise.

If you are an exercise fanatic, let me first ask you a question. Once you exercise, are you burnt out so that you can get nothing done? Or do you become invigorated and ready to tackle the world? We all know

ourselves. Take a little time to ponder this question. *Selah*. (When you see this in your Bible it means to ponder the thought in your mind for a while.)

Exercise is great if it helps you to stay calm, and puts you in a good mood without wearing you out. However, a good workout could also be accomplished by deep cleaning your house! Deep bending while picking up things off the floor, vigorous vacuuming to get your heart pumping, strengthening your arms by scrubbing toilets or bathtubs, or even making some good homemade bread with lots of kneading are all excellent forms of exercise. Women today neglect their homes and go to a gym or jog around the neighborhood. It's fine to keep in good shape, as long as your home does not reflect neglect.

To help you get a routine together, it might be helpful for me to tell you what I do when I get up, and maybe, a couple of other periods of time when I did it a different way. This may help you to decide how to set a routine for yourself.

My Present Routine

Because of my old age (I'm now in my forties!), I automatically wake up before seven every morning. I usually pray, thanking the Lord for the day, etc. Then, I slip quietly out of bed and splash my face with cold water. Then, I start the coffee maker in the kitchen. I round the corner into the office and turn on the lights, all three computers, and the printer. Next, I go online to answer the e-mails. When the coffee is done, I bring a cup of hot Java to my honey, with a kiss and a "good morning darling."

My husband and I make the bed and read our Bibles together, while drinking our coffee. At 7:30 a.m., I wake all the children. They have been trained in their routine, which is to make their bed first, get dressed (I lay out their clothes on their dressers, after I lay them down at night), and come out for breakfast. My oldest daughter makes breakfast for the little ones, following what was written on the menu board the night before. The older boys read their Bibles and drink coffee or cocoa.

After waking the children, I take my shower, get dressed, put on my make-up, and get a piece of toast. I "inspect" the children's room (going through EVERY drawer and the closet) and put up a sticker on their calendar (which they get a treat for on Fridays).

I look them over to make sure their hair is fixed, etc. It is usually about 8:30 a.m. when the entire family meets for our Prayer Meeting. (We use 3x5 cards for prayer and listen to the Bible on CD as we read along).

Once our Prayer Meeting is over, the men go to the office, and we begin home schooling until lunch.

Another Routine

When my children were small, not school age, this was my routine. I usually got up about the same time, seven in the morning, when I heard my husband in the shower. I would get up, make our bed, and tidy up the room. I would lie out my husband's clothes on his valet (that thing that holds men's clothing). At that time, I would iron everything as it came out of the wash and before I put it in the closet. But when our closets got smaller and cramped, I couldn't afford that much time to set aside for ironing. Instead, I began picking out his clothes and iron them before, or during, his shower.

Let me assure you, my sons can all iron for themselves, and my daughters iron for themselves (the younger ones are too small yet, but they will learn). My daughters know that someday they will iron their husbands' clothing; therefore, often they bless their brothers by ironing their things.

After I laid out his clothes, I would go down to get the coffee on, sometimes read my Bible, and wait until I'd hear the little ones stirring upstairs. (When children have a set routine of eating and sleeping, they will get up at about the same time every morning.) Then, I would come up, kiss them good-morning, and help them get dressed. Before we left their bedroom, the beds were made and the room was tidy. And unless I had to clean the bathrooms that day, no one would go upstairs until naptime.

Then, we would all meet downstairs for breakfast with daddy and walk him out to the car, waving as he drove away. Once inside, we would go to the "locked" toy closet and get out designated toys for the day. (More of how to organize children's toys in Chapter 9 "Toy Mania") Then, I would begin a load of laundry and check my chore cards to see what I needed to do for the rest of the day.

One Final Routine Example

When I had four children, and my oldest had started kindergarten (I didn't begin home schooling until my oldest was just starting second grade), my routine looked like this.

My alarm was set for 6:30 a.m. I would get up and wake Dallas (Eeeeeek, the infamous school bus)! I would go in and fix him breakfast, and he would join me in the kitchen when he was done dressing. I would give him his lunch box and backpack. When Dallas would come home from school, I would clean out his lunch box, make his lunch for the next day, and put it in the refrigerator. He was taught to do his homework immediately when he got home, then I would check it; he would pack his backpack, and bring it by the front door.

Everyone else was still sleeping, so I would walk Dallas to the bus stop and wait for him to get on. Then, I would walk home, usually to find someone awake. I would then fix breakfast for the rest of them, nurse the baby, and walk my husband to the door or to the car with the children in tow.

Once inside, I would again take out the day's toys for the children to play. When they were first discovering the toys, I would go into each of the bedrooms to make the beds, gather dirty clothes, dump trashcans, vacuum, and dust. Then, I would go to the next room and do the same thing. Ladies, it feels so good to have a clean house.

Another wonderful tip: I have never allowed my children to play in their rooms. Bedrooms are for sleeping, dressing, and reading. Sometimes, I have had play areas; usually it has been in the living room. And before they are ever able to go outside to play, stop for lunch, or lie down for a nap, the toys are all picked up. It's not difficult if there is only one toy bucket out at a time. (Again, we will get into more specifics about toys in an upcoming chapter.)

I really need to once again share my heart about home schooling. If you have EVER thought about home schooling your children, let me tell you that my husband and I believe it was the BEST decision we ever made, and that has brought about the fruit in our children's lives that so many comment on.

I put together a video series and an audio series entitled, *Home Schooling for Him!!* (*Home schooling for the Lord that is, not how to get your husband to home school your children*), that will motivate you and give you the confidence to do it. I have simplified home schooling, put God at the center, and have shared this method with many women I know, I've met, and also at home school conferences. They tell me that they now they find home schooling their children very easy and rewarding. Take a moment to go to our website store for more details—you'll find us at RestoreMinistries.net.

Conclusion

I hope that you can glean a routine for your family from those that I have shared with you. When you make up a routine, then you need to *routinely* do it every weekday morning.

This is the place to start to get your life and home back in order. Variety is said to be the “spice of life.” But too much variety (or spice) makes things wild and too hot to handle! If you don't have a routine, and you have to decide every day what to do next (not to mention getting your children to do something new every day), you will never want to get out of bed!

God is a God of order and routine. Every morning, the sun comes up in the east at the same time. Our seasons are set. Gestation of a baby, the labor and birth: all happen with specific timing and a set routine. This is God's way, a way of order and predictability. Be godlier by following His example and bring a workable routine into your family's life. It will bring the “peace that surpasses all understanding”!

Notes:

Chapter 6

Making the Most of Your Schedule

Number Your Days

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to Thee
a heart of wisdom.
—Ps. 90:12*

Whenever I get excited with something new to try with my family, it never fails, a crisis will hit. The enemy is a thief! Since you have prayed for help in your life, and God has answered you by giving you a new plan, then undoubtedly the enemy will come in to try to mess it up. Has this already happened the very first morning that you tried to set up a routine with your family?

The baby gets sick, your husband asks you to do something unusual for him, or family decides to visit that same week. This is just part of every day life!

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you, which comes upon you for your testing as though some strange thing has happened to you, but rejoice!” (1 Pet. 4:12) “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4) So rejoice! This just means you are on the right track, because the enemy is trying to thwart your efforts!

It is always important to plan ahead, set a routine in your life (as we discussed in the last chapter), and organize your home and your life; but remember, tests, trials, and temptations will come into your life every day, so you must be ready with a plan of action—don’t let trials take *you* by surprise!

When you wake up each and every morning, turn to God and ask Him

for His plan. This is what the verse in Proverbs 3:6 means, “*In all your ways acknowledge Him*, and He will make your paths straight.” This is especially true when a crisis hits. Go to God first, acknowledge that He wants to help you, and let Him direct the next step you take. That’s how God can turn your trials into triumphs! And don’t forget to **thank** Him for *every* trial, because He promises to work it for our good (See Romans 8:28).

First Corinthians 10:12–13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you but such is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will *provide the way of escape* also, that you may be able to endure it . . .” We all face trials, but what is important is to find God’s way *through* it!

Methods of Organizing to Save Time *and* Frustration

Though the unexpected happens when you least expect it, we cannot spend our focus on days like these. Setting aside the dramatic, let’s focus on ways to organize our life so that when things happen, we still will be able to function or pick up where we left off.

Notes: Using and making notes are only good if you constantly refer to them, diligently follow them, and have the notes when you need them! Instead of notes spread all over your house, such as using “stickies,” other scraps of paper, or lists, you may want to consider using an *organizer* to keep your lists all together.

Organizer: Organizers are wonderful, and I have used them for years; however, when you pick one, make sure it is simple. It seems as if they are designed for executives, and not for people like us; therefore, whatever you won’t use, take those sections out and either throw them away or give them to charity. (I used to keep them thinking that I would use them some day. Instead it just gave me one more thing that led to having to de-clutter sooner.) The best thing you can do is to keep only the sections that cover *your* needs.

When we moved to the farm and lived very far from everything, I found I did not get out as much as I did when I lived in the city (when I relied heavily on my organizer that I carried with me everywhere).

This section was originally written when I was out of the house more

often, which meant I needed to keep my organization method *with* me. Most of you do not live in rural settings, so this chapter may be very helpful to make sure you keep your organization *with* you.

Even now that we live in the city again, I find that I try not to leave my home often, and if I do, it is for short durations. At home, I am continually on my computer, which houses my “organizer” or daily calendar and office notifications, that come up all day long telling what to do when. When I leave, I can carry my palm pilot that I can take with me. Though the computer age is nice, I really preferred the organizer method. Unfortunately, my life now is just too high paced to look back.

The most important rule when using any organizer is that you must keep it with you at **all** times! This means that you carry it with you when you move to another room in the house, and be sure that your purse is large enough to accommodate your organizer if possible. (At one point, I had an organizer that was also a wallet. I used this one for about three years.)

Another great tip is to be sure to use a *pencil* instead of the *pen* your organizer may come with. This will make it easier to move or change things as your life or situation changes, not only day-to-day, but sometimes moment-by-moment!

With an organizer (that I carry or one that is on my computer), I find I am able to accomplish a lot more than I could without one and with much less stress! Here are some of the things I keep in my organizer that help me to keep organized and on schedule.

Phone numbers: This includes a “yellow pages” with not only phone numbers, but also the hours the businesses we frequent are open. Try to group all your numbers together on colored sheets, such as when I use a yellow for businesses like a “yellow pages.” I put in the hours and phone numbers for our bank, post office, library, Sam’s Club, and other places we frequent.

Before using my palm pilot and computer, in my organizer I used 5x7 cards (the next size up from 3x5 cards) and hole punched them. I put phone numbers and/or addresses for different groups such as a Sunday school class (green for growth), my husband’s church softball team (white like the ball), the swim team (I used blue), my husband’s co-workers (I think I may have used white), and emergency numbers (like

the doctors, the closest pharmacy, our dentist that I put on a bright pink card since the cards do not come in red signifying an emergency).

It is a wonderful thing to be a great helper suitable for my husband and family. I also found that I was the one other people would come to when they needed a number, which may or may not have been a blessing.

Calendar pages: Use “monthly” pages if you usually have a minimal number of appointments (three to four appointments or practices a week). Or use the “week at a glance” if you are a fairly busy person (more than one appointment a day). If you are busy all day long, you will want to use a daily calendar or only use the daily calendar for those days when you’re planning a lot of errands or appointments, or if you use it for making lists.

Get in the habit of “scheduling” when you are to *leave* the house versus the appointment time. Just make sure you write it down: “leave at 9,” so you don’t get there a half an hour early. Also, schedule the time you are to get ready and the time you are to eat (breakfast, lunch, or dinner). If you are someone who is always late, change this character flaw by padding your time. Allow 30 min, rather than 15 min.

Someone who is always late is not only a problem with a disorganized person; it is a problem with pride. You are saying that your time is more valuable than the person who you force to wait for you. Whether that is at an appointment, a luncheon engagement, or at church. Take time to redefine your life by allowing enough time to get ready and get somewhere on time, then write it down and follow what you wrote down.

Here is a list of some other information you may need with you in your organizer:

Children’s section: Write the sizes of clothes and shoes, current height and weight, Social Security numbers, savings account numbers, birthdates, blood type, and allergies next to your children’s names. And always use a pencil! Periodically, update the information when you find that the size or weight has changed. You can remember to do this by using a green or monthly 3x5 card, which we will talk about it in the next chapter.

You may think that you can remember all this in your head, since you

only have a couple of children. You may be able to, but what if, heaven forbid, you are incapacitated or unexpectedly should pass away. This information (and the method) would be invaluable to your husband and/or relatives like your mother or mother-in-law. Then be sure that the people close to you know you keep this type of data handy.

The weights are helpful especially with medicines. Though we basically never even go to the doctor, I still like to have that information written down. You can also use this in your memory box by making a new card each time you need to update it. Just remember to date it so you remember when they were that size.

For my husband, I made up on the back of a brightly colored business card my children's names, birthdates, and Social Security numbers so he didn't need to ask me when filling out paper work. He has kept it in his wallet for years!

Husband's section: Don't forget to write your husband's clothing and shoe sizes, Social Security number, savings and checking account numbers, his co-workers' phone numbers, etc. Again, this is invaluable in an emergency, but also handy when you find some clothing on sale or your mother-in-law wants to buy something for your husband on his birthday or for Christmas.

Addresses. When you use the address section of your organizer, once again, always write the addresses in pencil as our society is one that moves often. If you have a poor memory, you can keep track of a gift when it was received under each name (with the date) and when the "thank you"(TY) was mailed out. I began doing this because my mother-in-law would ask my husband if I got something from someone I really didn't know, and also asked if I had thanked them, but since they were names of people I didn't know, I couldn't remember. Now I can check and verify that I did receive it and that a thank you card was sent.

Also, make a note of Christmas cards (CC '05) received and the date mailed out for the same reason. When I get my Christmas cards, I keep the envelopes in a gift bag to check and update my address book that I now keep on my computer.

Prayer list. Record the date and the request, leaving space for the answer to prayer. So many people ask us to pray for them, and we say we will,

but fail to keep our word. This is a place to write it down so we can be women of our word.

If it is a long-term prayer request, I make a 3x5 card and add it to the piles that we pray during our family prayer meeting each morning. We have a specific stack *Pray for Others* that, **Praise the Lord**, have never gone unanswered. If it is a *Prayer for Salvation*, we put it in that stack of prayer cards and often include a picture if we have one. Most missionaries have cards with their picture that we always use and add it to the *Praying for Missionaries* pile.

However, since I am asked to pray about many things, I need to faithfully write it down in my organizer and then faithfully pray for it each morning.

Prayer tip. When I am approached with “would you pray about something . . .” I began taking their hands (unless it was a man) and praying right there and then! I stopped caring what people thought or where I was. I just thought, “Why wait to pray?” What is funny is that many of the people who always used to run after me to pray about something, stopped. Sometimes I believe that Christians like to have other people pray rather than praying, or often it is a form of complaining about what they are going through.

I really do love to pray and find it a privilege to do so; however, without a good method in place, like praying for them right then and there, adding it to my list in my organizer and then adding it to the 3x5 cards we pray in the morning, it became a burden rather than a privilege. I hope one or all of these methods will help you find the method that works for you!

Learn the secret of pre-planning. Make out your “**things to do**” for the next day, the night before! Use your organizer as a diary of things to remember, as well as what you are *to do*. So often, especially as I get older, I forget whether I did something or not. When I am careful to write my to-do list in my organizer and check it off as I go, then I can refer to it if my memory fails me. This is especially helpful if your husband has asked you to do something! And make sure you put his requests as top priority.

Making your to do list the night before will:

- Help you to be one step ahead.
- Help you to sleep better.
- Help you remember if you already did something.
- Help you to be a better wife as you put your husband's requests on **top** of your list and treat them with "priority"!

The Right Way to Make a List

The correct way of making a list is simple and works! Most people try to make a list in order of what they need to do first. Yet with any type of writing (and thank God for computers), the way to write a book or a list is to get it out of your head and down on paper, and then organize it.

Try this: when you make a list the night before, or anytime you are going to run errands, write down everything you can think of *as you think of it*. Then when your list is made, number them according to importance (remember, make sure you do your husband's request(s) first!).

If it is a list of errands to run, after you have everywhere you need to go written down, go back and look through the list for your first stop. It could be the closest location or the one that is the farthest away working your way back home. I have taught this to my husband (not by teaching, but by example as I made lists for him) and also to my children, which I do teach!

If you have a map, it might help to look for a route this way, especially if you do not have the kind of mind for directions. I have a map in my mind (though I, unfortunately, have absolutely no sense of time!) and looking at a map has helped me to find the shortest route to a location. I found that the route I normally took was clearly longer than what the map showed. Working with a map is also a wonderful thing to teach your children, whether you home school them or not.

If any of your stops are appointments that have a specific time, then I write the time, rather than the number, next to this. Then, I try to work my way to that part of town to hit the appointment, padding an extra twenty or thirty minutes for me in case I get caught in traffic or get a

slow cashier.

Unless I have less than three stops, whenever we get in the car, I write down each stop we make in the order I remember it on a little gadget that sticks to the front window of your car. (You can find these little gems in the car section of your Wal-Mart. They have a pad of paper and a pen with suction cups to make it stick to your windshield. All of our cars have them.)

Once I list every stop, I then number them according to the first stop through the last stop. My husband simply loves this method, as he is usually the one driving. I love it because I don't like to tell him where we are going next! I never like hearing women always telling their husband's what to do. It makes for a bossy wife and a hen-pecked, bitter husband.

