

Large Family Mothering

Building your home one piece at a time

Amy Maryon

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my family. The older ones especially as they had to “endure” as Mom tried to “figure it out” through the years. I thank you for your patience and your love.

To all the moms out there who feel like they can’t even breathe. Hold on Momma’s there is hope!

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"You have how many children? Oh Wow, you must have the patience of a Saint! You homeschool them all, stay at home, AND run a home business?!?!? I don't know how you do it with all of yours, I only have one and I find it difficult!"

This is a typical conversation scenario when I am out and about in town meeting new people. I have come to realize that I am NOT a Saint. and I never followed some "magic formula" for figuring out how to do everything, I just did! Are there days I fail? Oh for sure! Are there days where I just stay in bed late, don't answer texts, throw chicken nuggets in the oven with fries for dinner and call it good? Yes, Yes, and YES!

But one thing that I believe in, is trying to strive to become the woman, wife, and the mother that God has for me to be. How do I go about that?

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,

Colossians 3:23

One thing I have learned over this journey of my life is that life is hard. It is trial and error. I was never handed an instruction book on how to do things effectively with our family. The internet was not that huge years ago when I first became a mother, and when it did start becoming more and more popular I was in the mode of having babies and just surviving. I would get the occasional tidbit from a friend, but the majority of my life has been live and learn by my many mistakes.

It doesn't matter whether you are a career woman or a stay at home mom--the principles remain the same---you want to be the BEST that you can be. For myself, if I was in a career outside of the home doing accountant work, my first choice in life, then I would study, learn, and work hard, very hard at becoming a successful accountant. Being a stay at home mom is no different.

*The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing;
But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich.*

Proverbs 13:4

In life, we should WANT to strive and be the BEST that God has for us. He promises us that if we are diligent in working towards HIS plan for us,

we shall prosper. Those promises are for the stay at home mom as well as the working mom. God is no respecter of persons.

Why write this book? I believe what the Bible says about “iron sharpens iron” and the importance of sharing with one another to encourage each other. Momma’s we are on the same path of life. My life of ten children is no different than your life with one or two children. We are all striving to be the BEST at our jobs. If we can work together and share what has helped each other, than we will be much further ahead in life. Why? Do I know it all? No, I learn each and every day something that I can do better. But what I want to do is share all that I have learned because I have ten children, we have one income, and I homeschool them. How do I survive? How can I find time for writing and blogging? How do I have time to help in our business? How do I find time for me? All these things I will share as you read through the book. I hope you enjoy reading through the many tidbits and information that I have learned over the years. I pray some of them encourage you in areas that you want to improve in your own life. Even though I do it daily with a large number of people, all of the principles are the same for any size family. It takes time, planning, management, diligence, and patience to be successful in any area of life. All of these principles we will put to use in striving to make our homes a haven for peace and not chaos.

Be blessed and enjoy!

Amy Maryon

Household Management

1

CLEANING ROUTINE

The number one complaint that I hear from moms is that they can't keep their homes clean. Their children's rooms are always a mess. Their closets are jammed pack. There is always clutter sitting on the tables. They can never find what they need. Clothing sits in piles with nowhere to go. Food gets wasted because they didn't realize what they had already in the refrigerator or pantry. The list of complaints goes on and on.

With a little organization and planning you can create a successful plan on how to keep your home running smoothly and remove the clutter and things that fill your life with too much stuff.

The general rule to remember is

$$\textit{Less Stuff} = \textit{More Life}$$

If we can simplify our lives and get rid of the "clutter" and the inefficient plans for doing things we can start experience more of life. This includes more time for yourself and more time with your family. More peace in your soul because your life is not so crazy.

STEP I

What's the first task you do? You start with a cleaning systematization. What's that you might say? A cleaning system, routine, something that becomes a "way of life" for you. It needs to be flexible enough to be resistant to change and interruptions in your life, but efficient enough that you don't overlook things that need to be done in your home.

How did I do it in our life? I started out by making a list of all the chores that I had to do in my home. Yes, it seems that my list was very long and took me a few days to complete. I had many little ones and it was hard to concentrate at times. I suggest you take time for each of your areas in your home that need cleaning. Write down everything from wiping the walls, cleaning carpets, to organizing the food pantry. Work on it for a few days. Look back at it and see if there is something that you think you missed. Walk into that room and get a visual of all the things that you need to do and write them down. I'm including plenty of space for you to write down everything that needs to be cleaned.

STEP II

You now have your list made of all of the cleaning tasks that need to be completed in your home. Looks like A LOT doesn't it? This is the part that you may get overwhelmed and think that it is just too much and you might not want to continue. But, I encourage you to just keep working with this technique. You will get there. It is hard in the beginning because you are in your planning stages. This is where you have to lay it all out and figure out exactly what it is you have to do. The next part will be the "when" you do it. I promise you that after you start this, it will work for you. Your life WILL BE full of LESS STUFF and you will have MORE LIFE! Stick with it!

As you continue on with this planning system, you may think about a few extras that you had forgotten, just keep adding them to your lists. I know myself I kept adding things that I had forgotten like washing the table legs and chair rungs, etc. You will get it!

Now for part two of our cleaning systematization. I want you to gather up all your DAILY chores and place them on a new list. These are all things that you feel is important to do each and every day. In our home these things include:

- picking up master bedroom and making bed
- picking up boys room and making beds
- picking up girls room and making beds
- quick wipe of the bathrooms
- sweep of the kitchen and dining room floors
- washing one load of laundry
- feeding cat and dog
- feeding the chickens
- empty the big trash can
- wash dishes/put away after breakfast
- wash dishes/ put away after lunch
- wash dishes/put away after dinner
- wiping the counters and table after each meal

Yours may be different depending upon the needs of your family. You just want to give yourself something in writing of things that NEED to be accomplished each and every day.

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In the column on the right hand side put the initial of the person who is responsible for the chore. Give chores to children that are age appropriate. You may need to do some training with a child to help them learn how to do things properly. I know in our family, I had to endure a few “not perfectly” swept floors as my children were learning to sweep. At first it was not like that, they had to learn by doing. For children learning to wash dishes, start them out with the meal that has lesser dishes. We start ours out with lunch (because we don’t normally have very many). As they do better, they can move up and help with breakfast dishes. This allows another child to step in and learn how to do them at lunchtime. Given time they did learn and I am thankful for their assistance now as they are older.

Some tips.....

As you write down your daily chores on the following page, scratch it off from your original list to prevent missing anything during transferring.

You may want to delegate a different child for each meal. For example Jadyn washes the dishes at breakfast while Brooklyn puts them away. Autumn washes lunch dishes while Madelyn puts them away. Dinner Mom washes, while Evan puts them away. You can get however specific you would like to get. For our family, we choose a day for each child to do dishes. I like washing dishes and do them at every meal. Monday and Thursday Jadyn puts them away after every meal. Tuesday and Friday Brooklyn puts them away. Wednesday and Saturday Evan puts them away. For the children that do not have to put dishes away, they then help with clean up after each meal. Every family is different, this is just how we choose to do it. I at one time had everyone doing a different tasks and rotated them around, but for me it was a lot of remembering and confusion. This method works well. It is much easier for me to look at my chart and know who is supposed to do dishes for the day instead of for every individual meal.

Remember to include your children with your work. They are an important part of the family. They make messes and contribute to the extra work that needs to be done in a home. Giving them tasks to do keeps them busy, builds character, teaches them responsibility, and helps you out in the home. It is important to build up our children’s work ethic. If you don’t give them work to do, when will they be expected to work? If you train them up while they are young, as they grow older they will come to know that work is an integral part of life.

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that two times per week to keep your home clean. If that is the case then leave that in the weekly category.

Congratulations!!! You have successfully created a cleaning systemization for daily tasks. You can now put into practice your daily cleaning from this day forward. Take note, you may notice things that you forgot to add to your list that need to be done each and every day. Maybe you realized that you forgot to add “get the mail” to your list. Go ahead, add them and delegate it to someone. Get as detailed as you would like. I recommend for someone who struggles with getting it ALL done, that you be as specific as possible. When I first did this, my daily list was long. Now after doing it for 20 years I have my daily list memorized and I just routinely know what to do in the morning. You will get to that place as well. Just as you remember to brush your teeth and get dressed each day, you will start to form habits to complete your daily chores as well.

For the next few days you will have to reference this list quite frequently and help remind your children until you can get them something just for them to look at. This is just a temporary list. Place it in an area that you can see it like on the refrigerator or by your work station.

Don't get overwhelmed with all the other tasks at hand in your home. You are beginning with a small step. Start implementing this step. Don't worry about doing all of the other chores each day. Over the next few weeks, you will get to everything that needs to be done in your home. It is okay if you are just able to get your daily chore list done. Dust will still sit on the tables. Mirrors can have streaks on them. The children's bedding will be okay if it sits for more than a week without being washed. Relax and just get used to your daily chore list.

STEP III

Now let's transfer all of your chores that you find that need to be done weekly and place them in categories by room. Write down in the box the number of times you need to do this. Let's say for example you want your bathroom trashes emptied two times per week, then write the number "2" in the column. If the task only needs to be done one time like dusting the furniture, then place a "1" in the column.

Remember if you don't want to write in this book visit www.plainandnotsoplain.com for free printables of this task.

Weekly chores for: kitchen	

Weekly chores for:	

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Weekly chores for:	

Weekly chores for:	

Weekly chores for:	

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Weekly chores for:	

Weekly chores for:	

Weekly chores for:	

Some examples of weekly chores for us include

Kitchen

- wash floors
- wipe out microwave
- clean out refrigerator
- wipe all cabinet faces
- organize pantry
- clean and polish stove

Bathroom

- scrub the tub
- wipe sink and vanity
- clean and wipe drawers out
- clean toilet
- empty trash
- wash floor
- spot wipe walls for fingerprints
- check for toiletries

Living room

- dust all wood items
- vacuum –two times per week
- wipe the windows
- straighten bookshelf
- water the plants

Boys bedroom

- organize toys back to proper place
- put away laundry
- dust furniture
- wipe off tablets
- vacuum the floor ---two times per week

Outside work

- straighten the decks
- sweep the porches
- pick up the trash cans from the road
- clean out the van
- wash the van
- clean out the chicken coop

Remember to keep working at your daily chore list each and every day. You are beginning to form habits of doing something on a regular basis. You will start implementing this weekly list as you finish with it. Don't hurry through it, just work diligently. You want a better system for your life. You want a clean house that doesn't overwhelm you will "stuff." Putting this into effect will help you.

STEP IV

You have your weekly chore list complete. It has everything that you want to get done each week but not necessarily each day. Now you are going to have to make some decisions and choose which days you work on which tasks. For our family we choose a couple areas each day.

Monday we focus on floors and playroom. This means that we sweep and steam all the hard floors in our home. We also vacuum every inch of carpet. After the weekend, things tend to get dirty. We start the week out fresh by doing this. We also do a thoroughly cleaning of the play room. Things get organized properly and put away. The floors should be picked up as that is part of our daily routine. If I see an item that belongs to someone, I remind them to please pick it up.

Tuesday we focus on bathrooms. This day I deep clean and do all of the bathroom tasks that need to be done. Each day, I do a quick wipe but today, I get the tub scrubbed, mirrors polished, toilet disinfected, and trash emptied.

Wednesday is our kitchen day. We normally do extra baking this day, so I choose to deep clean it as well. As we are going about our baking, I do a scan of my cupboards and make sure that things are organized properly. I look through the drawers and see if the proper items are in each one. I straighten my pantry so that I know what foods I have to eat. I fill my sink up with some cleaner and wipe off the front of all of my cabinets when we are done baking. This removes food and finger grime. Make sure to wipe the cabinets on the bottom. Sometimes those are overlooked and they can get very dirty. I wipe the back splash to remove any splatters or grease. After all of our food is cooked and baked, I wipe down the stove and microwave and give it a good shine. I clean out the inside of the refrigerator, throwing away any old food and wiping each shelf. The outside gets a wipe as well. We also rinse and scrub out our water bottles for the week this day. We constantly keep them filled but once a week I sanitize and scrub them out. The floor gets a sweep and a spot hand wash to remove any food that we may have dropped during our baking. Our trash gets picked up tomorrow, so we make sure to empty all of the household cans and put the trash out to the road this day.

Thursday we focus on doing all of our dusting and window cleaning. We also straighten our school items. This means we straighten the books, clean out our homeschooling area---return pencils to their proper place, throw

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away any paper, put library books in bags, etc. I have a child that goes around and wood cleans everything in the home. Another child takes the window/mirror cleaner and goes around and cleans all the windows from the inside and wipes all the TVs, mirrors, tablets, computers, and phones.

Fridays we focus on the bedrooms and putting away all of our laundry. I don't designate one day to wash all of our laundry because we have so much. Plus our septic couldn't handle all that water. Each day I wash and dry one load of laundry. I place the dried clothing in baskets: one for girls, one for boys, and one for my husband and myself. Towels get placed in a basket on top of the washer when they are dried. If a child needs an extra chore for the day due to disobedience or I find that I am running low during the week and can't wait till Friday, I will have them fold this basket and put them away. Everyone works at separating and putting away their own clothing. The older children can fold and hang their own. The younger ones can put away in their proper areas once I fold them. Each bedroom gets a good cleaning. I will clean under the beds, straighten desks, shelves, and drawers. I will wipe down anything that maybe got forgotten during the dusting day. The girls wipe down their shelves. The boys organize their toys in their proper bins. Closets are checked to be in order. We thoroughly vacuum the bedrooms again this day. I also run the vacuum through the living areas again to get them cleaned for the weekend.

Saturday we focus on outside chores. We will empty and clean the van. We sweep and straighten the porches. We clean out the chicken coop. We wash the pet bowls out and clean up any dog mess. We catch up on any chores that could not be completed during the week. Maybe we had unexpected visitors on our dusting day and were not able to do that. Today is when we would "catch up" on those chores.

You will have to decide which days you want to do each of your tasks. Plan your focus area depending upon your circumstances. If you have to leave the house early for church on a certain day to help with classes, don't make that your kitchen day. It will only stress you out as you try and get everything done. Our kitchen day is a day that I know I am going to be home and not have to leave the house. On Fridays, we do our shopping and errands. The children like to go to the library, they know that once their rooms are done, we can leave. This helps them focus. Mondays are always busy after a long week, I keep my "extra weekly chores" shorter and just focus on the floors. You arrange it according to the demands of your family. If your husband gets home early on a certain day, don't take on a lot of extra work that day. Choose things that can be done quickly.

Create your list according to your family plans. You may need to switch it up a bit. Fill out the charts and work at your daily list and then designate a time in the afternoon to work on your weekly list. If you find that you can't get it all done in one day, that is okay. As your week goes on, you will find that you don't have as many extra chores on another day and you can rearrange and add those chores onto another day.

This is a work in progress situation. You are going to have to implement it and then evaluate if it is working for you or not. This is what a successful manager does.

As you fill in the weekly chores, designate if someone is to help you do that tasks. Place their initial next to the chore. As you do the chores throughout the week, notice if one child gets done with their work more quickly than others. You may need to add additional chores to that child if another tasks takes longer.

In our family, we try and not do extra chores on Sunday and make it a time for family and worship. It is okay if the laundry piles up this day or that there may be dirt on the floors. You will get to them. Make it a time of rest and relaxing.

Remember to post these lists along with your daily list in an area you can see. You will be making a final copy when you are finished. Right now, you will have erasures and changes made as you try and figure out what works best for your family.

Remember to cross it off your weekly chore list from step 3 when transferring so that nothing gets overlooked. Pay attention to the chores that you place a number next to. For example, if you need the trash emptied 2 times per week, make sure to write which two days you want it emptied.

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Monday	

Tuesday	

Wednesday	

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Thursday	

Friday	

Saturday	

If you don't want to fill in this book, visit www.plainandnotsoplain.com for free pintables' of these activities.

Step IV

Now that your daily and weekly chart is all done, it is time to work on our monthly chores. These are the chores that you need to do only once per month. In our family these chores consist of:

- washing the girls bedding
- washing the boys bedding
- washing our bedding
- washing the throw blankets
- organizing the freezers--to know what I have for meals
- wiping the dining room table legs and bench legs
- wiping the washer and dryer off
- spot wipe all high traffic areas on walls
- wipe switch plates
- wipe fan blades
- wipe down bathroom cabinets
- wipe and dust wall decorations
- vacuum behind/under/inside couches and chairs
- dust light fixtures
- clean oven

Typically you get 4 weeks out of the month to do these chores. In our home, I divided up the chores by the number of weeks that I had. I then made a list.

<u>Week 1</u>	<u>Week 2</u>	<u>Week 3</u>	<u>Week 4</u>
wash our bedding	wash girls bedding	wash boys bedding	wash throws
wipe the dining table	spot wipe all walls	deodorize trash cans	wipe down bathroom
wipe van blades	wipe switch plates	vacuum out couch/chair	clean oven
dust light fixtures	wipe/dust wall décor		

Notice that I grouped similar chores together. Instead of getting out the vacuum each week, I put all the “vacuuming” jobs on week 3. When I was going to wipe all the walls, I decided to do all the extra chores that were similar to that chore for week 2. We have a large family and I cannot do too much laundry, so I space out when I have to wash everyone’s bedding.

Now when do I get all these chores done? Do I have a “set day?” Not always. Typically I will have my list all printed out and then on Monday, I will look at my list of what I have to do for the week. If I get a few free

minutes here or there, I will tackle a job. Sometimes I wait and designate it all to be done on Saturday when I have extra time. These jobs are good for children who don't obey☺ They are not much fun and work well if I have someone who has an attitude problem. That isn't always the case, so we just tackle them and get them done somewhere in between life.

You can also delegate who does that by placing their initial after the chore. Do what is best for your family.

Week One	

Week Two	

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Week Three	

Week Four	

Step V

If you notice that typically four times during the year we have an extra week in our month. The 5th week. Hmmmm, what can we tackle on that day For myself, that is when I would do my extra annual cleaning. I don't like to have to take a week out of the year for my “spring” cleaning. When springtime rolls around, I want to be outside enjoying the sunshine. These are the chores that we have under our annual list:

- vacuum under and behind refrigerator
- wipe all walls from ceiling to floor
- clean out heater and cooling vents
- defrost freezer and wipe out
- clean behind washer and dryer
- carpet clean floors
- clean out basement
- clean out garage
- sort through and donate clothing
- sort through toys and donate
- sort through household things and donate
- clean off videos and bookshelves and donate
- clean out dryer vent
- clean out fireplace
- clean inside and outside of windows and sills
- flip mattresses
- test fire alarms/smoke detectors

I would divide up the number of chores that you have by four times per year. Every time that extra week comes around, aim to get that set number of chores done. If this list is on the wall along with your others, mark off the chores that are completed so that you don't do them again in the coming months. If you keep it in your household binder, you can just check it off. (See chapter 29—creating a household binder)

Maybe you just want to have that extra week to NOT have to do extra chores, that is fine. You have to find whatever works for you. The key is to have a list so that you know what you have to do each year.

Fill in the chart or go online to www.plainandnotsoplain.com for free printables for your binder.

Now that you have your rough draft copies, I would recommend going to my site www.plainandnotsoplain.com and print off the forms for daily, weekly, monthly, and annual jobs to make your final copy. You can also make them yourself in a simple wordpad document for each of your children. Put them in plastic protector sleeves to keep them nice and place them in your binder. (see chapter 29 on how to make one.)

Wow! Can you believe that you have organized all of your cleaning tasks into something tangible that you can actually use? I know it may seem like a lot, but all you have to do is implement it into your life. It will be okay if you forget to dust one day during the week. Know that the following week you will get to it again.

This method or systemization takes time. It takes time to sit and write everything out. It takes time to learn to implement and see what works and doesn't work. As with everything in life, time spent doing things that are important are well worth it in the end.

You want a smooth running home where your husband comes home and can sit at the table and have dinner with his family without all the clutter. A home where you won't be afraid if your friend just drops in for lunch. A home you won't be embarrassed to entertain others in. A place where your children know what is expected of them and they help contribute to it. A place that they value and love because they work together to keep it nice. All this starts with us and our willingness to make our homes a place of peace for our families.

*She watches over the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness*

Proverbs 31:27

2

MANAGING YOUR WEEK

*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,
making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.
Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
Ephesians 5:15-17*

Have you ever started out your week with intentions of getting a list done and by the end of the week realizing that you haven't even scratched off half your items? The weekend is here, you go into overload and stay up late trying to accomplish all of your "tasks" at hand. The week starts again and you find yourself in the same predicament the following week. How can you go about fixing that? You make a plan.

Many housewives of bygone eras had a set day to focus on different tasks. If you read books about homemaking and home life in colonial times, women had certain days they would do things. Wash on Mondays, Iron On Tuesdays, bake/make butter on Wednesdays, etc. When I experienced an Amish group, I realized that they have the same ideals. They would do all the wash on a set day, bake another day, deep clean another, and garden/outside work another. They had a main focus for each day of the week. That got me thinking.....here were women that have done this for many generations. How could I incorporate that into my own life?

In our home, I can't do all of my laundry on one day....our septic would overflow☺ I don't iron or mend....not me. We don't have to make butter.....but what are the main focuses for our family?

- laundry
- cleaning house
- baking
- errands
- office/paperwork

Monday is laundry day

After the weekend, we always have big piles of laundry, this would be the day that I would get up early and get the clothing separated and start washing. I teach my children to immediately put their clothing that they take off into the laundry hamper. I have a few that I still have to remind to pick up their clothing, but most of the time the dirty laundry is in the hamper. If I am diligently and call the children whose clothing I see at that moment, it helps them to stop what they are doing and immediately pick it up and put away. Train your children to do this, it will save you many countless steps in picking up each day. I have a teenage son who did not put all his clothing in the hamper and I refused to pick it up. There was a day when he put it in the basket all at one time. I did not do laundry and he missed out on some clean clothes the next day. I told him if he wants clean laundry, to pick it up every day. He rarely leaves it out now.

When I am ready to wash, I sort the laundry into piles.

- towels
- darks
- lights
- work clothing

I would also look and see whose bedding I am to wash this week and gather that up as well.

If it were a nice day out, I may get towels going first and then I can have them waiting in a basket to go out on the clothesline when the sun came up. If I had bedding to hang out, I would do that next. Anything that I wanted to hang outside----work jeans, work shirts those would get done so that they would have time to dry.

I then would throw in the whites and then the dark clothing. As the clothing came out of the dryer, I would separate it into four baskets:

- Dad and Moms
- the girls
- the boys
- towels

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We wash everything in cold water. The only thing I wash in hot water would be my cloth diapers. Everything else gets clean in cold. This saves huge on your water heater bill. I purchase a big bag of laundry soap crystals for \$8 and that will normally last us about a month and a half. We used to make our own soap, but I have found that the soap making items are more expensive in the area that we currently live in. While shopping one day, I saw bags of the laundry crystals and I purchased a smaller one to try out and we liked it. I've been using it ever since.

We don't use fabric softener or any other type of additions. I do keep a bottle of bleach in my laundry room to bleach my white rags or shower curtains. I can purchase a bottle and have it last me a few months. I find that if I hang out any items of clothing on the clothesline that the sunshine works as a natural bleacher.

When I had little ones, to protect their clothing, they wore bibs to prevent stains on their shirts.

If I have a pile of clothing that needs to be hand washed, I do that in my kitchen sink. I fill it with cold water and put a little laundry detergent in it and swish around the clothing. I do any lighter, non bleeding colors first and within a couple of seconds the clothing is done. If I have more I will do it in the same water and continue until finished. Drain the water out and place clean cool water in the sink and repeat in the order you washed them. I will do my light brown shirt first and then wring it out carefully, place my orange dress next and wring it out and follow up with the turquoise dress that always bleeds color. I take my balls of clothing and put them on hangers. I will place on the clothesline or over tub on the shower bar to dry.

I always do full loads as to not waste the water. I told you I have to be frugal with my septic system☺ I fill the washer with clothing just up to the agitator bar, if I have some extra room, I might throw in some washcloths or dark socks to the load to make it full. I can gauge from the size of my laundry hamper whether I will have a full load or not, if I don't I won't wash it that day.

I am constantly listening for the loads to be finished. I have a buzzer on the dryer to be able to hear when it is done. As soon as I hear it, in goes the load from the washer and out comes the load separated into baskets. If you

can do it all day, keep this going and by the end of the day you should have all of your laundry washed.

Later in the afternoon when everything was finished, we would take our baskets to the rooms and put them away. The little ones, I would separate and let each girl put her own away. Even the younger girls know how to put leggings and socks into their drawers. I help with hang ups and they place on the bar. We collect any extra hangers and place them on the bar in the laundry room.

Monday is now laundry AND clean floors day?!?!?

Now, fast forward to a few years later and we have a home where I cannot run my washer all day long. Our septic would not be able to handle it. My dreams of getting it all done are gone, what is a Mom to do? She just figures it out. In our home now, I only run two loads of laundry at the most each day Monday through Friday. On Mondays I normally throw in bedding and towels because those are the ones in need the most. I hang out what I can and dry the rest in the dryer. The towel basket gets folded at the end of the day and all bedding goes back on.

After each day of doing dishes, I place the washcloth and drying towel in the washing machine. Whatever load I wash the next day, I know that these are going to get clean. If I were to put them in the laundry hamper and wait until I wash towels, they would smell musty.

For the rest of the week, every morning that I get up, I see which category of clothing needs to be washed the most. If I have a lot of light clothing I throw that in. When it is dry I separate it into the baskets like I used to do for laundry day. The baskets sit on a shelf above my washer and dryer. On Fridays when everyone cleans their rooms, we put laundry away. This is the method that works for our current situation. You have to choose what you are able to do. If I could do it all in one day, I would. That is not the situation so I have to figure something else out.

Since I now don't have an entire day to dedicate to laundry I choose another "bigger" chore. That is the floors. On Mondays in our home now,

Large family living

I sweep all hardwood floors. I steam mop them all and we vacuum every inch of carpet. This includes moving couches and getting inside the cushions for a good vacuum. We sweep the stairs with a hand broom and hand wash them with a rag. Every square inch of our home will have been thoroughly swept or vacuumed today.

I make sure to shake and vacuum any rugs and get into all of those tiny corners as well. It will all be done, even if it is the only day that it looks perfect.

I have found that if I do a quick vacuum on the insides of cushions this helps with keeping mess off the floor too. I don't take them off, I just lift and do where the cushions separate. I push the couches back and vacuum or sweep underneath them.

Tuesdays are cleaning day

We used to dedicate this day to doing all of our home chores. This would include a thoroughly cleaning of the floors, dusting, mirror/window cleaning, and a deep cleaning of the bathrooms. This was great, back in the day. I knew that on Tuesdays my home would be spotless, but again life happens and we have to figure out something different.

My Mondays are usually a bigger cleaning day, the floors take some time. Tuesdays now start off with two loads of laundry in the early morning. I wash and dry and separate according to baskets and then on this day I tackle all three bathrooms

I will spot wipe each bathroom as needed on other days with a homemade cleaning wipe just to keep up but today we get in and scrub it good. It is convenient to keep a container of cleaning wipes or paper towels and all purpose cleaner spray in your bathroom for quick clean ups. As I am giving children a bath, I might do a quick wipe on other days that I don't do a deep clean. If after I use the bathroom in one of them and I notice they are dirty, I wipe them down with a couple of wipes quickly. Usually every morning I check them and grab one wipe or paper towel and wipe the sinks down, I use the same wipe and another one to do a quick wipe of the floors and then I throw those in the trash. I use a separate one and wipe the toilet rim and lid good. Some bathrooms aren't used as frequently like ours, so

they don't need wiping every day. The boys bathroom definitely gets wiped everyday and the girls bathroom is normally done every other day.

Lets deep clean....

I start off by sprinkling my powdered cleaner in the shower and let it sit. Usually it is still wet from showers so it works good. If it was not wet, I would turn the shower on for a moment to get it wet. Then I would flush the toilet and sprinkle some in the bowl. I start out with spraying some all purpose cleaner in the sinks. I wipe out the sinks with my sponge, turn on the water to wring it out and continue wiping my faucet. Make sure to get behind it and around all the corners. Wipe off the counter. Put away any items that may not belong on it. I open the drawer and clean out any hair that I see. I wipe out the plastic containers, see if the q-tip container needs to be filled, and make sure we have enough towels and washcloths. I wipe down the front quickly as I move to the toilet.

I then take my same sponge and wipe the inside of the toilet. I go around the rim and get up on the inside. I flush and put some all purpose in the water now. I then wipe the rim and the back where the lid latches on. As I need to rinse off my sponge, I do it in the toilet water--its clean. I continue wiping the lid and the toilet tank. I move down and do all around the front and sides of the bowl. Don't forget the back. You will be able to smell if there is any areas that you did not wipe. Everything should smell clean. I keep squeezing and rinsing out the sponge as I clean. I then wipe around on the floor by the toilet. I make sure to get way in the back. If I have boys, I wipe the walls, I know gross, but it will cut down on bathroom smell. As I am cleaning the floors, I move the trash can out in the hallway for the child who needs to pick that up and empty it today. I continue wiping all the floors, getting into the corners well. If I notice part of the lower walls are dirty I will wipe them as I am cleaning the floors.

I finish off by wiping up the sides of the tub and the edge. I then take my bath pouf scrubbie----which is designated for shower scrubbing only and start scrubbing the bottom of my tub. I scrub the floor and wipe around where the "ring" is. I rub my hand to see if I get all of the scum off. I scrub up each of the walls. I remove soap bottles and shampoo to make sure and wipe every little spot. Wipe around the bars and wipe off the top of the shower. It will have dust. I take my ice cream bucket that I brought all my

cleaning supplies with me in and fill with water and carefully pour down the sides of the shower. I make sure and rinse it all off. I check the shower curtain to see if it needs cleaning. If I notice any spots, I will scrub it with my pouf or make a note to bleach it later on. I put back all of the containers of toiletries, replacing any that are almost empty. If my husband's shampoo bottle is almost empty, I grab up another one and squeeze the remainder of the old one in it. Myself I would fill it with water and use one last time on my hair, but men are different and don't always do that. I squeeze out as much as I can and throw it away. If the bar soap looks low, I replace that too. My husband does not like running out of toiletries because he may not know where the replacements are. Keep them stocked. Even if you set it on the vanity for when it does run out this will help. Close the shower curtain so that it can dry properly.

I refill any toilet paper containers. I keep three to four rolls stocked in each bathroom to avoid any running out situations. I replace any hand towels and check over my room before I leave. I may not wipe the mirror this day because on my chore system I have on Thursdays to Windex everything. If I can I do, but if I am super busy, I know that on Thursday it will get done.

I gather up my bucket with cleaning supplies and move on to the next one. I repeat the same pattern with each of the bathrooms and when I am finished, I rinse out my sponge and place it in the microwave for a few moments to kill any bacteria. All the items go under the sink. If I notice that my powdered cleaner is running low and I may not have enough the following week, I put it on my shopping list for next week's errand day.

If I do this early enough, my day will go smoothly. Sometimes it does not and I have to space it out. But if my MAIN focus was just bathrooms today, I could get it done at sometime during the day. It might be in between nursing babies, doing school, or after meals. I just know what this day is designated for and I do it.

If this day was all cleaning, I would work hard at getting it all finished today. Do what is best for your sized home and what you can accomplish in one day. For myself, it is realistic to say that I can do my daily chores and deep clean all three bathrooms on Tuesday. This allows me time to still do school and prepare meals for our home. Don't over schedule yourself. Make work what will work for you. When we had a smaller home, I could

do all my cleaning in one day. That is not the case in our current home. Again, do what is BEST for YOU!

Wednesday is kitchen day

This day starts out and I grab my apron right away. I realized not many women do. What started me on the path of apron wearing was because I had to replace all my t-shirts because of the grease splatters or the stains on the belly area from the sink water. When I received an apron for Christmas and started wearing it years ago, I never went back. Every time I am in the kitchen, I put this on. This saves my clothing and it gives me something to wipe my hands on as needed. I even wear it as I am cleaning other areas of the home. I like the ones with a pocket and made with 100% polyester material. They don't wrinkle and they last for a long time. If I am up early and working on chores, I can put my sermon or music on and listen with my ear buds while my phone is in my pocket. The pocket is good for when I find small objects that go in other places of the home. I might find money, marbles, or tiny little toys. This is a life changing thing---really. For \$10 it will keep you clean. Ask for some for Christmas next time☺

After my apron is on I look at my menu plan and I see what sort of treats I want to make for the week. In our home, I make different things for us to enjoy for desserts or snacks. Here are some we make:

- puppy chow and rice crisp treats ***INCLUDE RECIPES IN THE BACK SECTION
- apple dapple cake and granola bars
- pumpkin muffins and banana bread
- energy bites and chocolate chips bars

We also will make a larger food prepare to stock my freezer for a later meal. This might be because I noticed that we don't have certain staples in the freezers. This can include:

- dried beans that I cook in my roaster or Crockpot until soft and scoop them into plastic deli containers to freeze for meals
- refried beans made from overcooked pinto beans and then pureed

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- eggs, if I have tortillas, I might make a big batch of breakfast burritos and freeze them
- French toast sticks and freeze for quick breakfasts.
- roast or chicken cooked in a Crockpot until it easily falls apart, divided into individual containers for later meals in the month
- soup—make a big pot and freeze into containers for a quick lunch

If I don't have a plan for the day, I check my freezers and pantry and see what I have an abundance of. If we have lots of mashed bananas, diced apples, or shredded zucchini, I'll do muffins or breads. I make what we have in the home. Sometimes we don't have many snack type foods and I will pop a big container of popcorn from the 25lb of seeds we have stored (we always have popcorn seeds) and dress it up with caramel corn topping or melted chocolate discs. Just to make something to enjoy. It doesn't have to be fancy, but it is still a treat.

Depending upon how much baking I have, my dinner for this day is easy. We typically do a pot of homemade spaghetti that I can keep the sauce cooking in the Crockpot all day long without taking up oven space. It is nice to be able to serve homemade bread that we made today as well.