Try this method yourself, and don't forget to teach it to your children.

Notes:

Chapter 7

Making the Most of The Right Method

The Tasks in Hand

*Let us examine and probe our ways,
And let us return to the LORD.
—Lam. 3:40*

Most women have no real *plan* to keep their homes clean and orderly. They simply see a problem; then eventually, they get around to doing something about it (and sometimes they never do)! Yet, women of the past had a very organized manner to keeping their homes clean and in good order. It was something that they learned to do as a young lady. We, on the other hand, have been programmed to believe today that keeping our homes clean and in order is beneath us! Therefore, we give no thought to this all-important call on our lives!

Surprisingly, I enjoy housework! I enjoy the rewards when it is clean and in order. It is not just the end result but also the work itself. I know keeping my house clean and in order is a special call on my life, not at all beneath me (or any other woman). I take it seriously and love to do a good job. How you look at your job will have a great effect on how well you perform it!

In addition, I love to teach my children these tasks. I think it is important that they feel they are needed and capable of helping the family, even if they are very young. Some women, who keep a nice home, do not allow their children to help—this is a great tragedy!

Some women (who often have only one or two children) believe that if they can do it themselves, or have hired help do it, that they shouldn't bother teaching their children. It is only the fortunate few (who often live in larger families) who are blessed to be prepared for life after they leave home.

Now on the other hand, there are women, many who work outside the home, that leave the task of keeping the home and even cooking to their children who are not really trained and are carrying a tremendous burden that they are not meant to carry. Neither of these extreme situations is right in the eyes of God. We, as mothers, are to carry the major responsibility of managing our homes, while we train our children to help (whether we need or want their help)!

Before we move on, another atrocity that is causing many marital problems is the “house” husband or the husband who is forced to help with the housework! Women who work outside the home (those women who are helping to pay the bills) have a very good point. But having your husband help with the housework will not solve the problem; but rather, having the wife at home full-time will solve the problem. Taking care of a home and a family **properly** is a full-time job! (For more information about how to be a stay-at-home wife when your husband insists that you work, see Lesson 14 “The Ways of Her Household” in *A Wise Woman*.)

And finally, let me speak sympathetically to those of you who have no choice but to do it alone; since you are presently a single parent (not by choice). I was one for two years. Therefore, I know how worn out you become when there is no other adult to help carry the load! When I finally ran out of steam, I made the mistake of telling my husband, who had left me and was living with another woman (all the sorted details, my husband and I share on our testimony tape available through our ministry) of my need!

My husband's (and father of our four young children) lack of response when I expressed to him my anxiety and my total exhaustion was just another hurt I didn't need at the time. However, it reminded me of the One who promised to “never leave me or forsake me!” I then asked Him to send me help. Lo and behold, He sent my husband home (with a new heart) to help me, and I was no longer a single parent! Hallelujah!!

If you are a single parent, it is my prayer that you are presently seeking to restore your marriage! In the midst of seeking restoration you will find a great source of strength in taking the Lord as your Husband. (For more information about restoring your marriage, see *How God Can and Will Restore Your Marriage* available through our ministry.)

No matter what the source of your exhaustion or frustration about your home, God has the answer! Make sure that you speak to HIM regularly about it. I promise that He will send you help. Just make sure that when He does send the help, you respond to your help with humility and gratefulness, not an attitude. No one will hang around long when you respond with “Well, it’s about time!” And then, don’t forget to get alone with God and thank Him for help.

I do know a woman who was sent supernatural strength and youth when she needed help. Her husband returned home in poor health after he had been living in adultery for several years leaving this very tiny and fragile wife to care for four young daughters. When called on to bless her husband, she asked God for a sign. His sign was her youthful energy and supernatural strength! She was able to physically help her husband, who had a stroke, though he was more than double her weight!

Let us all trust the Lord. He is faithful to answer us as long as we ask Him!

The Method: Task/Chore Cards

In Chapter 4, I promised you a method to maintain “unseen areas” of your home, closets, or drawers, so you would not become side-tracked during your daily clean sweep before your husband returned home each evening. When you come across a drawer or closet that it overrun, you will want to make it a weekly or monthly task rather than trying to sort or organize it when you are doing a “clean sweep” of your house.

When I was newly married, I had no idea how to have a routine to incorporate all the tasks of cleaning, laundry, cooking, shopping, ironing, etc. into my day, week, and month. I had never been trained nor observed it, as I mentioned early in the book.

You may or may not be in this desperate state, but very few manage a good home these days (as I have observed when I go visiting). This method can bring you up to a higher level with just a little investment of time or, for you who are like me, can get your home running efficiently instead of chaotic.

Supplies: To get started at making chore or task cards, gather these items from an office supply store. You’ll need:

1. One package each of blue, yellow, green, pink, and white 3x5 cards.
2. A 3x5 card file.
3. 3 sets of dividers:
 - a. Numbers 1-31 (to represent the days of the month).
 - b. Monthly cards (Jan.–Dec.).
 - c. And extra blank dividers.
4. Large colored paper clips or clothespins.
5. Plastic letter holder.

What you are going to do is gather an ongoing list that, once made, can last for years! Each morning, my children and I begin our day by taking a stack of multicolored 3x5 cards that are clipped together and waiting in a letter folder.

On the top white card is each person's name with a reminder to pray to begin the day. With small children who cannot read, I draw a stick figure of a little boy or girl on their knees, head bowed, and hands folded. On my top card, that is white, I wrote out, "Lord, help me to do my best to be your daughter, to be my husband's help meet, the children's mother, keeper of the home, and ministry servant."

After each person prays, they put *that* card in the back of their stack and go to their next card, which might be make your bed or personal hygiene (see below). My next card could be "Start the Laundry," while the children's could be "Listen to Bible Memory tape." If your child goes to school, you may make a card "Bring your backpack to the front door," followed by "Have breakfast," and finally, "Get to the school bus—leave at 7:45."

Each card is color-coded: blue is a daily chore, yellow is a weekly task, and green is a monthly duty. White (their prayer card) goes on top and pink is the last card that says, "Done!" The daily goal or, better yet, requirement each day is to go through each task, one-by-one, until your done card is on top!

Years ago, we called these cards "chore card." However, if I could make it stick, I would rather call them "task cards," since the definition of "chore" is an *unpleasant* task. Things that we do to contribute to our family or take care of ourselves should not be thought of as *unpleasant*.

So, how do you get this stack of cards? First, create a top card with the person's name on it to remember to begin your day with help from the Lord for "*apart from Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). "*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight*" (Prov. 3:6). Either of these verses can also be on your top card as a reminder of who to lean on. Next, you begin with tasks that you do on a daily basis.

Blue Cards are *Daily* Tasks

As you go through your routine each day, write down each task that you do. This can be anything *you* do or you *tell* your children to do on a daily basis. Write each task on a separate card. Everything you do on a *daily* basis will be on a *blue* card.

Some things I do are out of habit; therefore, I do not need a card. But often, I write it down anyway so I can organize my cards to learn to do them in a particular order. This is helpful when my routine is interrupted. I can easily see what I need to do next by referring to my cards. Some find checking off a task on a "to do list" encouraging. This same invigorating feeling is accomplished when you put the cards you've done in behind your done card!

As I mentioned earlier, I began using this system for myself (not with my children) so I could have some sort of method (without making daily to do lists or charts that needed to be changed or redone) to help me keep up with my household duties. Then when my children got old enough, I began using the 3x5 card method with them so I wouldn't have to keep telling them the same things over and over again. This 3x5 card method helped to train my children. It taught them to work independently; while at the same time, it continues to free me up from having to spend my time getting them to do what they need to do. This free time is accomplished by working not harder, but smarter and working more efficiently, rather than with more effort. This means you can do more in less time. With the extra time you can add more to your life, whether it be doing more or spending some time not doing anything, but relaxing. By following up and checking to see that their pink "done" card is up, I am also following up to make sure it is done.

Making Your Cards

I am the kind of person who loves this sort of thing: making lists and organizing stuff. But after speaking to many groups about my 3x5 card system, some brave souls told me quite frankly that they just couldn't do this sort of thing. So I had to ask God to help me create this method for everyone to use.

Well, God is always faithful! Soon I was just too busy with ministry to just "sit down" and think of anything. That is when the Lord showed me the easiest method for making the cards!!

I found the easiest way to make cards is to *not* just sit down and try to think of what I need to get done, but when I see the need for something to get done, I do it and then make a card.

First, I determine *how often* the task needs to be done: daily, weekly, or monthly. Then, I write the task on that colored card: blue for daily, yellow for weekly, and green for monthly.

Next, I determine *who* could do the task. I start at the youngest person in the family, and write their initial or name in the upper right corner of the card.

And finally, I determine *when* or what day of the week or month it needs to be done, and write that in the upper left corner of the card.

Let's get a bit more specific when making out a task card. On each card:

Write the person's initial in the upper *right* corner. I have two names that begin with the letter "T." So the older one gets a capital "T" and the younger one a lower case "t." (If all your names begin with the same letter, give each child a number according to their birth order.) My youngest daughter has a name that starts with "M," so my "Mom" cards are written out in cursive and my daughter's with a printed "M."

Blue *daily* cards are *always* kept in the paperclip or clothespin. The other colored cards (yellow and green that we will cover later) go in and out of the group of cards, but the blue *daily* cards *always* stay in the group.

How to designate who will do the job: I decide who is the youngest child capable of doing the job. (Always begin at the bottom, the youngest child available, and work up.) Most mothers start at the top and burn that oldest child out. That child usually marries and eventually ends up bitter! Worse, they often choose to have few or no children. Tasks in our house begin at four years old. Before that age, you spend far more energy getting them to do it and do it properly.

As you work your way up from the youngest to the oldest child, *you* will be left with the tasks that no one else is capable of doing. In addition, you will be the *initial* trainer and often the task supervisor (to make sure the job is done and done properly). Don't expect your children to do their jobs or do them well if you don't follow up.

This is also the beauty of this system. Each day, you need to put that day's cards in their stack when you notice the pink done card is on top. That tells you whether or not they *did* the task. Then in the beginning, and periodically, you should just take a look to make sure that they did the task adequately. The child may need more training. It may be that they are too young to manage the job, and it needs to be moved up to an older child or to you.

One of the most asked questions about my system is in regard to changing the jobs. My children keep their jobs for years! The only time they get rid of a chore is when I see I can delegate something I do to one of my children. When I pass my chore down, then I pass down one of their chores and so on. When a younger child is old enough for more responsibility, I look to the next child up, take some of their easier chores, and work my way up again to me!

When a job is passed down from one sibling to the next, the older one teaches the younger one to do it properly. The incentive to teach the younger sibling well is that the job doesn't come back to them! Often, I go over the job myself just to make sure that it is being done properly.

Now, with a great system like this that really works, you can see why I have no real jobs myself (and why I do believe that children are blessings)! If more mothers trained their children as they should be trained, you definitely would see *more* big families. However, most families keep their children as liabilities and not assets. They cater to them with outside activities, and wait on them like they are *their*

servants. The children are not happy, but have an “attitude,” and they are miserable. This carries into their married life that lasts less than a year, and they are home again. Mothers, take the time to train your children. Everyone will be happier because you did! Okay, I will stop preaching.

More than once a week and less than daily. When you have something that needs to be done twice a week, like Tuesdays and Thursdays, use a blue card and put “T & Th” in the *upper left* corner. If it needs to be done three times a week, like Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, then write “M, W, F” in the *upper left* corner of the card. When it is to be done every weekday I write “M-F” in the upper left corner. I like using a pencil when I choose the day and even the child, since it often needs to be changed.

I do switch jobs when they are not done properly. You may think that a child is capable of a task, but even after training it is not done adequately. Of course, when working with children, you need to lower your expectations a bit. But it is better to have them help (and maybe even come back in to perfect it a bit) than to neglect training your children.

So here is an example of a daily task. Making your bed would be a blue card since it is done *every day*. However, if you or your child is trained to roll out of bed and make the bed, he, she, or you would not need a card for this task. However, since many homes have unmade beds day after day, more than likely this is a card that you will want to include in your cards.

Personal hygiene is another daily task that is often neglected by children. Sadly, it is often neglected by many mothers who are blessed to stay at home. Therefore, personal hygiene would be a 3x5 card you would want to add to your daily *blue* cards. Let me get off the subject of organization and focus on your appearance. Many unknowingly tear their own house down with the lack of care in their appearance. Husbands leave the house and are often met with women in the workplace who have showered, put on their make-up, and are wearing nice clothes, not a bathrobe.

Then, we are completely shocked when our husbands come home one day to tell us that they have found someone else (9 times out of 10 it is in the workplace). For those of you whose husband does not work with good-looking women, they are everywhere when your husband leaves

the house: where he eats lunch, the neighbor, or your best friend. Not only do these women look and smell better than you do when he leaves the house, but they are also very agreeable. They listen to your husband's frustrations, which are often about you, and she sympathizes. She may listen and share his dreams, like you used to do before you were married. But at some point, since your marriage, you have exchanged your enthusiasm for criticism as you tear your husband down.

Dear wife and/or mother, get yourself into a routine of looking your best *before* your husband leaves the house. If your husband is not in the home right now, start getting into this routine, and I guarantee God will bring him around to get a good look at you. However, beauty is only skin deep. "Charm is deceitful and **beauty is vain**, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30). So before you focus on cleaning up and beautifying the outside, you may want to get *A Wise Woman* and start on the inside. (These workbooks are available through our ministry office or on our website).

Now back to our *daily* organization. Listed on this *blue* card for personal hygiene you might list what your child is to do, such as:

1. Get dressed.
2. Fix your hair.
3. Brush your teeth.
4. Put on deodorant for teens and preteens. (See chapter 15 for a great, non-toxic deodorant solution.)
5. And maybe conclude with: "Make your bed" rather than having a separate card.

Basically, you will make a card for each task that you normally are telling your children to do every morning, or a card for *you* that you need to include in your morning routine (so that you can organize your time better or to find your place when you are interrupted).

If you are a wife or mother who works outside your home, you will find that by using the cards (and training your children to use them to get ready in the morning), there will be much less chaos and stress. Your job will be first to train yourself to use them, adding to them as you see something you are doing so you don't forget, or adding something new with the time you are saving by working more efficiently. Even a card of checking on the children, or getting them up at a particular time (though I

believe in alarm clocks for the children if you are constantly in a time crunch) will save you time and help your morning to run more smoothly.

And while we are on the subject of mornings, for those who have trouble getting up, just tell them that they will need to go to bed early that night. Stay in bed for 15 minutes; then you go to bed 15 minutes earlier that night. Then be true to your word and follow through. Threats do not work, nor do warnings. A solution will only work when you follow through with the consequence. If you are in a sport or other outside activity that means you will be getting back late, just *one time* leaving the event early because your child has to go to bed will remove the problem forever!

But if you are not disciplined enough in your life, don't be surprised that your children are also undisciplined. Many mothers (and especially fathers recently), who observe my children, come up wanting me to take and train their children. But the children are not the problem, the parents are. Every little step you make in disciplining and organizing your life and then your children's lives will bring about great dividends.

Since I have delegated most of the household responsibilities to my children (though I used to do them *all myself* before I had children and also when my children were too young to help), when I was trying to give you examples of what I do each day to help you get started making your cards, I found I really had none to share!

Women often tell me that if they had as many helpers as I had they would be able to get their work done. Nonsense! It requires you to be organized, and do the work yourself before you can expect to move up to management. It wasn't until I had four little ones underfoot that I was able to even begin to delegate anything! And when you are teaching children, it really takes more effort and more time at first (which is why some mothers don't want to bother). However, your time, effort, and patience will reap great benefits for the future. I say jokingly (but honestly) that I could die and my home would still run smoothly because of this system.

Whenever you discover a task that doesn't need to be done daily, then you will begin to make weekly cards, which are yellow.

Yellow Cards are *Weekly* Tasks

As you go through your daily routine, you will find that some things do not need to be done daily; therefore, you would do them on a weekly basis. Write each *weekly* chore on a separate *yellow* card. For example, “Dust the kitchen blinds” would be a yellow card if you do it once a week.

As you begin getting your life organized and your children are being trained to do what you used to run around telling them to do over and over again, you will then begin to see other things that need to get done, but just not as often. It may start out as a daily blue card, but you find that since it is being kept up, doing it only a few times a week is enough.

Earlier I mentioned using a blue card with M, W, F *or* T & Th, when the task needed to be done two to three times a week. This is the first step to modifying the chore to be done less often. The other variation is using a yellow card with just “Mon.” in the top left corner, then another one for “Thurs.” for instance. Do what works with your children and/or makes sense to you.

Since the yellow cards are not used every day, but only weekly, they are removed at the end of the day and put in the same day next week. For instance, today is Wednesday the 16th, so at the end of Wednesday, I will pull all the yellow cards from under each “done” card, and put them in my card file for next Wednesday right in front of the 23rd.

Each day when I get the family’s cards ready, I pull the yellow weekly cards and green monthly cards. I then put them back into the 3x5 card file. Only the blue daily cards remain in the group.

For those tasks that only need to be done monthly, you would use green 3x5 cards.

Green Cards are *Monthly* Tasks

When you go through your daily and weekly routine and things become more organized, you will begin to see things that need to be done but daily and weekly is too often; therefore, you would write this kind of task on a green monthly card.