With all the kitchen work, it tends to get extra dirty. As I work, I clean. I usually have a sink full of hot, soapy water that I can wash utensils as I work. I try and keep my countertops wiped as I go. When I am finished baking with items, I wipe them off if needed. I give my mixer a good wipe off too. As things are baking, I start with some of my weekly cleaning in this room. I might start wiping off the faces of my cabinets in between muffin batches. I open up cupboards as we are putting dishes away and straighten them up. I look in drawers and make sure the proper items are in each one. If I see something I haven't used for over a year, I take it out and place it in my box to give away. If I notice that my butter knife stash has grown and all it does is keep over flowing into my fork container, I take out a few to get rid of. We can only possibly use a few in our home. Take out what you don't need. If I find that I have too many hot pads and I have to keep jamming them into my drawers to shut, I look through them and keep the nicer ones. I throw the other ones away. Same goes for

washcloth and towels. If I have plenty of them, I put the rest in the rag pile for my husband.

I do a quick look over my cleaning items. If I can condense some of my all purpose cleaner into one container, because I opened a second one without realizing the old one had fallen over in the back, I do that. I fill my soap containers and if it is almost empty, I fill the filler body with some water and pour it into the sink for dishes. I set it in the sink until I use it up that day and throw away the refill bottle afterwards. I wipe out all my major appliances.

I do a clean out of the refrigerator and wipe down all shelves and drawers. If I can condense some foods together I do. If I find a little leftover salsa in a container, I pour it into my spaghetti sauce mixture. If there is only a little parmesan cheese, I pour that into my sauce as well. Any leftover containers I put up front so that they get used up. If we have too many carrots, celery, apples or oranges, I take some out and cut them up for the children to snack on this day.

I rinse out my coffee pot and get it refilled for the next day. I wipe my kitchen floor with a rag to clean up any dropped foods while baking. I make sure to get the kick plate as that is often overlooked. I clean out my sink drains and dump the food pieces in the trash and give my sink a good scrub with some powdered cleaner. A good wipe with the towel we dried dishes with and wipe up any wet spots. Everything looks clean, I throw all of my used cloths into the washer along with my apron. I make sure all of the counters are cleaned up. We have already put some of the baked goods into the freezer for later in the week. The rest get covered and placed up high---to avoid snacking. My kitchen day is completed. Yes it has been a long day, my back does ache, but I feel accomplished after this day. Tomorrow will be easier.

Thursday is office day

This is my day to get all of my paperwork done. Throughout the week, if I needed to do something for bills, online, paperwork, etc I write it down so that I do it today. If I keep video recommendations from people, in my weekly planner, I will write down the movies on Thursdays for subsequent weeks. Then when I order all of my library books for the week for children,

Large family living

I will also order a couple of entertainment movies to watch. If I space them out over a few months, we have a new movie to look forward to. I order all my homeschooling books this week. I get my list ready for running errands tomorrow. I write down exactly what I need from each store. If I have to return something, I get it out and place it by the front door so that it doesn't get forgotten. I keep a bag by the door for all our library return books so that those can get put in the van to return.

This day, I also pay bills that are due each week. I have in the back of my planner a monthly view of which bills are paid each week. Since we are paid weekly, every week is designated to specific bills. As soon as I get a reminder that a bill is going to be paid on a certain day, I write it down in the current month on the week it will be deducted.

- Week one---groceries
- Week two--gas, electric, internet, trash bill
- Week three—insurance, cell phone bill
- Week four—house payment

This helps for me to know what each week is designated to. I might not be able to go shopping specifically on week one but I know to keep that paycheck aside for groceries.

If you have all your bill paying dates due on the same week, contact your creditors. Most will allow you to switch the date that your bills are due. I know for our family, I had a set schedule and then we bought a home and all my dates were changed. We had everything due at the end of the month along with our house payment. A few phone calls to utility companies and I was able to switch them to be more efficient each week.

If I need to mail away any bills, I have all of my necessary items in one place. I keep envelopes in my filing cabinet. In my purse I keep checks and stamps. Yes, I have learned that over the years, little ones think stamps are stickers?!?! I have kept them in my wallet out of habit. If I do have to mail something away, after it has been sealed and addressed, I stick a clothespin on it and place it with my errand list for tomorrow. This reminds me to take it with me to mail. I keep it on my console in my van, so that I don't drive past the post office and forget to mail it.

Even though purchasing your checks through your bank is more convenient, the cost is three times that of a mail order check system. Look into different companies. There are many that do it for a fraction of the cost and you have a wider variety to choose from.

If there was something I wanted to look up on the internet I would do that today. Maybe I wanted to research a better way to teach fractions with my child, I might do that today. I might want some new recipes and will spend some time looking them up. I plan any homeschooling get togethers and parties this day. If I have to send out text reminders, I do that. All my receipts, check stubs, statements, tax papers, etc that have been sitting on my desk from the week, I file into the appropriate files. If there is any mail, I open it and discard what I don't need. If it is a magazine, I flip through it and decide if it is really worth my time to read, if not I pass it along to a friend. I have a pile for her to give tomorrow.

This day is also set aside to write any letters to people. Yes, it is important to write out letters. How great it is for a mom who is home all day long, to walk to her mailbox, open it and find something just for her! I have a list of people in the back of my planner just for this. I have pretty stationary and nice envelopes. I keep my letter positive. I NEVER share negative things. This letter is meant to give the recipient a positive note for their day. I may share a bible verse, an encourage quote, or something positive that has happened in my life. I usually give an update on what everyone in the family is doing. If I have any photos to send, I do so. I might tuck in a special tea bag, a recipe written out on a recipe card, or some other small item. It doesn't have to be much. It might even be a pressed flower from something in our yard. Just to let the person know that I am thinking of them. This is a good habit to help form in your young ladies. Especially in our new age of digital everything. It is rare to receive hand written notes, but it is a treasured item.

I also keep this day to write out any thank you letters. Growing up, my mother always had me write a thank you letter for everything. As I have grown, I realize the importance of that habit. I try and instill that in children too. Whenever they receive something, I show them how to write a thank you note. It can be simple but thoughtful:

Large family living

Greeting

State the gift, a thank you and that you are considerate of it.

Share what you are doing with the gift.

Write something about the past and future.

Thank them again.

Close and sign.

February 10, 2017

Dear Grandma Linda,

I wanted to send a note to thank you for the crocheting kit. It was very kind of you to send me this item.

I am currently learning how to do make granny squares with this item. It is hard, but I am learning. I work at it a bit every day.

When we get to see you again, I hope to have a small blanket made. I really enjoyed our visit and look forward to the spring time when we can see you again.

Thanks again.

Love,
Jadyn

Maybe I have nothing to do this day...rare but it happens. I might clean out my filing cabinet. I pull out my individual folders and look through what I stuffed in them. I keep 6 months worth of check stubs and throw the rest away. I look through the warranty papers and see if any are expired. I look at receipts I kept from gifts that I wasn't sure if we were going to need to return but we didn't so the receipt goes. I don't need bank statements because I can go online and print them off if needed. I don't keep utility receipts or phone bills, all are accessible online. Anything that I can get online, I throw away. I keep birth certificates, social security cards, titles for cars, receipts for business expenses, medical bill receipts, warranties, insurance policies, and now my filing cabinet is nice and neat.

I might pull out the journals I started for each child and realize that I hadn't written in them in a while. I place them on my desktop and write in a couple of children's. I write different events that have happened in our life, things that they did, or how they have grown. I can't do all of them at once, but after I write a page and date it, I place it back in the filing cabinet. Throughout the next couple of days, when I have a spare moment I see the piles and write in some more books.

I have already ordered all our school books, but I may get inspired for books to read to my little ones, I search an internet book list that someone has made that are appropriate for kindergarteners. I order those to read for my little ones.

I might look up DIY homemade gifts and make notes of ones that I want to make for people at Christmas time. It may be March, but I have more time in March then I do in December to look up gift ideas. I make a list of people I want to give special gifts to and slowly start planning on them. For my girlfriends, I want to do a bag of my favorite things. I came across a stainless steel water bottle that I love. They are \$10 and to buy 10 of them in December is a lot. If I grab one every few weeks and work that into my grocery budget it doesn't put much damper on bills. I place them aside and keep adding to it. I might want to make something and see the items I need at a thrift store one day, I grab them for later use. I might find cute lotions on sale, I gather them up and save for later. I scan clearance isles after holidays and look for things to pick up. When the holidays come around, I have already been collecting items throughout the year so the pressure is off to try and find "extra money." I top off my presents with some homemade dark chocolate, coconut, almond, cranberry crunch candy and call it good. This is a much better approach then to have Christmas come and gone and I "wish" I would have given gifts to someone or I bought something that was overpriced because I felt I should, but now am out of money. It always helps to plan ahead.

If I hear my husband say he wants something I write it down in my gift idea section of my planner. When Christmas time rolls around, I already have an idea of what to get him. Same goes for my children, if there is something they have been wanting, we add it to the list. This helps prevent purchasing gifts that after the New Year they end up in the "give away" pile.

How do we cut down on paper clutter?

As soon as mail comes into the home it is sorted immediately. I place the junk mail directly into the trash. I set unopened bills in my bill holder on my desk for Thursdays office day. Any magazines get a quick look through. Do I keep it? Do I think it is just a time waster? I either throw it away, set it next to my bed, or place it in a bag to give to friends. Any other items that I might need to look through get placed on my desk for the appropriate time.

When I do get a chance to skim through a magazine, I will rip out any recipes that I might try. I tear out any articles that I will want to read later on and place them in a folder. I may take these with me while waiting in the car and read them. I place the recipes in my household binder in the “recipes to be tried” section. As I make my menu out for the month, I will glance at this section and see if I want to make something new.

Most every one of our bills is paid electronically. If I can have it paid automatically then it saves on paper, stamps, checks, and most important late fees! Don't pay get stuck with unnecessary fees, have them deducted to avoid this. An extra \$5 each month equals a couple of days worth of groceries each week lost in late fees.

When my husband brings home receipts and paystubs, I take them and walk them to my room and place them in the filing cabinet in the correct folders. If we get an invitation to something, I write it down in my planner—along with phone numbers or address and throw away the card. Any type of appointment reminders, as soon as I arrive home, I write down in my planner the dates and times and throw away the cards.

Did you know that you can have your name removed from marketing lists? This helps hugely in having junk mail sent to your home. This saves on the environment, on your trash pile, and time wasted by you looking through things you don't need.

To opt out for five years: **Call toll-free 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688) or visit www.optoutprescreen.com.** The phone number and website are operated by the major consumer reporting companies.

To register your phone number or to get information about the registry, visit www.donotcall.gov, or call 1-888-382-1222 from the phone number you want to register. You will get fewer telemarketing calls within 31 days of registering your number.

What about digital clutter?

Just as our physical inboxes can have clutter, so can our digital inboxes. On my phone, I can get all of my emails and texts together. As soon as I get one and can read it, I decide what I am going to do with it. I delete it, if I don't need it. I save it, if I need to respond and can't at the moment, or I file it, if it has important information.

I made a "save these" folder on my Gmail account. This is where all my emails are at that might need to be referenced. I might get a reminder that my ebill is ready to view and pay. I will look at it and write down which bill it is and the amount, on the appropriate paycheck week. This allows me to delete the email. If there are pictures to save, I scan through and save them so the email can be deleted. If my girlfriend sent me a recipe, I will decide if it is "really" something I would do, I then save the snapshot in my photos file on my phone and look to it later.

If it is something that I can't take care of at the moment, I save it as new and I see it every time I look at my phone. My goal is to let my inbox and text inbox be emptied every night. Before I go to bed, I respond to any texts and then delete the messages. Any other emails, I take care of and delete as well.

I will periodically go through my phone when I have a few extra moments and clean it out. I look through my photos and decide if they are to be kept or not. I have Dropbox on my phone and will grab all the images and videos and transfer them to my Dropbox account which takes them to my laptop. I then can save our family photos or get blog post photos ready for posting. I scan through my "saved" images and see if there is something I need to make a note of and write down in my planner. I might have taken a photo of a book, I wanted to check out, that will go on my Thursday planner day to order. The recipe I wanted to try, I will make a note on my errand day to get the ingredients. Things are cleaned out to keep my phone running smoothly.

Large family living

If I need to make a quick note throughout the day, I create a draft text and it automatically saves it in my inbox on my phone. This works great for something that I may have read in my Bible or heard on my sermon for the day. It is wonderful to look down and be encouraged throughout the day.

Maybe my friend and I were talking and she was giving me a recommendation for a movie or a topic to look up. I would transfer that information over to my planner so that it could be deleted from my phone.

Since I now don't designate a specific day to cleaning the entire house, on this day I keep my chores lighter. I want MOST of my focus to be on office type things so I rationed out the chores for this day to be dusting and window/mirror cleaning. I used to not and did it all in one day, but since we had to stretch things out a bit, this works for us. Dusting and window/mirror cleaning takes about 15 minutes out of my day. Not much of an inconvenience. Usually the children finish chores early and I split the jobs up between the two girls.

Friday is errand day

When we could do laundry all in one day and when we cleaned all in one day this day was just left for errands. This worked well when I had little ones because I was left to do the majority of it. When Mom has to do it all, it's good to keep it to one day. Now my children are older and can help more with keeping things neat. We now stretch out our cleaning to smaller chunks for the week as you have noticed. This day I have each group of children focus on their own rooms. This means that in order for them to come out with me and do errands, which they enjoy, they must get up and get their rooms cleaned. This includes putting toys away properly, dusting and window cleaning in their rooms. They have to clean under their beds, straighten their beds and areas up and do a thoroughly vacuuming of the room. I make them do under the beds and in all of the corners. I also give them their laundry baskets and they put them away as well. Before we leave the house, the rooms are spotless. I do this in my own room, before I even leave it in the morning. If I have a child that is finished with their rooms, I

might have them vacuum my room and the little boys room. The boys aren't old enough to run the vacuum yet so the girls help do that.

This is what works well for me now. When there were many little ones, I could not even fathom of doing extra chores on this day AND getting out the door on time. That is why not one homemaking schedule will work for everyone. You have to put into account what is best for your family and situation. That is why I am sharing what we did when we had little ones as to what we do now with older ones. I had to be much more structured with little ones to keep up on all of the daily tasks, but now that my little ones are grown and can be responsible for their items, the work load is not so much on just me.

I have also learned over the years that when you have little ones it is best to be at home. Routine, schedules, and the same is good to keeping happiness flowing in little children. When I had a nursing baby, toddler, preschooler, and several older elementary age children, it was easier to stay home. It took a lot of work and energy to get out the door. Then if someone was having a bad day or it was too cold or too hot, it made for unhappy trips. I remember going and just being exhausted coming home. I didn't have a stocked pantry, I couldn't even think about planning out my menu for the month---it was hard enough just for the week! Trips were every week to the grocery store and I had lots to get. Some days were great, others were always resulting in a meltdown by some child. Gone are those days. I am thankful to be able to do what I do now, but I did get through it. What would I do different?

1. I would have read my own book☺
2. I would have lessened my expectations for how I did things. For example, how I kept my house clean, having a better schedule, and keeping meals simple.
3. I would have stayed home more.

After I finally figured out that it was better to do that, then I started doing a routine and schedule and we stuck to it. It made the days fly by. I knew what we were supposed to do, my children knew what to expect, and our home was peaceful. Don't get discouraged if life is crazy. I understand it is. Take a couple of hours and make a schedule and have a plan. Don't be rigid, but be flexible. It will make all the difference in the world, I promise.

Okay on to focusing on getting out the door.....

This day we get up, get our chores finished, pack some sandwiches and grab some snacks to take. Someone fills water bottles and places them in the cooler by the door. I have already put my chili ingredients into the Crockpot for dinner. If I get up early enough I might make a pot of soup and just keep it warm in the Crockpot. This days meals is always something that doesn't take much prep work. I want something easy for when I walk in the door tired.

The children are dressed in comfortable clothing. The night before we pick out what they will wear. If they like sweatpants and I know we will be out all day, we wear sweat pants. If they are comfortable in sparkly shoes that don't match outfits completely, they wear them. I don't worry about "looking proper" it is about portraying a clean, neat appearance.

We place coolers with ice packs by the door so cold items stay cold. I grab extra cloth bags for groceries. We take a basket for breads and chips---I don't like smooshed bread.

While the children are eating breakfast, I go over the rules for shopping:

- No screaming or being loud in the car
- When getting out, be careful not to hit the car next to you.
- Don't brush up against the side of the van. Wait along the side while everyone is getting out.
- No running in the parking lot
- Only touch things you are going to buy
- Don't touch the candy in the checkout isles because it makes them melty and could break them
- No running or twirling in the store
- Don't climb on objects while shopping
- Don't ask for toys or items in the store.
- I tell them where we are going and what we are doing—they are not to ask me anymore
- Pay attention to others around you

- Smile----no one loves a grumpy face
- No talking to strangers unless mom is nearby.
- Always stay near mom
- If an elderly person or someone in a wheel chair cart needs assistance help them. Place items on the checkout counter for them
- If you don't obey the rules you go into the shopping cart or have to hold onto it—no second chances

While looking for a parking spot, if we are fortunate enough to get a front row parking spot, then great! But my second choice would be near a cart corral. It makes it easier to grab one and place children inside of it. Before we go in the store I make sure everyone gets a drink of water. I say, "Remember the rules for shopping." I remind them to smile and look pleasant. If I have a baby that is nursing, I make sure to feed the baby before we go into the store to avoid any unhappy little ones. If it is going to take longer in the store, I make sure not to dawdle and keep moving as quickly as I can. I have been in situations where I have a baby crying and have an unhappy toddler. Those are not fun situations to be in. If you plan, it helps.

If our shopping day went smoothly and the children are good, I may buy a small snack to enjoy as a reward for the day. On hot days, we might get a box of ice cream treats. Other times I might grab a \$5 pizza and each child gets one slice. This is not always typical but I do treat for good behavior.

As soon as we get out to the van, everyone goes inside, gets buckled, and gets hand cleaner on. We do this immediately after we have been out. Mom and an older one will help load up the groceries in the back. We place all cold items in coolers, chips in baskets and stack the bags as best we can.

When we arrive home, I remind them to grab up any items that they had brought with them and remove them from the van. We collect water bottles and put them back in the bag up front. I then delegate an older child to clean out the row that they were sitting in. This includes removing any forgotten toys, clothing, and removing any type of wrappers. If it is nicer outside, we will just take the hand broom that I keep under the front

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seat and quickly brush away any crumbs from the floor. It might be done perfectly, but at least it gets the majority of the mess out.

Depending upon what time we have gotten home, how warm it is outside (for grocery melting temperatures), or if it is raining, we vary who helps bring in groceries. Sometimes my son unloads it all and the girls and I put them all away inside to avoid anything from spoiling. If it is cold outside, we will all help unload everything to get it done quicker. Everything gets put away. All the freezer stuff goes in piles and the children carry those downstairs, and I will organize them. If the children know where the items go in the pantry and the can cupboard, they put them away. If they don't know where items go, they leave them on the countertop and I put them away.

We gather up all the bags and stuff them into one bag and place under the sink. Any boxes get put outside the door for my son to put for the burn pile. Bags get return to the closets, water bottles rinsed out with hot water and refilled, and a double check of the dinner to make sure it is cooked and we are done. We have free time and everyone gets to do their own thing until dinner.

I will empty out my purse, throw away any receipts I don't need, place ones I need in my bill holder until next Thursday's office time, collect any loose change and put it back in my change holder, and organize my bank cards and any other items that may have moved. I put my purse away and finish preparing anything for dinner.

All of our library materials that we just picked up get put in the appropriate place. School books and videos get placed on the shelf designated for that, any entertainment videos and reading books for the little ones get placed on a shelf in the bedroom. Everything that we did today, gets placed in its appropriate place, no matter how tired that I am. It is much better to get it done and then not worry about it the next day.

Saturdays are for extras

This day Dad might be home so I don't specifically focus on doing too much. If my week was busy or we had unexpected people over and I didn't get to doing certain chores, I would finish them up today. I also try and do outside type chores.

This might include:

- cleaning the chicken coop out
- picking up dog mess
- sweeping the porches
- cleaning out the van
- checking the yard for trash or toys
- cleaning outside windows or doors
- cleaning the garage up

If I find that I don't have anything "big" to do and Dad has no plans I make take on other tasks like:

- change out seasonal clothing
- declutter a room of the home---maybe my home is getting to be messy too often and I realize it is time to get rid of things
- organizing school for the month or upcoming week
- spend time in extra projects like sewing or crafting

I also plan on being ready to go if Dad would like to get out today. He works away from the home and enjoys being out hiking or swimming with the family. I have food already planned that we can take on the road. When I shop once a month we have some sort of item to grill. Whether that be chicken, hotdogs or burgers I know we have something to take with us. I usually have a watermelon each week and some sort of side to go with it. All the food that we can take is easy to grab up. We take the same thing each weekend so planning is easy.

- beach towels
- bathing suits
- grill or charcoal and lighter for grilling

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- cooler filled with drinks
- cooler filled with food
- snacks in bags
- bag with an extra outfit for everyone
- fold up chairs
- water and sand toys
- umbrella for shade
- fishing poles and tackle
- wagon for transporting things
- flip-flops or sandals for everyone
- extra water in jugs for drinking

It is the same thing so we keep it simple. I just know where all of these items are so that we aren't spending time looking for them.

Sundays are for resting and worship

This day is church. The night before, I make sure everyone has clothing and shoes set out. We get up in the morning and have an easy breakfast. Children get dressed, brush teeth, do hair, and wash faces. I don't allow TV or tablets as this slows them down. Whoever is done first, gathers up the water bottles and places them in the bag to take. I take tortillas, a jar of peanut butter, and a butter knife to make quick sandwiches for the ride home. This helps ward off the "hungrier" little ones before I can get to dinner.

We all sit together for service. We like having everyone together worshipping God. Little ones are allowed one quiet toy to play with. Nothing that makes noise. Older ones have bibles and paper to write things down on.

We believe in our entire family participating together so we do that. We don't worry about following after what other people believe. Our pastor understands what our convictions are as a family and he respects that. I respect that church may be the ONLY time that other mothers get a break and can listen to the message to get equipped for the week, I understand the need for nursery and children's church. I am not against any of it. This

is just something that the Lord has shown us to do as a family. We all are responsible for our own households. Not what everyone else does.

When we come home, I have the girls hang up their dresses---if not dirty. We put away our shoes and any other thing we brought in with us. I might start on dinner for the day. I typically just make one larger meal and we eat mid afternoon. The younger ones might do a bigger snack later in the evening but for the most of us, we just eat once. This day is for relaxing, taking naps, going to the park, or just reading a book. Whatever we find relaxing to do we do. I don't do laundry, I don't pick up messes. I do wash dishes and wipe down counters for sanitary conditions. I remind the children if they have left things out, but the majority of work is done tomorrow.

I find that God's word is true about resting on the 7th day.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 20:8-11

God's Word is not about being legalistic. We aren't to argue that it isn't proper to wash dishes and that we shouldn't do any work. Our world is not like that. If no one worked on Sunday, our hospitals would not run, our land would not be protected, our energy would stop. This isn't about what's right and wrong. His Word says to rest. If we run around and do things, and stay as busy as we do during the week our bodies have no time to recharge. God gives us a day to relax and get ready for the week, just as He did.

And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27

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Sunday rest is set aside for us. God knows what our bodies are capable of doing. He knows exactly what they need, that is why He has set it up for us to rest. Consider doing just the bare minimum this day.

Amy Maryon

3

FOOD PLANNING

The rising cost of food is probably the biggest challenges families face today. It is something that we NEED and if we don't plan and choose alternatives to save on money, this budget can get over blown each month.

When we were first married and starting out, I had the convenience food mentality. I didn't know how to really cook, we never planned our meals out, and we shopped whenever it looked like we were out of food. I look back and think how much we spent each week on average for groceries and eating out and it costs almost the same that we spend now with 11 people on a lean week☺ (Lean meaning, I had to cut out the "extras" but we still ate good wholesome foods this week.)

How did I combat this:

- I learned how to plan out weekly, then bi monthly, then monthly menus
- I learned how to cook, good wholesome foods from scratch
- We stopped eating out and learned to eat in

I am very thankful for my Amish friend, who taught me the fine art skills of homemaking. I did take home economics in school, but that just covered the basics. This woman, taught me how to make homemade bread, how to preserve foods, and showed me other ways to slash my food budget. She taught me how to make delicious tasting foods that my family would actually eat.

I started out with a basic cookbook from her. This had tons of recipes with basic ingredients that you should have on hand in your pantry. I would browse through the book, and write down recipes that I wanted to try each week. If they were ones that we enjoyed, I put a smiley face next to them in the book. If there was something we didn't like, I wrote that down too.

I learned how to build a pantry from her too. She would preserve jars and jars of food, filling her basement shelves with rows and rows of beautifully

colored foods. It was very inspiring. Here I was a Mom, my main job and I wanted to be the best that I could be. When I was in college and pursuing a career in finance, I was constantly looking for ways to improve my knowledge so that I could be successful in my career. Why would I not want to do this in my home life? I wanted to be a wife, that saved her husband money. One that her husband could come home from work after a long day and enjoy a nicely prepared meal from me. I had big dreams and started working on them.

Were all my attempts successful? I wish I could say yes, but they were not. Many of times, I had forgotten to add salt to a recipe, burned the dinner, or just added the wrong ingredient and ruined the dish. It took many, many years of trial and error. What I did learn was to skip all the big fancy dishes, and stick to basics. My husband enjoyed a basic meal of spaghetti or tacos verses the roasted spring vegetable medley over couscous. that I would have found in a magazine. Myself, I loved the roasted spring vegetable medley over couscous, but I was learning to cook for my family, not for me. I have learned how easy it is to make a large salad, soup, or other dish that only I would enjoy and store it for the week for my meals. But my first focus is my families.

Weekly menu planning

Every successful thing starts out with a plan. If you plan ahead for things, most of the time you won't end up stuck in the end. To begin for successful meal planning, I started out with a piece of paper. I wrote the days of the week and left some space in between. I then wrote down 7 meals that I could make for our family. I asked my husband what he preferred to eat. His response was spaghetti and tacos. Easy, two days gone. I then remembered a soup recipe that we ate at my Amish friends home and really enjoyed, so I added that along with some homemade bread that I learned to make☺ Sandwiches were easy on Friday nights, so I planned for some poor boy subs, another recipe from our Amish friends. I already had four days done, and only had to think of three more.

The weekend was coming, it was nice weather wise, and we had a grill, let's do chicken. My mom used to marinate it in Italian dressing and that made

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it delicious, I could do that. I found an easy rice recipe to go with it, from my basic cookbook. This was getting easier.

I looked through the casserole section and found a beef stroganoff recipe. Hmmm, I remember eating Hamburger Helpers as a child and that was good. I thought I could make it myself and added it to my menu.

Hmmm, if I make that grilled chicken, maybe we could make a little more extra and I could do something with it. We liked eating at the Mexican restaurant, and my husband enjoyed chicken fajitas---that would work. Seems easy enough, I found a basic recipe along with a Mexican rice in the cookbook.

Wow, seven recipes, this was going to be easy 😊

Then it was breakfast for me and the little children to think about. Think simple. I could do scrambled eggs and toast for a couple of days. Breakfast burritos—with some of those leftover tortillas from taco day. We like yogurt, but know the packaged stuff is loaded with sugar. I opt to buy a big container of plain or vanilla yogurt and make smoothies instead. A bag of frozen berries and a little bit of honey will sweeten it up. My husband liked bigger breakfasts when he was home on the weekend, so I planned for pancakes and omelets. I could save some of the ham lunchmeat from the Poor Boy Subs and some peppers and onions from the fajitas.

Lunches were planned out with leftovers from the night before. I added some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the children for a few days. I could get a package of tortillas and use refried beans with cheese and make Mexican grill cheese for the children. They really enjoyed that at our friends home and it would be easy and cheap. I could even make my own refried beans, something I wanted to start doing. Well, this time I will buy canned, but I am going to purchase some dried pinto beans to build my pantry, so next time I will have them made and won't need to buy the canned version.

I planned a couple of desserts and snacks for us for the week. Cookies were always fun to make. I could make a big batch and have enough for desert every night.

Salads are important and we will get a big bag and have it for the week. Some carrots, celery, and whatever seasonal fruit is on sale will be good for quick snacks.

If you don't mind repeating meals, consider making a big pot of chili or a pasta dish that you can have for a couple of nights.

Now I had a plan. I knew what I would make each day of the week and what I was going to feed the children for the day. Now it was time to build my grocery list.

I started out by looking at my first days meal.

- breakfast-eggs and toast
- lunch-peanut butter and jelly
- dinner—spaghetti

I wrote down on my shopping list the foods I would need for each of those meals. I then continued with all of the other planned meals. I added the snack items, the fruits and vegetables, and any other item we need weekly like eggs, milk, bread, and butter. I was thinking about making those homemade refried beans to begin stocking my freezer. I wrote down to get a bag of dried pinto beans for that purpose. I looked through my cupboards and refrigerator for anything else I might need and added that to my list. I looked at my list that I had on my refrigerator of items that I had run out of and thrown away already and decided if I needed to replace them or not.

Planning a monthly menu

The above method works for making a weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly menu. The concept is the same for all of these, it just take the initial time to sit down and make them. Once you have one made for any amount of time, you will never have to “think” about what to make for dinner again. You can always go in and change a couple of different meals if you wanted to change things up a bit.

Tips for making a monthly menu:

- Favorite meals are repeated weekly.

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- Dinner themes are designated for specific days. Choose from the following themes or make up your own:
 - soups and sandwiches
 - casseroles
 - Crockpot meals
 - heartier and time consuming meals like Salisbury steak, roasted chicken dinner, lasagna, etc
 - Italian
 - quick fix meals
 - chicken dish
 - Mexican
 - meatless dish
 - leftover night
 - pizza night
 - taco bar

Don't be afraid to repeat family favorite meals. It is okay for every Tuesday to be "Taco Tuesday" or every Wednesday to be "Spaghetti Wednesday." It takes the guess work out of what you are going to have. Your family will come to expect what you are having those days and look forward to them, especially if they like them.

I once had a master menu plan idea as well. This was a sheet that listed all of our families favorite meals. This worked great for when my brain was preoccupied taking care of many little ones. When it came time to create a menu, I couldn't even think about meals. To solve this, I referenced my menu plan ideas and took meals from it. This I made one day while I was mindlessly nursing a baby. I wrote down all the different meals that I could think of that we had enjoyed over the years. It helped when I was "forced" to make a menu plan out for the week.

Do what works best for your family. If a monthly menu overwhelms you, stick to a weekly menu. The following week double the weekly menu and change a couple of meals. Viola! You have a bi-monthly menu. After you get used to a few different weekly and bi-weekly menus, it will be easier to convert them to monthly menus.

The key is to keep working at it. Don't give up, stay determined to set up a monthly menu for your family. Work towards it every week. Take your "office day" and work a little bit each week until you can successfully have a month's worth of meals planned out.

You can use the following monthly menu as a guide to make your own or download copies free at www.plainandnotsplain.com

Monthly Menu Plan

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Lunch Ideas		Food Prep Reminders
Breakfast Ideas		
Baking or Dessert	Extra Quick Fix Meals	

I have a spot for quick fix meals. These are for meals when life seems to take a turn upside down and I can't get dinner done. We all have emergencies in our lives, and the quick fix section are for those rare occurrences when I am not able to get dinner on the table.

- fettuccine and alfredo sauce---noodles and jarred sauce
- baked potatoes with canned chili and toppings
- homemade pizzas on pita or tortillas—use jarred sauce and toppings

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- chicken nuggets and tater tots----I buy these each month and use them only when we need to
- canned tomato soup and grill cheese

Food Prep reminders section are for things like:

- Cook dried beans and freeze
- Make chocolate granola for breakfast foods
- Make a big batch of spaghetti sauce and freeze into individual portions
- Make chicken/vegetable broth and freeze
- Make homemade cabbage vegetable soup and freeze for easy lunch portions
- My chicken prep instructions for 20 lbs of chicken breast
 - Marinate 4 breasts in Italian dressing for grilling –freeze
 - Cut 3 breasts into chunks and marinate for stir fry
 - Cook 1-10lb package in crock pot and shred and freeze in 1 lb containers for future meals. Example: tostadas, chicken salad, chicken soup, chicken burritos, chicken casserole.
- My ground beef prep instructions for the 25 lbs of ground chuck I am going to purchase.
 - 2- meals worth of homemade meatballs (4lb total)
 - 2-meals worth of hamburger patties (6lb total)
 - 1-meal of Salisbury steak patties (3 lb total)
 - 1- meatloaf prepared and frozen (5 lb total)
 - 7-1 lb packages of cooked ground beef for meals

This helps when I arrive home from shopping and wonder, “What am I to do with all of this meat?” I could look back at my menu and figure it out or I could take a couple of minutes and write it down so that when my mind is “busy,” I won’t have to think.

Making a grocery list is the same concept as doing so for a weekly menu, but it is just longer. How I went about to organize this was to make a master grocery shopping list. I know lists, lists, list for everything☺

Remember, this was not done all at one time in my life. I have learned to implement different ideas and routines into our lives and all of them took time. I didn't do all of these routines and lists that we do now, in my first year of marriage, it was a process. When I started realizing things were not working in areas of my life, that is when I started changing them. When I would grow tired of making a grocery list every single month before I shopped, I finally took extra time and planned out a master grocery list on my computer and now all I have to do is print it off each month and write whether I need an item or not.

Planning a master grocery list

Before you begin this, you have to know your grocery aisles. I mentally walked down the aisles in the order that I would in the store. I start in the back and work my way up. I wrote down items that I normally would purchase in the order they appeared in the stores.

I placed a line before the foods to mark how many of each item I need. This list consists of the items in my pantry on a normal basis. It also includes what we normally fill our freezers and refrigerators with. Some months, if I was adding a new meal to our menu, I might need another item not on the list and then I would just write it down near the foods that it would be grouped with.

I wrote out a space for spices so that I could write down which ones I was out of. We get the large containers at Sams Club and use those. They are the most cost effective for our family and are a good quality. If you have an Amish bulk food store in your area, purchase your spices through them. They are much cheaper than a typically grocery store. Did you know that when looking for certain spices, most stores place them in alphabetical order? This will help you in locating them quickly.

The first time I made my master grocery list, I forgot a few items and had some in the wrong order when I went to the store. I made notes and then fixed them when I got home. It took some tweaking, but now we have a list that we can print off each month. This saves a lot of time. One quick look in the pantry, a quick run through my monthly menu, and a quick look in the refrigerators and freezers and then I am done.

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I place my fruit and vegetables needs in a separate part because I don't know where I will be getting them from. I might stop at a local farmers market that week or I might find a sale at a store. It is separated so that I don't forget it.

I also have my paper/household needs list. This includes all of the items that we keep stocked in the home. I have learned to buy a couple extras here and there when on sale so that this inventory doesn't get low. We rarely run out of these types of things. Each month, I look and see how many we have stored and if there is only a couple tubes of toothpaste that will get us through the month, I will usually buy a couple of extras if I can or if I see them on sale. Even if I don't necessarily "need" them. This help keeps our inventory full.

I left space in the bottom right hand corner for any other things that I might have to do that day. I may need to run to the library, bank, and post office. I make sure to write it down so that it doesn't get forgotten.

Here is a sample master grocery list.

<p>ALDIS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___chips ___pretzels ___salsa ___saline crackers ___syrup ___fruit snacks church ___crackers church ___dried strawberries ___dried apples ___dried coconut ___dried pineapple ___almonds ___peanut butter ___bacon ___italian dressing ___ranch ___lettsu ___mustard ___mayo ___corn flakes ___powd coffee creamer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___cooking spray ___baking soda ___baking powder ___brown sugar ___powd sugar ___choco chips ___tomato juice ___lemon juice ___soda for Dad ___green beans ___peas ___beets ___garbanzo ___pinto ___chili beans ___frozen beans ___tortillas ___dried pinto ___dried black beans ___cr mush ___cr chick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___ramen ___spaghetti ___bowtie pasta ___penne pasta ___curly noodles ___parmesan cheese ___jar sauce-pizza ___turkey pepperoni ___instant mush pot ___parboil rice ___sloppy joe ___hamb buns ___hotdog buns ___bread ___frozen straw ___frozen blueberries ___sausage links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___milk ___eggs ___sour cream ___cream cheese ___butter ___hotdog ___kiefbaa ___turkey bacon ___break sausage ___ham ___chicken breast ___salami ___cheese slice 	<p>VEGES and FRUIT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___carrots ___potatoes ___onions ___green onions ___peppers ___fruit 	<p>FRESH MARKET</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___lbs ground chuck Extra meat: 	
<p>WALMART</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___coffee creamer ___coconut milk ___nonfat plain yogurt ___spray butter ___popcorn seasoning ___cheerios ___wheat cereal ___taco seasoning ___salsa ___beef bouillon ___chicken bouillon ___alfredo sauce ___radiatore noodles ___shell macaroni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___soy sauce ___sesame oil ___sweet chili sauce ___straw jam ___coffee ___chicken nuggets ___brusel sprouts ___mixed veges ___tater tots ___cool whip ___ice cream ___thai coconut ___banana chips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___sub buns ___pita bread ___kale ___minced garlic 	<p>PAPER SHOPPING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___medicine ___bandaids ___hand cleaner ___toothpaste ___kids toothpaste ___flossers ___deodorant ___girls shampoo ___men 3 in 1 wash ___hairspray ___astringent ___suaue lotion ___cotton pads ___qtips 	<p>SAMS CLUB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___Doritos ___apple juice ___chicken breast ___feta cheese ___romaine lettuce ___grape tomatoes ___celery ___mozz shred ___cheddar shred ___american slices ___nacho cheese ___pecans ___olive oil 	<p>SPICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___trash bags ___dial gold bar soap 	
				<p>TRACTOR SUPPLY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___chicken layer pellets 		
			<p>CAT FOOD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ___quart bags ___gallon bags 			

Building your pantry

What if you don't have a pantry built up? You can slowly start building one. If you cut back just a bit on groceries each week---maybe you choose a less expensive dinner or cut out some extra snack type foods, you should be able to keep aside some extra money. I made my list of the items that I wanted to have stocked, if I saw some on sale while I went shopping, I would grab a couple. Each month I added to my pantry. When I would make my new grocery list each month, even if I had the items in my pantry before I went shopping and needed them for meals, I still planned on buying them so that I wouldn't take from my pantry inventory. Over the course of six months time, I was able to build my pantry with many different staples. This allowed me flexibility each month in planning meals. I never ran out of meals to make. If I had unexpected guests, we were able to still enjoy a good meal together. If the children wanted to make cookies and I didn't plan on making them, I could because I had all the ingredients stored in my pantry.

Plus it is a good insurance to always have food stored. You never know if you won't be able to get to the store due to car troubles or the weather. Maybe your husband 's job will be slow and you won't be able to get groceries that week. By having a well stocked pantry, you won't have to "suffer" in that area of your life. When you are going through tough times financially, it is a constant reminder when you don't have enough food to eat or are eating something you don't even like because you couldn't afford food that week. Keep it stocked so that when your husband is down, you can still prepare a delicious, basic meal to keep the harmony good.

Always rotate your stock. When you bring home a new bag of flour, place it behind the old bag so that the old one gets used up first. If you have a lot of items, use a permanent marker with dates you purchased on them.

What sort of items should you keep stocked? That will vary from each person and your dietary needs. Here is a basic list which will allow you a good start to stocking up. I would take this and then look at the foods that you purchase normally and start buying a couple of extra to add to your inventory.

Items you need:

- baking powder
- baking soda
- bouillon cubes
- canned beans black, kidney, pinto, garbanzo
- canned tomatoes—diced (you can always puree them if needed)
- canned soups to add to casseroles
- chocolate chips
- cocoa
- coffee
- flour
- honey
- nuts
- olive oil
- pasta
- peanut butter
- rice
- rolled oats
- soy sauce
- spices
- sugar brown and white
- tea
- tomato paste
- vanilla extract
- vinegar

These are some basics to have in your refrigerator. You can keep extras that are not perishable in your pantry:

- butter
- cheeses
- eggs
- jam
- ketchup
- lettuce
- mayo
- mustard
- orange juice

- plain yogurt
- sour cream

Fresh vegetables and fruit:

- apples
- bananas
- cabbage
- carrots
- cucumbers
- celery—if this gets wilted before you eat it, cut off the end and place in a bowl of cold water. It will crisp back up.
- garlic—you can buy jarred and store in the refrigerator
- onions
- oranges
- potatoes
- sweet potatoes

Foods to stock in your freezer:

- bread
- chicken breast
- fish fillets
- frozen mixed vegetables
- hamburger in 1 or ½ pd packets
- steak or beef roast

When you start building your pantry and notice that you have a lot of convenience boxed or canned foods. Things like Hamburger Helpers, canned—ready to eat soups, desert mixes, and packaged cookies, consider learning how to make these homemade. This next step will save you a lot of money. We purchased many things that were packaged and once I started making my own, I realized that they were cheaper, they tasted better, plus I was making a much healthier version of that food. You have to pay someone to package all of that stuff up individual, why pay when you can do it yourself? If you look at the list of ingredients on the back, you are also paying for a lot of preservatives which are not good to add to you or your families health.

Other things to stop buying packaged and consider making yourself:

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- microwave popcorn--use bulk seeds and pop in an air popper, in a large heavy stock pot with a little oil, or a brown paper bag and use the microwave. Use spray butter and some popcorn seasonings to flavor.
- Bread crumbs--save leftover bread in the freezer in a large bag --keep the leftover biscuit, the ends of the bread loaf, a stale leftover dinner roll and when the bag is full, process in the food processor . You can add parmesan cheese, basil, and oregano for Italian bread crumbs.
- Homemade pudding---It takes a little longer but the taste just doesn't compare. Place a piece of plastic wrap or wax paper on the top while cooling to prevent the film from forming.
- Croutons---make your own by buttering pieces of bread, adding spices, and then baking in the oven. You can use butter or brush on oil. Garlic, parmesan, oregano, or basil are all good spices to add. To add a "fun" touch, cut out little shapes with cookie cutters, store the scraps in your bread crumb bag for later.
- Pancake and waffles--you can make a large batch and freeze these in between sheets of waxed paper. This will be great for easy morning breakfast. You can pop them in the toaster for a quick heat. Add more liquid to your pancake batter and make thinner "crepes." Freeze these the same way, heat, and serve with canned fruit and some powdered sugar. Applesauce or jam are a family favorite topping in our home. You can also add cocoa powder to your batters to make chocolate waffles or pancakes.
- Chicken or beef stock---make your own. Save the bones in your freezer in a bag and when you have a large amount, simmer with vegetables and spices to make your own homemade stock.
- Frozen bread dough---fresh bread is one of the best smells ever! Learn to make this and freeze balls of it. You can take out the amount you want to bake each week without having to make it all from scratch each time. You love wheat, husband loves white? Make two smaller balls and place them next to

each other in the loaf pan. They will cook together and you will have a “half wheat, half white” bread to eat from.

- Gravy—skip the packets and make your own. When your roast or chicken is done, strain the liquid from the meat into a small saucepan. Stir a couple of tablespoons of flour and ¼ cup of cool water until mixed. Heat up the drippings until boiling and whisk in the flour mixture. Season with salt and pepper, instant gravy.
- Salad dressings---with a few simple ingredients, you can make your own based on your preferences.
- Cookies, brownies, and cakes---find a basic recipe and make it from scratch. Tastes just as good, maybe even better.
- Salad kits---find out what ingredients are used in what you normally would buy and make your own. It is cheaper and better for you to make. Asian chopped salad is my favorite. I realized for the same price of one bag, I can make a week’s worth of salads by making my own.
- Flavored rice and noodle packets---again look at the ingredients and search for a recipe with similar flavors.
- Hummus---homemade hummus tastes wonderful and is so easy to make.
- Barbeque sauce—easy and economical to make this with a base of ketchup and brown sugar.
- Popsicles and frozen treats---you can make a healthier version of these by doing it yourself.
- Granola and energy bars—we freeze ours and save for the month.
- Homemade granola---an easy and versatile recipe that you can make with your own favorite ingredients.
- Pizza crust—we have a delicious tasting recipe that is full proof and easy to make.

Repurposing common leftovers

We all have them. They are the plastic containers that usually get forgotten in the back of the refrigerator. The mashed potatoes you look at and wonder why you made so much! The roasted chicken that looked so great when you first made it, but now you wonder why you spent so much on it. The large can of diced tomatoes that was such a great deal, but now you don't know what to do with all the leftovers. We shouldn't just throw away and waste our food. There are many ethical reasons why not to do that. Here are some things that you can do to save money by repurposing some foods.

CHICKEN

After roasting a chicken, peel off the skin and discard. Do this while still warm, it will make easier to remove. Scrape the pieces off the bone and place in individual plastic freezer bags. Here are some ways to repurpose the chicken :

- Chicken salad---mix with some mayo for a basic sandwich. Spice it up by adding chopped celery, onions, mandarin oranges, halved grapes, sliced almonds and dried cranberries.
- Mexican grilled cheese---mix shredded chicken and cheese, and place in between two tortillas. Fry in a skillet and serve with salsa and sour cream.
- Chicken pot pie---inside a premade refrigerator pie crust add: 2 cups shredded chicken, 2 cans cream of chicken soup, and 1 can mixed vegetables. Bake 350 for an hour.
- Chicken crepes—make thin pancakes or use some frozen leftovers and add a chicken gravy mixture as your filling. Use shredded chicken and cream of chicken soup.
- Chicken shepherd's pie---in a 9x13 pan layer shredded chicken, frozen mixed vegetables, cream of chicken soup and top with leftover whipped mashed potatoes or make some instant potatoes for the top. Bake 350 for 30 minutes.
- Chicken noodle soup—make your own chicken broth, shredded chicken, mixed vegetables, and noodles.
- Chicken burritos---place in Crockpot: shredded chicken, can of corn, cup of salsa, and a can of black beans, drained. Heat

and serve on tortillas topped with cheese, lettuce, and sour cream.

CHILI

Serve your chili the first day with some homemade cornbread. Over the next couple of days, mix it up and serve in any of the following ways:

- Baked potatoes with chili and cheese.
- Chili haystacks---layer on individual plates: rice, chili, cheese, chopped lettuce, salsa, and sour cream.
- Chili and pasta---serve over spaghetti noodles with shredded cheddar and crushed saltines crackers.

BEEF ROAST

Always cook these in the Crockpot for the longest time possible. This makes the roast fall apart no matter how tough the meat may be. You can make the following:

- Beef stew---use leftover potato and carrots from your roast and make a thicker gravy for an easy stew night.
- Serve thickened gravy and beef pieces over mashed potatoes, rice, or noodles.
- Beef and bean burrito---mix shredded beef, refried beans, salsa onions and roll up in a tortilla.
- Philly steak sandwiches---sauté onion, green peppers, and add some shredded beef. Place on slider buns, or any other kind of bun. Top with provolone cheese and broil until melted.

PASTA

The best way to reheat this is by briefly immersing in boiling water. Toss with olive oil or butter, garlic, and parmesan cheese.

BREAD

- Freeze for bread crumbs
- Make croutons
- Make baked French toast

HAM

Ham is very versatile to use in many different kinds of leftovers. Try any of the following:

- Ham quiche—chop up a variety of vegetable and dice up some ham. Pour egg mixture over all and bake.
- Ham skillet—a family favorite after every ham dinner
- Omelet—dice up some for omelets
- Sandwich spread—place in a food processor to grind up and mix with mayo, onion, and pickle relish. You can also add some chicken that has been ground up in the food processor. This makes a delicious spread.

SCRAMBLED EGGS

Make these one morning and put leftovers rolled up in tortillas. You can add some real bacon bits and shredded cheese. Microwave or place on a cookie sheet to heat up.

MASHED POTATOES

- Twice baked potatoes—add sour cream, ranch powder, shredded cheddar cheese, and bacon bits. Whip and bake 15 minutes in a casserole dish.
- Shepherd's pie---make a chicken or ground beef shepherd pie for dinner. Layer: meat, gravy, vegetables, and mashed potatoes.
- Potato pancakes—mix with egg and spices to form patties and fry in skillet.
- Add to potato soup to thicken it
- Freeze in 1 cup portions---for soup thickener

RICE

Make fried rice by sautéing in sesame seed oil--- rice, veges, and scrambled eggs. Serve with soy sauce.

PANCAKES

- If you have extras, freeze between individual sheets of waxed paper and heat in a toaster for a quick breakfast.
- Spread peanut butter on for a quick snack. Add banana slices too.
- Make the batter thinner and make crepes. Place jam in between, roll up and top with powdered sugar.

POTATO PEELS

Normally these will go in the trash. Next time, wash and scrub potatoes and save the peels. Try and keep them in larger peel pieces. Drizzle with oil and add spices. Bake 40 minutes in a 400 degree oven until crisp.

EXTRA FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Maybe while at the store this week, you got a really good deal on fresh grapes or the Farmers Market seller offered you a large bushel of zucchini or green beans. What shall you do with all of it? Freeze it.

- Fruit such as grapes or any kind of berries- rinse in water and place on cookie sheets to freeze. Once frozen, place in plastic freezer bags. These make great quick snacks or for an addition to smoothies
- Bananas—you can freeze bananas with the peel on. If you want to use them, take out of the freezer and let thaw a few minutes. Peel as you would an apple for easy removal of peel. You can also chop up and place in snack size bags. These are good for smoothie additions as well. Smashed bananas are great for making banana muffins or breads.
- Zucchini—is great shredded. This is good for chocolate zucchini bread, zucchini cake or add it to soups or lasagna for extra nutrition.
- Green beans and cabbage need to be blanched first in boiling water and then frozen.

MILK

Did you know that you can freeze gallons of milk? If it is getting close to the expiration date and you are not going to be able to use it up, freeze it.

When you are ready to use, place in the refrigerator and let thaw. Use up quicker than you normally would for a gallon of milk. I plan some “milk dishes” to use it up faster. We might make macaroni and cheese, homemade pudding, or potato soup.

TOMATO PRODUCTS

Ever open a can of tomato paste, need only 2 Tablespoons of it and now you have a whole can to throw away? Freeze on a cookie sheet in 2 tablespoon blobs. After frozen, place in plastic freezer bag for easy use.

Any other canned tomato product can be frozen for later use. If you don't like diced or whole tomatoes, you can puree them. You can use in any dish calling for tomatoes:

- soups
- spaghetti sauce
- casseroles
- eggs

TURKEY

- Slice and make sandwiches
- Add chopped up turkey, can of cream of mushroom soup, a little milk and serve over noodles
- Taste like Thanksgiving casserole---layer in 9x13 pan a can of crescent rolls rolled out---bake 15 minutes. Top with chopped turkey, stuffing, vegetables, can of cream of chicken soup, top with mashed potatoes(whip again to make fluffy) and shredded cheese. Bake 350 for 30 minutes.

GROUND BEEF

- Mix with macaroni and cheese---add some leftover spaghetti sauce for a Hamburger Helpers style dish.
- Taco salad---salad, canned chili beans, crushed chips, meat, and dressing
- Haystacks---layer rice, meat, beans, cheese, chopped lettuce, salsa, and sour cream/ranch

- Chili---add canned beans, diced tomatoes, and tomato sauce

SPAGHETTI SAUCE

- Homemade pizza---we always use spaghetti sauce for our individual pizzas
- Pizza burgers—mix with ground beef, and top with mozzarella cheese
- Soup—you can add to your tomato based soups

LEFTOVER COOKED VEGETABLES

- Pizza—put on tortilla or pita bread and top with cheese—bake until crisp
- Soups—add to soups for added nutrition
- Stir fry—cook rice and vegetables and top with soy sauce and sesame seed oil
- No crust quiche---chop up vegetables and add to egg and milk mixture and bake in oven

Miscellaneous tips for the kitchen that have helped me:

- Squash--to make a smooth puree use an electric mixer and whip it. The blades will pick up any fibrous stings during the process making it easier to remove
- Chocolate curls—make your own by using a vegetable peeler.
- Make own soda alternative...fruit juice and club soda or lemonade and seltzer.
- Bacon—save time and mess by baking on a cookie sheet lined with foil in the oven.
- Sausage—cook in muffin tins to avoid greasy mess.
- Coffee--stays fresh for only about an hour after brew add a pinch of salt to your cup to get rid of the stale taste. you won't taste the salt.

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- Potato masher---works well to mix up meatloaf, quickly crumbles ground beef, scrambles eggs, crumble up feta cheese, chop eggs for egg salad, and mixes up guacamole.
- Cleaning water bottles, jars, or baby bottles-- sprinkle a little bit of dried rice or dry beans, soapy water and shake. It will clean the insides better than a bottle brush can do.
- Ring pans---make one by placing a tin can filled with dried beans in the center of a round cake pan.
- Heart cake by making one square and one circle cake and placing together.
- Make a round loaf of bread by placing on a cookie sheet, cut a crisscross into the top and bake.
- Store spices out of direct sunlight and heat. The sunlight will lessen the flavors.
- Place rolls together in clusters and bake.
- Freezing casseroles---place in the casserole dish you will be cooking and place in freezer—pop out and put in bag.
- Hang charts inside of cupboards of cookie equivalents, measurements, substitutions, favorite recipes, etc.
- Baking potatoes—stab with a fork to allow steam to escape.
- Baking potatoes—don't wrap in foil wipe in oil.
- Keeping cookies soft—place half an apple or slice of white bread in container.

Amy Maryon

4

EFFICIENCY IN THE HOME

I have learned that to be able to run my home efficiently and effectively, I have to have a plan. Things are not just going to fall into place, I need to make them happen. If I don't, life will begin to crumble all around me.

Clutter control

We all like things. Things can take over our lives if we are not careful. I myself used to be a “thing” person. I felt like my children needed every toy to grow their brains properly. I needed all of the top homeschooling books that I could get my hands on. I needed all the newest clothing for each season. My children needed a closet full of choices to wear and that I needed the easiest kitchen gadgets to make my life easier. Gone are those days. I grew tired of “the need” and tired of keeping my home clean.

The toy room would take hours to reorganize each week. My homeschooling shelves, mostly went untouched because we had found other alternatives to the books. My kitchen cabinets were stuffed full of things I never even used. Half of our clothing never even got worn. What a waste we were spending on stuff we didn't need.

If your home is needing a major declutter, I would recommend you don't tackle it all at once. Break it up. Write down the areas that you need to do:

- dining room
- kitchen
- school room areas
- bathrooms
- mudrooms
- master bedroom
- master closets
- children bedroom
- children closets
- family room/living room
- craft area/toy room

Depending upon the size of your home or your ability to take it on, work in small chunks. When I had lots of little ones, it was impossible for me to say that I would focus on a room a week. It just wouldn't get done. I would get overwhelmed and just give up. Then I started focusing on a different area each month. I wrote down which area I wanted to focus on that month and did it. Some months were easy, especially when I had the bathrooms or dining room. Others took longer like the kitchen. But it didn't overwhelm me because I wasn't feeling pinched for time. This was a good way to focus, because I knew that by the end of the year, I would have gone through my entire home. Every month, I was one step closer to being able to see less stuff in my home. Doing something is better than nothing. If you are diligently working towards a goal, you will see results. Things aren't going to just happen, you have to make them happen by doing it.

Some seasons of life, I was able to take an entire week to declutter my home and that worked well. I made sure that I was not going to have any distractions for that week. I stayed home and didn't do any running at all. I shut my phone off and focused on cleaning a room a day. After the normal chores were done and children were happily playing, I would tackle on a room. I would gather my supplies: a large garbage bag for trash, a box for donate, and a basket to return items to another part of the home. I also grabbed a bucket full of water, cleaner and a rag for wiping down places I was decluttering. I worked in a clockwise pattern around the room going through each and every place possible.

In the bedroom, I set up a main area to work on. The top of the bed was good. I would start on the nightstand, taking out the drawers and dumping the contents onto the bed. Trash went into the bag, donate items went into the box, and random items that went elsewhere in the home went in the basket. I wiped out the drawer, as it was going to be the only time I did that and then put the items that were supposed to go back in the drawer, neatly back in.

I did the top of the nightstand the same way and wiped it all off. I moved around the room in this clockwise pattern until everything was done. I then took my rag and wiped off the baseboards to remove the dust that had accumulated. I got the vacuum out and vacuumed under everything and moved the furniture that I could to get a good cleaning finished. After a

long days work, I took out my trash bag and if it wasn't full, I set it near the next room I was going to tackle the next day. The box I took with me as well. The basket that had other items for other areas of the home, got dispersed to the proper rooms. If it was a room that I had already cleaned, I made sure to put away the items in their proper place. If it was a room I hadn't tackled yet, then I just set the items in the room to put away later in the week.

When I got to the children's room that was usually a big job. I am going to recommend that you DON'T declutter your children's rooms while they are around. No amount of begging or pleading is going to get them to give up their beloved broken toys or the ones that never even get played with. If you have a hard time getting rid of things, place some in a container and switch them out every couple of months. We have some nicer toys that I didn't want to get rid of, so I placed them in a box in our storage room. In a couple of months, I was able to bring them back and they played with them like they were new.

When is the best time to maintain your child's room(or any room for that matter):

- before a child's birthday
- before Christmas
- before a change in season like winter or summer
- when you are redecorating or rearranging a room
- before a move
- when all seems out of control☺

After the end of our decluttering, if that was either each month or the end of the week, we took care of our give away items. I would bag up the things I wanted to give to specific people and place them in my vehicle or by the door waiting for the next time I would be heading out. If I had a lot, then I would make a special trip to drop off items to them. If they were things I wasn't sure I wanted to get rid of, I placed that box in my basement or garage. If I didn't even think about those items or need them in the next six months, then I took the entire box to the donation place.

Get the mindset of having **Less Stuff More Life**. The less stuff you have to clutter up your life, the more of life you can enjoy. My home is by far more peaceful just by having less things in our home. It makes life easier. I don't need to spend all of my time trying to maintain things in my home. The less you have the better.

Scheduling tips

With children, it seems you will always have appointments for things in their lives. Learning how to be effective in scheduling will help in the onslaught of chaos that appointment days may bring.

Here are some things we do when scheduling appointments:

- Pack a lunch to take with you if you are going to be gone for that part of the day. Make dinner early and place it in the crock pot. This will allow a smooth transition when home.
- Try to schedule the first appointment of the day or the first one after lunch. You are less likely to have to wait.
- Schedule family dental appointments back to back. You can get it done all in one day. This results in less time driving.
- Avoid scheduling maintenance checkups at doctors in May, August or December- the busiest months for moms.
- When you have appointments write the office and phone number down on the calendar so you won't have to look it up if you need to change.
- Bring along toys or books for the children.
- Bring along your magazine articles that you ripped out and kept in your binder. This is a good time for catching up on this.
- Always take the calendar with you to an appointment to schedule follow ups.
- If you are running late, be courteous and call them.

Timers

Timers work great for moms who are busy. I have used the timers many times in our home. A small electronic kitchen timer is great for any of these situations:

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- For a child who needs to sit in a time out ---we typically do how long based on their age (2 years old gets 2 minutes of quiet time)
- When fighting over toys, one gets to play for a set amount of minutes then switch to other child
- When doing a quick 10 minute clean up---this is great for after dinner or before Dad comes home
- For showers---teaches your children how to make their cleaning regime go quickly. We give them 5 minutes in the shower.
- When trying to attempt to keep to a schedule. Setting a timer when doing tasks such as reading or computer time. This will gently remind you that your time is finished and it is time to move on to the next schedule activity.
- When reading---my children have to read for 1/2 each day at a minimum. This is a helpful way, otherwise they come out and look at the clock multiple times and waste precious reading time.
- For daily rest time---this prevents the children who come out and ask me how many more minutes before they come out.

Making a list of goals

Remember back in the day when you made goals for yourself and what you wanted to do in life? You can still do this as a Mom and wife. For myself, I made a list of things that I wanted to see changed in my own life. I listed things like:

- lose weight
- decorate my home
- declutter my home
- improve my clothing
- work on character training with my children
- grow closer in my relationship with my husband
- read a book

These are going to be different for everyone. You have to decide what sort of things are important to you. I asked the Lord for guidance when making my list and that is what I came up.

What I did next was to break down each individualized item and made smaller, practical goals.

Lose weight

I didn't target in on a set amount to lose, I worked at doing what I could to change some of the non-healthy habits I had. I instituted a regular exercise time. I set out to exercise five days per week for a minimum of 20 minutes. This meant that if I missed a day, I would have to do it on the weekend or for a longer time other days. If I was feeling great and wanted to work harder, I could, but I knew that exercise would get short lived. If I set a minimum that is least I could do.

I then instituted eating oatmeal every day for breakfast. I did not care for it so I had to keep at it each day. I made sure to eat my cabbage vegetable soup for a meal. Then I could eat whatever for the other meal. If I was super strict, it wasn't going to work. I had to be tough in some of the areas and then less in others. As I lost the weight, I was inspired to eat better. I didn't worry about restricting myself from a special dinner we might be having, but as time went on I wanted to eat better and would choose a healthier alternative.

Decorate my home

I was tired of looking at walls that needed to be painted and walls that were bare, so I did something. I focused on fixing up a room each month. I would look through thrift stores and look up ideas on DIY that I could do inexpensively. I planned what I wanted to do in each room and started working a little each day at it. In my schedule, I marked off a couple of hours each week for this purpose. Then I knew that I would tackle it in that time frame. Most of the time, I was motivated to want to do it, but there were other times each week, when I didn't want to. This is why the scheduling is effective, I know that for those two hours, I will get something accomplished towards decorating.

When I was painting, I would never be able to get it all done in one day due to babies waking up from naps. I have learned that if you have a tray of paint you can just put the tray and the paintbrush or roller, wrapped inside a trash bag and sealed tightly. Place it in the refrigerator and then when you

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need in again, in the next couple of days, the bristles will still be soft and the paint not hardened.

If you are doing a job that requires a paintbrush, it works easier to use a plastic disposable cup filled with paint. It is easier to hold onto, and is the perfect size for dipping your brush into. You can just throw it away when finished.

Declutter my home

As I stated before, I either focused on a room a month and worked towards it or if I had the time, I would tackle my entire home in a week or two. This depended upon the season of my life and how much time I could dedicate it.

Improve my clothing

I didn't want to do this until after I lost my weight and was at a comfortable weight. Once I did, I started purchasing things I enjoyed wearing. I am simple and stick with what I like and what looks good on me. I know I like a certain brand of leggings so I will just buy those brand. Even if they cost a little more, I will purchase a couple every few months and in time I have enough pairs to wear. I will either choose black or brown. Then I know that they will go with anything that I own.

Undershirts, I knew what was comfortable and what I liked so I started weeding out the ones I didn't really love, but bought because I felt I had to. I then replaced them with ones that I knew I would like and would last longer because they were of better quality.

Same went for tunics and dresses. I purchased what I liked to wear and got rid of the ones I bought because I had nothing else to wear.

This happened over time. I learned what I liked and what was comfortable. Now I have a closet with outfits that I like to wear and I don't need to decide what is going to work for the day. I know that everything will work.

Work on character training with my children

As I had my first set of children, I worked much harder with them on character training. I was diligent to do this each day. Then as I had more little ones, I could barely find time to read books to them, let alone work effectively on training them! But I saw it in their attitudes and how they interacted with one another. I knew what we had to work on and so I set aside a time each day to do this. It was good to plan for 15 minutes after lunch time. We would all be around the table and we might focus on a character trait each month. I would find books that pertained to that trait. We would learn bible verses that went with it. We would play games that would teach that trait. As the children would start to exhibit that trait in their day, I made sure to make a big deal out of it and praise them. Over-exaggerated so that they would know it was important that they do that.

Grow closer in my relationship with my husband

I didn't choose this because I didn't think my husband and I were close, I chose this because with everything in life, I wanted to improve myself as a wife. We read the Bible to be a better person, we read books and blogs to learn how to improve our ability as a homemaker, but when it comes time to being a wife, how much do we work at it? I want to grow old with my husband. I want to be that old couple that sits on the porch and is happily drinking their sweet tea or coffee together. I want to enjoy time spent with him. But that takes work. It takes time. Time to put them first, time to invest in listening and talking, and time spent alone. We have had many babies one after the other and our time together was hard for many years. I am thankful that my husband made sure to get me out of the home when I needed it, even if it was just to drive us all together to town and get a treat. We didn't get to do many date nights alone through the years because we had so many little ones. But we always managed to do something. Even if it was getting take out Chinese for our anniversary and watching a movie alone together in the privacy of our room, with no children. Usually it was in between baby feedings☺ We did what we could with what we had.

Now life is much easier to be able to get out alone on a regular basis. I make sure to plan something each month so that we can get away alone. This might just be lunch together, a shopping trip, or a hike together. I also make sure to pray for my husband. Doing this on a regular basis is

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important for strong growth in the home. I make sure when he comes home, to drop what I am doing, give him a kiss and a hug, and to ask him how his day was. When he leaves in the morning, I have his coffee all ready for him to take. When he gets home from work, dinner is already warm and served on a plate for him to eat. He doesn't need to ask me for a drink because I know what he likes every night when he comes home. I make his favorite treat and leave it only for him. I buy him his own snacks and keep them in our bedroom so that no one else eats them. I send him text messages throughout the day to tell him I love him and that I am thinking of him.

All these things take time. I have to be intentional in growing our relationship. It isn't going to happen, I have to make a conscious effort to remember to do these sort of things for him. As he does for me. Even if he doesn't do them, it is okay. Our relationship isn't about you do this and I'll do that. There were times in our marriage when I wasn't doing anything because of my season, but he would do those things because he could. Then other times he was busier and couldn't take much time, but my life was not so I could.

Read a book

This may sound silly, but for a busy mom it might be impossible. If I had something that I wanted to read, I would dedicate time in my schedule to do it. I would take my book, figure out how many chapters I could read, and divide it up in my time frame to do it. Maybe each night I would dedicate to read two chapters before I went to sleep. This would get me closer and closer everyday to finishing the book. I do this for my children and schooling. The books they have to read, we divide up the number of chapters by the days of the week they have to read so instead of saying they have to read for ½ hour each day, they have to read 3 chapter to get done with the book by the end of the week. If I set a minimum to read this prevents any of them procrastinating until the end of the week.

FINDING MORE TIME IN YOUR DAYS

I get it, you don't have a lot of time. I have been there, I am STILL there. You as the mom, may be the one that does everything. It seems like you get up early and you go all day long with no help or reprieve. There was a time in my life that my husband worked long hours and had a long drive to and from work and he was not able to help me at all due to his exhaustion when he arrived home. I didn't have any family or friends that would come and hold a baby or help with a toddler, it was just me. I HAD to do it all. I could have very easily, stayed in my bed and closed my eyes for the day, but I couldn't. I had to get up and function and make my home work. My little ones were depending upon me. Someone had to push through and make it work. It was either succeed or fail time.

How did I do it all? The reason I write this book is to share everything that I do in my life. Why? Because it has allowed me the ability to do it all. The ability to have time for myself and the things that I want to do. None of this all happened at one time. I didn't have my perfect cleaning schedule or my monthly menu all at once. I worked at them. I realized that when I did have a plan, even if that plan was to fall apart, I still knew what I had to do each day. I still knew that if I didn't get to making my monthly menu, I had one from last month that I could use and it would work. It saved me tons of hours of frustration and time. I don't have much time. Investing in something once and seeing the benefits over and over again is the key to success.

I started out way back in the day and made a list. I was already sitting holding a baby, watching Baby Faith with my toddler on the TV, why not do something productive? I started writing down the things that were frustrating in my life.

On my list were things like:

- Having a schedule so that we could get it all done in one day if we tried.
- Time for my devotions
- Weight loss and exercise time

- Time to read to little ones
- Time for crafts with my girls
- Organizing my home better

It all boiled down to TIME. I needed MORE of it to make my day. Unfortunately we all have the same 24 hours in a day. I just needed to figure out how to make it all happen. The only way to do that was to make a schedule.

I wrote down the hours of the day in half hour time slots. From the moment I got up, until I went to bed. I then started filling in my schedule with the things that I had to accomplish. Getting up, getting ready. Getting the children ready. Making and cleaning up breakfast. Doing school. Doing dinner prep. Doing my daily chores for the day, etc. When I did this, I realized how much time that I actually had leftover in my days. Then I started filling in the time slots with the things that I had “wanted” to see change in my life. After lunch and before nap, was a good time to get ½ hour of reading books with my younger ones. I was wanting to exercise, if I did it at 8:00 while everyone was watching a video before bed, I could do that. Otherwise, I was just laying their watching TV every evening. I needed some time in my afternoon to focus on my devotions, while the children took a nap that was a good time to get that in. I made time for crafts with the girls each day, time playing with the toddlers, etc. All the things that I wanted to get accomplished I filled it in. Then I put it on my wall where I could see it in the kitchen and attempted it the next day.

I woke up and took note of what I had scheduled to do for the next hour. I then worked at my task. If I was off on some things, I penciled it on my rough draft schedule. When it was time to read to the little ones, I did. I kept note of the clock and was sure to end our story time on time. Even if I was tempted to keep going. The children knew when the stories were finished, it was nap time.