For example, a changing-the-sheets card in most homes is done once a month; therefore, I have these in green. To space out ALL the sheet sets we have, I make a fluorescent card with the instructions to “Change Your Sheets” and put it in my fifth child’s cards the day before I will wash the sheets.

Tara then puts that fluorescent card in that person’s room in front of their alarm clock. In the morning, that child (or my husband and I) do not make the bed, but strip the bed and put clean sheets on.

I keep a second set of sheets in a clear zipper bag (the ones that sheets, blankets and comforters come in). After the bed is made, the dirty sheets *and* the fluorescent card is put in the clear bag and brought to the laundry room. When the sheets are washed, they are put into the clear bag and put in that child’s closet, and I put the fluorescent card into that same day of the month (For instance, if today were the 10th, then I would put it in front of the 10th to come up in one month.

I try to space washing the sheets out over the month, doing one room at a time, and do it on a non-wash day. (I will explain more on ways to organize and simplify your washing in Chapter 13: “My Best Laundry Tips.”)

If you, or especially your husband, wants your sheets washed more than once a month, then you can make up two cards and space them a couple weeks apart. This is how you would handle any task that needs to be done more than once a month, but less than once a week.

To sum up the 3x5 card system and for easy reference:

The day of the week is always written in the upper *left* corner. Write the day the task is to be done on the blue *daily*, yellow *weekly*, or green *monthly* card.

Labeling: To designate which child, which day, and any other specification on each card, I offer the following suggestions:

Blue cards: On a blue *daily card* you may want the task done on M-F, or only Mon., Wed., Fri., or just Tues. & Thurs. Write this in the upper **left** corner.

Yellow cards: On your **yellow *weekly* card**, you would have any weekly task. Write Mon., Tues., or Wed. Write this in the upper **left** corner and keep this in the 3x5 card file holder in the next Mon., Tues., or whatever day of the week that job will be done next week.

Green cards: On a **green *monthly* card**, you would write the day of the month such as the 1st, 15th or 24th, etc. Write this in the upper **left** corner and keep this in the 3x5 card file holder in the day of the month: the 1st, 15th, 24th, or whatever day of the month that job will be done next month.

Once more: Begin by thinking about what you tell your children every morning, over and over again, beginning from when they wake up. Write what you usually say over and over on a *blue* card. If you have a chore list you've been using, write each task on a separate blue *daily* card.

For example: Make your bed and tidy your room would surely be on a blue *daily* card. Scrub the toilet or scrub the sink would probably be on a yellow *weekly* card. Wipe down the top of the refrigerator would probably be on a green *monthly* card.

Be specific: You can write out the explanation of how the task is to be done; i.e. under "get dressed," you would write "please check with Mom on what to wear" (if this is a problem you have with a particular child).

Can't read yet? If your children are too young to read, you can simply draw stick figures showing the task or cut out pictures in a magazine.

Can you explain what you do in more depth? For weekly chores, I break them down into *easy* jobs. Instead of Tuesday—clean the bathrooms; write "Mon.—John clean the sinks . . .," "Tues.—Bob clean the toilets (since he's the guy who always misses) . . .," "Wed.—Tom scrub the bathtub (and do it after *your shower* while you're in it and still wet) . . .," and "Thurs.—Cindy and Sue do the bathroom floors (the older one washes, the younger one dries), and Julie cleans the mirrors (she usually is looking in them anyway)."

Divide these jobs up among your children depending on their age and ability. Divide them up to spread out the work over the weekdays if you are a stay-at-home mom. For those who work outside the home,

determine if this is a job that they can do when they get home from school. This makes just doing the sink, versus the entire bathroom, possible without having to do all the housework on Saturdays.

If you are doing the jobs yourself because your children have grown or because you are still waiting for God to bless you with children, then it is still wise to break down jobs. If you have more than one bathroom, do both of your toilets, or all your sinks (include the kitchen), and all the floors on the same day. It is easier and quicker to do the same task in different locations rather than doing the toilets, the sink, the floor, and then the mirror.

Years before the ministry, we owned a maid service in California. It was my job to train the women my husband hired. I trained them this way to help expedite their time at each home and when working with another maid.

Once-a-month or every-other-week jobs: Use a green *monthly* card. When I see something that needs to be done not once a week, but every other week, then I make a green *monthly* card such as “wipe finger prints off the doors throughout the house (toddler high).” For instance, for *years* I had a green card for the boys’ haircuts.

Before making the card, I would wait until everyone started to really look shabby. But once I created this method of putting it on a green *monthly* card, I was able to maintain that nice clean look by cutting their hair each month. My child training has paid off as now my third son cuts everyone’s hair in the family except mine. I still cut and color my own hair.

Each time I notice something unorganized or unclean (such as a particular closet or the refrigerator), I put it on a green *monthly* 3x5 card. When you make something that only needs to be done once a month, use a green card, put today’s date (number only, i.e. the 16th) in the upper *left* corner. If it is a twice-a-month task add 14 days to the date (i.e., 16th plus two weeks, or 14 days, would be the 30th).

If a card falls on an inconvenient day (a weekend, birthday, or whatever), simply put it into the next convenient day. But when you are filing it back in the card file, place it in front of the correct day listed at the top left corner of the card, not the day you finally did the task.

Another note. It is better to “maintain” cleanliness than to attack a disaster. If you weekly wipe off the refrigerator shelves on Tuesday, and wipe the door (inside and out) on Friday, you will not have to completely clean your refrigerator each month. We eat all of our leftovers the day before I grocery shop. (Create your own food bar.) With all the food gone, I can easily wipe off these empty shelves to maintain cleanliness, rather than having to do a deep refrigerator cleaning as often. This is also when I go through the unused chips, breads, and desserts. Anything that is not eaten is thrown away (or was given to our animals when we lived on our farm).

Card file. How to use your card file and the system:

As I mentioned when we began, each family member who is participating in this system has a pile of blue daily cards that is held together with a clothespin or large colored paper clip. Each child (and you) has a different colored paperclip to help identify their pile easily. Or, you can use colored clothespins, and write their name on the wooden clip. (Since I use my same cards *for years*, the paperclips began to wear out the top of the cards. That’s when I began using the clothespins.)

Every morning. First thing each morning (or the night before) look at the initials and lay the piles of blue *daily* cards (that are held together with a clip) across your kitchen counter or desk, from left to right and oldest to youngest member of your family.

Then, get the yellow *weekly* and green *monthly* cards that will be in the front of your card file with today’s date (for instance, the 14th). In your card file, today’s date would be in front with all the yellow *weekly* cards and green *monthly* cards that you pass out to each family member. In other words, if today is the 24th, that group of yellow and green cards will be in front of number 24. You will take them out and put them into each pile of blue *daily* cards (that are held together with a clip).

In front of the pile of each person’s blue *daily* cards, you should have a **white** or fluorescent card with their name on it. This, we use as a prayer card that lists requests, which might include their friends’ and family’s salvation. Or, you can write out a card with a short prayer for that child to begin their day. With my daughters, I write out the verse about having a “gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God” that has

helped their contentious ways!

The last card is pink and has the word “done” written on it. Once they begin with prayer, they begin the task on the card, and then when complete, they move it to the back behind the pink “done” card. The cards are NOT held together with a ring or made from spiral held 3x5 cards, so that they can easily be moved around based either on priority or by time restraints (For instance, if there is a card to bring the trash cans in, and it needs to be done later in the afternoon.).

Pink cards. I use one pink card to indicate the stack “done” and pink cards are also used for birthdays (we cover this in more depth in Chapter 8 “Planning Ahead”). And finally, I use just one pink card that says “move next month’s cards forward” that is set for the 25th of the month (written in the **upper left** corner of the card). Put this card in front of the 25th card divider. Again, we will cover this in more depth in the next chapter.

One more time. Each person has a stack of cards held together with a clip. The top card is the white prayer card, followed by the *blue* daily cards. Next are the yellow *weekly* cards and green *monthly* cards; lastly the pink “done” card.

Rules for keeping them together: Keep a special container to hold the clipped-together cards. All cards must stay there; no one is allowed to carry their cards around. My children’s cards are in an old plastic mail holder.

Teaching them the method. Tell the children that as they finish a task, the card is put behind the pink card. After they pray, they work through each card. You may tell them they must complete each task in the order in which you put the cards (to learn obedience), or you may allow them to do the tasks in any order (to teach organization). It is important, however, that you do have a time that they are expected to have the tasks completed. It could be by noon, by 3 p.m., before they go outside to play, before dinner, or by morning. *However, do not say to do the tasks before they go to bed*, or you will have the latest bedtime ever!

My children got in the habit of taking all afternoon, instead of the hour it should have taken. So I began using a kitchen timer and set it for 60 minutes to teach them diligence. It worked! So this is now the way I set it

up every day. Our children do their cards immediately after they finish their schoolwork. If a particular day clearly has more chores that have been “proven” to take longer than 60 minutes, you can easily add another 10 or 15 minutes for that one child to complete their cards.

Making it work. The method *only works* if you put out the cards every (weekday) morning, and you enforce punishment if the tasks are not done. Periodic inspections are important to see if they are doing their tasks correctly and thoroughly! Also, if you make them do it over for being too lazy to do it right the first time, it will speak volumes to that child and all the other children who witness that you mean what you say! In addition, if they ever put a card that is *incomplete* or just not done behind the pink “done” card, it is a **lie!** Punish lying severely. A **liar** is an abomination to God!

Special circumstances. Because you have all your household tasks on 3x5 cards, you can easily move any card to any particular day. If you’re having company and you want the floors washed the day before your guests arrive, you could move that card to that day. If you find that during the summer you need to vacuum more often, you can make more vacuum cards; then at the end of the summer, throw them away. The most important thing to remember is that you want to maintain cleanliness, rather than always waiting until there is a giant mess. Use bibs for children and aprons for you and your little helpers. You have a very important job to do—so let the Lord be your boss!

Keeping “unseen areas” clean. To keep your closets or drawers clean and not become sidetracked during your clean sweep, you will want to make a “monthly” or green 3x5 card for these closets and drawers. The best method is to start doing it on a monthly basis, and later change it to bimonthly (two green cards spaced two weeks apart; i.e., 1st & 15th or 14th & 28th).

You will know how often you need to clean and sort depending on the severity when your card comes up! And if you are faithful to include your children in cleaning, you will find that they are much more interested in keeping it that way so they don’t have to deep clean as often! In addition, if you are doing it yourself, it is much easier to keep a closet or drawer clean, rather than to let it get so messy that you need to clear out the entire closet or drawer as you did back when you de-cluttered your home initially!

Miscellaneous Tips:

- Use birthday (or any occasion) paper tablecloths for wrapping huge presents. I find tablecloths marked down at grocery stores and at dollar stores.
 - Colds can be avoided or attacked with Vitamin C crystals. The bottle I have is 16 oz. for \$28. When we hear of colds going around our circle of friends or our church, I add two heaping teaspoons to our juice pitcher. The older children drink the most, down to the baby. At the first sign of a cold in any of my children, or myself, I make up a sports cup with a lid (put their initials on it so no one else drinks from it), and I add one teaspoon to juice. They nurse on that throughout the day; and if we've caught it in time, they won't get the cold or flu. If we haven't, I repeat it for the next few days and it is over faster. Too much Vitamin C can cause diarrhea, but to avoid a cold spreading through nine of us, that's a small price to pay.
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Notes:

Chapter 8

Making the Most of
Planning Ahead

More Ways to Use the 3x5 Card System

*The mind of man plans his way,
But the LORD directs his steps.*
—Prov. 16:9

As I began having more children, it became necessary to get more organized. Below I have a few more ways to use the 3x5 card system to organize your life.

Get ready: When you are planning to go somewhere with children, you exert a lot of mental energy trying to think of what you need to take. I came to realize that if I made a permanent list on a 3x5 card, I could write additional items I forgot this time so that I would have them for the next time. I can also erase what I really didn't need to take.

I took a blank divider and made a “Get Ready—Go!” file where I keep all of these permanent lists that I “add to” rather than making new lists. Below are a few suggestions:

Diaper bag: Write down what you *must* have: how many diapers, a sipper cup, wipes (I keep two wash cloths in a sandwich bag for sticky hands or a messy diaper instead of wipes that are safer), a couple of toys, training pants for the toddler, and clean bibs. After an outing, I restock my diaper bag as soon as I get home so it is ready to go (by checking my diaper bag card with the contents listed). This is a job that I began delegating to my older children when the last three were born.

Purse: My mom used to carry everything but the kitchen sink in her handbag (the size of a suitcase) that she would clean out annually. For my level of organization, I like to sort my purse once a week. I have a “sort purse” card in my “Get Ready” file. To properly “clean out” anything you need to take everything out. Remove all the trash, make a

pile of what needs to be “put away” elsewhere and put the things you need back in your purse. Then check your 3x5 card list to see if there are things you need to restock, and add any “new item” that you may need to add to your list (or you no longer need that you erase from your list). Though I like to do this weekly, your need may only be monthly.

Tip: I carry small scissors in my purse at all times. I cut threads that I see on my husband’s or children’s clothing, or cut tags off of things. But the really great way to use the scissors carried in your purse is for cutting up meat or pizza for little ones when they are younger. It’s impossible to cut with the plastic knives at fast food restaurants. Surprisingly, it is easier to cut steak, chicken, pizza, just about anything, with scissors than it is to cut with even a steak knife. I bought the bright handled ones with the blunt tip (the good variety that cut well), and I find that this one item is used and borrowed more than just about anything in my purse.

Couple “Getaway.” Once, my husband surprised me with the exciting news that he was taking me on a weekend “getaway.” (We’re pretty sure number seven was the “fruit” of this getaway!) He said, “Just throw a few things in a bag!” My head was spinning since I had to get six children situated (well need I explain?). I did throw a “few” things in a bag—too few! I had *nothing* to wear to bed—of course my husband was delighted. I didn’t wash my face for two days since I forgot my cleansers, and he looked very GQ by wearing no socks with his dress shoes. I learned my lesson.

When I got home, I made a list of all I *wished* I had brought that weekend, and made a 3x5 card labeled “Couple Getaway.” Later I added a “Couple Getaway with Baby” card, since my husband often got the impulse to getaway when I had a nursing baby.

Emergency bags. Even if you have a well-stocked diaper bag, it’s no good when it’s back home. So I got a plastic container for each car and filled it with emergency diapers, bibs, a receiving blanket (this comes in handy for many things), and underpants for those who still have an occasional accident. I also carry a brush, comb, and deodorant (for the sweaty teens)! Of course, I made a corresponding 3x5 card marked “Emergency Bag” for each car. Be sure to include a flashlight, flares, etc. Don’t forget the “throw-away” camera for recording an accident or a special event you would have missed. They’re cheap and can easily be replaced.

Special trips. Each year, we take a trip up to a river and stay in a cabin. Without a doubt, many things are forgotten, which makes it really “roughing it.” I have two cards that are paper clipped together that list everything that we need. Each year, I update and add it immediately after unpacking.

On one card, I wrote what each child was to pack in his or her own bag. I wrote how many pairs of pants, shirts, underwear, socks, also a sweatshirt, P.J.s, etc. Under toiletries, I sorted them into categories such as hair care (brush, combs, elastics, hats, gel, or hair spray), eye care (contacts, glasses, or sunglasses), body care (deodorant, sunscreen, etc.), face care (make-up bag, acne stuff, etc.). The four oldest (I let them do their own starting at 10 years and up) gather their own belongings, while I pack for the three younger. They lay everything out on their bed, and I check to make sure they did a good job (don’t let them pack their bags since it is harder to see what they packed).

For years their suitcase was just a pillowcase! Everyone had a different color, and it really worked well. (Of course with our large family, we never flew anywhere. Come to think of it, we did use Army duffel bags when we flew—about half the children ago.) Last year for swim team, each of the older children got a nylon sports bag that we now use for trips. I bought each of the younger ones a backpack for their birthday. (Do not use these bags for the beach—sand will forever be part of your belongings!)

Now that money is not an issue, we have been able to purchase sets of suitcases that have wheels. We purchased the ones for the three younger children, and the older ones purchased their own. This became a must when we began going to resorts instead of a cabin and began to fly with our children. Everyone is in a different phase in his or her life; do what fits your lifestyle.

Out to eat: When we *all* go out, we are stared at enough without everyone watching me try to figure out what each child wants on their baked potato! At most restaurants or fast food places, you will find, as we did, that everyone has their favorite thing that they like to order, so why not write it down? I started by making out a 3x5 card for my mother, who liked to take the children out to dinner, to expedite things for her. After that, I kept the card with my money (bills) in my wallet.

Then I began making one for each place we ate out. I even wrote down the amount it cost, which helped me to see if I had enough money with me (before we charged everything to gain “frequently flier miles”). An added benefit was that I knew whether they had over charged me! And if you are using a coupon and paperclip it to your 3x5 card, you’ll remember to use it!

For those of you who just let your children “choose” what they want, even if you can afford it, this does make for impolite children. Most children who come with us are indignant when I tell them they must choose “one” thing from the “dollar” menu when they have always ordered whatever they wanted. And when they are allowed to order, they often choose unwisely and order too much. Then they will leave so much uneaten food or will over eat.

Young girls should be trained to be “frugal” with their choices, since most married couples are on a tight budget. Also, the young men need to learn how to be prudent in their choices, since they will have a family to care for. We all know that it is “easy” to learn how to spend money, but it is difficult to learn how to get along with meager means; therefore, a child should be trained to do so.

“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Phil. 4:11–12).

Books. I tend to borrow and lend out a lot of books, and it is extremely hard to keep track of them when they are gone. So now when I lend or borrow a book, I write on a white card: “Borrowed from Sue” (or borrowed from the library) or “Lent to Sue” and the date I lent it out or borrowed it. I then put the card in my dated file to come up when the book is due at the library or a month later to *give* the book back or *ask for* the book back from a friend.

When I return a book, I draw a line through it and write, “returned” with the date, but I keep the card for a while! Many times there could be a question in the lenders or your mind whether the book was returned.

I also list on another card recommended books that I can’t buy right now,

and use this card when someone asks me what I might like for a gift. I keep the card in the month of my birthday or in December's section for Christmas gifts.

When I read a book, especially a borrowed book, I write notes down on a 3x5 card to refer to later. All of these I keep on a blank file card labeled "Books" that I keep in my file near the back (behind the days of the month 1–31 and the months January through December).

Birthdays! In the month section (January–December), I have a *pink* 3x5 card for birthdays. The name of the month is at the top of the card. Listed next is the *day* of the month followed by the person's name and the year (i.e. '78). Next, I put "send" with enough time for it to reach the person on time. The mail time is shorter if it is just a card; it is longer for a package.

For example, I write under January "7th Maura 1958, send card on the 1st.") When I hear a new baby is born into the family, I write the day at the bottom of that month's card; along with the name, the year, and when to send the card (or gift) for their 1st birthday!

The pink card is pulled on the 25th, so you have a few days to buy the card or gift and mail it. (If it is on the first of the month, it may be wise to put it on the 3x5 card for the month before, especially if you usually mail a gift to that person).

I keep this month's pink card in my paper clip every day until I have bought the card or gift for every birthday that month. Then, I put the pink card into the day the next card, or gift, is to be sent. At the end of the month, I put the card into the month where it belongs.

For instance, after I send Maura's card on the first, then I put the card in front of the 5th when I would need to send Jim's birthday card since his birthday is on the 9th of the month.

Tip: If you're like me, you like to buy ahead for birthdays and Christmas when you find a bargain or something you know they would really like. However, many of us have trouble finding *where* we hid it. On a white 3x5 card, write out whom the gift is for, what the gift is, and where you hid it. Put it BEHIND the pink birthday card for that month. You will be alerted what you bought and where you hid it on the 25th of the previous

month. It really works!

Parties or other engagements: There is nothing worse for women than to wear the same dress around the same people, because you can't remember what you wore last time. (Does this happen to you, or am I getting old?) What I do to remember when I speak somewhere is to write on a card the date I am asked to speak and what I plan to wear in pencil. I put this card by the date (or the day before) I'm scheduled. When I put that card back, I write what I did eventually wear so I know not to wear it again. (If I don't have another speaking engagement scheduled, then I store this card in "Get Ready—Go!" section of the file.) If there is a date, then I put it by the day of my next engagement.

You can use this method for church clothes, business dinners, or even PTA meetings (though these probably call for very casual dress now, so it wouldn't matter).

Bathroom linen closet: In our first house after our restoration, we had just one bathroom with only one small cupboard that I could keep toiletries, medicines, bandages, etc. in. It was almost impossible to find anything until I used my 3x5 card system. I first saved a bunch of the plastic gallon ice cream buckets with lids to sort and store the stuff. I numbered each bucket and wrote out a corresponding 3x5 card. I listed the number of the bucket, the contents, and where (which of the three shelves it was on) onto each card. This can be stored in the back of your card file with a divider marked "bathroom" or in the cupboard itself on a hook. When you, your children, or your husband needs something, just flip through the cards to find which bucket the item is located and on what shelf.

This system came in handy when I was sick in bed or nursing a baby. My husband or children would bring me the cards, then go and bring back the bucket so I could find the item for them! Then a few hours later, I would ask for the box of band-aids or anti-itch cream so I could get it back in the bucket and send it back with them to put on the shelf. Though we have many more bathrooms and lots of shelves, this method proved to be more efficient than what we have now!

Home videos. When we got a video camera, I was thrilled. But locating an event we wanted to watch was frustrating. So one day, we (the children and I) sat down to watch all our videos "for fun" and so I could

document the main events of the video on a *white* 3x5 card. I numbered the tapes 1–10 and numbered a corresponding 3x5 card. If I knew the date of the event we were watching, I wrote it down (or often tried to guess the date), followed by the event (like Axel’s 10th birthday, Macy’s first steps, A & E soccer awards, 1998 vacation in Ft. Walton Beach). Unfortunately, I didn’t know that there was a button that marks the date on the film for a couple of years of owning our own camera. With this method, we can now find anything we want to watch.

This method came in handy after my father passed away, and we were able to go back and watch the times we had spent with him. I hope to splice these all together, put them on one tape, and give it to my brothers and sisters for Christmas *some* year.

Tip: We made a tape of an interview with Great Grandma Brown a few years before she died. She dressed up in one of her church dresses, and we gave her a corsage. My husband, her grandson, wore his tuxedo from the church band. We followed the format of the “Tonight Show” as my husband introduced her and asked her questions about her life.

At one point, we (supposedly) turned off the camera to take a break—but we had actually taped it without Grandma’s knowledge. With the camera off, she began to “let her hair” down and was less formal. That’s when she began saying things that she wouldn’t have said with the camera on, which made us laugh so hard we were just about hysterical.

When we heard she had died, we made a copy and sent it up to Minnesota. The family later gathered at her home and played it after the funeral. They called to say that they laughed until they cried. They said it helped them remember how she used to be before she got sick; they said it was wonderful! We did the same thing with my father, and it was also a real blessing. By the way, Grandma’s was taken with a rented camera. If you still can’t afford one, rent or borrow one, and get each of your parents on tape for your children to remember. Do it now before it’s too late!

Notes:

Chapter 9

Making the Most of Your Children's Toys

Removing Toy Madness

*A child left to himself
brings shame to his mother . . .
—Prov. 29:15*

Is one of the most annoying and ongoing messes in your home the multitude of toys that are all over your house? If your children possess too many toys, here is a solution that I developed years ago! When my oldest children were little, I tried several ideas that I had read in a magazine, book, or heard on some talk show. All of them proved to be ideas that someone who had no children, or only one child, had thought up.

Toy boxes are, to me, a joke. The children tend to play only with the top items, or they will pull out everything to get something on the bottom. For a few years, I tried the Montessori method and created shelves on our sun porch and *tried* to get them to put them back up on the shelf. Honestly, this was so much work that it was not really worth it, even when I had only two children and had a lot more time to devote to toys.

A laundry basket, however, is great for a small child's toys and just enough toys for them. Even the smallest child can learn to pick up their toys and put them in the basket, unless that is, you don't make them do it when they pitch a fit. But just remember when you give into them, if you can't manage an eighteen-month-old, how will you manage when they turn 14 years old?

Today, there is no doubt that children in the United States have way too many toys. They get them from parents, grandparents, and for their birthdays from friends. Rooms are cluttered and there is no room to play because of all the plastic slides and other paraphernalia that parents wrongly believe are necessary to have. Some of you may share my

beliefs, but it is your parents or in-laws that are the culprit. There is an easy remedy if the grandparents live locally, and that is to tell them that whatever they buy needs to stay at their house. Oh what a joy it will be for your child to get to go to grandma and grandpa's house! My husband told me about going to his grandparent's house almost weekly. They had nothing to play with except a little footstool that he would flip over and play in like a racecar. Oh, how times have changed!!

I recently heard that baby showers for grandma were becoming popular! Grandma gets toys and other baby furnishings for her house when the grandbabies come to visit. Yikes, this is scary.

Well, after twenty years of proven success, here is a sure way to control the toy problem in your home or in grandma's home.

First. Sort all of your children's toys into categories or sets. Use any kind of container you have, such as huge laundry soap buckets, Rubbermaid tubs, laundry buckets, and keep any sets in their original box if you have them (and if they fit back once assembled). Throw out any that are missing pieces or are broken beyond playability.

Now, Lock'em up! Next, find a closet to put all the sorted toys into that has the ability to be locked, and bring out *one* set for an entire day. Horrified? You think they will not be happy until they can get their hands on every toy they want? A.D.D. (Attention Deficient Disorder) is not a disease but a behavior that we encourage and nurture in our children.

A child who is left to run from one event to another, to watch massive television, and has little or no discipline (even the word "no," is not used) is in for trouble or being "drugged" when they get to school and are incapable of sitting still for five minutes at a time.

The more you are blessed financially, the more your children will have, and the more destruction it will bring if you are not very, very careful. If your child is forced to play with one set, he or she is also forced to "be creative"! It usually comes over them quickly when they tell you that they are "bored." My cure for "boredom" is housework!

I immediately stop what I am doing, enthusiastically (with a big smile on my face) tell them "Great! I could use your help," and get them going on

the job. This method is not effective if you only “threaten” that they will work if they complain when bored. You must follow through for them to learn this is the natural consequence for not being creative and learning to entertain themselves. If you are not as determined a mother as I am, you could easily modify this method and just let one set come out at a time. And unless it is all cleaned up, another one is not given out. But trust me, that children who are forced to be creative (with only one set a day) are the most blessed.

Schedule. Now that your toys are organized and in sets, see how many sets you have, and assign each to a day for play. Here is an example:

Mondays: Legos
Tuesdays: Playhouse
Wednesdays: Space set
Thursdays: Cars (all Hot Wheels and trucks)
Fridays: Farm set
Saturdays: Airport

When my older four children were young, we would rotate on a one-week schedule. Now with my younger three, we have enough sets for a two-week rotation.

I also had a “music” day with all kinds of toys that made noise and another day for puzzles. I did not have these in the normal rotation but brought them out only periodically. I rarely could take the noisiness of the music day, but loved the day they did puzzles all day long.

You may be thinking that you don’t mind the toys, or you have enough room to let them have all their toys available every day. However, as I shared earlier, there are many more benefits when I followed the Lord’s leading on this. It helped my children to learn contentment. So many children are “bored” even though they have a toy store in their own home. All they want is more, as they flitter from one activity to another. Love your children enough not to indulge their boredom; instead, stretch them through teaching contentment. It will also help the creativity that God put in them that is now lying dormant.

Missing pieces: No matter how hard you try, you will find pieces of sets under the couch or behind a table. Rather than trying to put it right back in the set, I put a bucket that I marked “Missing Pieces” and put it in a

closet. When the children or I found a piece that was missing, we put it in the bucket. Then each morning after I put out the set for the children, I dumped the bucket out on the floor so the children could look for pieces that belonged in the set they were playing with. Even dad knew where to put something he found!

This kind of rotation can work with board games too, when your children get older. Just set a particular game for that day, and you will find that they get less bored with the same one.

This also helps when grandparents want to know what your children need for Christmas or birthdays. You can see what set needs more Legos or cars and get something that your children really need, instead of something they won't play with.

One more tip. Set aside a favorite or new set for when “Dad comes home.” My husband told me once, when he worked outside the home, that sometimes he would dread walking through the front door at 5:30 p.m. because of the “mobbing” that would ensue. They would beg him to wrestle or play with them, which he would do because he loved them. However, he told me that if he just had a little time to unwind he would be fine.

So the next night, I told the children that I was going to let them play with their favorite set “when Daddy came home.” When they heard him come through the door, he again was mobbed with kisses and hugs, but then they ran away to Mommy who had just taken out their favorite set! They played happily until dinner was ready. Then, they had a wonderful time with their Daddy who had time to relax after a hard days work.

This also works when adult guests come to visit. Just take out a special set that is brought out for such occasions. Speaking of guests, when you have children visiting your home, you will LOVE this method with your toys being locked up. Some children are destructive and break toys, while some are literal tornadoes. When you do get children visiting, make sure you insist that they help clean up the toys. Children who are made (maybe for the first time) to pick up toys will be less likely to destroy your home when they come back.

You will probably have to supervise the clean up, but you may be helping that mother who never thought her child would pick up. Make

sure you teach your children to clean up when at other people's houses to be a good witness when they see how your children are being trained.

Where children play. Early on in my mothering, I made it a habit to have no toys in the child's room, unless it was a doll or stuffed animal. I always kept children's reading books in their room, and that was all. Bedrooms, my children learned, are for sleeping, resting, or reading. This saved their rooms from looking like most children's rooms—a disaster that I did not want to have to clean.

A great way to keep the stuffed animals and/or dolls off the floor and give them a home (while at the same time decorating their room) is to put small cup hooks around the door of their closet or window. Then tie a ribbon around their neck and hang them from the hook. I did this because we seemed to have fifty stuffed animals that would always end up on the floor. Rarely did my children ask me to take them down to play with, so when we moved we donated them to the poor.

In closing, one very important task, even with toys, is to de-clutter your toys periodically. A good time is right before your children's birthday and at Christmas. Then you can see what toys your child may benefit from buying, and rid your home of toys that are broken, missing pieces, or no longer played with. Use the method for sorting from Chapter 2, and especially focus on toys your children have outgrown. Give outgrown toys to friends, to the poor, or box them up for future children (but only if it will be used within two years).

If your child is not playing with a toy, it is probably the biggest part of the mess you clean up, or step over every day. Do yourself and your children a favor by ridding yourself of toys they no longer use or need.

Notes:

Chapter 10

Making the Most of Your Meal Planning

Meal Planning Made Simple

Thou dost prepare a table before me . . .
—Ps. 23:5

“Mom, what’s for dinner?”

If you are like most mothers, **“What’s for dinner?”** is a question that makes you cringe. Whether you are asking yourself, or your children or husband asks, it is a question that plagues our sex. Would you believe that if you are blessed to be married for 50 years, you will make 18,200 dinners and 56,784 meals? That’s a lot of ideas for dinner!!

However, I believe that my method will take a big burden off of you. You may have heard, maybe even tried like I did, to cook for a month—but trust me. It’s too hard for most of us to set aside an entire day or two in order to cook all day! If that wasn’t bad enough, my husband complained that he didn’t want “left-overs” every night, since the meals were precooked and heated up!

My mother solved her dilemma by making the same meal each day of the week: spaghetti, hamburgers, pork chops, fish on Fridays, and chicken on Sundays. To have it set for a “particular day” would have been too organized for my mother; maybe mixing the meals up was her way of keeping us guessing, so we wouldn’t know which day to find a family to feed us. Basically, she had a few meals we would have repeatedly.

When I was in college, I came to the conclusion that it was not “making” the dinner; but instead, “what” to make that was the root of the problem. If I could come up with a variety of meals for just one month, it would mean that it would be served only 12 times a year! I also noticed when I watched old movies, like “Pollyanna,” that the cook would have a

clipboard that listed the meal, which the lady of the house would decide on at least the night before or maybe a week ahead. So, I set out to make a month's menu to save time, money, and mental anguish. "Viola"—it worked!

Here's the easiest way I found to organize my meals. By using your 3x5 cards, you can begin to make a schedule of meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner if you like—start with dinners) for a month. Doing so will save you so much mental energy that you would normally use trying to "think" of what to serve your family!

Making a schedule will not only save you mental strain, but your menu will be varied. Thereby, you will avoid having the same thing until your family is sick of it. Also, you definitely save money because you begin buying what you need, instead of running back to the store because you are missing an ingredient.

So, Let's Get Started!!

For about a month, begin writing down every dinner and lunch that you make on your calendar. This will serve as a sort of meal diary. At the end of the month, make one *white* 3x5 card for each of the different **dinner** meals you prepared that month.

Next, ask your family what they like from the meals you already make, and ask them which are their favorite dinners (maybe something you haven't had for a long time) or even things they would like you to make. Looking through cookbooks is another way to find meals. Even if I don't make the exact recipe, it often triggers my memory to something I have made but forgot, and I haven't made for a while.

You can also think of what you order at each restaurant or fast food place, and make something similar at home. Next, try to think of all the chicken recipes, hamburger recipes, and other meats that you have made. Write each meal you think of on a different card. You may also try to think of ethnic dinners, such as Italian or Mexican dishes, that are easy to make.

Now, count how many cards you have, in order to decide how many weeks of planning you can incorporate. For years, I had a four-week menu; then I went to a five-week. When you get to the end of your cards

(four or five weeks), you start you menu over.

How to Organizing Your Menu

Begin to “deal” all of your cards out on your kitchen table, by putting them in different piles. I usually do this by the meat meals: all the chicken, all the ground beef, and all the pasta meals.

Now, like a calendar, start with Sunday dinners, and put them down the left side of your table. The next column would be Monday’s meals. Also, be aware of the nights you may have church or pick up children from a sporting event (use your crock-pot recipes for these nights).

Don’t forget to “schedule” a night or two that you can eat out. (Write “Eat out” on its own card.) My children look forward to Wednesday night when they go out to eat, since many places offer kids-eat-free on this day. They also look forward to Friday night, because that’s “family night” at our house, and we always have pizza.

If you are married or restored, make sure you schedule a “date night.” Be sure to plan a meal that your children can manage to serve and clean up themselves, or your babysitter can fix for your children.

How to Use Your Menu

The cards work great with your 3x5 card method from Chapter 7. You simply put one meal in the front of each day of the week. Another method, that I prefer, is to transfer these meals to the calendar on my computer. (Most email programs have a calendar that is simple to use.) I print off the week’s menu so the family can see what we are having for dinner every night of the week!

For years, I wrote our meals for the day up on a marker board in our kitchen. I put the day’s date and listed breakfast, lunch, and dinner, since all nine of us were home and eating 24/7. This helped answer the question that I would be asked a multitude of times each day: “What’s for dinner?”