Everyone took a rest when they were little. Even the ones too old for a nap, still took the hour that we dedicated to “rest time” and did a quiet activity. This was a good time to allow them to do melty beads without toddlers getting into them. If I was needing a nap during that time, I took one. I shut off my phone and the entire house went on quiet mode during this time.

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The older ones had a clock in their room and knew that during nap time, you don't come ask Mom if it is time to get up. You stay in your room, until the time is done. I didn't place children together. This just frustrated me if they didn't sleep. Everyone had a separate area to be quiet in. I also set my alarm as to not over sleep. When I didn't need a nap and had a specific task to accomplish during nap time, I made sure to end during nap time. Even if I was tempted to just work for a few more minutes. I knew it was best to stop and pick up with the next task of the day. I have also learned that if you let children sleep longer, that just means they will be up later at night. Even if it is sooooo tempting to let a toddler or preschooler sleep longer than usual, I would normally wake them up. If they had not slept well at night or maybe were not feeling well, then I would let them sleep longer. If I didn't want to stay up later past my bedtime, I had better get them when naptime ended.

When it came time to doing crafting time with the girls, we worked for that ½ hour only. As much as they wanted to work longer, I said that we would put this away and continue working tomorrow at 2:30. This was then an anticipated time to look forward to. They enjoyed being creative. Every day at 2:30 we would do this together. Children like to have routines. They like to know what they are supposed to do and when they are supposed to do it.

After I tweaked and got my schedule set, I started working on the children's schedules. I scheduled the things in their days that they needed to get done. They had slots for free time, play dough time, time to play with a certain sibling (we alternated this each day), time for school, chores, time to help Mom in the kitchen (we alternated this too), and anything else that needed to get accomplished in their days. I typed it up like I did mine and placed it on the wall. This is when it got a little tougher. Not only did I have to stick to my schedule, but now I was helping them to keep to theirs. We worked at it. Some days we were a little off, but that is okay. We learn to be firm yet still flexible for these interruptions that will happen in a day's time.

I planned for most of our days to have something to do. I didn't allow them to just lay around and watch TV. That was easy. I wanted them to be productive at things, even if it was writing a letter to a friend, reading a book, working on some crafts, or playing with a sibling. I was teaching

them to maximize the moments in their days. I wanted them to learn how to get things done in life. You have to have a plan and work towards it.

I left most of our evenings free as when Dad is home, he doesn't like us working or tending to things that we can get done in the day time. After dinner, we had free time. I scheduled some bedtime stories and a bedtime routine but nothing set like we did during the day. This allowed us to go outside when he got home, enjoy a game together, or allowed the children free time if Dad was working late. Since most of their days were scheduled and they had a plan, this freed up arguing among them during the day. I have noticed that when they are bored and having nothing to do, they start fighting and bickering among each other. Being productive and having a plan, kept them happy and diligently doing things throughout the day.

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MAXIMIZING THE MOMENTS IN OUR DAY

Having a set schedule and sticking to it will help you get all of the things done that you are wanting to get done in a day's time, but how do you find MORE time in your day? You maximize moments.

- Do multiple tasks. For example, while talking on the phone, clean out your purse.
- Never walk through your home empty handed pick up as you go. If you are going upstairs take something with you that belongs there.
- Request that kids fold clothes, sort socks, brush dog, while watching TV.
- Clean bathroom mirror and shine fixtures while the children take a bath.
- Hold onto the kitchen counter and do leg lifts while waiting for water to boil.
- Have kids swish hands and feet around the tub during bubble bath to loosen bath tub ring.
- Cook 2-3-4 meals at once.
- Do a 10 minute clean up challenge when things are looking messy.

Being effective

Write it down

Having a lot of children and being pregnant often is enough to make you not remember things. My mind is going a lot of the time during the day and sometimes night. How can I remember things so that I won't forget them? I write them down.

If it is something that I need to remember in the morning, I stick a note on the bathroom mirror so that I won't forget. If I am running an errand and don't want to forget to go to the post office, I place a sticky note on the dashboard of the car. If I need to remind my children or husband of something, place a sticky note on their bathroom mirrors.

I already have my menu so I know what I am making for the day, I have a schedule so I know what I have to do for the day, and I also have my daily chore focus so I know which chores to get done for the day, but I still need lists. Sometimes there are things that I need to just remember to do. I had a homemade dry erase board that I made out of a glass picture frame, some cute scrapbook paper and some stickers. I spelled out in words different areas of my life: blog, food, office, household and then when I would remember something, I would write it down under my headings. Maybe I had an idea for the day for a blog post, I wrote it down. If I wanted to bake something, I wrote it down. I might get a library book suggestion from someone, that would get written down as well. This worked well. I would recommend making sure it is up high enough for no children to touch or accidentally erase. Paper lists are also great, but if gotten into little hands, it could easily disappear. Make sure you keep your lists up so that no one touches them☺ I used to do them on my phone, but since technology can fail easily, I have found that a good ol' piece of paper does the trick. If you have a choice of purchasing some paper, get something brighter. This helps when you "lose" your lists. I used a yellow notepad instead of plain white paper, this allows me to see it better when looking for it.

Have the right tools

There isn't anything better than planning on doing some big tasks, coming to that day, and realizing that you don't have all the tools needed to accomplish them. If you are going to plan on having a big baking day make sure that you have all the supplies that you need. Take into account freezer storage bags to place all your baked items in. If you are going to do some clothing organization and put away the season's clothing, make sure you have storage bins to do that in. Whatever your task, look through what you need and make sure you have all that is required.

Having buffers

In life, especially when having children you realize that not everyone will move at the pace you are. Traffic is going to be slower when you are running late. The checkout clerk is going to go extra slow the day that you need her to go fast. Your child is going to have a potty accident and you are going to have to stop what you are doing and clean up the mess. Life just happens. Nothing is smooth. We can't control everything around us,

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even though we would like to 😊 You have to plan for buffers. If you are going for an appointment, leave in plenty of time to get to it. It is better to have to sit and wait, then to be running late. Take some of those magazine articles you have placed aside to read one day. This is a good time to catch up on those. Always plan for longer than expected shopping trips. If you are done early, than awesome more free time! Even having a set schedule each day will not always run smooth. You have to come to expect that you will need buffers in your life. Be firm but not rigid.

Set deadlines

When planning that you want to accomplish something, don't just think that you want to do it "one day." Set a time and work towards it. For myself that might mean that I want to write another book over the next few months. I have to set a realistic time frame and say that I will write a chapter a day. If I don't write a chapter a day, then I need to take from my other "free time" to write. If my home was in need of decluttering, then I would set a goal each week to work on a room a week. If I didn't finish, then I would have to work harder to complete the task. Set realistic goals. If decluttering your home is going to be a major task, don't plan on doing it in one week. If you need to say, "This month I focus on decluttering my kitchen." Then you have the entire month to get it done. That might be a more realistic goal for you in your life. It all depends on what you have going on around you.

Work in advance

Procrastination leads to stress and strife in your life. Even if you work well under pressure, consider the extra burden of leaving things until the last minute. If you know you have a big project that needs to get done, space it out so that you can work on it a little each day or week. If you take the time to schedule it into your everyday schedule, that helps in accomplishing it. If you are needing to declutter your home, schedule to work on it for a ½ hour each day. If you work at it only during that half hour each day, by the end of the week or month you will have accomplished a lot. Sometimes it is harder to get large time slots for big projects and it works to spread it out for a little bit of time over the course of a week or month. If you have a bible study that you do at church and need to get the book part done before the next meeting, then schedule to work and get reading time in each day.

If you are planning a party, schedule out the tasks for you to do something each day. This week we are having a Valentine party for our homeschool group. Yes, I could plan on doing everything the morning of and making it stressful and crazy for myself, or I could space out and get the tasks done that I need to each day. A few weeks ago, I did an internet search for craft and food ideas. Last week, I purchased all of the items I needed for this party. Monday, we worked on writing out Valentines for everyone. Tuesday, we made a sample of the crafts that we need to make and packed all of the items needed. Wednesday, we will bake the treats we are making. Thursday is the party. I don't have to try and get everything done in the morning. We worked a little each day and can look forward to an afternoon of fun.

Take charge and create boundaries

As Moms, we are prone to do things out of guilt. We may feel guilty that our children are not allowed to do something so we make up for it by doing something that just completely throws off our day. Don't operate out of guilt. Don't let comments made by others fuel what you do for the day. You have to decide, with the help of the Lord and your husband what is important for you to do each day. Taking the time to ask the Lord what He wants you to accomplish is so much better than doing a bunch of things and still feeling empty inside.

Does your child play sports? Should they join the homeschool classes? Should they attend a study group? We can sign up our children for every activity under the sun, to make them not feel "left out" but is it worth it? Is it worth the chaos and busyness just to say that they did it all? I have found it is much better, to be home. Yes, I would love for my children to join tons of activities and stay busy all of the time, but I have learned that they are better adjusted by staying home most of the time. Yes, we do activities, and go out and belong to groups, but it doesn't over power our lives. We are called to be HOME makers, this means we stay home the majority of the time. We teach our children to enjoy being home. We teach them to enjoy simple things and that they don't have to always be doing something to be happy and content.

This goes down to the simplest of tasks like answering the phone. Just because your phone rings, doesn't mean you have to answer it. Unless of

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course it is a family member and could be an emergency. Let your voicemail pick up and call back when it is convenient for you. Call back on your designated time during the day to return phone calls. Stick to your half hour time slot. I set the timer when I do my phone calling and when it beeps, even if we are midway in our conversation, I kindly let the other person know that I have to go and will talk later. Work your life around you and your family, not how others want you to be.

Calendar

Have a family calendar so that everyone knows what is going on in your family. Make it visible for them to see. Write down birthdays and any activities that you have that month. Use different colored pens for different people in the family. You can also transfer information from birthday invites and then throw away the card. This cuts down on paper clutter. Write down the address and number in your planner on the day of the party for quick reference.

In my personal planner I write down things like getting haircuts, animal flea application, changing the filters on the home, etc for each month. In my December month I write notes about cookies I may have discovered along the way and would like to make, gift idea for people, DIY presents that I'd like to make. Things that I probably will forget throughout the year. All this helps in remembering what I have to do to run our home.

SAVING MONEY ON UTILITIES

Being able to afford a large family is something we have had to learn to work at over the years. Some things I wish I would have learned early on in our marriage, then we would have had more money to use for fun things. As with everything in life, you live and learn. I think back to when we only had a couple of children and the amount of money we spent each week was similar to what we can live off of now with ten children! I know sounds unbelievable but we did not know how to manage our money early on in our marriage.

We lived with the buy now, pay later mentality. Which led to debt. Much debt. We had two car payments and spent a lot of money on groceries with many packaged convenience foods. If we wanted to take a vacation, we did so. We did many day trips on the spur of the moment with no planning for food, etc. We spent unnecessary money on late fees and credit card debt. Everything was “great” until the economy crashed and my husband lost his job. We had a quick lesson in how to do things on the cheap because we were forced to.

“Cutting back” doesn’t put an inconvenienced mentality on us. It helps to cut back on these things so that we can have extra money for other things that we enjoy. We have learned to do things differently so that we can enjoy what is important to our family. Having a large family is important to my husband and myself, that is why we choose to do life differently. We have only had one income for most of our marriage. Only recently have we added second business incomes and that has been nice for extras. We learn to live on less than what we normally receive each week in job income. This helps to plan for any emergency that may arise. If my husband’s hours are cut at work or we have an unexpected medical or household bill, we are able to take care of it without suffering financially.

Cutting our utility bills:

- Clean or replace air filters every month.
- Adjust the thermostat in winter and summer.
- Have heating and air regularly serviced.
- Open windows to improve air quality.
- Close the vents and shut the door in rooms where no one is at.

- Use fans instead of air conditioners.
- Install ceiling fans---run on high in summer to cool room, on low in winter to push heat down from ceiling.
- Install extra insulation in attic.
- Stop air leaks---weather stripping, caulks, sweeps at the bottom of doors, etc.
- Plant trees and shrubs around house to shade the home and protect from cold.
- If you live in cold areas and have drafty windows, hang window plastic in wintertime.
- Keep rolled up towels around bottom of doors to help with drafts in the winter time.
- Dress appropriately-- my children and I wear socks and slippers, pants and sweaters during the cold months. In summer we wear tank tops and shorts. Just because your feet are cold, don't automatically turn up the thermostat, put on some slippers.
- Lower your thermostat during the night, use extra blankets or comforters during the cold months.
- Keep blinds and curtains drawn when the sun goes down. Open them to let in sunshine to naturally warm your home.
- Use a space heater when you only need to heat a small area of your home. Use caution with these. In our old home, we had an office space that did not get very warm in the winter time. If I turned the whole house heat up, it would. Instead we purchased an efficient space heater and used that when we would need to complete office work.
- Clean the dryer lint filter after each load.
- Make sure dryer is ventilated properly and duct is unobstructed.
- Dry several loads of clothes one after the other while dryer is still warm.
- Hang laundry outdoors and use it---hate scratchy towels---shake before you hang up and fluff in dryer for 5 minutes.
- Use indoor drying rack on days you don't use clothesline---put clothes on hangers and hang on shower bar.
- If your power company has a lower rate for off peak hours, do laundry when rates are cheaper.

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- Insulate hot water pipes.
- Set a timer on water heater—set to go off at nighttime and turn back on half hour before you wake up.
- Turn off water heater when out of town.
- Use cold water for all your laundry.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer coils cleaned. Do this once or twice per year. A build up of lint and dust will keep them from running efficiently.
- Defrost your freezers once per year. They have to work harder when filled with ice.
- Keep freezers full or add gallons of water to freeze.
- Keep the interior air vents free of food so that air can circulate properly.
- In summer months use an outdoor grill as much as possible.
- When cooking indoors use a toaster oven, microwave, electric skillet, Crockpot---these use less energy than a stove.
- Match the size of the pot to the correct size burner.
- Cook several dishes in oven together.
- Put lids on pots when boiling water.
- If you leave lights on all night use a 4-watt nightlight instead.
- Install dimmers on overhead lights.
- Use led lights whenever possible.
- Teach your children to turn off lights when leaving a room

Saving on water usage

Having a large family means more water and septic use in our home. I have learned real quick, about the dangers of not paying attention to this matter. Overflowing or backed up septic are NOT FUN! A little preparedness helps in this matter.

- Install a water meter on your well. This helps you keep track of how much water you use per day.
- Fix drippy faucets.
- Install water saving shower heads and aerators on faucets.
- Put a couple bricks in toilet tank to have it not use much water.

- Install energy efficient toilets that use 2 gallons of water instead of 15 gallons with a normal toilet. These cost about \$100 but are worth the extra money for saving on septic use.
- Never run a half full dishwasher, instead hand wash.
- Take showers instead of baths.
- Teach your children to take quick showers. Seven minutes is average, my children have learned they can do it in 3-4 minutes. We keep timers in the bathroom just for this.
- Replace your washer with a high efficient one. A regular washer uses 50 gallons of water for a complete wash cycle verses a high efficient one that uses only 15 gallons.
- Wash only a full load of clothing. Smaller loads still use a lot of water, be efficient in what you wash.
- Presoak heavily soiled items, so that you don't have to wash twice.

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EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND BEING SAFE

If you carefully plan ahead on things, you can avoid most emergencies. But sometimes things just happen. Here are some things we have learned over the years to be prepared for:

Loss of power

Check your main circuit breaker box to find out if one of the circuits has popped.

Do not open the freezer and your food should stay good for 48 hours. When the power comes back on, don't open it, let it get cold again and then check your items. If you must go into a refrigerator, consider removing items and placing them in a cooler outside to stay cold. Any milk products, use up right away. Condiments and things left with no power for a significant amount of time, throw away. Focus on eating out of your refrigerator to avoid any waste of food. Don't keep lunchmeat, dairy products, or animal products after the power has been out for a long time. It is not worth the risk of food poisoning.

Grease fire

Never throw water on a grease fire. If fire is small enough, turn off the burner and smother flames with a lid or damp towel. Baking soda also will douse flames. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby for emergencies not in the cabinet above the stove

Electrical fire

Never throw water on a burning appliance, use a fire extinguisher or smother with rug or heavy blanket.

Over flowing toilet

Immediately turn the stop valve clockwise underneath the toilet to shut off the water. Bail out half of the water with a cup and bucket and use a plunger to open a clogged toilet.

Amy Maryon

Burst pipe

Shut off the water supply valve at the stop valve underneath the sink or at the main shut off valve which is usually located in basement, crawl space, or utility room near water meter. If you don't know where these are, find out today. Turn off the water heater to prevent overheating and cracking.

Frozen water pipes

During freezing weather, let your sinks drip lightly through the night to prevent this from happening.

Sink clogs

Bail out water into a bucket. Boil a large pot of water and pour down---in case you put grease down the drain to help soften it. Try plunging it or use a plumbers snake. Sometimes just time is needed for it to flow out and continue working. I have had to wait many times for a couple of days for a sink to unclog due to me putting spaghetti or some other item down the garbage disposal. Keep plunging and wait. If it doesn't unclog, have your husband investigate further.

To prevent this, do not put food scraps into the drain. I loved my garbage disposal and would chop up anything in it. I have learned that not all food gets chopped up. Put large amounts of food in the trash. In my current home, we don't have a garbage disposal and I have to clean out my drains after every load. It has helped me to train everyone not to put any type of food scraps in the sink. We wipe down plates as best as we can into the food slop bucket for the chickens before placing in the sink.

In bathroom sinks and tubs we purchased a drain cleaning tool. It is a plastic bendable auger that helps remove hair clogged in the drain. With many girls and long hair, I do this about once per month or when I see drains start to move slowly. It takes me seconds to push down drain and pull up a chunk of hair. Throw into the trash not the toilet!

If you get a jammed garbage disposal never put hands inside. Push the reset button located on the bottom of unit. Use a heavy wooden spoon or broom handle and move the blades back and forth to dislodge the object.

How to hide items

Many people hide their money or jewelry in obvious places. Most choose under the mattresses, in nightstands, in jewelry boxes, or in underwear drawers. I have learned that this is the first place that gets looked at when searching a home. Try some of these “unconventional ways:”

- Store cash or valuables in a container you use for hobby materials like a knitting tote bag.
- Carefully wrap money in foil and place in the freezer
- Consider hiding items in the basement, most don't want to go through that area.
- Cut out the center of a stack of foam paper plates and place objects inside of it. Put about eight plates back on the stack and twist tie the bag back up. This makes a nice storage for items that are larger.
- Open up a tin can and rinse out. Place money or rolled up items inside of it and tape the lid back on. Place back in your food cupboard.
- Place money inside of a maxi pad and wrap back up.

Some other safety tips for every home

Personal safety:

- My husband always says STRENGTH IN NUMBERS. Don't go out alone. If you can take a couple of children, do so. Even if it means more of an inconvenience.
- Keep car keys and cell phone on your nightstand---if you hear suspicious noises at night you can set off the panic alarm. In case of fire, you can grab keys to get out quickly. You can take your cell phone with you to make emergency calls.
- Invest in pepper spray. I keep a portable one and take with me when we go to the park. It has been helpful when a dog has come up on the children and myself. Use extra caution when spraying this and DO NOT do around your children. This has alleviated my fear of walking and a dog coming up on me unexpectedly.

Outdoor safety:

- Keep shrubbery trimmed around the home, this leaves no place to hide.

- Put up a security system decal or signs in your yard—even if you don't own one it could discourage intruders.
- Buy an inexpensive motion detector alarm (around \$15) to warn you of people coming in your driveway.
- Spring for a chimney sweep---if you burn wood have it professionally cleaned annual.
- Fence in the pool.
- Make sure you home number is visible in case of emergency for workers to know your home.

Indoor safety:

- Install smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors and check every year during the “time change” of spring forward and fall back.
- Secure tall bookshelves and large furniture to the walls.
- Extension cords---never place under rugs or heavy furniture where they could fray.
- Create a plan of escape for fire.
- Avoid burns in shower by setting hot water heater to 120 degrees.
- Invest in fire extinguishers.
- Skid proof showers and tubs.
- Store heavy items properly --- at waist level or below.
- Guns---be sure they are locked up, unloaded, and stored separately from ammunition.
- Don't overload outlets---be sure that you have no more than one high wattage appliance plugged in to any given power point.

Preparing for disaster

MOST Americans are NOT prepared for an emergency. You should always keep a 3 day supply of food and water on hand for each member of your household. If you do not have a basement, choose a room with few windows and on the interior of your house. You should keep the following:

- Water---3 gallons of water per person. We use the big blue five gallon water containers and change the water each season to ensure a fresh supply.

Large family living

- Food—an adequate supply of canned and dried food for each person for at least 3 days.
- Clothing—at least one change of clothing per person.
- Supplies---should include a flashlight, a battery powered radio, extra batteries, a complete first aid kit, toilet articles---toilet paper and maxi pads, backup prescription medication, a can opener, matches or a couple of lighters, a package of tea light candles, duct tape, and heavy duty garbage bags to seal windows and doors. You should also include a wrench (to turn off utilities), dust masks, and some wet wipes.

Store the emergency supplies in clearly designated and accessible areas. A clear plastic tub works well. Adding a deck of cards and perhaps some games can help pass the time during a crisis.

Have a way to prepare food whether that be your gas stove or a portable camping stove. Keep an ample supply of propane tanks so that you can cook on it for multiple days if needed.

Have a way to keep warm. Investing in a small kerosene heater is a good choice in cold weather areas. We use our kerosene to heat my husband's workshop most of the time. Be sure to keep a container of kerosene on hand too.

We use small tea light candles to light bathrooms and other areas when the power is out. Use extra caution with small children.

I have seen advertised where they have emergency situation kits for families. Yes, they can be effective and work in bad situations. For our family, I think that if we are inconvenienced with a bad situation my children are not going to want to eat a bunch of dehydrated food or steel cut oats. Find things that your family enjoys and keep extra stock of them. This is why having a pantry is good. Your family can still eat some of their favorite foods. Steel cut oats and dehydrated foods are good, but if it is a short term usage, keep extra food stocked and it will go much smoother. Plus if you do not use up that dehydrated food that is sold in one of those kits, it will go to waste. Why not invest in things that you can rotate through your regular stock. Much more efficient and effective.

Household Structure

9 KITCHEN

Your kitchen is going to be a central gathering place in your home. This is where you will spend the majority of your life. You will be cooking three meals a day, helping your children with schooling, making crafts, and working on projects in this zone. This is the area where Dad first walks into and sees his family gathered. It should be a place of peace and not messy chaos.

When you walk into this room, what is the first thing that you notice? Is there an area that needs to be worked on? Do you have a large accumulation of paper that needs to be put away? This zone can also become a catch all for everyone's items if you are not careful.

This room needs to be accessible and able to clean well as it needs to be the most hygienic. If you can make the lighting better, do so by changing out higher wattage light bulbs. Consider window treatments that allow the most light in this area, especially if it is a darker spot. This room needs to be functional as well as adaptable so that it is pleasant for the cook to be able to do her duties. Give the walls a boost by painting a new color of paint. Choose a bright cheery color. Use a semi-gloss so that it is easier to wipe off and clean. If your cabinets are drab, consider painting them a new color. They don't have to be wood grain, you can bring new life into your kitchen by painting the fronts of all your cabinets.

Keep rugs to a minimum in this room. A good foam mat in front of your kitchen sink is a good idea, as you will be standing here for long periods of time. Everything else is just something that you are going to have to shake off each day. If you do want rugs, consider something with a pattern to it, as food will drop and it will be less noticeable.

For our large family, we have found it more effective to have a large 32 gallon trash can in our kitchen. A regular sized one needed to be emptied two times per day. Having one large can, has helped us cut down on this task.

There are some tips which you can follow when setting up your kitchen and learning the most effective way to arrange things.

Organizing your kitchen space:

When going about organizing your kitchen space, you want to place things where they are going to be the most efficient. You don't want to have to reach from one cupboard to the next when making meals. If you place "like" items together this will help cut down on the amount you move around. Place items that you don't normally use in an out of the way cabinet. You don't want to be getting out your plastic bowls on a regular basis but have to move around serving dishes that you only use a few times per year. Make things accessible and easy.

Choose a cabinet that you can place all your baking items into. I have my mixer, measuring cups, spatula, mixing bowls, and a plug nearby for all my baking projects. This prevents me from reaching to this cabinet, walking over to this one to grab that, and moving things from one counter top to another when baking.

If you have a large pantry, that is excellent. Keep all your food items in one area. It is much easier when putting away groceries or needing to look and see if you have an item if they are all in one place. If you cannot do that, place like items together. Keep all your cans in one place. Stack all your beans in a row, then vegetables, then fruit, etc. Get in the habit of placing all food labels facing front. This will allow you to see what you have at a quick glance.

Boxed dry goods should be stored by type. Group breakfast cereals together, rice and beans together and staples such as flour and sugar together. Bags of staples such as dried beans, rice, and sugar are odd shapes for shelf storage. It is more efficient to store these in quart jars or see through plastic containers. Square ice cream buckets or plastic coffee cans with labels also do well. Mark clearly on the outside what is contained on the inside. It is important to make sure items are securely closed. Pantry moths will make their way into the tiniest opening and lay eggs in your rice, beans, and flours. You will be surprised one day when you open up the container and find a small web-like environment from these mealy worms. Yuck!

Large family living

If you live in a humid environment, it is best to store items like flours, cocoa, nuts, and dried fruit in the freezer. This will help control the stability of the flours and like items from going rancid.

If you have a large amount of an item like a 25 lb bag of popcorn seeds, store them in five gallon buckets. I get the square white buckets from a local store who gives them away for free. Again, be sure to securely close these to keep from spoiling. When we lived up north in the cooler states, I was able to store flour, oats, and sugars directly into the buckets and keep in my basement all year long. Since we have moved down south, the humidity is much greater and I can no longer store items like that. I have since purchased online foil storage bags for 5 gallon buckets along with oxygen tablets. You place the tablets into your bucket and seal the bags shut. This will remove any air and moisture from your bags and ensure a longer life of your foods. This has been the best alternative for me. Fifty pounds of flour takes up a lot of space in a freezer!

Organize by level of importance. Long term storage items like bulk oatmeal, flours, etc should go towards the bottom. The most commonly used items go in the center and items that are rarely used go on the highest shelves. Any foods that will spoil should not be in your pantry. Place them on the counter otherwise they may get forgotten.

Store dishware and glasses on an accessible shelf in a cupboard as close to where you usually eat. If you can choose an area closest to your dishwasher or sink, this will help speed up the process after you wash and dry them. If you have small children, keep plastic cups and everyday used items in an area that they can easily access. This allows them to help put dishes away and frees you up from having to get a cup down every time they need one.

How many of each plate and glass should you have? That depends on your situation. We have a set of twelve which allows us all to have one place setting of dishes per person. What happens when you have guests? Our family takes the route of paper products. When you have a group of people over, it is easier to not have to wash dishes when you would rather be visiting. Our favorite dishware is our blates. I know they are not called blates. That is our family made up word. These are low shallow bowls but with sides. They hold soup and cereal well but are flatter and can hold a meal easily. We purchase these from the Amish and they are used every day

in our home. All of our dishes are made with melamine. Which is very sturdy. Think what the cafeteria trays are made out of. They are durable and can take a lot of abuse. Anything breakable we have done away with over the years.

Expensive place settings we did away with. I remember picking them out for our wedding and back then I think they were around \$30 per place setting. I also remember the day when I dropped my first plate and broke it! I have learned over the years to be simple. Non-breakable works well with children. Having special dishes for holidays and such seem nice, but you only use them once per year and then you have to store them. I would opt to pick out a few nice serving trays or bowls for such occasions.

Glasses are nice, but not with a family of children. We purchase the restaurant quality plastic tumblers to use in our home. They are attractive and most importantly—non breakable! Can you tell we have broken many items over the years? I just think back to how often we would replace glass sets and dish sets and now I don't have to do that anymore.

When setting up your coffee area, place it all in one spot. In the cupboard above where your coffee pot sits, place all your mugs, ground coffee, sugars, creamers, etc. This allows you to save time by not moving from one section to the next when making coffee. If you love coffee, invest in an inexpensive grinder. Purchase your whole beans and grind as you need them. This makes the taste much better. The cheapest option is to buy it ground already at the store. But if you are spending money on premium coffee each week this is a good alternative and the taste doesn't even compare. You can get used to anything. I love premium coffee, but I also can get used to drinking instant coffee. Which I did for years.

Your under sink storage. Since this space has such odd dimension and with the presence of pipes it can seem nearly unusable. To make the space as efficient as possible think of placing under the sink storage baskets to store all your cleaning supplies in. Keep all your daily cleaners in a bucket to carry around the home with. Place childproof locks if children are in the home. You can also get slide out or pullout towel bars. These are simple chrome rods on runners to hide towels from view most of the time while keeping them easy to reach. The cabinet door mounted fake drawers in front of the sink are usually just wasted space. There are some small units

that you can place on the inside of this to store sponges and soaps, to keep out of view.

Keeping drawers organized is simple and the most effective to keeping your kitchen efficient. Limit them to the storage by type. Keep flatware drawers free of the large utensils that belong in a designated drawer. Use wooden drawer organizers that pull out to the space that you need. They are inexpensive and you can find online or at your local store. Place large spoon and pancake flippers near the stove in a drawer where you will be using them. If you don't have a lot of drawer space, place large spoons and items in a small crock or heavier jar. I used an old speckled blue coffee tin for this purpose. Place next to your stove for easy access. I keep a small tin can in my baking cupboard which contains the utensils I use for baking: whisk, rubber spatula, and cookie scooper. If you keep a drawer for hot pads and trivets, don't store notepads and can openers in the drawer. Have a place for everything. Remember don't keep tons of pens, notepads, paperclips etc in here. Place those in the office area. Keep only one notepad and a pen for taking down notes.

When placing washcloths and towels, make sure they adequately fit in the drawers. We keep one drawer for washcloths and one for towels. This helps them not to get stuck in the top and helps people from grabbing a towel to dry their hands on instead of a washcloth. Pot holders and trivets go near the stove for quick access. If you don't have a drawer available, consider placing a small hook near the area. Keep cleaning rags separate. These can be in their own drawer or placed under the sink in a container.

Instead of throwing all of your extra plastic shopping bags under the sink or in a drawer haphazardly. Make a simple storage tube. Sew together a simple tube out of scrap material. You can place elastic in one end of it to keep it closed. If you are not sewing savvy, cut off an arm or leg from an old shirt or pants. You can hot glue or tie the ends together.

If your cabinet shelves are kind of yucky and you want to line them with shelf paper, skip that and use pieces of linoleum. Cut them to fit exactly and you will have an easy way to wipe them off. One of our homes had this inside and I thought it was so easy to keep clean. Especially when food spills, it is easy to wipe up and looks new again. I have had the shelf paper and it doesn't wear well and looks dirty and used after a while.

The kitchen can be a catch all for your home. It is easy to just shove papers into a drawer or place a random item in the cabinet. Stick to the rule to have a place for everything. Be constantly aware of not placing items that don't belong in here. You need to remind your children if there are things that they have forgotten to pick them up and put them away. This works best for us as well 😊 When you first walk in the door, immediately take your purse, keys, and bags and put them away properly in their place. Don't let them accumulate on the counter tops. While doing your daily cleaning and you come across items that don't belong in here. Place them on the counter top and when you are finished, put them away where they go.

When mail is brought in the home, it should be gone through near the trash can. Dispose of any junk mail promptly. Place magazines where they will be read and take any bills to your office area to be gone through on their designated day.

When organizing appliances and items, find a place inside of the cupboards to keep your counter tops free. Don't put anything out unless absolutely necessary. This will reduce your clutter tremendously. If there is a item that you use everyday such as a coffee pot or blender then keep that out. Items that are not used daily, put away. Keep your counter tops clean. Step back and look at your kitchen. Which area are your eyes drawn to? Is there something that you can do to improve that zone? Is there some things that you can put away? Is there an area that you are drawn to because it is cluttered? Consider going through that and putting it away. Place papers in your desk or office area, not the counter tops. Put keys and other items in your purse. Notice which areas are constantly messy and take hold of cleaning that up.

What sort of items do I need for the Kitchen?

This is an area where you can go overboard in. There are tools and gadgets for just about anything to help make life easier in the kitchen. If you are first starting out or if you are just needing to declutter and get rid of a few things, this is a good section to read.

Cooking items and how many you need:

Insulated baking sheets

If you are just starting out, I would recommend one set of insulated baking sheets. This has one large, one medium, and one small baking sheet. Your oven will only allow you one set at a time, no need for more. As you bake more, you will see if you have a need for another larger pan.

Baking sheets with sides –jelly style roll

Two of these is sufficient. Again, your oven space will only allow two at a time. These are great for baking hamburger patties on, making brownies or bar cookies in, or cooking a pan of chicken fillets.

Muffin tins

Skip the mini muffin tins and go for regular size. Get two pans (24 total muffin slots) as one batch of muffins and cupcakes normally fills two pans. This is good for making breakfast morning egg cups in as well. You can place a strip of bacon around the bottom and fill with a cracked egg for a nicer breakfast. You can also make individual meatloaves in muffin tins. These also pop out and freeze well for a later use.

Stainless steel saucepan

Skip the pan sets, and purchase good quality stainless steel pots. They will last a long time and are better for you. Don't get Teflon which is coated with chemicals that are harmful for you. This small pot works well for making soups, heating up small leftovers, or boiling water in.

Stainless steel stock pot

Invest in a heavier bottomed one as it will make your cooking better. This is good for making chili, cooking noodles, or cooking a pot of rice. In our large family we own two of these. I only have two large burners, so I have no need for more. If you are starting out invest in one, add more as needed.

Large skillet---chicken fryer

This pan works as a frying pan or as an extra pan for making sauces. You can fry in it, as the name suggests but I don't use that feature☺ Having just this size pan allows me to cook up eggs or omelets, but it also allows me to cook spaghetti sauce in it. I can cook pancakes and grilled cheese in it as well. It cuts down on cupboard space because I don't have other sized frying pans to crowd my cupboards with. This one does everything.

Bread loaf pan

I suggest investing in stainless steel bread pans. They will last you a lifetime. I have done the glass ones but they can break. The Teflon coated ones are not safe to use. Spend a little bit more and get a couple. These are great for baking bread, making meatloaf, or making quick breads and freezing.