Every morning, you can post the menu for the day on your refrigerator (using a magnet marker board, or if you are printing it off from your

computer calendar, just use a magnet). I recently bought a marker board for our laundry room. Every morning (or before I go to bed), I write down the date. Underneath and down the left side I write “B” for breakfast, “L” for lunch, and “D” for dinner. I write the meal out briefly (i.e. “B: blueberry pancakes, “L: macaroni and cheese”, “D: beef stew”). This helps with answering the same meal questions all day long: “Mom, what’s for breakfast, lunch, or dinner?” I even write the time these meals will be served, so everyone can be there and seated. You can also use a small brass dinner bell. I ring the bell to give them five minutes to finish what they are doing (i.e. clean up their mess and wash their hands), so they can get to the table. When dinner is on the table, I ring the bell again.

One more thing about the marker board: I write down the right side any appointments or important “to do’s.” Above this board, we have a corkboard that holds all phone message slips. Just recently, we purchased a new marker board that is magnetic so I was able to eliminate the corkboard.

Choose any one of these methods to announce your meals, or think up your own way. The best way to stay ahead of things is to work it into your daily routine, and write it up the night before or no later than first thing in the morning. This way, you have time to lay out your ingredients, and thaw any meats.

Incorporating Lunches into your Monthly Menu

If you are home for lunches and want to incorporate them into your menu for variety, you will also be thrilled with how much it will help you with the mental energy!

Begin with the lunches that your husband will be participating in (usually on the weekends). Ask him for his favorites, and write a blue 3x5 card for each lunch that you made over the month. Then look at the calendar, in which you documented what you ate for lunch and dinner before you created your dinner menu.

Next, ask each of your children their favorites, but make sure they are alone when you ask them. Since we have homeschooled and had a home business in our home for YEARS, I have always tried to have ONE of each of the children’s “favorites” once a week. (However, they are

strictly warned not to complain when they eat something they don't particularly like on someone else's day).

For years, Wednesdays were peanut butter and jelly sandwich day, since they were going out to eat that night. Hey, I had to eat one everyday of my life as a kid—once a week won't kill them!

If you don't have a month's worth of different lunches to correspond with your dinners, just repeat the lunches that everyone seems to like. Now, lay the blue lunch cards over the white dinner cards in the file, or put this on your computer menu.

Now, try to match the lunches with the dinner meals. If we are having pasta or a meatless meal for dinner, I make sure that I have a meat like hot dogs or a ham sandwich for lunch. The main objective is to match a lunch with a dinner.

Breakfasts and Your Done!

Truthfully, you really only need one week's worth of breakfasts to give you variety. For instance:

Sundays: Donuts, it's the Lord's day so we REJOICE and make it special!

Mondays: Toast (keep it interesting try different kinds like raisin bread).

Tuesdays: Cereal (if you don't have cereal everyday, then only open one box at a time, or maybe two).

Wednesdays: Baked goods (This is when we have something baked from a box mix. Have one of your young girls learn to bake by having her make this for the family. When everyone praises her, she will begin to want to learn to bake more and learn to cook!)

Thursdays: Hot cereal or frozen waffles.

Fridays: Sugar Cereal

Saturdays: Big breakfast (This is when I make a big hot breakfast like my buttermilk biscuits, scones, pancakes, and French toast, along with

bacon or ham, juice—the works!)

Sugar Cereal. Since my husband and I came from totally different backgrounds, I was unprepared for sugar cereal for my children every morning like Daddy used to have. I am not sure how we came to this and how he ended up agreeing to it (it had to be GOD!), but years ago, we made Fridays mornings “sugar cereal day!”

It is really better to sometimes not make something totally taboo (unless you and your husband are in complete agreement—if you are, thank the Lord, because most couples are not!); instead, make it a “treat” or “reward.” God loves to bless us, so this may be an area where you can bless your children!

Our children don’t feel deprived, nor are they “weird,” but live in self-control and moderation rather than excess (which is the way the world lives).

Make “sugar cereal day” a special day like a Monday, so they pop out of bed, or a Friday, because they made it through the week!

And only do the “once a week big breakfast,” if your husband is agreeable. Some men do physical labor and need a hardy breakfast, like my neighbors husband when we lived on our farm. You need to adjust all my “recommendations” with your family, and just see what works. And if you do pick one day a week for your big breakfast, try not to pick Sundays when you go to church!

Here is my list of breakfasts we had when we lived in Pensacola (to give you more ideas):

Monday is cereal, Tuesday is toast, and Wednesday is baked goods morning (i.e. Scottish scones, blueberry muffins, buttermilk biscuits, Australian damper, and banana bread. Sometimes, I have substituted gingerbread when I had no ripe bananas). If you don’t bake, buy a pastry for that day. (Most cities have day old bakery stores; just bring them home and freeze them—just set them out the night before.)

Thursday is fruit and granola bars, and Friday is SUGAR CEREAL DAY! Saturday is our big breakfast, and Sunday we stop for donuts on the way to church. (Since our church service runs until 1 or 2 p.m., I give

my little ones a bowl of cereal or toast.)

Once again, the latest you want to have your meals posted (or put your ingredients out) is **before breakfast**. The more chaotic your life, the more you need to stay ahead and not fall behind! Here's a wonderful promise for your family!!!

“The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them” (Deut. 28: 12–14).

Another Benefit to Using 3x5 Cards

Use your cards to write out any important information, such as how many chicken breasts to cook or how many eggs you scrambled. Write it in pencil. If the amount was too small or too large, change it so you don't have too much or too little. It also will help you not to keep recounting. As your family grows and your needs change, you can easily adjust your cards. Also, write out the grocery list of ingredients on the back of your card. This will prove helpful when making out a grocery list, which we will get to in a later chapter!

Taking a Break

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is always good to take a break from cooking, and actually schedule a day or two to go out to eat each week.

Most families are out of balance and either eat out ALL THE TIME, or never eat out. Of course, sometimes it is because your husband loves your home cooked meals.

If you go out too often, it is usually because you are not prepared. The method that I have shared with you should help, but don't try to stop

completely; instead, set specific times to take a break.

Sometimes, we women need to go out to eat; but very often, where you go and how you order will determine how often you can go out. Because of our large family, we watch for 99¢ burgers, ALWAYS **order water** or share drinks, and I decide what is to be ordered or give them a couple of choices. We also go where kids eat free, especially when so many were under 10 or 12.

There are many national fast food chains and local restaurants that want to entice families, so they offer free or inexpensive kid's meals. I see them all the time on signs. Call the restaurants in your area to see if they have a Kid's Night. Be sure to find out what day, the time it starts, the ages (be extremely clear on this point), and whether the drink is included or not. I've ordered water for my children when they could have had a soft drink (a real treat). It would be wise to find all this over the phone so you don't look cheap or end up eating there on the wrong night!

Gathering the Spoil

Our family no longer "celebrates" the holidays of Halloween, Christmas, and Easter as the world does. However, from reading enough of the Old Testament, we believe that we should take advantage and "divide the spoil!"

On these holidays, candy is usually given. First thing the morning after, we go to the grocery store, and buy the more expensive candy (or decorations for Christmas) for 50–75 percent off! We place some of the candy (chocolate) in the freezer, and it can last for months (though we usually eat it sooner than that!)

I buy all my wrapping paper, ribbon, bows, and tags the day after Christmas, and store it in my Christmas boxes for the next year. Also, I try to find wrapping paper or bags that don't look like Christmas, and use them for birthdays.

In October, most of the burger chains offer coupon books for just a dollar for trick-or-treaters. Since we lived in the middle of nowhere, and before that we had a German Shepherd in the yard, we had no trick-or-treaters for years! One year, I bought a dollar booklet for 12 fries, and we used them afterwards. Now, it is a tradition. Some burger chains offer fries;

others offer an ice cream cone, cookies, or fries. Watch the expiration date. Some last until the end of November; others will go to the end of the year.

With bags of fries for less than a dime, along with 99¢ burgers, you can't make it that cheap at home! And this can come in handy with all the hustle and bustle of the holidays. Isn't God good?

Notes:

Chapter 11

Making the Most of Fast and Easy Meals

Meals that Work so you don't have to!

*She rises also while it is still night,
And gives food to her household,
And portions to her maidens.
—Prov. 31:15*

As we become organized in our homes and try to stay two steps ahead, instead of five steps behind, some days are still hectic; therefore, easy meals are a must. Being the mother of seven and feeding a family of nine, I need to plan ahead and be creative.

I became a better cook, when I began to humble myself. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6–7).

When my husband left in 1989, I told the ladies in the classes I taught that I simply couldn't cook. One lady came forward and said she would come over and help me make a delicious and “easy” pie. “Easy” was the word I was looking for. She came over and step-by-step she walked me through the pie recipe in this chapter.

Soon, many ladies began giving me recipes with the word “easy” in the title, and I was off and running. Now, I want to share some of my easy meals with you.

Microwave Ham Steak

I buy a ham, ask the meat department to slice 1/2 of the ham (starting at the rounded side) in thin slices, and leave 1/2 for me to slice thick. This gives me meat for sandwiches and a dinner.

I pour the juice from a can of pineapple chunks into a microwave safe dish and put into it the thick slices of ham to cook for about 1/2 minute. The first slices are for the youngest, so they will be cool when the last slice is cooked. I serve it with pineapple chunks over the meat and rolls on the side. This whole meal takes only 10–15 minutes to make!

Nachos

I always keep ground beef in the freezer, thaw a little in the microwave, and then cook the ground beef as I turn and scrape. After draining the fat, I add taco seasoning. Put corn tortilla chips on a cookie sheet, pour the taco meat and shredded cheese over the top, and cook under the broiler. I serve it with salsa for dipping, and we all sit around the table and enjoy.

Dallas Chicken

The name for this meal was derived from my son Dallas, who was able to make this at five years old while I was nursing Easton.

Take boneless, skinless chicken breasts and cut into bite-size pieces (I did this step!). Then, put one can of cream of chicken soup and one small container of sour cream in a baking dish and stir. Now, stir in the chicken pieces and cook about an hour at 325°. Serve over rice, noodles, or baked potato with a vegetable. Delicious!

Surprise Quiche

Keep frozen, all ready prepared pie crust on hand. If you have left over meat, cheese, or vegetables—you can make a meal. Cut up all ingredients and put into a pie crust. Pour in four eggs and a little milk over the top and bake until the middle of the egg is cooked. Serve with rolls and/or a salad. California restaurants charge six dollars a slice for the strangest combinations of ingredients in their quiches!

Baked Potato Bar

Cook your potatoes in the microwave for about eight minutes for four potatoes. Then, transfer them to your oven for about 10 minutes, while you get the other ingredients together. Get out your leftover meats, vegetables, cheeses, and sour cream; put them over your potato. It's

better, and a lot cheaper, than Wendy's!

Southern Fried Chicken

My next-door neighbor gave me this secret family recipe that she was famous for. Though she used regular chicken cut up, I use boneless, skinless chicken. Dip the chicken in buttermilk and then self-rising flour that has salt and pepper added. Fry on pretty high heat in peanut oil (just don't let it burn). The meat is so juicy and tasty—even skinless!

Pork Chops

My mother, bless her heart, could not cook. But everyone loved her pork chops (if you didn't mind that it was burnt). Her secret was to sprinkle seasoned salt over each chop, roll it in self-rising flour, and fry in oil. I now buy the boneless chops that have less fat and tend to be thicker and juicier. Serve them with applesauce for the true McGovern way (that was my maiden name).

Enchiladas

If you put your cooked ground beef or frozen chicken in with your favorite taco sauce and a little water or salsa, your meat will be ready, and all you need to do is assemble the enchiladas. Heat the corn tortillas in the microwave to make them soft, put in your meat, and roll. Cover with canned enchilada sauce, sprinkle with cheese, and bake about 15 minutes at 350°.

Enchiladas go well with refried beans and chips. If you like Spanish rice, cook white rice with the juice from stewed tomatoes and pepper.

My Family's Favorite Meals

Tuna Fish Cakes

This was a recipe my mother used to make. My children actually go wild over it. Use the tuna packed in oil, dice up some onion (you can use a food processor for this), and add one raw egg per big can of tuna (this holds the tuna and onion together). Mix it up early in the day. If you want the easy method, fry them on a griddle. But the tastiest way is to fry them in oil (they do splatter and pop occasionally, so be careful).

Use a medium-sized cookie scooper to get the right size. Flatten them out like burgers (you can call them Tuna Burgers if you prefer), and fry them until they are browned on each side. We serve them with elbow macaroni, and prepare a sauce with a can of tomato soup with a little bit of water. The sauce can go over both, or just the noodles, to suit the individual's taste.

Chicken Pot Pie

Use any chicken meat you'd like to fill the bottom of the pan you plan to use. I used to boil boneless chicken in bouillon, and cool before breaking apart. But then, after Y2K, I had at my disposal a lifetime supply of canned chicken and turkey meat (actually it lasted almost 5 years!). Heat up a can of cream of chicken soup with just a little milk (about 1/4 of a can), and pour it into a microwavable dish.

Throw in some mixed vegetables (you can add potato chunks too if they are diced small) and the chicken, and cover the mixture with a refrigerated piecrust. Cut slits in the top for the steam to escape, and bake in a 425° oven for 30 minutes or until the crust is a light brown.

Roast Beef

A roast is nothing new, but let me encourage you to put it into the crock-pot with your seasoning (we use dried onion soup mix). You can have it cooking while you are at church (if you put it in frozen, make sure it is at a higher setting).

With a cheap, less fatty roast, put it in the night before church. Put

potatoes in your oven to bake on low (325°). When your family gets back from church, you can have an afternoon dinner ready by the time they change their clothes and sit down at the (already set) table.

Gravy

A roast is normally dry and uninteresting without gravy for most men. My husband was a big gravy fan. I had tried to pick up my mother's technique; however, as providence would have it, I never learned. Fact was, her gravy, though smooth, had very little flavor (she used milk).

One night, we were invited to a dinner given at the church for all recent newcomers. It was a small church, and the older ladies put this occasion on periodically to welcome new families. On the menu was roast with potatoes and GRAVY. My husband was in heaven! Not only was the meat tender, but the gravy was out of this world! My husband mentioned to our server that if he hadn't already been married, he would marry the person who made this delicious gravy.

When the meal was done, a kind, older gentleman stepped up to my husband and announced, "I heard that you wanted to marry me!" My husband was startled until the man continued, "I made the gravy!"

Here is the recipe that is easy and always delicious, no matter what meat you are serving!

When your meat is cooking, pour water into a glass jar or Tupperware container with a tight lid. Put flour into it and shake until it resembles milk. For richer gravy, use more flour with the water so it looks like thick cream. For milder gravy, put only enough flour in for it to resemble non-fat milk. Now, pour your meat drippings into a saucepan and bring to boil.

With a whisk, begin whipping the boiling meat juices, and slowly pour in the flour and water combination. Go slowly, and watch for your family's desired thickness, then stop.

If you are short on meat drippings, make your gravy thinner so that it will stretch.

Easy Lasagna

The trick to making it easy is not having to cook the noodles! To accomplish this, simply use twice as much sauce as usual and make sure each noodle is heavily coated with sauce. Make sure you let it sit for a couple of hours before baking.

1 pkg. lasagna noodles
2 cans sauce (try Paul Newman's sauce for a treat)
1 small ricotta cheese
2 pkg. mozzarella cheese
Parmesan cheese

Mix ricotta and one package of mozzarella cheese together. You can season the cheese with garlic, or mix in a little spinach if you'd like. Pour enough sauce to cover a long casserole dish. Lay out three noodles, and pour sauce on top (if the noodles aren't cooked, turn them over, and coat the other side).

Now, spread 1/2 of the cheese mixture on top of the noodles. Lay another row of three noodles on top, and cover generously with sauce (again on both sides of the noodles aren't cooked). Spread the remaining 1/2 of the mixture on top of the noodles and lay one more row of three noodles on top, and cover generously with sauce; flip over and pour more sauce on top so that both sides are coated. Finish up with the remaining package of mozzarella cheese, and sprinkle Parmesan cheese over the top of the cheese. Bake at 400° for 35 minutes. Let it sit for 15 minutes, while you whip up a salad!

Meat Loaves

There are so many ways to create diversity in your meat loaves. Let me share one of mine with you, and then let your creative juices flow to develop some new creations of your own. Mexican meatloaf is a favorite with my family. Use the crumbs from your taco chips (you can use flavored ones too) to replace the breadcrumbs. Use taco sauce to replace the ketchup and taco mix to replace the seasoning (just be careful of too much seasoning!). Serve it with rice, beans, and tortilla chips.

By changing the mold you use, you can spark your family's enthusiasm. Use two pie pans, and the meat loaf can be cut into pie slices. Scoop your

mashed potatoes out with an ice cream scooper, and it'll look like pie à la mode.

Thick Beef Stew

My mother used to “flour and fry” her meat before cooking it in the stew. Since I use the crock-pot, I did away with this step. However, I was unable to duplicate the thick gravy. My family, especially my boys, pleaded for gravy. I tried something, and voila, gravy!

When the stew is done, about 10–15 minutes before I serve, I mix up the flour and water in the jar (see the gravy recipe above). While stirring the stew, I slowly pour in the flour and water until it has the desired thickness. You will have to add a bit more seasoning to regain the flavor.

Crock Pot Recipes

Chicken Parmesan

Put your favorite spaghetti sauce (with a little water) in the crock-pot with some boneless chicken breasts and/or thighs. Cook all day. Make pasta and a vegetable (summer squash or zucchini is delicious with this). Then put one breast or thigh over the pasta with the sauce, and sprinkle it with Parmesan cheese.