Baking or casserole dish

You can have an entire cabinet full of these. Keep it simple. A 9x13 sized glass or stainless steel pan is sufficient. You can bake a cake, casseroles, lasagna, or meatballs in it. Having a couple extras for side dishes is a good idea. They are great to put vegetables or potato dishes in. Look for these at garage sales, or thrift stores. Most everyone gets rid of the "odd" ones in their sets. You only need a couple, as you only offer a couple of sides for your meals. In our large family, we have purchased from Sams Club the chafing pans that you would use for a catering party. They are large enough to accommodate our size food needs. Plus they are durable.

Cooking tools

Grater

This is great for shredding items quickly and you can get them cheap. If you find one that has a plastic container to catch all of your shreds, invest in that. This cuts down on having to get another bowl, plus keeps shredding neater. Skip the plastic as it will break easier and go for metal.

Extra large and large serving spoons

These are for stirring foods in your pots on the stove. Skip the plastic and go for stainless steel. The durability can't be beat. You need one extra large sized for pots. Then get two or three larger ones for serving foods. These would fit in your casserole dishes and would scoop out your mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese. Remember do not leave these in your pots while cooking, the heat will transfer on the handle and you can burn your hands if not careful. Always remove and place outside on a spoon rest.

Wooden spoon

These are good for stirring or mixing up items. Choose a heavier duty one. You only need one.

Rubber spatula

These are good for scraping bowls while baking. Don't use it in cooking pots as it will melt. Use it to scrape out cakes and breads. One is sufficient.

Slotted spoon

An extra large stainless steel one is good for your cooking pots. As well as a larger size one for serving foods that contain liquid. It is good to use in your corn that you are serving to drain out the liquid before placing in on your plate. One of each is sufficient.

Pancake flipper

One good quality stainless steel with a plastic handle is good. These can be used for flipping burgers, cooking scrambled eggs, or flipping pancakes.

Cake server

A small square tipped server is good for scooping out lasagna and cutting brownies and serving them. We own two—a square tipped one and a rectangle-tipped one.

Serrated bread knife

Skip the knife sets that take up your counter space and give you knives you will never use. We have owned three for most of our entire marriage. If you purchase good quality ones and a knife sharpener—they will last a lifetime. You can get a knife sharpener in the kitchen tools section of the store for around \$3. The bread knife is good for cutting...breads.

Large chef knife

This is good for cutting meats, large amounts of vegetables, or cutting through a dessert. Again a good quality one that will last a lifetime.

Vegetable paring knife

This is used daily in our home. I peel potatoes, apples, chop onions, and slice cheese with this. Keep a couple if you are going to have others help you prepare meals. Get ones made with stainless steel, heavier duty , and of good quality.

Can opener

I have owned so many can openers over the years it is ridiculous. Skip the electric kinds, they will eventually break and you will be stuck with an unopened can and no way to open it. The only one that I have found to be worthwhile was one I purchased at Walmart. It has a “Made in America” label on the front. It is stainless steel with black plastic handles. This has lasted me the longest out of any ones we have owned. Remember it is important to keep the blades dry on these or they will rust easily. If you must wash it, dry it well before storing. It cost around \$10 but works better than the more expensive ones that were made elsewhere.

Whisk

A small whisk is a good thing to have in the kitchen. Not a necessity as you can use a fork for most things, but does help. Skip the large bulky ones and invest in a smaller one. This is good for whisking up eggs, puddings, and sauces. Forks work fine if you don't have, but whisks make it go quicker.

Kitchen shears

You have need to cut many things in the kitchens. A sturdy pair of shears works well for cutting meats, children's foods, and a host of many other things you will come across. Just be sure to wash and dry thoroughly after cutting foods and items.

Ladle

You only need one of these. Plastic or metal is fine.

Tongs

Good for picking up meat and can be used for the grill. Get the stainless steel kind.

Plastic measuring cups and spoons

One set is sufficient for these. I would recommend ones that have raised measurements on them—the ones with the sizes printed on them, wash off over time.

Glass measuring cup

A larger 2 cup measurer is sufficient for any of your kitchen tasks.

Cutting board

Get two of the plastic thin kind, one for meats and one for vegetables. These paper thin kinds are easier to store and don't take up much room. If you can get them in different colors to be able to quickly tell the difference, that is a bonus. If not, mark them with a small amount of nail polish or permanent marker. Over time, you can invest in a wooden butcher block cutting board---but it is NOT a necessity.

Colander

Invest in a stainless steel one to keep for your entire life.

Mixing bowls

Invest in stainless steel to last forever. You don't need an entire set of these. Get one large one and one small one. Sam's Club in the restaurant section has a nice large one. You can pick up a smaller one at your local store. The smaller one is nice for mixing up frostings, puddings, and mixtures to be added to your larger pot.

Which small appliances do I really need?

Blender

This is something that you want to get a more expensive, higher quality appliance. Cheaper ones are fine, but what I have learned is that they are "cheap." They break easily and don't mix up as well as a Vitamix or a Kitchen Aid. It will be worth it to save up and get a nicer well made one sometime in the future. Skip the plastic and go for glass---more durable.

Handheld mixer

A cheap handheld one will work fine for the amount of mixing that you will do. We buy the cheapest one about every 2-3 years. That is about how long it lasts for. I have bought the in-between priced models and they just broke. Save up and invest in a nice Kitchen Aid mixer to have forever but until that time, a handheld Sunbeam mixer works for what you will need.

Crockpot

This is great to be able to throw in some ingredients and hours later, dinner is made. Look for ones made of porcelain, you don't want the Teflon coated kinds as they leak chemicals into your foods.

Toaster oven

If you are just starting out and cooking for two people, a toaster oven is a good thing to invest in. Why? Two people do not require that much food. You can heat up leftovers in this, make toast, or bake a small dish. It is more efficient energy wise instead of heating up your big oven for a small dish. It will definitely save you money.

Food processor

Price affects the quality greatly. If you can invest in a more expensive one, than do so. A glass one is going to last longer, be easier to clean, and won't contain odors like plastic does. Look for one with fewer pieces to clean.

Microwave

Consider not getting a microwave. They change the molecular structure of food in order to heat it up. It decrease the availability of certain nutrients in food. Swap it out for a good convection or toaster oven. This will eliminate the need for a toaster. You can heat leftovers up in in and make toast.

Electric roaster

Not a necessity, but an item to purchase and use a few times each year. This comes in handy when I need an extra oven for cooking, especially during the holidays. It is great to put the turkey in and keeps my oven freed up for other things. I also cook my dried beans in this and freeze into individual portion containers. I cook ribs and large batches of macaroni and cheese and spaghetti in this for special meals. It is also nice if your oven is not working and you can't get it fixed right away. I have baked a cake in this before when I realized my oven was dead.

Toaster

Not a necessity, as you can use a toaster oven if you have one. You can also toast bread on a skillet. Our family owns the four slice toaster. To me, it gets in the way and I would get rid of it. But my children and husband enjoy toast on occasion, so I keep it.

Waffle iron

Not a necessity, but something that is good if you want to make waffles. If you don't own one, then you make pancakes.

Sandwich maker

If I was a new bride and I was going to be making meals for just myself and husband, then I would get one of these. These are great for making quick warm sandwiches to eat.

Miscellaneous items

Hot pads—you need two square ones. Skip the mitts, they are big and bulky. But a good choice for children learning to get things out of the oven.

Dish cloths—get the kind that has a mesh scrubbing material on the back to make clean up easier. One set is sufficient

Dish towels—one set is sufficient of these, get a thicker terry cloth kind to absorb water

Serving dishes---purchase a couple for serving foods in.

Dish drying mat---skip the bulky dish rack and opt for one of these. They look much more attractive, don't take up much space, and when you are finished you can throw it in the wash to keep your countertops cleaned. Invest in 2-3 to have one available at all times.

Trivets---if you are handy—crotchet some circle sized ones. These protect your counter tops from heated pots and pans.

Plastic storage sets---if you are decluttering—keep only what you actually use. If you are a new bride, purchase a couple of pieces. You will learn quickly what you actually use and what is a waste. We have two oversized large rectangle containers that can hold a big batch of muffins or cookies. We have one large bowl with a lid for cut up fruit and salads. I own two medium sized containers for leftovers during the week. We also purchased in bulk plastic pint sized deli containers for storage. These are great for storing everything. We use ours for:

- tomatoes pureed and frozen
- shredded cheese—buy in bulk and separate, freeze
- ground beef—buy in bulk, cook and freeze

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- shredded chicken—cook in bulk and freeze
- refried beans--homemade
- cooked dried beans
- shredded zucchini—frozen for baking
- smashed bananas—frozen for baking
- homemade applesauce-frozen

There are whole isles full of lots of other kitchen items to make your life easier. Most of them will just accumulate in your cupboards. The items I referenced today are all of the items that we use in our home. I don't own anymore. We have lived this way for many, many years and have made thousands of meals and baked items. We did it with just these tools. If you come to find out that you are doing some task more than others and want a gadget to simplify that---then buy one. This just covers the basics and will get you through without decluttering up your life.

Working effectively in the kitchen

When cooking in the kitchen, keep your sink full of hot soapy water and wash items as you go. Training yourself to wash as you go will make clean up much quicker. At the end of a long day of working in the kitchen, the dishes are the last thing you want to wash. By keeping up on the task, your mess will be less. If you have a helper in the kitchen, don't put knives in the sink, place them in the drain opposite to avoid getting cut accidentally.

Keep a spray bottle full of ½ vinegar and ½ water under your sink. Use it to wipe down your countertops and stove while cooking. Vinegar is a natural disinfectant. You can also use it to spot clean your floors.

Skip the paper towels, to cut down on waste. Keep a drawer or bucket full of rags to use in the kitchen. Use these to wipe up spills and messes. I like microfiber cloths and flour sack cloths for this reason. Toss in the laundry when done.

Make sure to thoroughly wash off dishes, cutting boards, and utensils well with hot soapy water. Disinfect countertops, knobs, faucet handles, stove handles, etc to avoid any food borne illnesses.

Change dishrag and towel daily as well to cut down on bacteria breeding. Skip the sponges for dishwashing, use a washcloth with a scrubbie backing. Keep some wire scrubbing pads for tough, stuck on food in pots. Rinse out after use and throw away as they fall apart. A three pack lasts our family six months at a time.

Washing dishes and After meals routine

One of my favorite daily tasks is washing dishes. I enjoy looking out my window, reflecting on the bible verses that I have placed around my sink, and pondering things. It is a time of peace for me. I have come to enjoy these few moments of solitude in my day.

I do own a dishwasher, but it is only used when I get behind or can't keep up with the dishes. It is a rare occurrence as we do them immediately after each meal. A tip I have learned for using a dishwasher if you have a spot for a "rinse aid" don't buy the expensive stuff, just fill it with vinegar. It will help your dishes to not have spots and be clear. Skip the heated setting for drying them and let them air dry. Saves money.

Everyone helps after each meal. Everyone eats, so everyone cleans up. As soon as meals are finished, we start scraping all of the leftovers onto one plate or bowl. This cuts down on the "dish washer" doing more work. The more effective you are in cleaning off the plates, the easier it is to hand wash them. Use a scrap of food like a piece of bread, part of a potato, etc to help get "all" of the food remains off. Dump the scraps into the food bucket for the chickens or place in the trash. Stack plates together. Then stack bowls on top. Carry over to the sink and place next to the sink ready to go in. We place utensils in the hot soapy water as the sink is filling. Drink remains are poured into one cup and then dumped out. Cups are then placed in the sink to be washed first. If there is room, we place the plates and bowls, otherwise they get left on the side of the sink until ready.

Dinner leftovers, get put into a container and placed in the refrigerator. We scrape out as much as possible from the pots and pans. Place in the other side of the sink and fill with hot soapy water to start soaking while I continue my tasks. Everyone is helping clean up the table and put items where they need to go. When we had friends stay with us the children enjoyed doing a 10 minute clean up. We set the timer and they worked as quick as they can to try and “beat the clock.” I found this quite effective. Those days when we are having a “hum-drum” day with not a whole lot of excitement, we opt to do this to liven up things after meals.

Condiments are closed and returned to the door of the refrigerator. Trivets are put back in the drawer. The table and benches are wiped down. Someone grabs a broom and sweep up any mess that has accumulated while eating. I begin washing the cups and placing them in a row on my drying mat. After they are finished, I grab my stack of plates and bowls and start washing them. As I rinse them, I place them in a row on the drying mat as well. If they are plates, I stand them up against the backsplash, so the water can run off easier and make drying quicker. Bowls are placed on an angle, next to the plates to drain easier. I wash any “cleaner” serving bowls. I then wipe off my silverware and place it on the mat. This has been soaking the longest so wiping should be easy.

I then might run a quick wipe across the counter tops to wipe off any food. I pay attention to counter edges and check to make sure that the cabinets and drawers don't need food wiped off them. Someone is sweeping the floors and getting underneath where food has dropped while I've been cooking. I wipe off the stove, as it has accumulated splatters from cooking. I double check the oven, for anything I may have left inside of it. We look around and see if there is anything else to put away. We might need to keep a dinner plate out for someone who is still working. That gets placed on the stove top or in the microwave. During breakfast or lunch we may have a little bit of leftovers like some cut up apples and oranges, I leave them out for quick snacking through the day.

Our dishes helper, is currently drying the dishes and putting them away. I then wash my cooking pots and pans. I grab out my metal scrubber to get stuck on foods. I try and soak them immediately to aid in quick removal of foods. If we are baking something that may make cleaning harder, we try

and line the pans with aluminum foil to avoid scrubbing. Make sure to wipe around the rim of the pot and on the sides and bottom. The drying mat is emptier now so I can place this on it for the dryer. I tell my children, to not place the lids on directly in case there is some moisture left in the pots. Set off the sides a bit, to allow moisture to escape.

If you do have a pot or pan that has burned on food that seems to not come off, just let it continue to soak. I have tried many different methods in trying to get burned off food to come off easily. I have learned that if you just add hot soapy water and let it sit, it will come off eventually. I leave it soaking, then come back to it after I do other tasks in the kitchen. If it is still stuck on, let it sit longer. I have burned one of my favorite pots badly and it was not looking like it was coming off. I even had my husband take it in the garage and sand it off. It still would not come off!!! I let that pot soak for 3 days! I kept changing the water and trying to scrub it. Finally on the 3rd day it starting breaking off in pieces. Stainless steel is durable and good for this even through heavy duty burns.

When all your dishes are put away, use the drying mat to wipe up any water that may have accumulated under and around your mat. Take your washcloth and do a quick scrub to you sink. Use the towel to wipe off your faucet, handles, and the back of the sink. Make everything shine. Place all of your wet items in a pile and gather up any cloth napkins. Take directly to your washer and put inside. It can get washed with the next load of laundry. If you aren't going to be doing laundry the next day, hang up any rags to dry. This will help avoid them smelling like mildew. If they do smell, sprinkle them with some baking soda and let them sit. Then wash normally.

One look back into your kitchen, should bring you peace. Food and dishes should be put away. Everything has been wiped down so there should be no clutter out. The floors swept and clean. Your stove looking sparkly. Everything else should be straightened. If there is anything that looks out of place, fix it. If someone has left something, tell them to come pick it up. If you need to return something, do it now after the end of your day. When you walk away from your kitchen, it should be ready for the next day and all of its demands.

10 DINING ROOM

This room is simple. It contains the place where your family comes together and will share a meal. What does it look like to you? Is your table even accessible? Are there stacks of papers and books that have accumulated on the table? Bags, purses, and coats sitting on the chairs where you left them while returning home for errands? In our home this table is used for everything. I do my work on it, the children do school, the boys play toys, the girls play play-dough, and we eat on it each day. I have to make sure that when the children and myself are finished, that we pick up our items and put them away so that the table can be clear and free from distraction while we are eating.

If your table is worn and you aren't fond of the top of it, pick up a cute tablecloth at the store. You can get seasonal ones quite inexpensively, but add a nice change of decoration in this room. I'd skip the cloth kind, especially if it is used frequently. Get a vinyl one that wipes off easily.

Make sure your chairs, benches, and table legs are added to your chore system to be wiped off a few times per year. After each meal, take your broom and sweep up under and around your table to remove any food that may have made its way to the floor. It takes only a few moments, but will make a difference in combating the mess in our homes. If you don't have time, give a small hand broom to a child to do this task. They might not get it all, but they can learn and hopefully most of it will get swept up.

Skip the paper products and save yourself money by purchasing cloth napkins. Choose ones that have patterns and can hide food stains better. Skip the light colored or white ones as they will stain. Look at discount stores for these and keep an amount that will allow you to use them for meals and get them washed to restock your drawer. You can also make some with material quite inexpensively. For a fancier table, learn how to do simple folds with them. This is a good activity for your children to research and help "set the table." Do an internet search on "how to fan fold napkins." They will liven up a place setting.

If you have any other furniture in this room, go through it and keep it organized. Choose simple wall decorations. Ones that are easy to wipe down and keep clean.

What to buy and what to keep for this room?

A table that is sufficient for your size family. If you are going to purchase new, think heavy duty so that it lasts a long time. Consider if you get a “fancier” one that looks perfectly shined for right now but when you have children they might end up dragging something across it and scratching it. Think durable. An all glass table is not going to be good when the toddler throws something on it to break it. Or keeps running into the corners and hitting his head. Think about if you can add a hook on high chair as well. If you don’t have a lot of space, a hook on high chair is a nice alternative to a larger high chair that takes up much room. All these things to consider when looking. If you are just starting out, you can probably find one used from a local ad listing place. Many people upgrade or move and have to get rid of what they own. Same goes for if you are looking to upgrade your table. You might be able to find one where someone is moving and can’t take it with them.

If you find one that is less than ideal consider if you are able to paint or refinish it. It only takes a little bit of time to sand down and apply some new stain and clear coat to a scratched surface. Consider painting the bottom of your chairs a separate color than the top for a cleaner line. We did our chair bottoms black and kept the top natural colored wood.

Skip the rug under the table, as it will become a catch all for food and stains.

Place settings will be something you have to clean up around, opt for a nice centerpiece. Consider using different wreaths laid down with a large candle in the center. Look for these at your local thrift store. The internet is full of tons of DIY centerpieces, do some looking, and get creative for cheap.

This room is going to be the room that you are going to need the “least” amount of items before setting up a home.

Meal time manners

Meal times should be a time of peace and not chaos. We have had to work many times over the years to train our children in the “fine art of table manners.” This is a time that we consistently help them work at being able to sit at a table for a long period of time and be considerate of those around them. I have a lot of little ones and it gets loud. Sometimes too loud to want to even eat. They are constantly all wanting to talk and interrupt each other, so it is a daily reminder to wait their turn. Things we work towards achieving at each meal:

1. The loudness factor. Lowering our voices while talking and waiting our turns as to not interrupt.
2. Chewing with their mouths closed and not talking with food in their mouths.
3. Not asking for more unless all of their food is eaten on their plate.
4. Not getting up and getting their own food, asking first.
5. Taking drinks while eating—they could go a whole meal and not drink.
6. Asking the host, if they may be excused before leaving the table.

Before they leave, they have to scrape any remainder of food, into the scrap bucket and take their dishes to the sink. We help the younger ones with this task, but everyone can learn how to do this. The older ones stick around to help clean up everything.

Now that the second group of children are getting older, we like to work at having conversations around the table. Something that maybe everyone does already but in our home, it is more of eat and keep moving. When the older set was younger we did conversational starters. On my blog, you can download and print them off to use. You place them in a jar and during meal time, reach in and grab a “starter” and everyone gets a chance to respond.

As a family, we have gone through our starters many times and now we have new questions to ask each other. You can copy these or download them from www.plainandnotsoplain.com. Cut them into strips, fold them up, and place in a decorative container near your table. Let someone choose a ‘starter’ to get the conversation going for dinner.

Amy Maryon

If you were free to do anything you wanted to all day what would you do?

What was your favorite thing you did this summer? Why was it your favorite?

Do you know some of the jobs that your parents had when they were younger?

If you could change one thing about your family what would it be?

Name three activities that make you happy.

What is your favorite and least favorite food?

What is one fun thing you hope to do in the next year?

If you had three wishes, what would they be? (You can't wish for more wishes!)

Do you know how your name was chosen, or how your parents name was chosen?

What special talents do you have?

Name a special talent about someone else at the table.

What is your earliest memory?

What would your perfect day be like? Where would you go and what would you do?

Where is your favorite place to have quiet time?

Tell one truth and one lie about yourself. See if we can guess which one is true and what is a lie.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

What is your favorite type of weather?

If you could choose a vacation destination, where would it be?

What is your favorite season?

Large family living

What is something that you can do for someone else this week?

What will you miss most about winter?

What traits about your mom and dad would you like to have when you are grown up?

Tell me a favorite memory from our family.

What is your favorite tradition for Christmas?

What is your favorite tradition for Thanksgiving?

What are some things that you can do for a person who isn't feeling well.
Name three things.

What are two things that you are thankful for?

What is one thing that you did today that helped other people?

Name alphabet gratitude. Begin with letter A and say each letter an item you are grateful for. Example: Apples, bananas, Collin, Dad, etc.

Share something that someone did nice for you this week?

If you had superpowers what would they be and how would you use them to help others?

What is your favorite thing to do outside?

What is your favorite thing to do inside?

What food could you eat everyday for the rest of your life?

If you could eliminate one chore for the rest of your life, what would it be?

If money were not object, what would you ask for your birthday?

What meal would you like to make for our family all by yourself?

What is the best and worst part of your day today?

If you could be trapped in a TV show for a year, which one would it be?

Amy Maryon

If you were stranded on an island, what three things would you want to have?

Older children questions---we keep these separate for ages 10 and up.

Why do we celebrate the 4th of July? What is your favorite part of the holiday?

Do you think we have too much freedom, or not enough?

Share a person you admire and tell us why you do. Famous or not.

If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?

What is one skill or thing that you want to change or improve of yourself this next year?

Do you find it easy to say "I love you"?

What is your favorite thing to do in the world and why? How would you feel if you couldn't do it anymore?

Is there someone you know who is having a hard time right now? What might you do to help them know you understand or want to understand how they are feeling?

"Don't judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes" What does this phrase mean?

Do you prefer to read or hear?

Do you prefer to listen or speak?

What does "open-minded" mean? Do you know someone who is "open-minded?"

Is it important to show compassion to other people, even if they may not show compassion back?

What makes a good friend?

Tell us one truth and one lie about you. See if we can guess which one it is.

Large family living

If a friend asks you to keep a secret that you don't feel comfortable keeping, what would you do?

Is it always good to be loyal? When might it not be?

What three words would you use to describe our family?

Think about someone our family knows that could use a helping hand.

Who is it and what can we do to help?

What is one act of kindness that you have done for someone in the last few weeks?

If someone gives you a present and you do not like or want it, what are some ways to respond?

What is your best personality trait?

Would you rather work in a group or by yourself?

What does it mean to be inspired?

When you do something nice for someone else, how does it make you feel?

What is your greatest talent?

Teddy Roosevelt said, "Do what you can, with what you have where you are." What does this mean to you?

What will life be like when you, the child are the age of your parents?

What do you daydream about?

Where do you think you will want to live when you grow up?

What fear would you like to overcome?

If you never had to work for money, what would you want to do as an adult?

If you could invent a machine to do something in your life, what would that machine do?

Amy Maryon

If you could stay up all night, what would you do?

If you had the chance to leave Earth, would you? What are some things you would miss the most?

Imagine you are in the woods by yourself for a whole day. Where would you sleep and what would you eat?

What are some things you could on other people to do for you. What would happen if they stopped doing those things?

During what part of your day do you feel most anxious and rushed? How could we change that?

Where do you feel most relaxed?

What is the most beautiful place you have ever seen?

What is the hardest thing about being ___years old?

What is the best thing about being ___years old?

Would you rather be rich or famous?

What is your favorite form of exercise?

What is your favorite outdoor activity?

What do you love most about being a part of this family?

11

BATHROOM

Items you will need:

- Towels—keep 3-4 towels per person. If you purchase the big fuzzy ones, they are going to take up more space in your washer and have a longer drying time. Consider lighter towels as colored and darker ones will start showing white fuzz as you wash them frequently.
- Two hand towels---keep one for using and one for getting washed.
- Washcloths—you can get a big pack of these quite inexpensively. As they get worn, turn them into rags and replace.
- Shower curtain and liner. Get a polyester liner and keep it clean. At the first sign of mildew or mold—use bleach to kill it. If you keep it rinsed off daily and sprayed with vinegar and water solution, this will help deter mold. Use a fabric liner that will match your bathroom. If you don’t know your color scheme, wait till you find your home.
- Trash can—get a neutral colored, inexpensive basket and line it with a plastic shopping bag. This helps keep the can clean and free of bacteria growth.
- Shower caddy---get one big enough to hold all of your shampoos, a place for scrubbies, and a place for bar soap. The white rubberized ones last longer than the shiny metal ones.
- First aid kit—keep these supplies simple. You typically don’t need “all” of the items they supply you with. Here are some items you will need:
 - pain reliever or ibuprofen
 - band aids-variety of sizes
 - hydrocortisone cream
 - antibiotic cream
 - bottle of hydrogen peroxide
 - bottle of alcohol
 - allergy medicine---for allergic reactions to things
 - cough/cold medicine---best to have on hand instead of when you are at home and sick and can’t get to a store.

- cough drops
 - thermometer—digital is easiest
 - bug spray
 - sunscreen
 - keep small packets of condiments in the freezer to place on burns. You can tape them on to keep in place. This is much easier than carrying around a washcloth filled with ice.
- Kleenex—best to have on hand, instead of when you need it.
 - Toilet paper---we use the 1000 sheets per roll, it is better on our septic system. Plus it is more value for your money.
 - Plunger---you will NEED one of these one day and it is best to have it on hand.

Skip all the frills that they offer for bathrooms: soap dish, Kleenex holder, toilet brush holder, bath mats, rubber suction tub mat, rugs, etc. These are just things that you will have to clean extra. Keep it simple, less mess, and it will stay neater.

Most everyone will have their own personal products that they use and won't have to pre-purchase before they get married, because you use them each day. Here are some:

- shampoo/conditioners
- bar soap/body soap
- scrubbies
- personal menstruation products
- toothbrush/toothpaste/flossers/mouthwash
- make up
- face routine items—cleansers, toners, etc
- razors/shave cream
- hair comb/brushes
- hair styling products
- hair styling items---blow dryer/hot rollers/straightener
- electric razor

Bathroom organization

On the top of your sink surface is where you will want to store everyday items. If you are preparing your home for a husband, he will need all his daily grooming items in one zone. This will make it much easier for him not to have to hunt down items. For yourself keep daily items together. Instead of just setting your toothbrush by the sink, place it in a cup or get a mounted toothbrush holder. Limit the makeup that you wear on a regular basis on the counter top. Place the rest in a drawer. Keep hand pump soap near the sink. Bar soap tends to get messy skip and go for the pump.

Door racks can be installed on sink cabinets and you can place your blow dryer and curling iron out of the way under the sink.

For your shower organization, store only items used on a daily basis in here. A wire shower caddy can hold shampoo, bar soaps, and bath loofahs. This helps keep them off the edge of the tubs.

If you don't have much space to store bath towels, roll them to take up less space. If you don't have any space under sinks or in a closet, consider a large basket. If you still are tight on space, get an over the toilet storage rack. The wire ones are inexpensive and give you more room in an unlikely space.

Hampers are needed to catch dirty laundry. If you are not concerned about space, you can choose a floor standing model. Store inside the shower if you don't want to look at it. If you are low on space use a mesh bag on the back of the door.

Consider small baskets to help organize items within a drawer. Use small containers to hold q-tips, flossers, and cotton balls. A spray paint lid works well to store q-tips in within the drawer. Get acrylic plastic containers with lids to store them within view on your over the toilet metal rack.

Cleaning the bathroom

This is something that needs to be done on a daily basis. Nothing is worse than using someone's bathroom and having it smell like urine. I understand we aren't always able to do a deep clean, but an everyday wipe takes seconds and makes all the difference in this room.

Doing a weekly scrub is important. Use a powdered cleanser with an old bath pouf to scrub out the tub and shower. This helps remove bath scum easily. Wipe every inch of your bathtub. Move out soap and shampoo bottles and wipe down. Carefully scrub around the faucet and any bars. Do a check with your fingers and see if you feel any “film” left on the tub walls. Rinse down with cold water and place items back inside. This is a good time to stock back up on items almost gone. If shampoo is almost gone, squirt it into the next bottle, or just place the new bottle in the shower. Check bar soap size and place a new one in if needed. Launder any washcloths that have been sitting in here.

If you want a bathmat, laundry it each week. Each day after your shower, place it over the edge of the tub to dry. Or just dry your body while you are standing inside the shower and wipe your feet off before you step out. When you are all dried off, wipe up the floor with your towel and place it in the hamper.

When cleaning the sink, make sure to wipe behind it and inside the bowl where germs accumulate. You can do this with some wipes, or a sponge and all purpose cleaner.

Lack of proper toilet cleaning is the number one cause of smell in this room. If you have a male in the home, they are likely to pee in areas outside of the toilet. I know, gross?!?! But a reality. Make sure after thoroughly cleaning the inside of the toilet that you pay careful attention to the outside and all of its bends and corners it offers. Wipe the floor all around the toilet well too. You can go as far as wiping the walls that surround the toilet to ensure all urine is removed.

Wipe the entire floor well each week. Check faces of cabinets or walls for anything that needs to be wiped off.

Daily cleaning

If you keep a spray bottle with ½ water and ½ vinegar in this room, you can wipe it down quickly on a daily basis. You won't have a need to worry about a child getting into poisonous cleaners as it won't be toxic. Keep a roll of paper towels to wipe with or store some cut up rags with it. You can

Large family living

throw them in the wash after wiping down. Do this as soon as you get out of the shower each morning for a clean space.

Your bathroom should have an exhaust fan to keep out moisture to prevent mildew growth and to help aid in the removal of “smells.” If your bathroom does not, keep a spray bottle of air freshener on the toilet for this purpose. It is very embarrassing to be using someone’s bathroom and having no way to get rid of the smell. If you can install an exhaust fan do so. If you are unable to do that, place a small fan in this room. Use a small 5-inch clip on fan to help detour mold and mildew from growing in this room. It is the perfect growing zone for this type of mess, you don’t want to have to try and get rid of it. A simple fan turned on every time you use it and then shut off after it is dried will save you, trust me.

LIVING ROOM/FAMILY ROOM

This room is used for day to day living as well as a place to entertain visitors. It must be fresh and lively but also cozy and peaceful in the evenings. One of the key components is flexible lighting that can be altered to suit the rooms different uses. Look around your room and notice the color schemes. How well does the curtains, flooring, and furniture blend together? Does it follow a common color scheme? Can you add accented colors to help add character to the room? A painted floral vase, pillows, or candles are all ways to add spices of color in this room. How are the traffic routes in this room? Are the seating arrangements flexible? Are there areas to place things on, like a book or a cup of tea? Does all your storage work well with the room? Can everyone who is seated see the television? Maybe you need a quieter seat or two that does not see it.

If you are a new bride setting up a home for the first time, this is going to be a room that you are going to want to see before you buy things. Being able to see where the furniture is going to go, what it looks like as a whole, and if there is room for other things is important. Keep your eye out for some good deals on furniture. It may be worth investing in a carpet shampooer and buying your items used and cleaning them. You can always use the carpet shampooer in your home for many years to come. We clean ours every 4 months with a lot of foot traffic. You should do it at least every spring and fall.

Things you can buy:

- Pick out a couple of your favorite scented candles to have in your home. Think vanilla or woodsy smell for a nice calm atmosphere.
- Vacuum. You don't need a top of the line brand, something mid-priced, with a washable canister and Hepa-allergen filters is important

If you are just trying to cut down on clutter and weed things out in this room, then do so. Start in one area and work your way around in a clock pattern in this room going through everything. Keep only what you need and get rid of things you don't.

Cut down on clutter from knickknacks keeping them on a single shelf. It sounds great having a collection of things, but if they are stored in a box because you have too many, what good are they? Keep a few of your favorites and display them creatively.

Don't let stacks of newspaper and magazines take over, cut out what you want and pitch the rest. When looking through magazines and you see something you want to try later, rip out the recipe and place it in your home binder as a reminder when making your menus.

If you entertain little ones, keep a closed container or basket with some toys in it. You can also keep a couple of books to read to them.

Save your tabletops and use coasters for drinks---you can make inexpensive ones from Modge Podge, photos, and a tile square. For instructions visit www.plainandnotsplain.com under DIY.

Window treatments, blinds, and curtains. Every home varies and what you do is your decision. Keep them simple and easy to clean. If you need to have blinds, cleaning them can be tough, but just takes some time to do it. Close them and use your dusting attachment from your vacuum to clean them. If they get really grimy, take a rag and wipe every individual blind. Yes, I know painstakingly hard, but necessity. You can also soak the plastic ones in a bathtub or kiddie pool with cleaner to help remove grime. Wipe after soaking for awhile.

Dust items regularly in this room and vacuum every few days. At least once every week or two, move the furniture and vacuum underneath to remove any accumulation of dust and dirt. Look around and see what attracts your attention? Is there an area that is messy constantly, change the way you have it.

Cleaning your game cupboard. Take everything out and go through all of your games. Place pieces in plastic zippered bags. Throw away boxes if not needed. Secure card games with rubber bands. Place all the games back neatly into your designated cupboard.

Any books, dust the shelves off and place books neatly back on the shelves. Go through and see if there are any that you can get rid of to free up some space.

13 LAUNDRY

Having a plan when doing laundry is important for getting it all done during the week. Setting up your routine and “when” you do laundry is KEY to getting it all done. If you are tackling it all on one day, then get it done. Make it a goal to keep it rotated and get everything finished. If you can’t do it all in one day, because like our family, your septic would be overflowing, then make it a priority everyday to throw in one to two loads.

Area

If you can dedicate one area to laundry that is great. You need some shelves for clean baskets, a place to store detergents and other supplies, and place for dirty laundry separation. If you can have an additional table to fold things on, excellent, but not everyone has such a large space. In our new home, our laundry is in a closet area off of the hallway. I can’t have a set place for three laundry hampers. I must keep one in each bathroom. When I do laundry, I have to dig through the baskets to find each type I am washing that day. I liked it much better when I could put towels in one, lights in another, darks in a third. But you do what you can with what you have and you make it work!