Beef Stew

Boys will love your stew, if you tell them it's what the cowboys ate! Put in stew meat and any leftover or frozen vegetables you have lying around. Add seasoning (I use Lipton onion soup mix). Cook all day and serve with rolls or bread (like the cowboys). To vary this, I make thick stew by adding flour mixed with water—shake it in a Tupperware container or jar. Also, you can add stewed tomatoes and beans for variety and extra nutrition.

Beef Stew: Stove Top

Another variation for stew I stumbled upon (isn't God good?) was to cook it on top of the stove. I had meant to put it in the crock-pot for dinner, but I forgot. So, I put it on the stove and boiled it. The rapid boiling of the meat for an hour makes it so tender! It was the best stew we have ever eaten!

I have my girls cut up the stew meat into small, bite sized pieces with scissors. Then, I have my boys peel and cut up my potatoes. (Ever since my boys were allowed to have a pocketknife, they have been required to cut up and peel ALL the potatoes and apples I need. That was part of the deal to be able to get one—lots of practice!)

Put the meat and potatoes in a tall stock pot, cover with water, pour in Lipton onion soup mix (or season it the way you like), and bring it to a boil. Boil for about one hour, but keep your eye on it so that the water doesn't boil out. About 10 minutes before the hour is up, pour in some corn or vegetables. The potatoes make it thick.

Bar-B-Q Sandwiches

One of our favorite places to eat bar-b-q had incredible chopped beef sandwiches. My husband commented that it tasted like Cattleman's (you can use any brand of bar-b-q sauce you like). I put stew meat in the crock-pot and pour the sauce over it and cook it all day. At the end of the day, don't pour off the water, just break apart the meat with a wooden spoon and add more sauce if you'd like. Serve on a hamburger bun or Texas toast. My husband's favorite is when I use this same recipe, but use boneless chicken breasts instead of stew meat. This is good enough to serve to guests.

Delicious Baked Goods and Breakfast Treats

My husband's grandmother was a full-blood Swedish woman and an incredible baker. My husband just assumed that I, too, would "some day" be able to bake. However, he married a health food nut (and a contentious woman to boot!). It was many years before I would submit and allow my husband to have the desires of his heart—sweets! It took my losing him, until it burned like a fire within me, to want to bake for my husband and family.

The pie recipe in this chapter was my first success at baking, which gave me the courage to try more things. Then, one date night, while we were walking through a large bookstore, my husband stumbled on a blue ribbon recipe book. It was full of baked goods that had won a blue ribbon at the state fair. I changed them just a bit to compete with my Swedish mother-in-law, which made everything just a bit sweeter!

The rest of the recipes are those that women have given me over the years as I confessed to not being able to bake. Ladies, I am now known for my delicious baked goods. Therefore, any one of you, just by following the recipe, can please your husband and family. "Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her, saying: 'Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all'" (Prov. 31:28–29).

Breakfast Treats

Erin's Buttermilk Pancakes (and Waffles)

Every time I make these pancakes, my husband tells the children his plans to open up a “pancake house.” The same lady who helped me bake my first pie gave this recipe to me. The original recipe called for whole-wheat flour. My husband asked me to use white flour. When I obeyed him cheerfully, his love for me grew ten-fold!

When I told him I was adding more recipes to the book he quickly said, “Not your pancake recipe I hope. I plan to open a pancake house some day.” After he thought about it a bit, he was convinced that my call was in ministry. So here is the recipe for you to enjoy, compliments of my understanding husband.

2 C flour
2 C buttermilk
2 eggs
2 T. oil
1 t. baking soda
1 t. baking powder
1 t. salt
1 t. vanilla

Mix all the ingredients with a hand mixer on slow, then on high. Once it is completely mixed, do not mix again. Cook on a 350° griddle. This batter can be poured on a waffle iron for light and crispy waffles. I usually make up extra batter, and use the leftover to make up waffles to keep in the freezer to just pop in the toaster.

Ever since we moved to Missouri, I have had to add more liquid for the consistency that my family likes. If you like them “cakey,” use less liquid. If you like them thin, use more liquid.

I also found that I had lighter pancakes when I use self-rising flour for 1/4 of the flour; recently I began using unbleached white flour for a more natural, flavorful taste.

Pancake Variations: To make Swedish pancakes, remove one fourth of the flour; they are thinner and taste a bit more “eggy.”

For a real treat, I make the second half of the batch chocolate chips pancakes! My children rave about them to all of their friends!! I like using the “mini” chocolate chips! When you have made all the plain pancakes that you want, then pour some chocolate chips into your batter and fold them in. These are my favorites too!!

For waffles: I had heard that it would require more oil, so I experimented with it. With my new Belgium waffle maker, the best consistency, I believe, is when the oil ratio stays the same. They are a bit crispy on the outside but tender on the inside. However, with my old regular waffle maker, they were *very* crispy. Test this yourself; keep all the other ingredients the same, just vary one tablespoon of oil and increase it according to your family’s taste!

Melt-in-Your-Mouth Butte rmilk Biscuits

You can’t live in the South without knowing how to make good biscuits. I used to love biscuits, and I ordered them whenever we went out. Then, I made my own! Now I cannot eat anyone else’s. These will give you rave reviews.

One night, we were asked to bring something for a homeschool potluck. I made up a huge batch of these biscuits. A lady came over to our table to ask why my children had snuck up to the buffet line and were hiding something under their napkins. They each had smuggled two biscuits before anyone could get them! Needless to say, she (and most of the mothers there) begged me for the recipe!

On another occasion, my second son, Axel, used to help pick up day-old baked goods from a local bakery to give to the poor. An older man would pick him up quite early for the task. One morning, I got up early and made up a batch of these biscuits and some delicious coffee (I’ll give you the secret to great coffee after the scones below) to share with his driver. The following week, my son panicked when he noticed this gentleman sitting out front almost an hour before they were scheduled to go—it was still dark! He was waiting for the biscuits, and this time he brought his own mug for my coffee!

2 C flour
1 T. baking powder
1/4 t. baking soda
1/2 t. salt
1 T. sugar
1/3 C shortening
1 C buttermilk

Preheat oven to 450°. Sift flour, powder, soda, salt, and sugar. Using a hand-held pastry blender, cut in shortening until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Make a well with the dry ingredients and pour in buttermilk. Using a fork, stir quickly until the dough follows the fork around the bowl. (If you make huge batches like I do, then use a serving fork to make it so much easier to mix!)

Turn the batter onto a lightly floured surface. Knead gently 10–12 times. (If you over knead quick breads they may look good but they are like rubber. So do NOT over knead biscuits, scones, or the damper—any quick bread.) Pat the dough about 1/2 inch thick (you can use a rolling pin to make them an even thickness).

Dip the cutter into the flour between every few cuts. Cut dough straight down; do not twist the cutter.

Place one inch apart on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake in preheated oven 12–15 minutes at 450° or until light golden brown on top. (If they are ever doughy inside, it may be that they are too thick, so just pat them thinner next time.)

Scottish Scones

I found this recipe in a magazine many years ago. My family fell in love with it. One night, I met a woman from Scotland, and she begged me for the recipe. It seems her husband, an American, was disappointed that she was unable to make him Scottish Scones. A few weeks later, when I walked into the store where she worked, I thought she was going to leap over the counter when she saw me. She said that this recipe totally changed their marriage, and she is now married to “the happiest man on earth!” However, a few months later, she said that he had put on quite a few pounds!

2 C flour
2 t. baking powder
1/4 t. baking soda
1/2 t. salt
2 T. sugar

1/3 C butter (6 T. sliced thin)
3/4 C buttermilk
1 large egg, lightly beaten
A little milk for the top

Combine the top five ingredients; then, cut in VERY COLD butter with a pastry cutter until very fine. Add the buttermilk and egg. Stir with a fork until moist. Knead only five to six times (no more). Divide the dough in half; pat each half into a circle. Cut each circle into eight (pizza type) wedges with a sharp knife that you continue to dip in flour. Place them an inch apart on a lightly greased cookie sheet. Brush with milk and sprinkle sugar over the top. Bake at 425° for 12–15 minutes. Serve hot!

Overnight Coffee Cake

Every Easter, instead of celebrating with eggs and the bunny, we have a Hallelujah Breakfast—Jesus has risen! I make this up the night before. It is simply delicious!

We also have a turkey for a Thanksgiving dinner. We thank the Lord for dying on the cross, and thank God for sending His Son. We are too busy to do it on Easter Sunday this year, so we will celebrate our Hallelujah Breakfast on Saturday.

2 C flour
1 C sugar
1/2 C firmly packed brown sugar
1 t. baking soda
1 t. baking powder
1/2 t. salt

1 C buttermilk
1/2 C butter (1 stick & 2 T)
2 large eggs

1/2 C firmly packed brown sugar
1 t. cinnamon

Combine the first six ingredients; next, add buttermilk, butter, and eggs. Beat at low speed with an electric mixer until moist; beat at medium speed another three minutes. Spoon or pour the batter into a greased and floured 13x9x2 pan. Combine the last two ingredients, and spread it over the batter with your hand. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Uncover and bake at 350° for 30–35 minutes or until a wooden pick comes out clean from the center. Serve warm.

Australian Damper

This is basically a large biscuit recipe from “down under.” And ladies, it’s so EASY—there are only three ingredients!

Cut two sticks of butter or margarine into six cups of self-rising flour with a pastry blender until crumbly. Add one cup of buttermilk and stir with a fork until moist. Knead three–four times (no more). Cut dough in half and form two round mounds. Cut an “x” in the top of both with a steak knife. Brush with milk, then sprinkle with sugar. Bake at 425° for 25–28 minutes until slightly brown. Serve warm with jam.

Tip: When cleaning up flour from the surface after you are done kneading, use a DRY cloth or paper towel for easy clean up. Move the trashcan next to the counter and wipe. Then follow up with a wet cloth afterwards.

Tip: For those who have a septic tank and not a sewer system: When washing anything that is greasy, wipe it as clean as you can with a paper towel (or the cheaper napkin). Grease is what clogs a septic and prevents them from being absorbed into the earth. By removing grease, it helps prevent your septic tank from needing pumping as often.

French Toast

Buy the long French loaves already partially cut. Mix three eggs, 3/4 cup milk (make it sometimes with buttermilk for a different flavor), and 1–1/2 teaspoon vanilla. Dip and cook on a 350° “buttered” griddle. I rip half of the butter wrapper off and rub it over the hot griddle. It makes it tasty! (You can sprinkle cinnamon on top for a little variety.)

By using different breads, you can make many different kinds of French toast. My favorite is using cinnamon raisin bread!

Great Coffee

It is important, when you want to be a good hostess, to be able to make great coffee—whether you drink it or not. Great-Grandma Brown tried to hint that I needed help with my coffee, during one of her yearly visits before she passed away. Once I got the drift, I said, “Grandma, please tell me what to do!” This is what she told me.

First, make sure your coffee pot stays clean. If used daily, clean it once a month by pouring vinegar through followed by two water brews.

Next, make sure the strength is not too strong, not too weak, but “just right.” Measure one rounded kitchen teaspoon per cup of coffee. We recently bought a coffee scoop that equals 3 rounded teaspoons full of coffee.

Now, for the final secret—this was the Lord’s doing. We used to have Shepherd Meetings (some churches call them cell groups) in our home, when we lived in California. Our group consisted of two coffee addicts! I was totally unprepared for our first meeting. I could quickly see that I was going to run out of regular coffee. After I prayed, I thought I might “stretch” the regular coffee by mixing half regular and half decaffeinated together. Everyone went WILD! The group drank all the coffee I had in the house that night!

I began to buy one can of each (decaffeinated and regular) and mix them together, until I realized that the coffee companies make 1/2 and 1/2 now (half caff). If you are buying your coffee and mixing, just make sure you buy two different brands when selecting your decaffeinated and regular. I store my coffee in the freezer to keep it fresh after opening.

Ever since that night, I have given this secret of great coffee out to my friends. Those who follow the above steps come back to tell me the praises they now receive for their coffee!

Tip: Grandma Brown also made be buy new dish towels. I used the thick ones (terry cloth) that were intended for drying hands, not dishes. Dish towels are very thin, and they don’t leave lint. I bought a bundle of them at Sam’s years ago, and they lasted for years!

Impressive & Luscious Desserts

Chocolate Fudge Cake

This chocolate cake recipe, with the following icing recipe, is the most delicious cake you have ever tasted. For a fancier cake (this is what I do for my friends' birthday cakes), spread the first (or bottom) layer with raspberry preserves, then the icing. Incredible!!!

3 C flour (take out 6 T.)
1-1/2 t. baking soda
3/4 t. salt (1/2 & 1/4 t.)
3/4 C butter (1-1/2 sticks)
2-1/4 C sugar
1-1/2 t. vanilla
3 eggs
3 (1 oz.) squares unsweetened baking chocolate, melted
1-1/2 C ice water

Preheat oven to 350°. Generously grease and flour three (nine inch) round cake pans. Sift the flour, baking soda, and salt into a medium-sized bowl. Cream butter in a large bowl; then, gradually add sugar and vanilla, and beat until mixture is fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Blend in melted chocolate. Now, add the dry ingredients alternating with ice water. Mix the batter for two minutes. Pour into greased and floured pans. Bake in preheated oven for 30–35 minutes or until wooden toothpick comes out clean. Cool in pans on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Then, remove from pans and cool completely.

The **LIGHTEST** Frosting

My husband was sure that we could become rich by offering this recipe in the back of a woman's magazine for a dollar. When my friends have a party, they ask me to bring my cake as their "birthday present"!

1/3 C powdered sugar
1 box (3-1/2 oz.) instant vanilla pudding
3/4 C cold milk
8 oz. tub of Cool Whip

Keep everything very cold by putting your bowl and beaters in the freezer. Mix the top three ingredients on high speed for about two minutes until thick. Carefully fold in Cool Whip with a rubber spatula. That's it!

Delicious Deep Dish Apple Pie

As I told you earlier, this was my first attempt at baking with the help of a friend.

1 pkg. Pillsbury pie crust (these are not the crusts already in a pie pan. They are folded in plastic wrap. You can find them in the refrigerated section, often by the butter, of your grocery store.)

5 lg. Granny Smith apples (green & tart)
1 C sugar
2 T. flour
1/4 t. salt
2 t. cinnamon
1/4 t. nutmeg
4 T. butter

Remove the apple skin with a knife and remove the core. (The first time I tried to make this, I took out a “peeler” to peel the apples! Maybe I was just nervous—LOL! Peelers only work on potatoes and some vegetables—just in case you are starting off like I did, knowing nothing!) Slice them very thin. Mix all of the five dry ingredients together. Follow the directions on the piecrust box to prepare the crust.

Layer apples along the bottom of the crust, and sprinkle the dry mixture over each layer until all the dry mixture covers all the apples. (The first time I did this, I sprinkled the mixture on like I sprinkle sugar on my children's cereal—sparingly. My friend laughed and told me that I had to get *all of it* over the apples—well, then I understood.) Now put the four tablespoons of butter on top and cover with the top crust. Put slits in the top crust and wipe with milk to make the crust shine. Bake in preheated 400° oven for 50 minutes.

My daughter, Tyler, made almost a dozen pies last year using the Jonathan apples from our tree. We took them out in the morning to thaw and baked them the usual way. They were absolutely wonderful—even

the lasts ones that were almost a year old!

French Apple Pie

For French Apple, just leave the top crust off and spread cinnamon mixture from the “Overnight Coffee Cake” recipe. Bake for the same time and temperature as the pie above.

Cobblers

I keep piecrusts (see above) on hand in my freezer and some pie filling (in cans) in my pantry. Just flour the crust well and place in a pie pan. Now pour a can of pie filling in and pull up the sides to “try” and cover the top (leave a little hole). Sprinkle with sugar (and cinnamon if it’s apple filling) and bake in a preheated 400° oven for 20–30 minutes. Scoop and serve hot with vanilla ice cream—delicious!

Tasty Gingerbread

My mother tells me that she was known for delicious gingerbread, but somehow lost the recipe. She says that this is just as delicious as hers, but she still liked to tell me the story of how she used to make hers in a cast iron skillet, whenever I made her some of my gingerbread.

1 stick butter
3/4 C firmly packed brown sugar
1 egg, beaten
1/2 C light molasses
1 C milk
2-1/2 C flour
1/2 t. salt
1 t. baking powder
1 t. baking soda
1 t. ground ginger
1 t. cinnamon
Sugar for the top

Preheat oven to 375°. Generously grease a nine inch square baking dish. Cream the butter and sugar. Add egg, molasses, and milk; beat until well blended. Sift in flour, salt, soda, powder, ginger, and cinnamon. Beat until mixed. Pour into greased pan, sprinkle with sugar, and bake in

preheated oven for about 30 minutes or until wooden pick comes out clean. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature.

Sweet Cornbread

This recipe is not from the South. In the South, the cornbread is not sweet at all and is baked in cast iron skillets. I have never acquired a taste for it. However, you will not believe how delicious this cornbread is. It is so tasty that if there is ever any left over, it is eaten up the next morning by the first man (or woman) up!

1 C flour
1 C cornmeal
1/2 C sugar
4 t. baking powder
3/4 t. salt
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1 C milk
1 stick butter
1/2 C sweet frozen corn

Preheat oven to 425°. Generously grease a nine inch square pan. In a medium bowl, combine flour, cornmeal, sugar, powder, and salt. Add eggs, milk, and butter. Mix only until well blended. Put into greased pan. Bake in preheated oven 20–25 minutes or until the wooden stick comes out clean, and the top is lightly browned. Serve warm.