Separation

Separation of laundry is important to maintaining your clothing. If you wash your nicer shirts or dresses with bath towels, it can get fuzzies on it. Jeans and other dark clothing will bleed somewhat and make your lighter clothing dingy. When separating sort according to these:

- towels/washcloths
- jeans/dark work shirts/dark socks and underwear
- dark clothing---nicer shirts and dresses
- lighter clothing/underwear/white socks
- reds or any other clothing that will bleed--keep separate.
- all whites or partial whites that you want bright do separately in a bleach or oxygen cleaner

- sheets/comforters---larger loads keep separate as to not overload your washer
- hand washables---check tags and do these in a bucket in your sink

It is okay to throw a few washcloths in with any clothing load. We do this every day. As soon as we are done with dishes, we put our wet washcloths and towels into the washer so that they don't get smelly. They get washed with the next day's laundry. I will throw in a load of towels, dark, or light clothing. I don't throw in bath towels because one shirt will attract lint like crazy.

Washing

We wash everything in cold water. We have done that since I learned it was a waste of money to wash in anything but cold. This saves tremendously on your hot water bill. The only thing that we washed with hot water was cloth diapers. You need to do this to sanitize them. Bleached items, we do warm water too as to let the bleach get activated.

I start the wash and add a cup full of laundry detergent. As it is filling up, I put in the laundry that we are washing. Be mindful of not stuffing it all on one side. Layer it around the drum carefully to avoid it going off balance. Fill the clothing below the top of your middle agitator. Notice when the clothing is agitating around that the clothing is "actually" moving. If you have it stuffed full, the clothing can't get properly moved around and washed. This will result in smelly clothing.

We do a normal or heavy wash for each of our loads. If we do a smaller bleached load, I will put it on a low setting. Note, if you do wash clothing with bleach, to ensure that there is none leftover for your next load, you can do an extra rinse cycle to make sure none is left. If you are brave, throw in a load of towels, something you don't mind getting ruined. I would not recommend putting in a load of regular clothing, as there may be a small amount left. Use caution when using bleach, as a tiny amount will ruin clothing.

Drying

As soon as it is done washing, place it in your dryer. Make sure to remove any shirts or dresses that you don't want to "shrink-up." We now have a gas dryer and I was unaware of the "power" of how quickly it dries. We have shrunk up many shirts, that I now check through to hang anything I don't want dried.

If you have access to a clothesline outside, hang out your laundry. It helps when you are taking it out of your washer to layer it according to how you are going to hang it outside. Towels together. Jeans together. Shirts together, etc. When you clip clothing, overlap it just a bit to the next article of clothing to use every inch of space on your line. Shirts hang upside down as they will clip easier. Jeans and skirts, hang from the waistline. It is normally harder to overlap and share with another pair so don't even try. If you can get a clothing drying rack this is good for smaller items that you don't want to take up much space on your line. We use ours for underwear, socks, washcloths, and leggings. When we had cloth diapers, I would use my drying rack to hang all of my inserts on. I placed it directly in the sunshine so that it would naturally bleach them.

If you live in a high allergy area like we do, the pollen can be thick during certain season and it coats everything. We only hang items out when we know it is low. I usually just hang blankets, bathing suits, towels, and jeans outside. The rest we put in the dryer and I will even hang up all of the shirts to let them air dry on a shower bar. If I was looking to save some extra energy.

There was a time when our dryer died, so we hung everything up. We did it by using a clothesline, a drying rack, and keeping up on it. As long as you don't get behind, it is easy to stay up on dirty clothing. The moment you decide not to do laundry, is when it gets backed up and sometimes it seems it takes forever to dry. When we had no dryer and I had to be careful of the weather, I would do extra loads on the days it was nice because I knew I might not get the opportunity to hang things out. I was careful to hang up any bath towels that weren't very dirty and reuse them. Any clothing that didn't directly touch the body like skirts, jumpers, and jeans by a person who stayed indoors all day, didn't get laundered each time. Pajamas that

were on a cleaned body, got re-worn for a few days. This is possible to do, even in a large family.

Folding

As soon as laundry is dried, I separate it into the appropriate baskets:

- one for towels
- one for Mom and Dad
- one for the girls
- one for the boys
- one for the older boys

Any dresses or nicer shirts, I hang them up. Most of our clothing is everyday and able to stay thrown together in a basket. I don't fold them before placing them in the baskets, we fold them when we put them away. When we put clothing away each week, I take down the articles that I have hung on the bars above the washer and place them on top of each person's baskets to be delivered to the bedrooms. By sorting into the various bedrooms is easier for us because we don't have a set day that we do laundry. I wash and dry all week long so by having a basket for each person, I am able to keep them there out of sight until we put them all away.

If I did not have an area to store laundered clothing in, wash all in one day, and sort from a big pile and then put away that same day. We did this back when we had four smaller children.

I put away my husbands and my laundry. If I have a smaller child tagging along with me, I will ask them to put Dad's socks in his drawers, etc. The older boys do their own. I periodically go through and check their clothes. We often times find a missing sock or a missing t-shirt in their closets. The little boys, I put away myself. It is easier than having them help. I then help the girls separate clothing into the four girls piles. Everyone can put away their own underclothes. I then hand the smaller girls their clothing that is on hangers and they put them away. The two older girls, put away their own. My oldest daughter at home, is responsible for doing her own laundry, which she washes and dries herself.

Towels are folded as the basket gets full. I save this for a child who needs an extra chore for the day or for someone who doesn't have a morning chore.

What is the best washer and dryer?

For years, we got by with just one set of regular-drum washer and dryers. They worked and did their thing. Then we got a high efficiency-top loader washer and dryer and life changed. The amount of time I spent doing laundry went down a lot, due to the ability to do bigger loads. This was great when I had my hands full of six little ones under seven years of age! Cloth diapers got cleaner, and my husband's dirty and greasy work clothing got cleaner as well. I loved my HE washer and dryer. We went with the top loading format instead of front loading ones because of complaints from friends who said because of hard water build up, their seal was leaking. We never had any issues even with hard water.

Then life changed and we moved to another state. I was never able to use my high efficiency that we brought due to the size of the opening in our washer/dryer area. I used what they had. It was just a regular washer and dryer with a drum. I just did laundry more frequently. My children were also older and life wasn't so time consuming so I was able to keep up. I installed a clothesline to help with getting laundry done quicker and that was great.

Then we bought a home so we could be permanent in our new location. I was using the washer that came with the home and it works well. The only reason we are going to purchase another high efficiency front loader is to help cut down on the water usage in our home so that our septic is not overloaded. A septic specialist told us that a regular washer can use 50 gallons of water each load. If we had a high efficiency washer, most use only 15-25 gallons. We added up how many loads we do a day, how many showers we took, how many flushes we did on a average day and it was getting pretty close to the size of our septic. We decided instead of "worrying" about staying within a two load per day limit, that we would invest in another high efficiency washer machine.

Tips that have helped me over the years:

Train each of your children to pull out their socks when taking them off, pull their pant legs straight, and to check their pockets. My children “know” that mom is not going to check their pockets so if something is left inside, it can very well get washed. I have washed an electric razor before, an Mp3 player, lots of money, and many times a wallet. This teaches them that it is not my job to do that. It takes them only seconds verses me minutes to check everyone’s clothing.

Consider buying all white linens. Even if your color schemes change you will always have uniform matching towels. You can always bleach these and a new white towel will match an old white towel. The same goes for bed linens---whites never fade, they look cleaner.

Close zippers and other fasteners to keep them from snagging things.

Fold or hang up clothes as soon as they are finished drying to cut down on wrinkles.

Keep an ice cream bucket that you can do hand washables in.

Use bleach only when needed. Nothing beats bleach for whiteners but it will break down the fibers in your clothing quickly. Sunshine is a natural way to brighten and remove stains on clothing. Hydrogen peroxide will help remove blood from clothing that has been stained.

Taking good care of clothing ultimately means buying fewer clothes. Follow care instructions---drip dry, etc.

If you have an area like a shelf to keep your sorting baskets separated all the time, get heavy duty square ones. They will last longer and not break as easily as round ones. If you can’t have your baskets out all the time, get round ones to stack easily and out of the way.

Thicker plastic laundry hampers last longer than flimsy ones that have lids. We do away with lids and keep them sitting in the shower of the bathroom out of sight.

Large family living

Keep a small mending kit near your laundry room---even if you have a separate sewing area. You are much more likely to fix a hole or sew on a button if all your items are together. Keep a pair of scissors, some dark and light thread, and sewing needle handy. Don't let your mending pile stack up, if you can fix it, take a few moments and do it. If you are not, then get rid of it.

Train everyone to put away their own laundry. Let go of ideals of folded socks, underwear, and pajamas. As they get older they will want their drawers neater. You put away the clothing that needs to stay neat, but they can do the others.

If you have only worn something for a few hours or have worn it but have not gotten it dirty like a jumper, pair of jeans, jean skirt, sweaters, etc, hang up, let air out, and then put away. Wash only clothing that sits next to your body---underwear, leggings, socks, t-shirts etc. Wear an apron to keep food and stains off your clothing. If it is not very dirty by the end of the day, hang it up for the next day. If you had a busy day in the kitchen, throw it in the next load.

14 BEDROOM

When setting up your bedroom, think relaxing comfort in this room. Also remember that it isn't always about "us," consider your husband's views on colors and schemes in this room. Most men wouldn't want pink and girly comforter choices. Consider something with a hint of masculine in your choices. This can easily be attained with the many difference choices on the market today. Even if you went with purple as your choice of main color, you can easily throw in blacks or dark browns as accent colors. Ask and find out if he has any preferences when choosing colors for this room.

In this room, the bed is the focal point. Make this a warm inviting place. Just by placing pillows up for a headboard, spices up the room. Consider investing in some large, king sized pillows to place up against the wall in your color scheme choices. Use three or four per person. We place a dark brown in a firm pillow against the wall, then a deep turquoise color in another firm pillow, a tan with a softer pillow, and then finally another dark brown to match in our favorite soft pillows. We only sleep on the softer pillows and just use the firm ones for decorations. The firm stand up nicely against the wall.

What sort of bed linens should we use? Skip the white linens because of everyday use, they are going to get stained and ruined. As much as we "think" those husbands of our are going to be showered every night before bed, let me tell you, they slip one night. or two depending upon how tired they are. Patterns work well to hide stains. Get two sets. One to use and one to put on while the other one is washing. Invest in a nice pair of Egyptian cotton sheets. Don't skimp on this. You will be thankful for that nice feeling while slipping into bed. Plus they will last longer.

What about a mattress? We have had our share of beds over the years. We have invested thousands of dollars on spring time mattresses and have found that they always get worn. Our last mattress we bought, we purchased it online from Amazon. It is a memory foam mattress. It was a fraction of the cost of spring mattress, delivered to my door, and has been the best mattress we have ever owned. We got a platform base, so there was no need to buy two mattresses. I did my research. I read over many

reviews from customers on Amazon and found the company to purchase from. I loved one that reminded me of a television commercial, where they dropped a bowling ball on one side of the mattress and the other person didn't even feel it. This reminds me of our bed. It is firm, yet comfortable. We purchased a nice memory foam mattress cover made from bamboo and that protects our mattress. We have since, started switching over all of our children's mattresses as well. They cost the same as the "cheap spring twin mattresses" and the foam exceeds expectations in every comparison.

Place a nightstand next to your bed to make your space personal. Include a small lamp and an area for your alarm clock and any other item that is special to you. Is there a place for books? Special lotion you put on at nighttime? Make it your own. Also consider which sort of things your husband would like next to his bed. Have a spot for him to place his items and make it personalized for him.

Next, lay down in the bed and consider the view from that spot. If you have a television in this room, is it in a comfortable position for you to lay and watch? Are remotes placed in an area where you can find them easily?

If you have a dresser, decide which items to keep on your dresser. Go through any items that you don't have matches of like missing earrings or broken jewelry pieces and throw them out. Keep only what is of use to you. Simply by organizing your jewelry box and placing like items together can keep your dresser clutter free. If you keep makeup on your dresser, place it in a container to keep it all together.

Consider placing a comfortable chair and small table in your bedroom to create a relaxing area. This is great for reading a book, working on a laptop, or just a place for some quiet and a warm cup of tea. If you can place it near a window and you have a nice view, do this. This is also a place where your husband can sit down and put on his socks in the morning.

Under the bed storage is invaluable. If you need to conceal items, use a bed skirt. Don't just shove things underneath here. Have a plan and consider carefully what you are going to keep under this bed. Use storage containers or boxes to keep them neat.

Clothing is a major source of clutter in the bedroom. We will discuss that in “What’s in my closet?” section.

This room is your own. As easily as it is to not do anything in here, take the time to decorate and make it personalized. I like to hang things for myself and my husband. We have a large “G & A” for Greg and Amy, above our bed on an angle. Something I saw on the internet one day while searching for wall decorations. We also like to keep some wedding pictures in here. Things that remind us of our beginnings. Always special to see.

This may be your office area as well, if you don’t have a spare room. I keep my desk, filing cabinet, and computer in our room. This stays neat most of the time. I keep my designated “office day” for going through and keeping this straight. Times of the year when I am writing books, going through curriculum, and doing taxes is when it is messy.

On my desktop, I keep it simple. I have a holder for bills that come in and need to be paid. As soon as I get the mail, I open it, and place the remittance part in the holder, and if I need to keep the statement, I file that in the appropriate folder. My holder only holds things that I need to keep a mental note that they are there. I have some coupons that I need to be reminded about using that I store here. I have Box-tops that we collect and give to our church. This does not get “stuffed” full of papers and notes. I only keep what is going to be something I currently use within a couple of weeks.

I have my planner open at all times on my desk. It is an inexpensive and purchased each year at Christmas time for \$6. It is on my Christmas list for my husband and children to buy. He likes a list of things that he can take the children to buy for me. I am not a gift person and do not like “unnecessary” things. But my husband enjoys purchasing, so I get prepared. I make a list of things that I am wanting to replace each year. This helps hugely in deciding. Christmas time is a good time of year to get things that are worn from use. On my list every year are:

- a new planner
- a new apron
- hot pads and kitchen towels/washcloths
- candles—specific scents

- body lotion and spray
- any sort of household item that I have been thinking about getting through the year. I make a list in my back of my planner. This year I wrote down popcorn air popper, new cooking pots, new pans, etc.

This is great for my husband as he can take all the children and let them pick out something for Momma, but I don't get bombarded with tons of dollar store items that I am never going to use! Be specific and have a plan, most husbands will appreciate this.

Back to my planner.....

In my planner, the day after Christmas when everyone is busy playing with their toys, I take the time and fill it out. I write down birthdays from the previous year. I fill out any important numbers and addresses. Yes, it is repetition and I end up writing the same thing every year, but it gives me something relaxing to do the day after Christmas. I keep this open on my desk top to the daily/weekly spot so that with a quick glance each morning and night I look and see if I have anything "extra" to do that day or what sort of plans I have that week. I used to do digital with everything, but I have found that digital isn't always reliable. Things fail, phones die, laptops suddenly freeze up and then life stop. Paper, will always be around.

I also keep out one pen that I like to write with. I have done away with just having random pens in my home. I purchase a pack that I like and it lasts me years.

My laptop stays on my desktop. It is closed to protect it and no one else is allowed to use it. This is for Moms work and that is all. If I have some online work for a child to do and can't get to another one, I will allow responsible aged children but they have to sit at my desk.

I have a metal paper holder that is also on my desk. On this, I keep all my younger children's tablets stored on. This allows me to keep them plugged in and charged and in a safe designated zone. I also keep my bible study book and bible on this. I keep a notebook that has notes that I am writing for specific things. Currently, I have one filled with our homeschool group

ideas and get together. It isn't for random things to get put on, it has a purpose and I keep it that way. Otherwise things are going to get lost.

Above my desk, I Modge Podge some coordinating contact paper on clipboards and placed those above my desk in a group of five. On my clipboards are reminders. One, I keep blog reminders and things to do geared towards that part of my life. I have one that has book list ideas that I received from friends. On another I clipped our library card and all of my children's accounts numbers for a quick reference for when I am ordering new stuff for the week. This keeps paper clutter off of my desk and gives me a chance to look up with a quick glance for things I need.

Before I leave my room in the morning, I quickly pick up this room. It takes only seconds to do. I grab any dishes leftover from my husband. I pick up any dirty laundry and place it in the hamper. I make the bed and fluff up the pillows. I open the curtains and pick up the remotes. I look around for any forgotten toys, and pick up anything that is not supposed to be in here. If my day is busy, I might not get a chance to make it back here. When the day is over and we make it to our room for night time, everything is ready for a peaceful evening. We know where the remotes are for the TV, no searching needed. We fold back the covers and the bed is already made, and we can relax in our room. This helps for a clean slate of mind and a peaceful time together. No one wants to come to bed after a long day and have to move piles of laundry or search for the remote control for the television. Remove the chaos to have more peace in your life.

OUTSIDE/GARAGE/TOOLS

If you are a new bride and want to know what sort of things to get for setting up a home, I would recommend you see what your husband has. You also don't want to accumulate too many things for outside the home, until you know what your outside is able to fit. You may not have a garage or storage shed to store things in. Less accumulation the better.

I would recommend getting yourself a small tool kit to have in the home. Even though my husband has every tool imaginable, there are many times when I am looking for a hammer to construct a piece of furniture and can't seem to find it anywhere in my husband's stash. We have used an ice cream scooper many times to pound in those tiny nails when constructing bookshelves and entertainment centers.

You can get an entire kit that contains everything, or you can purchase separately. Don't go super cheap, because they are not going to be strong. You don't need to go expensive either, unless you're using it every day in a job. I would recommend a visit to a Harbor Freight store, they have good quality tools at an affordable price. Things I would recommend getting:

- one Phillips head screwdriver---also known as a star tip
- one flat head screwdriver
- a mini screwdriver kit for eyeglasses, phones, or small electronics
- a hardware kit with an assortment of screws, nails, and wall anchors
- wire cutters
- adjustable wrench
- pliers
- tape measure
- small handsaw
- a 9 inch torpedo level
- a cordless drill with a screwdriver bit--this has been something I have grown to love in my life as a wife. I used to screw and unscrew all day long until I couldn't stand it. One use of the drill with a screwdriver head and it turns a long job into something

done in seconds. They even have cute “girl” colored ones at the hardware store.

There are many simple household repairs that you will be required to do when keeping a home. I would suggest you learn as many as you can from the men in your life. If you don't have any sort of guidance I would recommend YouTube. There are many videos on how to repair simple things in the home. Learn how to do it correctly, otherwise you will have a big mess.

If you are going to take on jobs like painting a home, don't just start painting. Do some research online and look up some simple tips to help you on your venture. Some household maintenance and repair jobs may seem simple, but once you embark on them they can turn into a big job. A little help and advice from someone who has already gone before you, messed up and has learned along the way is HUGE. If you don't have access to internet, as some may not, I would recommend purchasing a simple household repair book. There are many online that are quite inexpensive.

If you enjoy gardening, I would purchase a garden tool hand set. This will allow you to plant flowers for the season. They have plastic ones now so you don't have to worry about them rusting. Keep these along with some gardening gloves in an area where you know they will stay and not get taken by children. I place mine under the sink so that I always will have them. My boys think they are great shovels, but will often times lose them. These are just for Mom.

What sort of yard work you have to do, depends on your yard. A shovel and rake are always good tools to have. A shovel is good for scooping dog mess up. A rake is good to remove dead leaves off flower beds or just for cleaning up your yard after the fall season. An outside broom is a good addition for cleaning off porches otherwise, your indoor one will get used. A hose is necessary for watering flowers, filling up kiddie pools, washing the car, or cleaning off the decks.

Place rugs outside the doors to prevent dirt from coming inside. These can be rubberized to grip the dirt better.

Some tips I have learned from keeping a home

If you have battery operated items and they are failing, take them out and use an emery board to remove any dirt to the ends. Place them back in and sometimes you will get a little longer use out of them. For remotes, sometimes if you just do a little twisting and turning of the batteries while in the remote, it will allow them to work for longer periods of time.

We buy rechargeable batteries for everything. Harbor Freight has rechargeable batteries quite inexpensively. We bought a simple wall charger and use that as soon as someone brings us the batteries. They will cost you more than regular batteries, but will last you much longer.

When storing coolers, make sure that they are completely dry before closing. Place a few drops of tea tree oil on a cotton ball and place inside. This will keep out any mold naturally.

If you have tiny holes in the wall from nails, you can fill in with a non gel toothpaste to hide them.

When deciding where to hang your pictures, place a bit of toothpaste on the back on the hanger. Press the picture up against the wall and it will leave some of the toothpaste where you need to put the nail in.

Sewing tools

Even if you are not a sewer, having a few tools around the home is helpful for quick fixes. This will allow you to sew on buttons that may have falling off, fix a hem in a dress, or sew the seam back into a blanket that has raveled. I would recommend the following for a simple, basic kit:

- a good pair of scissors used ONLY for material and thread---if you cut it on anything else, it will dull the blades.
- few spools of thread---black, tan, and white are good choices
- needles with eyes in them
- small stash of extra buttons
- safety pins for holding things together

Amy Maryon

I have learned that when buttons come off on heavily used items like on a coat or your husband's pants, use dental floss to sew them back on. Won't fall off again.

CLEANING SUPPLIES NEEDED

Deep cleaning and maintaining a home requires a few simple tools and supplies to have on hand. It doesn't take much money to keep a home clean. You can go elaborate or you can go simple. I will give you the simple ways as I have learned having "too much stuff" requires upkeep. We keep it simple and my home stays clean.

Vacuum

What sort of vacuum you need, depends upon the home you live in. Many newer homes are hardwood floors or tile. The need for a vacuum is diminishing. If you have the choice I would choose your living areas to be non-carpeted, it is much easier to keep clean and keep down the dust content of a home. I would keep the bedrooms carpeted or a large rug if needed for comfort. In our family room, we do have wood floors but I keep a large carpeted area for the children to play on. We will eventually do away with the carpeted living room and hallways in our main living area. We have owned expensive vacuums and we have owned cheap vacuums. Expensive vacuums die eventually, as with everything. Cheap vacuums if not equipped with HEPA filters and a good sucking system, will not pick up all the dust and dirt that you need to keep your home allergen free. I would choose something mid-way in price. My advice, is to buy the warranty that they offer at the store. Usually about \$8 for 2 years. Worth the price in a large family of roughness. Look for a HEPA filter and all of the attachments that you need. If you have non carpeted floors look for a wand attachment that you can sweep under your sofa or across your wood floors to pick up dust. It works more effectively than a "stick attachment." Make sure you can see into your canister and able to clean it out and wash as needed. Forgo the bags and anything that you are going to have to buy extras for each month.

Broom

If you have a large area of floor to sweep and keep clean, look for a broom with an extra wide head. This will allow you to do less strokes while sweeping. We use a rubberized broom that is made to remove pet hair. It

has bristles and allows for fine pick up of dirt and other items. It will last forever as the bristles will not get bad as a traditional broom does. You can wash it as needed to keep it clean. We got the idea from a friend who owns a hair salon and uses one to pick up the fine hairs. It costs more, about \$20 for a regular sized broom. A wider head broom is around \$45. I would recommend buying the regular sized one and if you love it, like we do, invest in the wider head. You will always be able to use the smaller head for porches, garages, or any other areas. We used ours to remove snow from our deck this winter. I am showing no wear after 2 years of use.

Mop

I am not a fan of any type of sponge type mop, as it just pushes the dirt into the corners. I recommend always sweeping the floors and then either hand washing floors or steam mopping them. We use a steam mop and it sanitizes and cleans the floors without any harsh chemicals. Don't get one with the disposable pads, purchase one with washable pads and motorized electronically. If you can, get the two year warranty, for around \$6. Again, worth the price if it decides to fail. This is important to do instead of using chemicals on your floors. This is where babies stick close to each day, you don't want your baby breathing in harsh chemicals.

If you can't afford a steam mop, skip it and hand wash your floors. Getting on the floor with a bucket of warm water and all purpose cleaner is all you need. You are able to control how clean your floor is, making sure all of the nooks and crannies have been thoroughly done. Only needs to be done about 1-2 times per week depending upon the traffic area. This will save you from having to store a sponge mop and try and keep it sanitized and free of bacteria.

Other tools to have

Here are a few other items that we have in our home and don't normally use on a regular basis, but I am glad we have:

- Bottle brush—for cleaning water bottles
- Sink and tub hair removal auger for cleaning out hair from slow moving drains
- Big scrub brush

Large family living

- Dryer lint removal brush---for cleaning way back in the line
- Carpet shampooer---good thing to invest in, if you frequently shampoo your carpets---get a warranty
- Metal dish scrubber---for tough stuck on food on pots
- Hand broom and dust pan
- Sponge—for cleaning bathroom—microwave sponge after use for 2 minutes to kill bacteria

Types of cleaners:

- All purpose cleaner—in a pourable bottle and in a spray bottle diluted
- Window/mirror cleaner
- Powdered cleaner
- Wood duster/cleaner
- Dish soap
- Laundry detergent
- Microfiber cloths—for cleaning—they do a great job of “scrubbing”
- Magic erasers---if you have children these are a necessity. Some things cannot be wiped off, and will only be removed with one of these.

Things to skip:

- Air fresheners---skip synthetic air fresheners, sprays or plug ins. pick up an essential oil diffuser for a natural approach or invest in some favorite candle scents.
- Liquid drain cleaners---all you are doing is eating away at your pipes and mucking up the watershed. Use a snake to unclog drains.
- Expensive cleaners
- Toilet brush---bacteria breeding ground
- Toilet tablets—if you clean them regularly they won’t smell
- Cleaning wipes—use paper towels and a spray bottle full of all purpose cleaners (best choice would be to use cut up rags and cleaner, then wash)

Going green

I have written in previous books about how to go from chemical use to going a natural approach. It is effective and easy to do. I would strongly suggest that you consider what type of things you are putting into your realm of breathing in your home. If you deal with any type of allergy, asthma, or breathing problems, consider switching to all natural cleaners. You can visit my blog and see my 21 days series to an all natural home. I won't go into detail here.

If you only bought one thing to clean your home with, buy vinegar. Yes vinegar! Won't it smell? It does at first but the smell will dissipate. You can use this and it is just as effective in killing mold, bacteria, and germs due to its acidity level. Clean your floors, countertops, mirrors, and windows.

Baking soda is another natural alternative and will be helpful in scrubbing your tubs. You can put a box in your refrigerator or freezer for bad smells.

Regular dish soap will clean everything else. If you use it to wash the food off of the plates that you eat from, you can use it to clean other areas of your home from sinks to tubs. There is no need to spend money on expensive bathtub cleaners, it is a degreaser and works well. I also recommend, when you are in the shower, using some shampoo or body wash to swish around the rim of your tub. It is a degreaser for your hair and will do the same for your tub.

If you use rags to clean with and won't be able to do a load of laundry to keep them from smelling, hang them up. This will prevent mildew from growing and then you can put them in the wash. Hang some hooks under your sink for this purpose. Or place on a hanger to dry.

Don't buy an expensive caddy to carry all your items in, use an old ice cream bucket. It works well to rinse the tub with and you can easily carry your items from bathroom to bathroom.

Manager of
the
home

WORKING ON OURSELVES

It is important for us to want to refine our character and be the best that God has called us to be. I know this topic has been hard even for myself. It took many years of “refining” myself and I still do it daily. I have by no way reached my goal. I just continually strive to be where God has me in my own life. The Proverbs 31 woman, has been an inspiration for myself. Many years ago, she seemed so far away from the life I was living. She didn’t even seem attainable. After taking the time to study, pray about each verse, and allowing the Lord to mold me into the woman He has me to be, she isn’t so far off. You, ARE a woman that can be the Proverbs 31 woman. She IS attainable in your own situation. Let’s look at how you can see yourself in her:

The Woman Who Fears the LORD

An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

These verses explain how much you are worth. Do you realize the importance of you as a wife and Mom? We are needed individuals in life. No one can take the place of a mom who can comfort a sick child, or the one who can give that loving touch to a child who is hurting. One that can be a wife that her husband can depend on. No matter what type of background you came from you are precious in the Lord’s eyes. There is no excuse that we are going to be a certain way because of our past family history. When we said those vows: through sickness and through health, through rich and poor, it is easy to be loving and honoring through those good times, but when the bad times come and pressure starts to push down on us as wives, do we break? If we are trusting in the Lord and doing what WE, ourselves are supposed to be doing, then we leave the rest up to the Lord and He will be faithful and just to see us through. We can’t let our emotions rule the way we act through the various circumstances that come against us in life. We need to be continually trusting the Lord and being a faithful woman. We need to know that God will take care of us, if we listen to Him. Can you see why the Bible says that the “excellent wife” is worth more than precious jewels? She is rare in the world that we are living in, but not someone impossible to be.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

If you have ever gone through heart ache and trust issues in your past, you can understand how hard it is to trust that individual again. It is easy in a marriage when you catch your husband doing something unfaithful to you as the wife, to not want to trust him again. We put up those walls to protect ourselves from being hurt further. We don't allow our husbands access to our hearts because we are afraid of them getting broken again. We may start looking at other husbands and fathers and "wish" our husband were that way. We might even slip up and say things during a heated argument to further show our disappointments in our husbands. These are all wrong things to be doing. When we are joined together with our husband we became one. We need to show him unconditionally that we will stick by him and see him through all his struggles. We need to take an active role in getting to know what our husbands likes are. He needs to know that your heart is committed to him and him alone. This will create a man who is willing to lead his family. One that even has flaws, but can rise above them because he has someone cheering him along. Be his biggest fan. When he fails, don't show your disappointment. Encourage him and he will get better!

She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.

This woman had to make her own clothing. That would have to be an area I would have to learn, otherwise my children would be wearing flour sack cloth. Thank goodness for inexpensive clothing options for our families. We have a lot of children, if I went to the store and just bought what I saw, we would seriously be broke real quick. I have to search out clothing through various sources to find good deals. It takes time and it takes work when I have to bring all my children with me to the store. I don't do it all at once, I would have a meltdown. I take a list and I look a little each time. If I can grab a couple of new outfits for someone each time I visit the thrift store, eventually everyone will have what they need. Same goes for food, I plan out my menu and shop. I have to search out and find stores that have

better deals for food because it is a big expense in our family. I have to realize that it is cheaper for me to buy gallons of milk and take the time to make homemade yogurt instead of buying premade ones. This I had to learn how to do. I had to look for ways to make all the convenience foods that I used to purchase. This was trial and error, sometimes it was a flop, but I kept at it and learned how to make it taste good. Things take time, but diligence will pay off. The Proverbs 31 woman is busy applying herself to home management duties and running a successful home.

She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

Motherhood lacks sleep. I think a number one complaint of moms with little ones is that they are tired. I get it, I have gone on no sleep for most of my marriage. I have had to learn what it is like to “have” to wake up because a toddler needs breakfast, even though I was up all night with a fussy baby. There are other people that depend upon me to meet their needs. Sleep had to take a back seat. Eventually that goes away and you will get the rest that you need.

I realize how great it is now, to get up while it is dark and start my day. It is much nicer to have some quiet time before everyone else needs me. I love my time in the mornings. I look forward to them. I can take time to read my bible, listen to a sermon, or work on some writing tasks. It allows me to think when there isn't chaos going on around me.

I can get my meals started for my day so that no matter what obstacles come my way, we will have food to eat. If I don't prepare and get out the frozen chicken in the morning, it won't be thawed by dinner time. If I assume I have bread for sandwiches for lunch and don't bother looking, lunch time may come and then I realize we don't actually have bread and now I have nothing quick to feed my children. Preparing for my day and what foods we are going to eat is a priority.

She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

I never thought I would ever be able to help out and provide an extra income in our home. My main job is taking care of the home. I never ventured out and looked for ways to make money. Yes, I always dreamed I could but the reality is, I have to be at home. I prayed about this years ago and asked the Lord for ways to help me, make money but by staying at home. Over the years, I believe He gave me much wisdom in learning how to cut way back on our grocery budget, show me ways to cut costs in our home, and help stretch our dollars. It has been only recently, that I have been able to make money. The Lord didn't show me this in the midst of trying to take care of six little ones. He didn't add confusion and more stress into my life, He planted a seed while I was still nursing and taking care of little ones and I started thinking about it. I slowly started working before I even ventured out and did anything. Before even buying a domain and beginning my blog online, I started reading about other blogs. I looked up advice from experienced Christian bloggers. I started writing posts to have on hand for when life was busy. Much thought went into it. Then when the timing was right, he provided me a way to begin. My first start up costs, I saved gift money and purchased my domain and site use. Then over the next year, I worked diligently adding more content to my site. I was tempted numerous times to go against what I originally said I would not do and do affiliate programs and advertising. The Lord showed me not to do one that you had to click here or close this window to get to where you needed. Make it plain and simple. My original vision. So I kept working and knew the Lord would have to provide otherwise I would not continue on this blog. I was then contacted shortly afterward through a friend of a friend who was going to pay me to write blog posts. What?!?!? Some people do not even write their own? It was something I knew I could write about so I did it. I got paid money and it paid for my next year of domain and site use. Over that year, I started writing my home economics books. After that first year, I was able to easily pay for my site and domain. This past year I was able to have enough money to do some advertising in three national homeschooling magazines to gain more exposure. Then at the same time, provide free content for those who cannot afford to purchase it.

I am also planting seeds for my children. I am documenting all that I do. All our recipes, our schooling, our training, how we run things, etc for them to remember or to use as they gain families of their own. The additional income helps for those little extras in life that sometimes seems impossible

for a large family. Every year, I see an increase. But it has to begin with something the Lord has shown you. Remember not every good idea is a God idea.

She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

I am sure the writer is talking about emotional strength here, but we can go both ways. I don't think the Proverbs 31 woman was one that was lazy or one who laid around all day. She didn't waiver when her husband came home from a bad day and complained about life. She didn't crumble when her friend offended her. She was strong on the inside. She was able to not take offense at things. She realized people are people and what they do doesn't always have to affect you. She was physically able to be strong and take care of her home. She could play with her children and still keep up to the demands of motherhood. She didn't let her lack of physical care creep up on her in life. She kept fit. She used opportunities to get some extra exercise in even if that meant just dancing with her children. She was strong emotionally so that she could handle whatever demands her mind might need. She didn't let her husband's bad day at work decide what type of day she would have the next. She stayed focused on her God.

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.