If you need to double the recipe, you can mix them together, but bake them in two nine inch square pans, so that they will cook in the center.

This can be eaten as a dessert—it is so good; however, we usually eat it with our fried chicken dinner and our chili.

Cookies!!

Cookies are a favorite with our family. My husband used to be our cookie baker, and then I took over. Next our oldest daughter took over baking our cookies and quickly became our most famous and requested baker. Now our second daughter has this job. Many evenings she is asked by everyone to “make cookies tonight—*pppllease!*”

This seems to be the best way to teach your daughter to cook. Begin with baking. It is easier to mix and bake something than it is to have to regulate a burner or a flame. But I think the key reason this works so well is because just about everyone loves homemade sweets; therefore, she instantly gets rave responses (if she doesn't, make sure you tell your family to "make a fuss," if they ever want homemade baked goods again!). This gives her the confidence and motivation to learn to bake more (to get the attention and compliments).

Cookie Tips

Microwave your butter for all of your cookie recipes, while you get your ingredients out. My husband used to let the butter sit out and cream. I never knew any better, so I microwaved mine until the butter was melted. Everyone raved about my cookies, so I taught my daughter to do the same thing. In our microwave, it takes one minute for each stick.

Ladies, I put all my ingredients out in a row along the counter according to the order of use (left to right). After I measure and put it in the bowl, I put the container back. This is not only a good method for keeping your kitchen clean, but it also helps me to remember what I have already added, since I am usually interrupted at least a dozen times when I am trying to concentrate. (I also do this when I'm getting ready in the bathroom and putting on my make-up, since I am always "thinking of something." Prior to this method, I would forget to wear deodorant or look in the mirror hours after getting dressed only to notice I forgot to put on mascara!)

Some more baking secrets: When baking cookies, bake only one pan at a time and turn it when they are halfway through baking, unless some like the cookies crispy like my husband does. Also, let the sheet cool before putting more dough on it. Make an investment in a metal cookie scooper to have evenly baked cookies that are easier and faster to make. (These scoopers may be hard to find, but well worth the hunt.)

Extraordinary Chocolate Chip Cookies

No matter how great your chocolate chip cookies are, they can never match this recipe! My brother, who is a professor in Japan, requests these cookies within minutes after stepping through our front door when he visits.

I am going to give you the double, double batch measurements that we use. Allow everyone to get “their fill” as they are coming out of the oven. Then fill the “cooled” cookies in an airtight container and freeze the rest.

When company comes, or someone just “drops by,” take these (and any other kinds of cookies you make) out of your freezer and put them on a plate. Make the above coffee or a pot of tea. By the time the coffee is done, the cookies are thawed—serve to delighted guests!

2 sticks of butter, melted 2 min. in microwave
1 C Crisco
1-1/2 C sugar
1-1/2 C brown sugar
2 t. vanilla

mix in big bowl
4-1/2 C flour
2 t. baking soda
2 t. salt

mix in smaller bowl

Pour dry into wet ingredients and add four eggs then two bags (or four cups) chocolate chips. Bake at 375° for 9–11 minutes.

Peanut Butter Cookies

I know. I sound like a broken record when I tell you how delicious something is, but these are the best peanut butter cookies I've ever eaten. The secret is that you use "chunky" peanut butter!

1 C (2 sticks) butter, melted
1 C chunky peanut butter
1 C sugar
1 C brown sugar

mix in larger bowl:
Add:
2 eggs and 1 t. vanilla

Mix in smaller bowl:
2-1/2 C flour
1 t. baking powder
1-1/2 t. baking soda
1/2 t. salt

Combine both bowls

CHILL IN REFRIGERATOR FOR THREE HOURS

Scoop and roll in sugar. Press down with a fork making a criss-cross pattern. Bake at 375° for 10–12 minutes.

Chevy Toffee Rancher Cookies

You will find that these are the best cookies you've ever eaten, guaranteed! Unfortunately, we had a run of guests that begged us to make them and we "over-dosed" on them.

1 C shortening
1 C sugar
1 C brown sugar

3 eggs

2 C flour
1/2 t. salt
1/2 t. baking powder
1 t. soda
1 t. vanilla
2 C oats
2 C corn flakes

1-1/2 packages of English Toffee bits (10 oz. bag)

Mix dry, mix moist, combine, then add toffee bits.

Bake on WELL GREASED cookie sheet at 350° for 10 minutes. Make sure they are dark on the edges; if they are underdone they really are no good. Cool on wire rack before eating for best flavor.

Note: Your spatula will stick when removing the cookies from the sheet. So, after removing three cookies, wipe off the end of the spatula with a moist cloth.

Oatmeal Crinkles

You have never in your life tasted cookies like these. Last year, our pastor announced how much he loved oatmeal cookies. Every one of my children leaned forward in the pew to motion to me that I needed to bring him some of mine! Isn't it nice to have fans?

4 sticks of butter
4 C sugar
4 eggs
2 t. vanilla

Cream in larger bowl
2 C oats
2 C raisins (my husband has me omit these)
5-1/2 C flour
3 t. soda
1/2 t. salt

Combine in smaller bowl

Cream, and then combine both bowls. Roll into a ball and then into 2/3 cups sugar. Bake in preheated 350° oven for 15 minutes until lightly browned.

Equivalent Measurements

3 teaspoons	=	1 tablespoon
4 tablespoons	=	1/4 cup
8 tablespoons	=	1/2 cup
12 tablespoons	=	3/4 cup
16 tablespoons	=	1 cup

Liquid Measures

2 tablespoons	=	1 ounce
2 ounces	=	1/4 cup
4 ounces	=	1/2 cup
6 ounces	=	3/4 cup
8 ounces	=	1 cup
2 cups	=	1 pint
4 cups	=	1 quart

Dry Measurements

4 ounces	=	1/4 pound
8 ounces	=	1/2 pound
12 ounces	=	3/4 pound
16 ounces	=	1 pound

Chapter 12

Making the Most of **Shopping Day**

Grocery Shopping Made Easy

*She is like merchant ships;
she brings her food from afar.*
—Prov. 31:14

Meals are important. Jesus had the Last Supper before His death, and it also tells us that we are going to eat in heaven—oh, joy! Also, in Psalm 23, God talks about preparing a table for us (right in front of our enemy’s no less!). Yet, the polls today tell us that families don’t eat together often enough, because they are always on the run and need to just “grab a bite.” We know this is an important time together, yet many of us fall into the same trap as the world.

The only way to avoid this trap is to prepare your meals and your table ahead of time, and make mealtime special for your special family!

However, to be able to prepare a meal, you have to have all the right items on hand. Therefore, this chapter is how to make your shopping efficient and easier with just a few tips and a few hours invested time (in planning) that can last for months and often years.

The Scriptures talk of the “excellent wife,” who brings food from afar. Today, we have the local supermarkets and many kinds of food from which to choose. We don’t have to gather our food, because these stores do it for us. What we can do is use our time and resources wisely to find specials or bargains around town, stock up to save money, and also be prepared ahead of time, rather than running out at the last minute.

Lists

Most women write out a list as they “think of it,” just as they are running out of the door. This is not only inefficient (items needed that will be

forgotten), but it uses a **lot** of mental energy and usually causes stress, which quenches the Spirit. The Bible tells us that God intends us to be “the head and not the tail”; therefore, we need to take this all-important task seriously, and invest just a bit of time to prepare ahead.

One of the best ways to keep your home stocked with items you need is with a dry marker board. On the side of our refrigerator (or now in our adjacent laundry room), we have a marker board for our family to write something they need or that we have run of. As you, your husband, or children notice something that you are running out of or need—just write it on your marker board.

Next, invest just one trip to the grocery store (and a warehouse store like Sam’s Club), and create a printable list. To make this list, you only need to walk around your store once, and write down the number of the aisle and what you buy on that aisle. Now, type it out on your computer, print out four copies, and put it on a clipboard. (Before I had a computer, I used to just go home, rewrite a list, and make copies at the office supply store.)

On the top of four sheets, write “Week 1–4.” Now, sit down with your meal cards and highlight of all the items you would need for that week’s menu. To help, look on the back of the 3x5 cards from your week’s menu you made in Chapter 10. (If you didn’t make the list of ingredients when you created your menu, now might be a good time to get it done. All this time “invested” will bring about great dividends for many months, or years to come.) Next, mark (in another color) the staples that you **MUST** always have on hand like: milk, butter, and eggs. We always have apples, lettuce, and tomatoes on hand too.

Save these lists, and periodically update them with the items you keep writing down, or omit those items you rarely or never buy.

When to Shop

Avoid the weekends and after five during the weekdays. If you hit the grocery store early in the morning (while your family is still sleeping), around 6–7 a.m., you can head straight to the meat counter and get meats at a **reduced price**. I can buy the more expensive ground beef, like sirloin, for less than the cheapest ground beef. (If you’re not a morning person, hit the store early just once a month and stock up on your meat.)

Another added benefit of shopping early is that it is always less crowded. If you can't go that early, late morning is also good. Just try to *never* grocery shop on the weekends or after 5 p.m. weekdays.

Where to Shop

If you want to save money, choose a store where you bag it yourself. Not only do I like to save money, I also like to organize my bags according to where it goes in my kitchen to save steps when I get home.

If you have several places to shop, like going to a discount bread store, go to these first if at all possible. Even Sam's Club may not have what I have on my list, so going there first will enable me to transfer what I need onto my grocery store list.

The Day *before* your Weekly Grocery Day

Making my list and shopping in one day took too much of my time and effort. So a few years ago, I divided it into two days. It made all the difference in the world. I take more time and effort to make sure that I have everything on my list. I also found that I rarely missed items I needed.

With a new printed list, go to your marker board and transfer the items written down onto your list with a highlighter, and then erase them. (I tried unsuccessfully to get my family to simply highlight what they needed on my printed list, but it proved to be too much effort since they would have to search for the item on the list. It is much better to make it easy for them to do so it gets done!)

Next, use your highlighted list of your week's menu, and check your pantry and refrigerator against the "needed ingredients" for that week's menu that you have highlighted.

Get your coupons out, and if you have a coupon for that item, put a "C" next to the item. When you are at the store, check the coupon to make sure when choosing the item that it is the one they are offering before you get to the register.

Shopping Day

For summer months, I invested in coolers and cooler bags to get my frozen foods and refrigerated foods home safely. It also helps to have a couple of rectangle laundry baskets in your trunk to put your bags into, which will save you time and effort getting the bags into the house. It also prevents the items from spilling out of your bags while driving home.

If you'd like to use this as a "learning experience" for your child, give your child the clipboard, along with a pencil, and the coupons while you push the cart.

Have your child tell you the next item you'll be looking for and the coupon special brand or requirement (buy two get one free). If you have other children, let them be the one to get the item and put it into the cart. Have your helpers hand the coupons to the cashier, and be sure that your children unload your shopping cart.

Back Home

When unloading the car on shopping day, everyone has been taught to help. They place all the bags on the counters or table, and once the car is empty, take all the food out of the bags. The older children (or I) place the food in the cupboards in an orderly fashion. I have a shelf for cereal, for chips, for cokes, for canned goods, for baking, etc.

If you have several children that can help, break down this job for efficiency and speed. I had my tallest put away cokes and chips that went in the cupboard over our refrigerator. My organized daughter put canned goods away, always being very careful to have them sorted properly with the labels facing forward. One put away refrigerated items, and the guy who's always in a hurry put away the freezer stuff. The youngest child collects all the plastic bags and puts it into one.

Prepare Ahead

If you cook your ground beef when you get home from the market, it will not only be ready to throw together in a meal, but it also tastes fresher, and it can be kept longer in the refrigerator without going bad. (I pay one of my sons to do this. He needs the money, and I hate this job.) Cooked

ground beef also keeps well in the freezer; use zip lock bags to save space and eliminate buying a lot of plastic containers.

Make up your meatloaf, pour the sauce over you bar-b-q ribs, make up your lasagna, and put them in the refrigerator. This not only makes it easier; it enhances the flavor of your meal.

Check Your Menu and Assign a Day for each Meal

Even though you have a set menu, check your husband's schedule. Plan his least favorite meal the day he works late, the quick dinners for sport nights, and on church days—use your crock-pot for the meals you need ready when you get home. Just write in pencil the day of the week you will make that meal. If you skip a meal that week (because you are eating out or have been invited to a friend's home), draw a box around that meal. At the end of the month, you use these meals up before starting your next month's menu, since you all ready have the ingredients.

Joy!

The most important thing you can do is to *enjoy* the job God has given you, and find “joy” in it! By being incredibly prepared and staying ahead of this all-important task of purchasing the food and preparing meals for your family, you will be less likely to hate the job. Anything that you are good at, you like doing; however, things in your life that you struggle with you can't help but hate.

Once you use this chapter to conquer this task, begin to enjoy the challenge of preparing fun things in fun ways. Cut your sandwiches up with a cookie cutter. If your children hate the crust, cut out different shapes in the middle, then take the crust and use more peanut butter or your sandwich spread to roll them into a “wrap” that they will eat!

In the summer, purchase plastic burger baskets for lunches or a burger dinner for fun. Put a sucker (like a Dum-Dum) on their plate for a tiny dessert.

And to keep your children from overeating and save on “serving dishes,” rather than placing the food on the table “Country Style,” line your plates up on the counter in order of age, and serve each child portions. Even husbands will eat less and keep their weight down. And if anyone does

want “seconds,” they have to make the effort (and call attention) to it by going back to the kitchen or stove.

With your meals and shopping organized, you can now find enjoyment by creating delicious, nutritious, gourmet, and fun meals.

And finally, be sure to set your table early in the day and make it pretty, fun, and inviting for your family. That will show them just how much you really care!

Chapter 13

Making the Most of Your Clothing

Buying and Washing Clothes

*. . . they were not in want;
Their clothes did not wear out . . .
—Neh. 9:21*

Clothes are very expensive to buy and/or replace if they are stained or in ill repair. It is, therefore, very important to keep your family looking like “children of the King” by keeping their clothes clean and in good repair. Even if you if you are struggling financially, you can usually dress well with so many yard sales and thrift stores available nowadays. “. . . And she who remains at home will divide the spoil!” (Ps. 68:12).

Even if you are unable to afford garage sales or thrift stores, there are so many families who are just “looking” for someone who can wear their children’s outgrown clothes—so make your needs known. First make it known to God about your needs through prayer. God tells us that HE will supply all your needs, but He wants you to ask through prayer.

Secondly, make your need for clothing known by mentioning it to someone who clearly is “through” having children and has children just a bit bigger than yours. A friend of mine told me a wonderful example of this. She had always admired a friend’s little girl who wore the most gorgeous designer clothing. She simply asked her friend what she did with the outgrown clothes. The mother now passes all her daughter’s clothing onto this friend who has six children.

When I was “delivered” from having yard sales or trying to make a buck by selling our clothes to consignment shops (as I said in an earlier chapter), our family began overflowing with clothing! It took me a long time of prayer before I found a group at our church that passes clothing around so I could pass Macy’s clothing to them. The rest of our clothes, I

simply give to the closest thrift store to our home.

Whether you need clothes, or you have clothes to give away, it is important that you keep your clothes clean, which is what this chapter is all about!

Before I get started, however, I want to share my heart regarding mothers who have their children do their “own” clothes. I am all for training my children (as you know from my workbook *A Wise Woman*), but I am not in favor of this system, because I like living in and promoting “family.” Though our children learn to cook, clean, and do laundry, we do not do it “independently” from each other, but rather we learn to do it as a family.

Society as a whole loves to “divide and conquer” yet our very nature draws us to wanting to “belong.” Cults pray on young people, because they are “communal” and they finally feel they are needed (even if it is trying to sell beads at an airport!). I am not saying that if your children do their own laundry they will end up a member of a cult, I just want to emphasize promoting family and “servanthood” (caring for each other rather than self) that is becoming as outdated as remaining a virgin before marriage. Moving on . . .

Praise God. If you have a washer and dryer, PRAISE God for your modern conveniences! If you don’t have to wash on a board, or at a river, or carry water and boil it, praise the Lord! Most of us don’t *have to* hang out our wash to dry, but have a drier! And we don’t have to load coals in our iron when pressing our clothes!

Be thankful. Be thankful by showing God your appreciation for the clothes you have by:

1. Keeping them clean: Use bibs, aprons, and a stain remover when you or your family does spill.
2. Keeping them wrinkle free: Keep up with your ironing, and fold or hang as soon as the dryer stops. Also, not overloading your washer and drier will help with the wrinkles.
3. Keeping them mended: A stitch in time really does save nine! Learn to hand sew or keep your sewing machine up with white thread during the warm months and black during the colder

months for quick mending. If you know how to sew, but don't have a machine, there are very small machines, even hand held ones, that will mend a seam.

Diligence. Setting a schedule and a routine will increase productivity and keep you from dreading this very important job you do for your family.