This woman is confident in her calling as a keeper of the home. She knows she is doing all that she can to make it a successful home. If she wasn't the best cook and needed to be, she learned. She did all that she could do to be the best at her job. Even if this meant she had to stay up at night and learn. Maybe she doesn't have "merchandise" but intangible gifts. Maybe she is an excellent hostess and can make anyone feel comfortable. When they have a gathering with people, it is successful because she has put her heart into her work. She worked long hours to prepare for this day and can see the results. She makes what she does good by prudent management.

She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.

Her hands are working constantly. I know it is tempting to take the “easy route” of doing things. It is much easier to buy bread than to make homemade bread. It is easier to purchase things online or in stores than it is to wait and look for a deal at a thrift store. It is hard work to be frugal. The Proverbs 31 husband is delighting that his wife is willing to help stretch their income. Many women can make bad rash decisions over one shopping trip, that will set them up for a financial disaster. By staying busy and putting your hands to the distaff and diligently holding the spindle working, you can help avoid some of these rash decision.

She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

Even if your husband doesn't want you to give to the poor, you can do things as a homemaker. We get emotionally moved more than men typically. We probably would give away all of our money to help others, but that might not be what our husbands have in mind. That is okay, let God work on them. As a homemaker, if you know someone is in need, you can do something instead of nothing. It takes just a few extra cents worth of flour to make an extra loaf of bread. Add a few more ingredients to that pot of soup and you can give a jar away to a neighbor along with the bread. Your children's clothing can go to a friend, who needs extra for their own. If you can sew, you can offer to help someone who needs some mending. If you are able, you can babysit a friends child while they need to run to an appointment. There are many things that we can do that doesn't take financially from our paychecks. Search your heart and ask the Lord what is it that YOU can do to help someone else out.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.

We are from the north, we know what it is like to have to prepare for the cold. You have to have gloves, hats, coats, boots, and snow pants otherwise you will freeze. I needed to make sure my children had footy pajamas

otherwise they would get cold at night. I had to prepare for if the power were to go off during snowstorms so that we would be able to eat, drink, and be warm. You never knew if you were going to be stuck at home for days at time. If you are prepared it doesn't matter. Moving down south, when they get snow, it seems everyone is in mass chaos to stock up on bread and milk. Literally, you are snowed in for one or two days. That isn't much time to be stuck at home. It is, if you haven't prepared for it. We don't need to be afraid of the things to come, if we plan ahead. When a new season is upon your household, look to see if you have all the clothing needed for your family. Take note at the end of a season and see who will need a winter jacket for next year. Make a list and keep it in your purse. When you are out and see some on on sale, you will know what you need to purchase. I keep lists of shoe sizes in my purse and which ones I need for the next shoe size up for each child. This prevents me from buying one more pair of shoes for a child who already may have some in the storage bin.

The same goes for a stocked pantry. There might be a time when you can't get out because your car won't start. Will your family starve? Do you keep medicines on hand for when sickness occurs? Can you make chicken noodle soup for your sick child without having to run to the store, while they are sick? By being prepared you will not be afraid of what will happen because you have done all that you can.

She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

She is careful to make her bedroom a safe place and comfortable haven for her and her husband. Burn some nice candles before going to bed. Clean up your room before your husband comes home. Turn down the bed clothes and make it look cozy and inviting. Make it a place where you enjoy coming together after the end of the night. The Proverbs 31 woman had chosen fine linen of a beautiful color for her clothing. It wasn't drab and blah. She took care to look nice for her husband. He enjoyed her as his wife. Before he comes home take notice in a mirror of what you look like. Is your clothing stained and dirty from children? Change your top. If you need a new apron, put on a clean one. Fix your hair. Make yourself

presentable. Your husband has been gone all day long and the first thing he needs to see when he comes home is his beautiful, smiling wife. Not one ready to complain about the awful day she has had. She has dinner ready for him and a smile on her face. She asks him about his day. She doesn't let the kids jump all over and bother him. Let Dad come in and sit down and relax and eat. There will plenty of time to talk about you and your problems later on after he has un-winded. Make your home an enjoyable place that he wants to come home to.

Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

Her husband is known in the town by his wife. The community knows she is a good woman. Not one to cause strife around town by spreading gossip. She spends her time at home taking care of her family. The people that do know her realize she has a giving heart and will help anyone that she is able to. She doesn't have ulterior motives. Her heart is pure and her hands are clean. Her actions are done with good motives. She has a reputation of being a good person because she truly is.

She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.

She is successful with the gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon her. She is rewarded because she has perfected those gifts and can now sell them. You might not be the best at something, but with some careful time, devotion, and commitment to it, you can be good at anything. Maybe you enjoy cake decorating, then practice making cakes. Offer to do some for friends birthday parties and take photos. Create a portfolio and then when you feel ready, you can start a small home business. . Find out your gifts and fine tune them.

She is resourceful to her material possessions. this happens by prudent management

Being married for over 21 years, I have come to realize that it is not always possible for me to get to the store for everything that I need when I need it.

I have had to learn how to be creative out of sheer survival. There was a time we were invited to a little girls birthday party and there was no way I would be able to buy a present. I had to get creative and I ended up making a variety of mini cookies and treats to give as a gift for a little girls tea party. This way she was able to go to the freezer and take out small portions of chocolate peanut butter hearts and mini heart sugar cookies for an afternoon of tea with her dolls.

There were many times I didn't have all of the ingredients that I needed to make meals. I might be out of bread that day and had to serve lunch on saltine crackers. I had no tortillas for taco/nacho night and had to improvise and make haystacks over rice. We had a birthday celebration and could not buy cake materials. We learned how to make homemade cupcakes and frosting out of chocolate pudding and cool whip. It worked.

When we couldn't do big Christmas presents we looked up many homemade gift ideas one year. You do what you have to do to make it work. No one has to know your situation, you just put on a smile and serve with a willing heart. This can be a huge pressure lifted off from your husband, if you are not complaining about what you don't have. Make use by what you do have.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

Being a faithful women of God and doing exactly what the Lord has you do, nothing else matters. You won't wonder if you are doing right or wrong, you are content in your life because you trust God. When people come against you, or your husband comes against you, you don't waiver. You are strong inside and are doing exactly what God has called you to do. No matter how people or situations act around you, you can "laugh at the time to come" because you know the end result. God wins. We don't have to fight our battles, because they have already been fought. Do what God has YOU to do and nothing else matters. It is not our concern, it is Gods.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Most women I know, they like to talk. They can talk about everything. They have opinions or ways to do things and most of the time we know our way is best. Am I right? I have had a hard time with this in my own life and had to do much reading in the Bible about watching the words that I say. It is hard to think before I speak. My own emotions and insides want to just respond with a “snippy” comment, when one is directed at myself. I want to yell at my children when they do something like spill juice for the fifth time during the day. Being in control of your words is hard. I get it. I encourage you to take note of the things that you say during the day.

Do you wait until it is your turn to speak when talking with your husband? Are you quick to interrupt when he says things that you might not agree with? I myself, have to continually say a prayer to the Lord in my head and ask for wisdom in how to respond to things. I know what I want to say, but it isn't always the same as what the Lord wants me to say.

When speaking to your children, do you speak words of kindness and love? Children don't need to be burdened down with family issues. They need to see you smile as a Mom and know that they are content in their own little worlds. If you are having issues with your child and you see yourself yelling at them or speaking negative words, find out why. Most of the time, our children are not acting properly because we didn't train them. If you are getting frustrated with them because they don't come when you call them and you end up yelling. Stop and begin training them that day. Work continually on it until you see results.

Most of the time we yell because we are not in control of situations in our own lives. Stop and take a step back and see what it is that is “triggering” your outbursts.

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

Being a homemaker might not seem like it is hard work. Seems like everyone should be able to take care of children and a home. There is a reason that we have take-out food restaurants, professional organizers, and maids. All these types of services take the place of what a homemaker can be. Even if you are not skilled in these areas, you can learn. If you don't know how to cook or bake, then get a basic cookbook and start learning. Watch videos or learn from a friend. If you struggle with clutter, read books or blogs about decluttering your home. If your children have allergies to something, gather information so that you can do everything there is to know about how to fight it yourself.

Whatever kinds of struggles are going on in your home, teach yourself how to fix them. We started home businesses in our family. I had to take the time and get books on how to start a home business. I had to learn how to do the accounting aspect of that. Yes, I could have paid someone else to do it, but I have the time, so I need to make it work. I could sit around and pursue personal interests like watching TV or talking with friends, but I am choosing to do something to better my household.

Being idle can be a dangerous thing. It makes you start thinking you need more things or that you don't have it as good as someone else. Busy yourself with the tasks the Lord has for you. Stay focused on your family and your home.

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”

While raising your children and going through difficulties in your marriage, you might not always see good results. You might even get frustrated that life is not going a certain way. Can I encourage you to push onward and continue in the path that the Lord has you on. Learn to listen to Him and do what he says. If he tells you to stay in a certain place, then stay. If he tells you to do something that you can't understand why, just do it. The

Lord knows all that you need to be “successful” in life. He wants to see us do well. He wants to see us be an example to those around us. If we are doing everything that WE are supposed to do in the Lord, He gets the glory. You can direct everything that has happened to Him. People will see how God’s hand has moved in your life. Even your children and your husband, as they are older and see more of life, will be thankful for the woman that you have become. They might not say it while you are being “refined.” As your husband goes to work and talks with his coworkers and here’s how other wives act, he will be thankful for a solid, non-wavering wife. Your children will go out in the world and see other parents and how they acted, they will be thankful for the Momma that you were to them.

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

There is nothing wrong with looking nice and taking care of our appearances. These verses mean that it is more important to work on our hearts. When our hearts are knit with the Lords and that is our main focus that is worth much more in God’s eyes. The world makes us think that if we aren’t pretty or if we don’t dress a certain way than we can’t even compare. But the Lord looks passed all those outside issues and zones in on our hearts. Even people can see through others appearances and can tell what their true motives are. I remembering hearing someone say that a girl can hide a lot of stuff being all that makeup. Being known as a woman who people can truly trust and have as a friend is much more valuable in life than one who looks the prettiest. Be known as a woman of God whose heart is pure.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

As a wife and mother it seems that we might toil and work and not see the results right away. We might work hard at training and teaching a child in the way they should go, but then they stray and we wonder what we did wrong. We might do all these things that God has called us to do as a wife, but our husband still chooses to not be a faithful man. We can’t change

other people. We can only do what God has called us to do. He calls us as mothers, to be a honoring wife to our husbands and to teach and train our children up in the Lord. We are ONLY responsible for the ways that WE operate in life. It is so important for us to read our Bible, to pray, and to seek the Lord in ALL areas of our life. We need to know, that we know, that what we are doing is from God. He will bless our outcomes. That is where our whole foundation of Christianity comes from---having faith in something. If God says something, then we have to believe it. Even if we don't see the outcome right then and there. He promises in His word that an investment in the kingdom will be blessed. Our "works" will be praised in the days to come if we are doing so with a pure heart.

ESTABLISHING A MORNING ROUTINE

It seems we do a lot of routines. Routines for chores, routines for our days of the week, routine for how we run our life. Guess why?? Routines are habits that work. If I know WHAT I have to do WHEN I have to do it, it gets done. Otherwise it sits and I can see it. The mess starts to creep up and bother me. Things stay messy and overwhelm me. I wonder why my home is always a mess. I go to my friends home and “wish” my home could stay as nice as theirs did. I get depressed. I sit and eat and think about all of the negative things. No Mam, no Mam!!! You start your routines and you stick with them. The ONLY way you are going to see positive changes in your life is to DO THEM!

Starting your day off right, makes all the difference in the world. I have been that mother that just rolls out of bed, drags her feet to the table to pour some cereal and milk for my children and quietly drink down my cup of coffee to try and wake up. After a little while, it seems I am ready to go, meanwhile my children are all off doing their own things.

I noticed that when I woke up before everyone else, got a shower, got my cup of coffee and had a few moments of quiet, how much better I felt and more positive I was for my day. When I had little ones, it was about survival, it was almost impossible to get up early, being honest. I needed all the sleep that I could get. With a nursing baby, a toddler that woke up a few times a night, and a couple of preschoolers who still might wake up one time during the night, it was hard. But that was only temporary. Those days seem to last forever, but I promise they move on. I can now look back and not even know how I did what I did. For the most part now, my children almost sleep all night long. I am able to wake up fairly early each day, I don't need naps, and I can stay up later and spend time with my husband. Those things didn't happen back in the day.

My morning routine now consists of me getting up between 5 and 6 am. This time works well for me. I like quiet. It is the time I can read my Bible, listen to my sermons and work on my writing without any distractions. If I don't get up early, these things don't get done. I can't just slip away during the day, my days are full. My home is busy and loud most of the day. I

really enjoy my quiet time in the morning and it is something I anticipate so it isn't a chore to wake up. I get my shower and get dressed for the day. If you only did this a few moments before your children woke up, you will feel 100 times better I promise. It is like you are saying, "I am ready for my day!" versus staying in your pajamas and wanting to climb back into bed.

Get dressed, it makes all the difference in your mood and tone for the day. If I am going to be home for the day, I might just throw my hair in a pony tail. But If I am anticipating people or am going to be leaving, I let my hair air dry and then after I do my writing, I plug in my hot rollers and put my hair up. It takes less than 3 minutes to roll my hair up and let it sit. I can do this while I am starting my morning chore routine. If I need makeup, I will do this now too.

My coffee pot has been programmed the night before so that is ready to drink. I like to take ½ hour and read my Bible, do my devotions, and pray.

The mornings are not my only time of prayer. The Bible says in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

My days are constantly filled with prayers. They aren't "formal" prayers. They are the prayers when I look in my pantry and am so blessed by the abundance of food that we have and I thank Him. It is the text I receive from a friend, who is going through something, I can pray for peace in their lives. It might be my spouse having a wrong start to his day, me lifting up a prayer and rebuking the devil. I might start to feel sluggish, a slight headache, then it is time to start rebuking and not receiving that sickness. It might be throughout the day as we are doing school and I am finding myself frustrated with a child, I pray for wisdom to know what to do and how to teach. When I get in the van and begin our venture, it is a prayer of protection for our family. It is a prayer of wanting to be a blessing to someone else today. These are constantly on my lips. My relationship with the Lord is as it would be with my spouse or best friend. I constantly talk, share, and listen.

Then I start working on my writing. I check my emails, comments, and any other blog related items. I continue working on my posts or books and periodically look at the clock to make sure it isn't too late for my husband. If he hasn't gotten out of bed yet, I go and remind him what time it is. I keep working, even as my eyes are scanning the kitchen for his "out the door items." As he comes out of the shower, I pour his mug of coffee and set it with his items that he needs to leave with. I stand up when he comes in the room, I don't want to show that my work is more important, I give him a kiss goodbye and shut off the outside lights. I then continue working.

I stop working at my designated time, it depends upon the day and what I have going on. Right now, I am working on this book so I will write till around 8 am. Normally I stop around 7:00am. The children may still be in bed, I don't have a strict rule about waking everyone up early. They all typically are up between 8 and 9am. My older ones get up on their own earlier, but I don't mind if my little ones sleep for a bit. I've followed this rule with all ten of my children. I used to think that if they never got up at a set time each day and learned to rise early, then they would never be prepared for a job or "real" life. I had visions of them being the mother or father that stayed in bed all day while their spouse got up and took care of the children. Gone are those fears.

When my oldest ventured out on her own, I can tell you that she never missed a day of college. She is an elementary educator and can get up every day on time. My son, who I thought would NEVER learn to get up is usually the first one out the door in the morning and to work on time, if not early. My other daughter, liked to sleep in as well. I had talks all the time when she was going through her "teen sleep in phase." I explained over and over the importance of setting a schedule and getting up on time and how that will affect her work schedule and life. Sometimes it was a losing battle. I let her grow on her own and guess what? She gets up early and has her own set routine each day. She works at a Christian summer camp for girls and has to wake up early every day.

What have I learned from this? Don't fret over having to be up just because your children are homeschooled. If your husband doesn't mind, let them sleep for a bit. They will see from your example of getting up early as

they grow. They will come to appreciate early morning preparing. Live life by example.

I then get out my apron and put it on. If everyone is still asleep, I will put my headphones in and listen to my bible sermon or some praise and worship music. My favorite music group right now is "I am They." My home is busy and loud most of the day so I appreciate this bit of quiet. I can finish up my coffee, if I haven't already. I gather up the laundry for the day and throw in my load. This is done now instead of when I first wake up, because I know that no one is going to get in the shower and I won't be disrupting anyone. I then do a quick pick up of my room. I take out any dishes from the night before, pick up my husband's clothing--no he does not pick it up, make the bed, and return remotes to their proper place. Any miscellaneous toys or other articles that don't belong in here, I grab with me and put in the proper rooms.

If it isn't Tuesday, when I deep clean the bathrooms, I check each of the bathrooms and pick up any loose clothing or replace any towels. I use the wipes that are stored in here and do a quick wipe of everything. Even if I think it is very dirty and needs a thorough scrubbing, I know I will get to it on Tuesday.

I take a quick glance at my planner and see if there is anything important to do today. I then look at what day it is and a glance at my daily work so I know what I have to do. I fill the sink with hot soapy water and place the dishes from the night before. I keep my sink full for breakfast dishes later on. I empty out my coffee grinds and refill the pot right now. I set it to come on in the morning. I wipe down my counters and table top and place the benches on the table.

I look at my monthly menu plan and see what we are going to have for dinner. I scan the refrigerator for any leftovers for lunch. If I am unsuccessful, we may do peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Other times we may make some black beans and rice. Lentil rice casserole is another favorite. If we have a lot of tortillas on hand, we may make Mexican grill cheese or homemade pizzas. Sometimes if groceries are running low, we will do chicken salad or peanut butter on saltine crackers. I always try and put out some vegetables or fruit with lunch as well. Cut up celery, carrot sticks, cut up apples, and orange segments are all good choices. I have

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learned that lunch does not have to be a standard set thing. It is just a time during the day that we need to refuel and get some vitamins and nutrients into our bodies. Provide a simple protein and some vegetables.

Mondays, I start by making sure the floors are all picked up. If there is a big mess, I will wait for the children to get up and help pick it up. If it isn't too bad, I may start sweeping. Right now this is a good job for me to do. We have a lot of tile floors, I want to make sure it is done correctly. As my girls grow up, they will learn and do it too. I have other jobs set aside for them to help with. I shake my rugs outside and leave them on the porch until I am finished.

If I am really ahead of myself, I may start sweeping the stairs and work my way downstairs to sweep. As the children wake up, they have breakfast and get ready. I already have the chores that they are responsible for each day from our daily chore list. They know what to do and do it. I have one girl help me with steam mopping while the other girl vacuums the carpet. Laundry is done, I flip a load and keep going.

Then it is time for school.

Tuesdays, I start my routine out the same with with all my own personal time and after I throw my apron on, I grab my cleaning bucket with bathroom supplies. I tackle each bathroom usually before everyone gets up. They know what they have to do in the morning and don't need much guidance. Then school begins.

Wednesday, I do my same personal morning routine. After I get that apron on, I gather up any items I might need from the freezer to start thawing. I throw in dinner and will begin my baking and food prep early on. I have to stop much throughout the day for school lessons, so it is good to start early.

Thursdays, I do my same personal morning routine, but there is usually not a big need for an apron. This day I am taking care of business paperwork,

and/or doing my list of office needs. This is our last day of school as we only do book work Monday through Thursday. After today I feel like a good accomplished person.

Fridays, I do my same personal morning routine, and we normally clean up the house the night before. This morning, I might do a quick pick up if anything is needed. This is the day we are leaving to run errands, so I prepare myself and help get things moving to get out the door.

Weekends are different. I don't normally get up and work. I may sleep in a bit. I even let my children sleep in later this day. It is the only day to really "rest" in the morning.

Find what works best for you. If you find it difficult to wake up early in the morning do everything that you can do the night before to make your mornings go smoother. Set out breakfast items, get the children's' clothing out, or have your coffee programmed and brewing as you wake up. Anything that you can take care of the night before, do it. That might mean cleaning up your home and having it spotless before you wake up.

Do whatever works best for you. Back when I had little ones, that system worked for me. I could not find time in the morning to get chores done, but night time was an easier time for me. Do what you can. Just begin with taking care of yourself FIRST and work with what you got.

ESTABLISHING AN EVENING ROUTINE

In our home, Daddy is home at night time. I don't like to plan anything from the time we eat dinner, until the next morning. My husband does not enjoy watching me clean and do unnecessary work, when he is only home for a few hours at night. He understands if I needed to do something because he knows that I would have worked really hard during the day to get it done. I don't run the washer at night, to keep it quiet. The only routines that we do each evening would be to:

- Clean up dishes after dinner
- Wipe down the tables and counter tops
- Leftover food gets put away
- Sink rinsed out and towels place in the washing machine

We then try and get to our park and get some exercise for the day. We try and do this each and every day as it is important to us. It is about a 5 minute drive for us and the children take their scooters and we walk/run. We go for ½ hour to 45 minutes and then head back home. We keep the scooters in the van, as they can be folded up and stored easily.

If it is raining or colder out, we will do something inside. That might mean we do as a family:

- jumping jacks
- knee lifts
- lunges
- planks
- push ups
- leg lifts
- sit ups

We will play follow the leader and run up and down the stairs a few times. All the while doing different activities like hop on one foot, walk backwards, or run in place.

This might last anywhere from 20-30 minutes. It is good to get our hearts pumping and doing our bodies good. For myself, I started exercising after baby #8 and felt much better. I was able to have way more energy for my life. Taking that extra ½ hour a day is worth it to me. I lost a ton of weight during this process. Doing something everyday keeps us in good shape. I want my children to learn the value and importance of exercise so we do it together. If they were in school they would have gym class and sports. We don't have that so I have to be the gym teacher.

Before bedtime, if the children need a bath, I will do those tasks. I bathe them on Saturdays and Tuesdays typically during the cooler months as they don't get very dirty. If the little boys go out in the garage and get dirty, they will get one more often. If I set when I have to give them a bath, it doesn't come to the point of me wondering when the last time it was that I gave them one.

Saturdays, we cut nails and make sure to clean ears good. If the boys need a haircut, then this is the time to do it.

If we don't do baths then we do a good wash up. I have them brush their teeth, wash their hands with soap and then I wash their faces with a washcloth. If their feet are dirty, we wipe them off as well.

They put on clean underwear and pajamas. Then we sit and have our reading/devotional time.

After devotional time, they go to the bathroom and then I tuck them into bed and kiss them goodnight. I turn on nightlights and the noise machine.

I then go to my room and brush my teeth, floss, and brush my hair. I will apply some body spray and put on my pajamas. My husband and I will talk, look through the news for the day, and possibly watch a movie. Normally we just fall asleep with the movie. I can fall asleep early by 9 or sometimes stay up till 10:30. I like to go to bed early and wake up in the morning early.

20 MOM TIME

My days were long back when I had lots of little ones. I made sure to schedule some time for myself in the evenings just to have some quiet alone time. Sometimes that alone time was with a baby sitting in a bouncer seat. I would feed them and lay them down carefully while they slept. The children were all tucked into bed for the evening and I was going to do something for “me.”

I remember feeling jealous when one of my girlfriends that didn't have as many children as I did at the time, was sitting giving herself a pedicure. Her nails were all filed nicely and she had pretty polish on her toes. I was sitting nursing my baby feeling like I had zero time to do things like that for myself. I was thinking back to my days of when I used to do that. When I did things like facials, took baths, and painted my toes. It seemed long gone were those days. Well, it wasn't long gone, it was that I didn't take the time for them anymore. I put that on my schedule. Even if I couldn't do the ½ hour bath soak, I could get a 15 minute facial scrub in, that would work!

Here are some things that I have done over the years to pamper myself (even if for just a few moments):

- Use plain coarse cornmeal as a facial scrub. It is cheap enough to use as a body scrub in the shower too.
- Honey is a soothing treatment for blemished or irritated skin. Apply to clean skin and leave on while you soak in warm bath for 20 minutes.
- Oatmeal and honey combined make a moisturizing mask. Use plain uncooked oatmeal and add enough water to make a paste. Add a tablespoon of honey and apply to face.
- Beaten egg whites used as a mask will temporarily tighten the skin.
- Tea bags will cure puffy eyes in a jiffy. Dampen two tea bags with cool water. Lie down for 10 minutes.

- Coconut oil and raw sugar will soften very rough hands, feet, and elbows. This makes your hands and feet feel amazingly smooth after use.
- Soaking in the tub and then coming out and applying a nice smelling lotion to your entire body. Most of the time, I didn't have much time to apply lotion. This was a nice treat to my "dry" body.
- Cut your toenails and paint them a pretty color. Don't even bother with your fingernails, the polish will wear off as soon as you start your next day's tasks. Toenail polish will stay on for some time. Just by having your toenails painted, makes you feel a little better.
- Enjoying a cup of tea and quiet. Hmmmm....seems kind of far off doesn't it? Try it.
- Journaling , this was something I enjoy. I enjoy writing down my thoughts for the day and I enjoy it even more as I am out of that stage in my life, looking back and seeing how life really was. I also started journaling for each of my children. I took a wire bound notebook and throughout the year, I will write for every child different things they have accomplished that year. I also like to write out a questionnaire and "interview" them to see what their answers are. If they can write well, I let them fill in the answers themselves. Here is a sample of what I ask them each year:
 - write your full name
 - I am happy when I am
 - I am good at.....
 - People think that I am
 - I think I am
 - I am getting better at.....
 - What I wish for the most
 - If I could change anything in the world.....
 - A letter from _____ on being 10 years old....List your favorite:
 - color
 - month
 - song
 - name
 - singer
 - food

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- holiday
- subject
- state
- number
- book
- drink
- board game
- computer game
- dessert
- season
- outdoor activity
- ice cream
- outfit
- animal
- sport
- video or show
- snack
- meal
- hobby

The journaling for my children has been something I have enjoyed looking back on. For much of their younger years, I often times forget things that they had done. By having some sort of documentation has been nice reliving those times. When I had many little ones I wasn't able to take many photos or videos while they were young. Journaling was something that I could do when I was sitting for the many hundreds of hours that I was nursing babies. It is nice to have something more to remember their childhood from. I encourage you to start one for your child, no matter what their age. I use a regular school spiral notepad. If I start from the time they are born and write until they turn 18-19 years of age, it takes up an entire notebook.

What is the most important thing for a mom to focus on for herself:

- Eat a healthy diet—what you put into yourself, is going to come out in how you perform.
- Sleep—take naps to help catch up on the loss of sleep you experience.

- Vitamins—you might not be able to get everything you need for the day(I take prenatal ones, even not being pregnant).
- Exercise—this makes all the difference in how you feel each day. It allows you to keep up with all those little ones and that boundless energy they seem to have!

Random personal tips that I utilize in my life:

I grew up in the north and had to wear a fluffy winter coat much of my childhood. I would have my mom curl my hair before leaving for school, put on my coat, and then head to school. Due to static build up from getting in and out of the car, by the time I would get to school and take my coat off my hair would be sticking up everywhere! Not good for a little girl who didn't want her hair sticking on her face all morning! My mom placed dryer sheets in my coat pockets for me and I would wipe them on my hair. The static was instantly gone! I have used this method many times over the years. I keep a small box in my van console just for this reason. I will be walking into church and can feel my dress sticking to my legs. I grab that dryer sheet and wipe it on my legs and on my clothing. My girls are thankful for this practice as well, no fly away hairs for them!

When shaving your body, skip the shaving foam and use cheap hair conditioner. This helps condition your legs as well.

Buy a nicer razor with the soap or conditioner strip on it, and then after use, keep it dry. Don't place it in a spot that it is going to get water on. Your razor should last you for months at a time, even after the conditioning strip is gone, the blades should stay nice if not allowed to get wet and rust.

Use a bath pouf or loufah to exfoliate your skin. If I can't do a natural body scrub, due to time, I make sure to put some soap on my loufah and scrub every inch of my body. I am amazed at how much dead skin cells this removes.

I use lotion each and every day of my life. I have done this since I was a teenager. I contribute my lack of stretch marks, even through ten babies to this. By keeping your skin hydrated, it is allowed to stretch with ease. I have used Suave cocoa butter forever. I believe that they don't recommend you using it in the first trimester, now, ask your doctor first. There are

many alternatives that you can use. When birthdays and Christmas come around, I use up my Bath and Body Works creams until they are gone and then I am back to the old faithful Suave. Make sure it is a good moisturizing kind. You don't want the watery, thin kind.

Brush your teeth in the shower. Is that strange? This is something we have done forever. It saves on time because you can get it done and have a couple of moments in the warm water.

As I get older, I notice that my lack of iron can get lower if I am not careful. I have learned that if I am very particular and sure to either eat a bowl of oatmeal in the morning or a handful of cheerios than this helps. On my salads I will put a can of chick peas and beets. I buy Kale instead of other leafy greens, due to its high iron content. This has helped stabilize and keep my level up. When it was low and I was needing to boost it up, I bought a grain fed, organic calf liver at the health food store. It cost about \$8. I then came home and sliced it into small slivers, a little larger than a vitamin. I would freeze these individualized on a cookie sheet and when frozen, place in a container with a lid. Each day, I would take out two and swallow them with a drink of water. I promise that you cannot taste it at all. The thought is gross, but I did not want to buy the expensive iron pills and other alternatives were not high on my priority list. The iron content is higher when it is not cooked. Do some research and look into the benefits of this. I did it for about a month and my level had gone back up. Now, I make a conscious effort to eat iron each day. No more raw liver for me!

21 PERSONAL TIME SAVERS

Clothing and shoes

I keep a small index card with everyone's clothing and shoe sizes in my wallet. This helps for when I go to the store and find shoes on sale and look to see if anyone needs them. If I have gone through my children's clothing recently, I would write down if they have enough shoes of that size. I will note what they need for the next size as well. This helps to not buy multiple shoes, even if it is a good deal.

Jentzen size 12, needs sandals this size and next. Clothing size 6 needs shorts

Autumn size 13, no shoes, next sizes needed. Clothing size 8 needs tops

Madelyn size 11, needs boots, next size needs only sandals. Clothing size 6 needs nothing

This helps tremendously to save money and time shopping.

Phone talking savers

I remember back when I only had a couple of children and it was much easier to get on the phone and talk to a friend throughout the day. We would spend hours talking just about anything. Gone are those days. It seemed whenever I did get on the phone, it would consist of a baby crying, children squabbling or someone just needing me. I am so thankful for our technology and texting abilities. This has allowed me to stay in daily contact with friends. I still do like the personal phone calling once in a while when I can set aside some time. It doesn't happen every day, usually only once per week. I have come to truly believe what it says in 1 Timothy 5:13:

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

I believe that there is a time and place for talking on the phone. I do know, from personal experience that if you don't occupy yourselves at home, it is

much easier to fall into the trap of gossiping. If you have nothing to focus on in a conversation, it is easy to fall into the traps of agreeing with another person or saying things about someone that maybe you shouldn't say. Losing focus and allow the enemy to get into the midst of your conversations.

How can I make my time talking the most effective and avoid gossiping? I set up phone calls with friends as I do appointments. We say, "Let's talk Friday morning at 2:00." I also keep an ongoing list of things I want to discuss when talking on the phone. If I think about something throughout the week that I want to share with my friend, I write it on a piece of paper or in planner on the day I have set aside to talk. This helps me not to forget to mention it to them and gives us something to talk about.

I also have a timer or a clock to view so that I don't talk too long. You can usually tell in a conversation, when you are just trying to talk just to talk. This is the time to end the conversation. I know that if I go over my ½ hour or hour, my household is going to start to turn upside down. I kindly let my recipient know that I have to get back to my children and that it was good talking to them.

If you have a friend who likes to talk, definitely set the time and let them talk. Call before lunch time or before dinner. If you have to cut them off, let them kindly know that you have to go to prepare food for your family.

If you can, take this time to do a task that doesn't require much thought:

- Clean out your purse and organize your wallet
- File your nails or paint them
- Straighten your jewelry box or untangle necklaces
- Fold towels
- Put away laundry

I have learned to be selective in my talking time. If a friend wants to chat each day, I recommend we go to the park and play. This is good for the children and this allows me time to talk. But since we have moved to another state, I don't get to see my old friends, so I do designate time to talk on the phone. It isn't every day, as we are all busy with our families.

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When I do make a phone call I have to prepare:

- I make sure that ALL of my children know I am going to be on the phone and that they have something to do.
- I don't call when I know that their husband is going to be home from work nor do I talk when my husband is home from work.
- If I can, I talk during nap time or early in the morning before the children are up.
- I get my list so that I can reference it throughout the conversation.
- I make a cup of tea or fill my water bottle----this is a good time to get a full bottle in.
- I walk to a quiet room so that there isn't any background noise for the person whom I am speaking with.
- I keep my distraction to a minimum, as to give all my attention to the person whom I am spending time with.
- I make my voice pleasant. As if the person can see that I am smiling and intent to listen to them.
- I make my comments positive. I don't dwell on negative things.
- If I need to share something I am going through, I do so without complaining. This is a time of encouragement not dwelling on the negatives.
- If the person I am speaking to is negative, I turn it around into a positive.
- If they want to discuss gossip, I say, "I don't think we should talk about that." and leave it alone.

Our time as mothers is precious, choose wisely in engaging in idle conversation. If you must talk on the phone, make it count and be worth it. When you get off the phone ask yourself? Was my time encouraging to the recipient and to myself? If it was not, I encourage you to do better the next time or limit the amount of time that you do talk.

Some phone tips:

Set your phone to vibrate instead of ring. Don't let it interrupt your day unless it is a family member.

Cut solicitors short by saying, "Thank you for calling, but I am not interested."

If you have to call utility or bill companies call at off peak times. Monday and Tuesdays between 10-2 are busiest. If they are open 24 hours, call later in the evening, and your wait time will be less.

What if you get stuck on an automated service? Press "0" multiple times to get to a customer service person fastest. If you don't say anything at all, some automated phone services are set up for old rotary phones and will take you to a customer service agent right away.

PREGNANCY

Being pregnant is a wonderful time in a couples life. The excitement of the first thought of “Could I be pregnant?” and then the confirmation from a test, can be a whirlwind of emotions. All this excitement and bliss, and then the reality sets in. You get sick. You start to feel tired. Your normal energy levels are way down and all you want to do is stay in bed all day long. This might be fine to do if this is your first baby, but when you have a home full of other little ones and you are feeling this way, it can be an overwhelming time.

When this time in my life started, and it did with all ten babies, I cut back tremendously on my expectations of what I would accomplish in my home.