1. Sort your clothes by using three different-colored baskets: use a white basket for whites, a light color for your lights or bright clothing, and a dark basket for your darks. Teach children their colors by having them sort their own clothes as they take them off. Once they are either dressed in their bedclothes or dressed for the day, they can be trained to bring their soiled clothes to the laundry room. Or if you prefer, you can have a laundry basket in their room for them to bring to you on laundry day. However, very often with children they will throw clean clothes that they try on and don't wear; or put dirty clothes in their drawers that you discover a week later. If you have either of these situations, you might want to use the first method.
2. Set days, i.e., Monday, Wednesday, Friday, for your washdays, or you can wash a load as soon as that colored basket is full (if you are having your family sort their own clothes as they take them off). This works better for smaller families, where set washdays are a **must** for larger families.
3. Turn the clothes the right way out or inside out for sweaters and girl's tights. Teach your children to do this themselves. If my children don't turn their clothes, I make a pile of all the clothes that are unturned and make one child (the biggest culprit) to turn or shake out the rest of the family's socks). It only takes ONE time for each child to turn someone else's socks to remember to turn their own clothes.
4. If you zip up your clothes, they will fold easier, but more important, it saves the life of your clothing. A zipper frays clothing in the washer and especially in the dryer.
5. Take time to look for soiled or stained clothing, and pre-treat them with a stain stick, or what I prefer is the new liquid detergent I use that gets out **everything**, including blood!

6. Oops, I spoke too soon. The only thing my laundry detergent doesn't get out is anything oily or greasy. For this I use "Goo Gone." If you can't find this, look or ask for a citrus stain remover. It took out a stain from a baby romper that was **covered** with red lipstick in just two washings! And when my sister visited, she just about cried when she told me her son (who had *begged* his mom for designer shorts for the summer) got a black oil stain on it. She told me she had tried "everything" and it didn't help at all. It took two washings with "Goo Gone." Just make sure you cover the stain, let it dry, then use a liquid detergent on it when you wash.
7. My favorite laundry detergent is OUR Detergent. It's a liquid, which is what I always use with my darks, since I often end up with powder marks on dark colors. It uses a pump, so you don't have messy cups. It works with cold water. It gets my clothes so white, and the colors are so much brighter. I found out about it from a Christian woman's magazine, and I have told everyone about it. You can order online at ourproductsonline.com. Recently, a neighbor I recommended the OUR detergent to asked what I thought of their other cleaning products, which I had not tried. After trying them, I now love ALL their products, especially their powdered whitener. Their products are safe for your skin, without petroleum byproducts or harmful chemicals that you don't want to use next to your family's skin. And if that is not enough to convince you to try this, it costs my family of nine just \$5.00 a month to use! I use the smallest recommended amount per wash and still cannot believe the great results and such a cheap price! If you do give this product a try, mention my name and they will send me money toward more of their products! Thanks!!

Washing Tips:

1. If you want to stay ahead of the game, collect and sort your clothes at night and start your first wash load—whites. If you do your whites at night, you save competing with the hot water you use for showers.

2. Throw your whites, which consist mostly of towels, underwear, and socks in the drier since these will sit before folding. When you wake up, you have a load to fold, your third load in the washer, and your second load going in the drier. This saves me so much time it is unbelievable!
3. To get **cleaner** clothes, don't over fill your washer.
4. Use a detergent that requires only a quarter cup. Others have fillers, which can burn clothes, cause skin irritation on children and others that have sensitive skin, and may be some of the causes of sickness and diseases like autoimmune disorders. Again, I highly recommend trying OUR detergent.
5. Though I used to use liquid fabric softener and recommended using a Downy ball, I no longer recommend using chemicals that come in contact with the skin that are easily absorbed into the body. And fabric sheets are said to be one of the worst products you can use regarding your health, and often cause skin rashes. A natural softener, especially for towels, is vinegar. There are different kinds, but Heinz makes a good one that is made from vegetables, not petroleum, and vinegar is so cheap to use.
6. For clothes that you do not want to go into the dryer, put these in a net laundry bag. All my children know that a net laundry bag does not go in the dryer (that used to "somehow" get dried, and ruined before I invented this method).

Drying Tips:

1. Remove your clothes immediately, fold or hang up, to eliminate wrinkles.
2. To save electricity—dry two small loads together.
3. Shake out clothes as you place them in the dryer, rather than throwing a giant wet ball of clothes, to get fewer wrinkles.
4. Place your laundry basket *under* the dryer door to prevent your clean clothes from falling on your dirty (or lint covered) laundry room (or garage) floor.

5. It is the dryer, not the washer, that fades colors, especially black items. So if you have something that you want to keep looking like new, don't dry it, but instead hang it up to dry. Then to help it get less stiff, put it in the drier for about 5 min. Just makes sure you don't forget it's in there! I set a timer so I don't forget.
6. My sister and I used to spray our jeans with a little water, or throw a wet washcloth in with them, so we didn't have to iron jeans or our wrinkled tops. I showed this trick to my 13-year-old daughter who thought it was the neatest thing she ever found! This works for just about any wrinkled item that you have that you don't need to look pressed.

Folding Tips:

The fastest way to fold is to have smaller baskets set aside for your:

1. towels and wash cloths
2. socks
3. underwear

While folding, fill these baskets with your towels, socks, and underwear, until all your loads of laundry are done. Fold or hang up the remainder of the clothes immediately. My younger children fold these baskets for me (youngest number 1 to the oldest number 3), but before little helpers, sorting these items, and saving them to the end, cut my time folding.

When I fold a shirt or pair of pants, I hold them on the shoulders or at the waste band and give them a quick, sharp shake to smooth them out for a *quick* fold. There are some mothers who fold in a “fancy department store fashion” that forces them to have to do all the folding, since it is too complicate (or she is too picky) to have her family help.

My sister also likes them done in a “fancy” fashion that keeps her from keeping up with her folding! She never can get around to it (since it takes her probably five times as long as it takes me per load). So she buys more laundry baskets, lets them sit, and is then forced to iron everything before her family can wear it. If your method causes you to fall into either of these groups, then find a simpler way. (Funny, while revising

this chapter, I just so happened to be visiting my sister and folded at least a dozen or more loads to free up the laundry baskets that I had planned to buy for her!)

To Reduce Ironing:

1. Hang up all your clothes immediately on colored plastic hangers (to be ironed if necessary).
2. Fold clothes right away, after *each* load to avoid wrinkles.
3. Fold underwear, socks, and towels after the *last* load.
4. Assign designated items to be folded by your children (youngest working up to the oldest).
 - a. wash cloths (youngest)
 - b. towels
 - c. underwear
 - d. socks
 - e. the rest of the clothes (oldest child or you)

*She looks well to the way of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

—Prov. 31:27

Putting Laundry Away:

1. Have the “folder” put away what he/she has folded into the proper drawers (if possible) or at least on the bed, or dresser in the right room, or in designated laundry baskets that are taken to the room later once filled with all the loads.
2. Or, you could have each child put away his/her own laundry. On the farm, I used to make each family member’s pile and then call out “laundry break.” Each family member would take a “break” from whatever he or she was doing to come get his or her pile of laundry and put it away.

3. On Mondays, or when a lot of clothes are in the wash, this is the best time to organize the drawers. You can put this task (to organize drawers) on your children's 3x5 cards for Monday. Then, the newly folded clothes can be added neatly to the newly organized drawers.
4. If you are short of drawer space, use colored, small baskets on shelves in closets to organize your clothing, socks, underwear, or shoes. This is especially helpful with small children's clothes. When my husband left us, we had no dressers, so I found some cinder blocks and made shelves with boards. I found dollar plastic baskets, which served as our "dressers" for many years! I particularly liked being able to see all the clothes folded, not stuffed, in drawers.
5. Make sure you have a special drawer or basket for underwear, socks, P.J.'s, shirts, pants, and sweaters. And within the drawer or basket, divide it to separate socks from underwear or other smaller items. Shoeboxes work well in the sock and underwear drawer. I mention this because I was not raised this way. As a teenager, I believed I had "invented" this method not knowing that almost everyone lived like this!
6. Teach your children how to keep their drawers neat by having them sort their drawers each week as one of their task cards. Soon, my older children automatically put that card as "done," because they *learned* to **keep** their drawers organized!

Ironing Tips:

1. Ironing your husband's clothes shows other women in the workplace that "there is a woman who cares for this man"—and one who is hard to compete with! If you want to keep him, don't have him iron his own clothes!!
2. Use a spray starch. It helps to keep clothes looking newer and crisper. You can buy liquid starch and put it into a spray bottle to save money, and it can be diluted to suit your husband's preference.

3. The proper order to iron a man's shirt is: collar, then cuffs, sleeves, left front, back, and then right front of his shirt.
4. Don't crowd clothes in the closet—get rid of what you don't wear! Rule of thumb—if you buy a dress, a shirt, or a pair of pants, **give one away**. Give to the poor—"Give and it shall be given!"
5. Use colored or matching hangers to make your closet look neat. Each family member has a specific color, which helps keep things in order in your laundry room and when putting away the items in rooms and in closets that are being shared. Colored hangers are extremely cheap. Use the little size for your younger children, and move up to the large hangers when the shoulders hang over the sides. The smaller hangers also work well for pants to keep the pants from sliding down to one end.
6. Collect all your *empty* hangers when you put away newly washed and ironed clothes. Have a place by your washer to hang the different colored hangers. Some places I have used are: a wire rack over my washer holds cleaning products on top and has a place to hang up hangers underneath; on the edge of a high table where I folded my clothes; and along the end of my ironing board.
7. Hang your clothes (in the closet) in some kind of order: all your shirts together, then pants, your dresses, next coats, and rearrange them with light to dark clothing within each section. You may laugh, but it helps to find what you are looking for.
8. "Airing dirty laundry" is the biggest mistake you could make. Never share details of your husband or friend's personal matters with others. "He who repeats a matter separates intimate friends" (Prov. 17:9).

Remember . . .

*The heart of her husband safely trusts in her
and he will have no lack of gain.*

—Prov. 31:11

Stains:

1. The three most important things to remember are: always check for stains **before** putting items in the dryer (preferably before you put them into the wash basket); never iron over a stain; and use the easiest and least caustic method first.
2. Some of the stain sticks advertise to rub the stain before you put the item in the hamper. It has worked many times for me. If it doesn't work or you forget to use it, follow some of these other tips.
3. Fill your washer on low setting with soap and water (and bleach of the powdered OUR for whites), and put in the extra dirty or stained items to agitate alone. Then turn off the washer, and turn on a timer. Let the stained or soiled items soak for just 10 minutes. Check the stains again. Fill the washer the rest of the way, and then add the remaining laundry.
4. If you have young children, you probably deal with a lot of stains. When I did, I usually washed my lights before I washed my whites, in case all my attempts still left a stain. At this point I use the more drastic method, and wash a light item with the whites. If this still doesn't work, go to the last step.
5. With extreme caution, use bleach with an old toothbrush, or better yet, purchase a bleach stick. It works great with white fabric. If you use it on a colored item, as soon as the stain disappears, run it under water to remove the bleach. If it's used on a stain on a colored item that would not come out, and it does get ruined, it was ruined anyway. If it still doesn't come out or the item gets damaged, try this . . .
6. Seam rip a famous name label from another garment, and sew it over the stain or bleach mark. At the time this is being written, you find labels anywhere and everywhere on the garment. Many times it makes the article of clothing look more expensive! This also works for covering a small hole or tear. I have used a label to upgrade an inexpensive brand of clothing or the clothes I sew!!

7. Use lingerie bags to wash panty hose, bras, knee high stockings, or any other delicate item. It not only protects them in the washer, but it also makes it easier to remember not to put them in the dryer where they lose their elasticity.

Notes:

Chapter 14

Making the Most of **Sewing**

Clever Sewing Notions

*She stretches out her hands to the distaff,
And her hands grasp the spindle.*
—Prov. 31:19

Sewing is somewhat a “lost art” in today’s society. But since Scripture tells us the “excellent wife” sews (well actually, she spins her own fabric, then she sews), I feel it must be important or God wouldn’t have mentioned it! If you don’t know how to sew at all, there are certainly women in your church with whom you can get together to learn the basics, like sewing on a button, hemming, mending, and operating a sewing machine. If you do sew, and sew fairly well, you may be willing to help another woman learn.

Let’s talk about some sewing tips that will help you save time and/or money. Most women don’t think they have the time, or that it is sometimes cheaper to buy it than sew it. I think that is why sewing is no longer fashionable.

Tips to Save Time

Scissors. Put your scissors on a piece of elastic and hang them around your neck. I saw this being done at a fabric store by the personnel, and have done this for years!

Pincushion. Use a wrist pincushion. You’ll never end up at the sewing machine or ironing board without pins. It’s even worse if they’re hidden under a piece of material. (These first two tips cut my sewing time in half!)

Cutting patterns. Cut many patterns on one particular day, while you're all set up on the table or floor. Cut right over the V—then, go back and snip a quarter inch into each of the V's.

Patterns. Use the same pattern over and over. You'll know it so well, it will cut down on the time of following the directions. And you may even find short cuts to your pattern. Using different prints, solids, plaids, and stripes, as well as various buttons and collars, will give each item a different look.

For patterns that you will use over and over again, make a pattern from a remnant of fabric. I did this for my daughter's dress pattern. It not only was easier to reuse than the thin paper pattern, it also did not require using pins to keep it in place for cutting! I was able to pass that pattern down and used it for my next two daughters.

Facings. Don't use the facings, instead line—it is so much quicker! Just cut out the yoke of the garment doubled. You simply sew it around the neck and sleeves, turn and press!

An entire child's wardrobe: Make a wardrobe for your toddler. Make two to four blouses or shirt in different styles (round collar, square collar, sailor collar, ruffle collar), then make different dresses or jumpsuits in various colors and slight pattern changes. This saved me so much money (when I didn't have any!) and got my children constant smiles of affection from strangers!

Bibs. Make and use bibs for little children (my four-year-olds still wore them when eating). This will save time with laundry and with having to buy new clothes! I also bought Battenburg collars at Wal-Mart in the fabric section for about five dollars, and use them with my daughters when we'd go out to eat. For my sons I made squared collars that were lined to go over their little rompers that not only saved their clothing, but also dressed up what they were wearing!

Tips for Saving Money

Buying patterns. Buy only one pattern for your boys and one for your girls. Make sure they have size variations (open the pattern before you buy it and look inside to see). I make a fabric pattern by cutting out the size I need on another piece of fabric I don't want. When you lay your

fabric pattern on your good fabric, it will not need pins to hold it while you cut.

Lining. Use your unwanted white sheets for lining. You can also find white sheets at yard sales or at thrift stores, or use a complementing fabric to line. Stripes inside a floral print is nice. Keep your scraps of fabric for this purpose. Just lay what you have on top of your material to find a winning combination.

Buying fabric. Buy the fabric when it is a dollar a yard, no more than two dollars. You'll find fabric all over town this cheap if you look. When you need to sew something, check in your box of fabric first before rushing off to the store.

Avoid trendy. Buy the classic fabrics rather than the trendy. Also do this with your patterns. Then, the clothes can be passed down to other children without looking out of fashion.

Buttons can add style to your clothing at an inexpensive price. Many times Wal-Mart has buttons on sale for 10¢ or 25¢ cents a card. Different buttons, different trim, and different lengths of dresses make the clothes look different even though it is the same pattern.

Modest and warm: Make pantaloons for your girls—they are good to dress up an outfit, they are modest, and great for warmth in the winter.

Wear for years. Make your girl's dresses ballet length. Then, she can wear it the next year at calf length and the final year at the knee.

Teach your daughters to sew. There is no better way to help your daughters than to teach them skills that will help them when they are married. If you don't know how to sew, or cook, or do other domestic tasks that help whether you are married or single, then find a woman who can train her. The "women's lib movement" left most of us unable to do simple tasks. This makes us struggle and dread everyday tasks that would be easily done had we learned when we were younger.

For more information on training your daughters (and your sons) for life when they leave home and get married, make sure you read *A Wise Woman* available through our ministry.

This not only will train your children, it will help you be the example of a Godly wife, thereby leaving your children the best inheritance—Godly parents!

Notes:

Suggested Reading

Clutter's Last Stand by Don Aslett. All of this man's books are wonderful, but this one is *must reading*. I kept jumping around this book looking for the quick tips for organizing, but there were none. I finally settled down and read the book from beginning to the end. It was enjoyable and funny, but most importantly, it changed the way I looked at what I owned. The unexpected side effect was that it changed my buying habits (I stopped buying what I didn't need). Check to see if this book is in your local library. Most bookstores carry it, or they can certainly order it for you.

Side-Tracked Home Executive by Pam Young. After thinking I was the only one using 3x5 cards to organize my daily tasks, someone said, "Oh, you must have read *Side-Tracked Home Executive*." It was their book (it's written by two sisters) that gave me the idea to color code my cards, and showed me how to work in monthly chores into my system. It is very funny and well worth reading.

About the Author

Erin Thiele is the mother of four boys, Dallas, Axel, Easton, and Cooper, and three girls, Tyler, Tara, and Macy. Her stand for marriage was founded on the Rock of God's Word, during her struggle to restore her own marriage; Erin's husband left her for another woman and eventually divorced her. Two years later, her husband returned, and their marriage was miraculously restored! Even before his return, Erin founded Restore Ministries International to encourage women who had been abandoned by their husbands or who were experiencing marriage problems.

If you have access to the internet, be sure to visit Restore Ministries website at: RestoreMinistries.net. On our website, you'll be able to read many powerful testimonies of restored and improved marriages, post prayer requests, and find out more about our other resources such as books, videos, and audio tapes on marriage, family, and training children.

Restore Ministries International
POB 830 • Ozark, MO 65721

*For a complete list of
our other books and resources
Visit our Website:*

www.NarrowRoadPublishingHouse.com

or

EncouragingWomen.org

or

HopeAtLast.com