Each morning, I would get up and take a shower. Something about physically getting ready in the morning, makes for a huge step towards attempting to feel better. If I wasn't feeling comfortable in regular clothing, I might put on pajama type clothing. One of my favorite outfits to wear while in the beginning phases were stretchy cotton A-line type dresses. They offer these for non-pregnant women. It was an easy transition from my regular clothing feeling a little too snug into something that my belly was able to be free in. Pull your hair back in a pony tail and you are off.

I purchased cleaning wipes for this time in my life and would use these as soon as I was done in the bathroom. I would give the sink a wipe, wipe off the toilet, and then quickly wipe the floor. I straightened the bathroom as I left. Yes, one thing accomplished!

When you are pregnant, most women will start to “rethink” their way of eating. Now you are responsible for the health and well being of your growing baby. This is time to not think that you just need to eat double of everything and whatever your body is craving, but more intentional eating. In that first trimester, up until about 16 weeks, you might not be feeling well. This is a crucial time of baby developing and your body is going through a bunch of hormone changes, it needs good nutrition. If you are going to eat a nutrient deficient diet, your body is going to put out that sort of energy. If you want to have the most energy, and to feel the best, you

need to be sure to include foods that are going to help your body during this time.

Start your morning out with eggs for breakfast. Eggs provide nutrition and protein for the baby and yourself. This should be included in your diet while carrying the baby and nursing. I enjoyed breakfast with a piece of toast and eggs each morning. If you can't stomach eggs just yet, eat some oatmeal. This might not even sound like anything you want to eat in the morning but it will "stick" to your insides better than conventional breakfast foods will. If you can eat some oranges, peel and eat one with your children now for some extra Vitamin C.

After breakfast, clean up the mess. Get your sink filled and wash those dishes. Let them sit on the rack and air dry for this meal. Fill your water bottle up and stick in something for flavoring throughout the day. During this time, I would place a peppermint herbal tea bag to help flavor my water. If I was out I would do a few squeezes of lemon into my cup. This helped with the taste of water, I did not care for at this time. I filled the children's water cups and placed them where they could easily reach them on their own. I put my baby gates up to corral everyone to an area that I could safely watch them and we started our day.

I also kept the little ones toothbrushes in my kitchen during this time. It was much easier for me to brush their teeth while I was already in the kitchen than to have to take them all to the bathroom and do it. I did this for many years until they were all old enough to do their own.

I threw in a load of laundry real quick, to make sure there would be towels for showers and that my husband would have clean clothing. Sometimes dry towels would sit in the basket in my bedroom. My husband just knew to grab a towel before he headed to the shower in the morning. I tried to put away his laundry, but there were times it sat on the chair ready for him to wear. He didn't complain, he knew this was only for a season in our lives. I didn't worry about completing any more "scheduled" work for the day. I wiped the bathrooms, did dishes, and made sure there were clean clothes. Anything beyond that would be great, but when I was feeling sick, most of the time nothing else happened. It was okay. I might wait until nighttime, when I was feeling better and then sweep and vacuum my floors. We played in just one area, which made the house stay clean.

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My choice of area was the living room. I put up gates so that no little ones could go in the bedrooms or get to the kitchen and make messes. There was plenty to do right in the living room area. I would sit, or lay down on the couch and sometimes that was my days. I would let the DVD of Baby Faith play over and over again to occupy little ones. I might read some books, I might snooze in and out of sleep, but I took the rest that my body needed. Some days, we skipped school entirely, but knew we would catch up again soon. I did not attempt preschool or kindergarten formally during this time, there would be plenty of time after baby, now was the time to just get through.

Lunch time would come around and we would keep it simple. This was a good time to use napkins or paper plates. I would put away dishes from the morning and clean up lunch as well. Dinner would get started, if I didn't already. I would keep meals at an easy pace now. Most foods smells were so heightened for myself, that it was difficult to prepare foods. I remember myself eating canned soups, because the thought of the food I prepared, did not even sound appealing. I had not eaten canned soups since I was a child, but I went out and searched for lower sodium, simple vegetable soups and I ate that. This was good on my stomach. This part only lasted a couple of weeks.

Protein helps with nausea, eat in small snacks throughout the day to help feel better. My snacks throughout the day were protein filled: hardboiled eggs, almonds, yogurt, hummus, canned Garbanzo beans, and granola bars. I would keep lots of fresh fruit, all prepared and cut up if needed. Bananas were good on my stomach and provided good nutrition. I would prepare salads, one time and eat them throughout the week. If I had to make one each day, I probably would not. Making individual containers helped me to "want" to eat them as well. Layer them in plastic deli containers or pint sized jars.. Put your moisture ingredients like cheese and beans on the bottom, then your vegetables and greens on top. Keep them stacked in your refrigerator for easy grabbing. When ready to eat, chop up some hardboiled eggs and nuts and place them on top. An easy lunch.

I made a lot of meals that could easily be stretched for a couple of days. My husband didn't mind and I was thankful. Think Crockpot, simple meals.

We used disposable products during this time to help my workload. Paper plates and disposable diapers were a staple. This helped my life out a lot. I would eventually go back to the cloth diapers, but for the days when I was feeling poorly, I used them.

Drink lots of water. You should be doing this anyways, but it is crucial during pregnancy to keep hydrated. Your body is doing a lot of extra things internally, having it be hydrated is important. This helps with nausea as well. Sometimes we just feel sick and it is tempting to not drink anything but do the opposite and you might notice a change. Symptoms of dehydration can be similar to those of morning sickness.

Use this time to research good nutrition for yourself and your baby. There are many things we should be doing anyways, but pregnancy gives us an excuse to actual do it. Eat fresh, as close to nature foods that you can. Stay away or limit your processed food intake. Take a prenatal vitamin each day. I took mine at night time before I went to sleep. This was the only way that I could stomach them. You can also get chewable gummy vitamins that will be less harsh on your stomach. Take these before planning to try and conceive and continue through nursing and beyond. I took a prenatal vitamin even when I wasn't pregnant or nursing, to have my body be prepared for the next time.

Each day, try and get outside for a few moments. I know it may seem impossible at times. If you have to wait until your husband gets home from work, then do so. Getting in the fresh air and sunshine will make a difference in how you feel. I normally felt sick all day long, but I did get little breaks throughout my day when I was doing okay. Utilize those moments and do something that needs to be done.

When you start to feel better, keep your diet good. Don't over indulge in processed or sugar filled foods. How you eat is going to determine how much energy you have and how you feel. Get adequate sleep. You might be feeling better, but your body still needs rest. Continue drinking lots of water. As your days progress, you will begin to be able to do more and life will change. Now you can catch up on that school that you didn't do. You can start to enjoy making meals for your family. Your home can get organized once again and you might just take down those baby gates. I would recommend with curious toddlers, keeping them up in areas that can

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become unorganized quickly! Baby gates were staples in our home when we had little ones.

Keep your expectations low for things during this season. Do the things that are important for you and your home. Everything else can wait until you are feeling better.

PREPARING FOR BABY

Having a baby is a wonderful thing, but it can also cause unrest in new moms. We feel like we need to get so many things done and are not going to feel complete unless we do them. I have given birth to babies ten different times over my life. I have had to plan, prepare, and get myself organized for them. I never once, had anyone come and help me after the baby. I had to do it alone. My husband was busy providing for the family and most of my children were too little to do any real work. As more and more babies came, my older ones helped more, but I was careful to not put off all of my work on to them. I have seen many families where it seems that the children, especially teenagers become the mom. I never wanted to do that. I believe in them helping to a degree, but ultimately it is my job to get things done. It was time for me to prepare.

Here are some things that I did every time I had a baby:

For those first few months of pregnancy when I was feeling sick and not up to my normal standards, I kept my expectations of the home low. I didn't do a lot of deep cleaning, I kept my every day cleaning to a minimum. I spent a lot of time laying on the couch and reading to my children. I finally got to sit and read books to my little ones! I made sure to drink a lot of water and keep small amounts of food inside me all day to help me feel better. I drank a lot of raspberry leaf tea to prepare my womb for baby.

Declutter

As the months went by and I was able to do more because I was feeling better, I then started getting my home in order for the baby. I did a complete home decluttering and cleaning. I got rid of things that were constantly making a mess in my home. I cleaned the walls and every nook and cranny that I could do. This made me be able to sit back and feel accomplished at my doing. I broke it up into weeks and got a room done each week.

Chore schedules

I then made sure to go over my chore schedules. Usually each fall and spring is when I switch over who does what chores. This allows everyone to be able to do a new chore for the next six months or so. During those six months they learn how to effectively do their cleaning task. The first time I show them what is expected and how to do it. Then I may supply a printed chart of how to do it, and then they do it on their own.

If their task is sweeping, I explain that they have to remove rugs and any other items that are on the floor before they start sweeping. I show them how to get into the corners to get the dirt off. I show them how to work in a pattern while sweeping so that they don't miss a spot. Yes, at first they might not get all of the dirt and that is okay. We continue with it and eventually they get good at it. Some jobs you might not want to "take the time" to teach, and you may need to switch them around. For example, I started a new child on sweeping the floors and they weren't doing an effective job of it. They just weren't ready for that task. I had babies who were crawling on the floor at this time and I needed the floors to be clean. This was a job that I knew I needed an older one to do because it had to be done correctly. That other child did get the opportunity to learn how to sweep, but it was later on as they got older.

When I delegate who does what chores, I usually get some input from the older children and ask them which chores they would like to help with next. I don't always give them what they ask for but it helps to see what they would like to do.

One season in our life we gave children zones to be responsible for. They were responsible for all of the cleaning that went into that room. Some had two because one might not be that much upkeep. If a child had the bathrooms and hallways then each day that was their focus for cleaning. They would come look at my daily chore chart for the bathroom and see what needed to be done daily for that room. Usually it was just a quick wipe of the sink, toilet, and floor. All the floors picked up and mirrors checked for splatters. Then they would make sure that the hallways were picked up and swept daily. In the afternoon when we took a break for a quick clean up of the home before Dad would get home, they would check their zones. If they had to wipe something they did, if the floor needed a

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quick sweep they did that as well. Then on days when we had deep cleaning they would do all of the work that needed to be done in that room. I had sheets printed off of the expectations of what I wanted on the deep cleaning day. The bathroom chart would have:

- scrub toilets inside and all around the outside
- clean sink bowl and faucets
- wipe all walls, clean out drawers and wipe
- clean out hair brushes
- scrub tub
- fill supplies needed in here
- fill toilet paper container
- empty trash
- wipe floors

This allowed them the responsibility for taking on a bigger task and seeing it completed. This helps in all different types of skill levels and being able to manage multiple jobs themselves.

You have to decide which system will work for your family. The zones were good when I had more older children and they needed more work to do. I was busy with little ones so this helped.. Now we have more elementary aged children and I have a lot more time on my hands to complete more of the chores. Work at getting your systems and routines running smoothly without chaos in the mix. This will make things easier when baby is here.

Get children independent as much as possible

If you have older children get them to the point of being able to do their chores independently as well as doing most of their schooling by themselves. When I have a baby coming, I don't plan on doing much schooling with the little ones. I keep it to the basics even if that means taking off a few months of "formal schooling." Keep it simple. Don't take on a task of teaching a first grader to read when you know baby is coming. If you have to help older ones, schedule it during a time when you know you are going to have a few moments of quiet. Nap time is a good time to go over math with a high-schooler. We did a lot of read aloud book time when I was busy nursing a baby. My children enjoyed this time and we still

had “school” it was just a different kind. It allowed me to sit and rest and still interact with my children but it wasn’t a frazzled scheduled time.

Organize your household binder

Go through and update your binder. If you need to print off extra copies do so now so that when baby is here it won’t be something you have to do. If you need to make a couple of menus beforehand, do this and save them for the upcoming months. If you have to make lists of expectations when cleaning, type them up and print them off. Show your older children where you keep everything so that they can find them easily. See chapter 29 of how to create one.

Character issues

If you are dealing with certain character issues in your home, before baby arrives is a good time to work on them. If you have a toddler or preschooler who isn’t coming when you call their name, work on that. Train them to come the first time you call them. Make it a fun learning time. Explain to them what you are going to do and what you expect them to do. Tell them you want them to be a “big boy listener” and when Mommy calls their name, they come the first time. Practice it throughout the day at random times. Make the first few time easy and reward them with a jelly bean or a chocolate chip. Then attempt it when they are engrossed in playing with a toy. Call them and if they don’t come the first time you say their name, go over to them and gently remind them that you called their name and they are to come find Mom that first time. Take them by the hand and lead them to where you were at. If you have an older child that can help you remind them, this helps. Do this over and over and reward until you think it is “set” in them. This is a HUGE helper when baby arrives and you can’t always get up and check on the toddler.

If you are going to have a new baby and a toddler at the same time, I would recommend you teach some blanket time. We worked and taught blanket time with our toddlers. I would place a small blanket on the floor and placed the year old on it. I would give them a couple of quiet toys and would teach them to sit on their blanket. They weren’t allowed to scream at this time or crawl off of the blanket. I would start out in small increments. Five minutes, then seven, then ten. We worked our way up to ½ hour. I

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sat on the floor with them and each time they would attempt to leave, I would say, “No, no, no...we are going to sit here.” Sometimes they cried, but if we were diligent and worked at it each day they eventually learned.

I used to have bench time with my younger set as well. I placed a bench out in the open and all the children would sit on it. I then would either read a book to them or we would listen to something on CD. They weren't allowed to slump down, touch each, or fidget. This we started at in small time slots and worked our way up. This was an excellent trainer for church sitting. All of my children could successfully sit during a 1-2 hour service without much commotion. I would never attempt this at church, because it would end up with a screaming child and Momma giving the “looks” to the children. If you work at it, during the week, you can eventually work up to sitting at church for an entire service without interruptions.

This was a necessity in training them to be able to have some self control and some quiet time. The blanket time was great for if we were at a meeting or were visiting with people. I was able to set the baby on the blanket and they would sit there for ½ hour without me having to chase after them. No longer were prayer meetings, church sermons, or bible studies something I avoided due to my fear of children not being quiet. My children were a joy to take places that I would normally wince at taking them.

Freeze meals

Before baby arrived, I would plan out and freeze multiple foods. I sat down and thought about what I could freeze for us to eat. We did:

- lasagna
- meatballs for spaghetti or Swedish meatballs
- garlic beef enchiladas
- pineapple salsa chicken
- tater tot casserole
- chicken pot pie
- meatloaf
- burrito casserole
- individual bean burritos

- individual breakfast burritos
- breakfast pancake muffins
- pumpkin chocolate chip muffins
- monster cookies
- French toast sticks
- energy bites and bars

I also planned out simple dinners for us to prepare. Things that wouldn't take much prep and I could throw all together in the Crockpot if needed. These would include:

- sausage, red beans, and rice
- spaghetti
- fettuccine and sausage
- cheeseburger casserole
- haystacks
- lentil rice casserole
- Haitian black beans and rice
- sloppy joes
- beef stroganoff

This was great because I did not have the time to prepare food every day. If I had simple dinners planned, it was easy to have a child help me with dinner prep. Plan for some easy meals for when you are away having baby and your husband is home with the children. Usually Dad will get pizza as a treat on his way home from the hospital for the children.

Stock up on groceries and household supplies

Before baby arrived, I would stock my pantry as much as I could. I did not want to run out of things and I probably wouldn't feel like going shopping when I had a new baby anyways. Being stocked up on all that I needed, relieves me from having to go out because I ran out of toothpaste or toilet paper. Make sure to look over your inventory carefully. Pay attention to medicines that you normally keep stocked up as well. In case of a sickness with another child while trying to take care of a baby. When baby is due to arrive, make a shopping trip with your husband and fill your refrigerator full.

Change out seasonal clothing

Depending upon what time of year it is, switch out your next season's clothing. Even if it will be a month or two earlier. Doing this will prevent you from not having the proper clothing for your other children. This is a big task and not something you want to tackle while having a newborn.

Getting ready for baby

In your last month, get out and wash all your baby items. Pack your hospital bag, and get out some nursing clothing. Set up baby's area and get ready for your new bundle of joy.

Life after baby

After baby arrives, life will change dramatically. At first it will seem easy, you may have more energy from not being pregnant and baby will do an awful lot of sleeping over the next few days. You may be tempted to stay up later and do things, but know this is just the time the Lord gives you to rest. Typically after a few days of baby sleeping a lot, he will then be awake more. The demands on you will get tiring. Your toddler will demand more, your sleep will become less and less. I recommend you sleep as much as you can. Even if you "think" you should stay up later and watch that movie, skip it and get your rest. It is much better for me as a Momma who is not tired than one trying to deal with children and having no sleep. I scheduled a nap time for myself every afternoon. I would sleep for an hour each day. Even if I didn't "think" I needed it, I was glad I did for those first few months. After that your body will adjust and you won't require as much sleep.

The reality of having a home full of children is that you are going to be exhausted. When you are exhausted, your attitude is likely to be negative. Motherhood is hard work. Doing all that needs to be done, is tough. Know that this season of life is only temporary. Try and keep a smile on your face, even when you aren't feeling it. Bend down and look your little ones in the eyes and pay attention to them. Listen to them talk about "nothing." Smile at their silly words, give them kisses and hugs often. Get at their level. If you are feeling that creeping attitude come upon you and you ready to snap, take a breath and don't. If your husband says something

that maybe he didn't intentionally mean to say meanly, don't take it to heart. Learn not to take offense. You are fragile, hormones are running, and you are likely to take things out of content. If something is truly bothering you talk to your husband at a later time when tensions are not running high.

Your body is already running low due to babies demands, you need to keep it fueled properly just like a car. Watch what you eat on a daily basis. If you are putting low nutrient density food into your body, that is how your body will run. Eat small meals throughout the day. Drink lots of water and herbal teas. Mothers Milk tea was a staple after each of my babies. It was great at maintaining my milk supply and nursing. I would fill up my water cup and place the tea bag inside it and sip all day long. Snack on vegetables, almonds, granola, and dried fruit.

Step outside, if only for five minutes per day. I know this might sound silly, but I know as a Mom you get busy. Sometimes we are so busy, that we don't even get to step out and enjoy the fresh air. Literally take a step outside, breathe in the air and enjoy the solitude and quiet of outside. A little bit of sunshine on your face will bring life back into you. If it is nice out, take your children outside if it is not a stressful thing. I had three babies under three and going outside was not something enjoyable to do. Only do if it is easy to get out. Place baby in a wrap and walk outside for a few moments. This works if baby is being fussy. Sometimes just a change of scenery is a good thing for fussy little ones.

Simplify

Now that baby is here, you have already been planning on getting everything in order and hopefully it is working. In the event that it is not, simplify it. If it is stressful trying to get all of the chores done, then don't do them. Keep your cleaning at a minimum. Do the things that are a necessity. If it is important for your husband to have clean work clothes, than make sure that you get the work clothes washed. Make sure there is always towels for after showers. If you can only get the dishes washed and the counters cleaned off then great. It will be okay if fuzz sits on your carpet for a couple of weeks. Don't be hard on yourself. Do what YOU can do for this moment. Life will get easier and you will be able to catch up on things.

HOW DID I LOSE THE WEIGHT AFTER BABIES AND STAY IN SHAPE?

Having ten babies over the course of twenty years, I have seen my body change shape multiple times. My first four babies, my body didn't need much work afterwards. I was young, my body bounced back for the most part. It was easier to be active and to stay in shape. I was able to walk every day and food wasn't really an issue. I added a few extra pounds with each one but not enough to be bothersome.

Then I had six more babies. These babies came about every year and a half to two years. Those in between years, I was busy nursing someone always. My body didn't have much of a break from being pregnant or nursing and I was noticing it with my extra weight. I also noticed it with being tired. I was exhausted. I was taking care of all of these little ones and barely having enough energy to keep up with everyone. Plus I was carrying an extra 60 pounds of weight that was unnecessary. I finally decided to do something about it.

After my eighth baby was born and a few months old, I decided to exercise. I don't like exercise, I don't like sweating, it's just not something I enjoy. But I will do it. I put all my little ones down for bed. It was 7:30-8:00pm. I would put a video on in the little ones bedroom and told the older children, that if anyone cried to let me know. I placed the nursing baby in the swing in front of the window so I could check her while walking. I started walking around my yard. We had a hilly yard so it was up and down. I did that for a half hour each night. I walked hard, I walked so that I sweat. If I wasn't sweating, then I would force myself to run some of the time. I sprinted the straight ways and walked the curves. The faster I sweated, then I knew I could be done. I checked the baby each time I passed by the front of the house. When my half hour was up, I came in and if no one was crying or needing me I started doing floor exercises. I would do leg lifts, crunchers, pushups, anything that I could remember from back in my exercise days of youth. Sometimes the baby was needing me, so I opted to get my shower quickly so that I could nurse her. I didn't always get to do floor exercises, but I did get to walk. I didn't have to worry about exercise keeping me awake, I was exhausted from children and easily went to bed.

With this round of weight loss, I didn't change my food habits as much, but I did cut back on portion sizes. I still had whatever I fed the family, pastas, gravies, etc. I also increased my water intake. I made sure to drink a lot of water each day. I was pretty good on that because I was nursing, but this time I made sure to drink a full water at set times. So that I got it in all day. I would drink one water bottle before lunch, after lunch, in the afternoon, and after dinner.

Then I got pregnant again. I still exercised for a bit, until morning sickness came and I couldn't do it. I waited until I felt better. My exercise routine didn't continue every day after that it was sporadic. We might have made it to the park a few times per week but it wasn't a daily thing. I wasn't counting pounds now because I was pregnant. My husband knew having all these little ones was a lot of work so he made sure to get me out and get me walking at the park even if it was at a slower pace. Just to save my sanity. He is a good man.

After baby #9, I worked hard when I was ready. I did the same thing, strapped the baby in the swing and walked. This time it was getting colder and rainier a lot. My husband bought me an elliptical machine to use indoors. This was very convenient. I could exercise no matter what the weather was like outside. I had it in our basement and would let the children play while I was down there. It was a cold basement, as we lived in the north, so I would bundle up the toddler in a fleece snowsuit and bring her down to sit in the pack and play while I exercised. We had a baby pool that we filled with deer feed corn to let the toddlers play and they loved it. Some would ride scooters. It was loud but it was okay. Sometimes I would exercise and someone would be crying, upset that I wasn't holding them, or just upset with life. It was still okay. All their basic needs were taken care of and I was right there within view. I put my headphones back in and did my elliptical for 30 minutes.

I changed the way I ate this time around. I started eating whole foods. Lots of salads, cabbage vegetable soups, and started eating oatmeal for breakfast. This time the weight came off much easier. It took about half the time as did last because now I was exercising and eating better. I was feeling great. I had way more energy than I ever dreamed of. I could easily stay up all day long and not need naps.

Then I was pregnant again with our #10. Same story, got morning sickness but still continued to eat healthy. I continued to exercise as much as I could. We invested in a quadruple stroller at this point and it was great to take to the walking path. We did this many nights after my husband got home from work. I still gained exactly as much as I did with my other babies, even with eating better food choices and exercising. When he was born, it was the best birth I had ever had. It was easy, I bounced back afterwards much quicker. I attribute that to my body being stronger beforehand. The weight this time came off very easily. I still had to work at it, but it was not as hard. Exercise and eating better food choices were just part of life.

I weighed less than what I did before I started having babies. I loved my body, well the size of my body. Things get old and that is normal, but I loved that clothing fit better, that I had more energy, and I didn't have these extra rolls all the time. It makes a difference in your moral.

Did I keep it off? My youngest is now four years old. We have moved to another state and staying active is easy because we were always exploring and hiking up mountains. This past year, we finally got "comfortable." We purchased our home and didn't do as much hiking as we did when we first got here because now we have things to do, people to meet, a home to enjoy, etc. I have noticed that when I get busy and "forget" about staying active, I notice my weight creep up on me. We were busy with holidays, people visiting, etc and I did put on a few extra pounds. It has made me aware that I don't want to get "comfy" I want to stay active and trim like I was.

It is a daily habit that I make to get exercise. We live up on a mountain now and just walking up the driveway a couple of times is plenty of exercise. I make sure to get the children out and we do it together. If it is nice out, we drive to our park and ride scooters and walk/run. It is only five minutes away and very convenient. We come inside and do some stretching, planks, leg lifts, push-ups, and arm workouts with weights. Simple exercises that we can all do. If my children were at school, they would have gym class and have to do the same sort of things. Being at home all day, it is easier to forget about exercise, but it is important to do it.

I make sure that our families food choices are good. We still have treats, but I make sure to monitor how many they get. If I know that if I have overindulged, then I will choose to not eat treats and will choose salads and soups until I get back to where I was. Having a balance is important. I want to stay active because it allows me to get done all that I want in a day. My days are 16 to 17 hours long each day and I am able to do it without feeling exhausted. It is because I am exercising. That 30-45 minutes of workout time allows me the energy to keep going all day long. It is worth the time to do it.

“WHAT’S IN MY PURSE?”

I am not frivolous or care about designer anything in my life. I am a thrift store, finding deals kind of woman. One of the things that I noticed I did every season, was purchase a new purse. Each time I would get a new one, I would find one that didn’t have the flaws of the last one. I found a designer purse at a thrift store that I really liked one time and kept going back to it after experiencing the many flaws of my other purses. The problem was, it was a knock-off and was starting to rip apart on the insides. I used it for many, many years. My husband finally said, “Honey, we are buying you a new purse!” This past year for Christmas, that was my gift—a new designer purse.

How did I justify spending a large amount of money on a purse? My theory(I say theory because I don’t know the outcome yet, but I am assuming that I will never have to purchase a purse again!) is that if I ration out what I had been spending on purses every year....around \$30, it will save because I won’t buy another one. I mean not anytime soon because I will have no need to “improve” this one, because it has everything I have been looking for and it will last because it is made with quality materials.

I started looking and researching which purse I wanted to get. These were things I was looking for:

- Simple and plain looking
- One design, no distraction
- All one color---brown is my only choice
- No zippers or snaps
- Able to open up and with one glance see my keys---I grew tired of digging for them
- Pockets on the inside to hold smaller items that get lost
- Large enough to hold items when I need it, but not too big that it is bulky on a day to day use
- A zippered compartment for items I want to secure and remain hidden

After many trips to the store and reading reviews online, I finally found the purse I wanted. I bought the Michael Kors Jet Set purse. This purse is medium to large sized. It is large enough for me to put four children's tablets in, but small enough for me to take grocery shopping. I didn't want to pay the retail price of \$300, so we looked around. We have a Michael Kors Outlet store near us and many discount stores like Dillards and Marshalls. Certain times of year, they have designer purses come in and they offer them at a fraction of the cost. They are not knock-offs. We did our research to learn how to spot the difference. The reason being, I did not want my purse falling apart as did my previous "knock-off." I wanted one that the leather was going to hold up to the many years of being used. We didn't spend the full retail value, but got it at half the price.

I like my purse. It works exactly as I need it to. I didn't just go in and pick one out. I saw it, immediately knew it was the one, but I waited. I went home and watched people on YouTube review theirs. I thought about how I would use it, if there was anything I wouldn't like about it and then decided. I originally thought I wanted the zippered top, then I thought, what if the zipper gets stuck or breaks, thus I chose the open designed one. I am very happy with my well-thought out purchase.

This is how I organize my purse:

I keep my keys clipped on the key strap. It is a habit I am learning to do every time I place my keys in my purse. This avoids searching. On my keychain, I removed the store scanner cards that I rarely used. I keep a digital bar code on my phone for that. I keep our two house keys. I painted them different colors as to be able to tell the difference for each the door they open. I keep my vehicle key and that is all. Any extra keys for our older children's car and my husband's vehicle are left at home in the office. No need for me to carry them around on a day to day basis.

I keep a small first aid kit in my purse. It contains motion sickness pills, pain relief, band aids and first aid cream. I have allergy pills and hydrocortisone cream as well. This way it is always with me and I have no need to go back to my van if I need it.

In the pockets of my purse I keep:

- extra personal business cards
- pepper spray---protection against people and dogs
- hand sanitizer
- chapstick—pineapple-coconut
- Bath and Body works hand lotion
- small packet of Kleenex
- small tube of pain relief
- a pen
- a maxi pad

In the bottom I keep a packet of mints and my two wallets.

I don't keep any makeup in here. I used to keep it in my purse, but I realize that if I am going to wear makeup, I put it on before I leave the home. I don't need to "touch up" anything while I am out. If my husband and I are going out on a date, I might take my lipstick with me to put on after eating. But this mostly stays in my bathroom, where I apply it.

I have a wallet that is a zippered type pouch style. In this goes change and any small amounts of dollar bills.

In my regular wallet, I keep:

- bank debit cards
- store membership card
- photo Id
- insurance cards
- checks
- any large amount of bills for grocery shopping

I also keep any restaurant coupons in here so that I remember to use them while we are out.

If it is winter time and we have a lot of static cling in our clothing, I keep a dryer towel in here. I always kept one in my winter jacket while growing up

to help this. Wipe down your hair and dress with it and it will take away your static cling.

I used to keep a small container of wipes in here, but have run out. I keep a package in the van for any type of hand wiping mess we may encounter.

Note, that I have only recently in the last few years started carrying pepper spray. I never did out of fear of one of my little ones going into my purse and accidentally turning it on. My children are all older now and they all know the risks and importance of not touching that spray. I don't allow my children to go through my purse, that is just the rules. We don't go through other people's personal things. Pepper spray is convenient for me when we do go out. It is nice for walking at the park and an unexpected dog comes up, I have a way to defend my children. If I am every alone, which is rare, I have a defense that I carry directly in my hands until I get back in my vehicle and lock the doors.

As soon as I get home from running errands or doing shopping, I clean out my purse. I take and discard any receipts I don't need. If I have to file some, I put them on my desk or directly in the filing cabinet. If I have thrown change in the bottom of my purse I put it in the zippered pouch. If there are toys that have accumulated those get given back to the recipient.

I think when you spend more money for something, you want to take better care of. I don't think about putting candy wrappers or things that could dirty up my purse, because I want it to last. Even when I put my pen back, I double check it to make sure it is closed. I don't want ink stains on it. If I notice any markings on it, I wipe them off. Again, I want this to last. It is an investment. Even when I put it in my van, I double check the floor and either set it in a basket that I keep for this purpose in the van or make sure it is on something clean. I think you should do this with everything in life, but I know I didn't with those things that I knew I could replace at my next thrift store trip.

“WHAT’S IN MY DIAPER BAG?”

When I had little ones, I always took a diaper bag out with me when we would go anywhere. You never knew when someone was going to have a “blow out” diaper or just have a potty accident. I don’t have to carry a diaper bag anymore, but I do remember how very important it was to have things stocked when I did leave.

As with different seasons of life, diaper bag needs change with the different season of life in children. What you need for an infant is much different than what you need for a toddler.

When we had a baby, we kept the following in a diaper bag:

- plenty of diapers
- container of wipes
- a couple of outfits---sleeper type ones were our #1 choice
- a couple of onesies to go on first over top of diapers
- burp cloths---I had homemade flannel ones
- extra pacifiers
- nursing pads---I had homemade flannel ones
- an extra blanket for swaddling or changing baby on
- my baby sling—I made a homemade version similar to a New Native Baby Sling
- a small baby laundry bag to hold wet clothing
- plastic grocery bag for dirty diapers

I always took my water bottle with me when I would go anywhere to keep hydrated. These type of requirements were taken just to go out for a couple of hours away from the home. It would be enough if baby had an accident—which seemed to happen with each one. I have nursed all my babies until over a year old, so I didn’t have to worry about taking a bottle. As they were over 6 months and I started doing a small ½ juice-- ½ water bottle, I would take that for trips to the store or anywhere that I wanted to get a few moments of shopping in.

I also would take an extra nursing top for myself. I have many times experienced the “let down” part of nursing. The time when my body would hear another baby crying and would start to produce milk. I would use pressure to press my breast with my arms to help stop it, but sometimes it would be too late. Then I needed a change. I always carried a light flannel blanket with the baby and would use that if that happened while in the store.

As they got older, I needed the same sort of items but added things like:

- sippy cups
- small quiet toys
- teething rings
- baby snacks like Puffs or Baby Mum Mums
- pacifier and holder
- a blanket for “blanket time”

Then as we entered potty training phase we had to prepare differently. Let me share that when we are working on potty training, we try and choose a week that we are not going to be out away from the home. After the child is comfortable using the potty, we have to carefully plan out how long we will be out. This can get tricky, as a newly potty trained child doesn’t always want to resort to wearing a pull-up after they have experienced underwear.

We have always kept a potty chair in our van for this purpose. Before we would get out of the van, I would have the child use the potty and that would allow us ample time in the store. That potty chair has saved us many of times when we were out and someone had to use the bathroom and I couldn’t even think about stopping and running in all my children to use a restroom somewhere. It even has helped me many times!

For these children, we make sure to bring along an extra outfit and shoes. I know shoes doesn’t usually sound like something you need, but with girls, it seems that if they do have an accident, it would go down into them. Make sure you have plenty of wipes to wipe them up. When they do get home, give them a bath as soon as you can, to remove urine from their bodies.

As my children are all over 3 years of age, I don’t necessarily have to take a diaper bag with me everywhere we go. I now just take things regularly. We

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always have extra clothing stocked in the van for boys or girls. We take drinks and snacks whenever we leave the home. The children just naturally take things to keep themselves occupied. The needs are less as they get older, but you still have to prepare for any situation while out.

“WHAT’S IN MY CLOSET?”

This area of your home can become overwhelming if you are not careful. It is very easy for us woman, I think, to go overboard and purchase things that we “think” we will need and wear “one day.” Every woman must evaluate her time and where she spends it. I know for myself, the majority of my time is spent at home. Yes, I do go out of the home for shopping, going to the park, homeschool meetings, and church classes, but it is not a required thing for me each day. My main clothing choices should be something that I can wear comfortable every day, doing things with my children. I also like to have special nicer outfits for Sunday church and for going out on dates with my husband.

So what do you keep and what do you get rid of? Before my big weight loss, I had my “skinny” box of clothing. The clothing that I one day wanted to fit back into. When I decided I was tired of being overweight I did something about it. I did want to get back into my skinny clothes. I started working at it. Once I knew I was not going to be pregnant anymore and would not need my bigger skirts, I passed them along to someone else. When there was a possibility of being pregnant, but I was still working on weight loss, I kept only a few skirts and tops that were nicer, I wasn’t planning on making those my clothing choices for long. Having less clothing to wear, would motivate me to lose the weight even faster.

As soon as I would drop a size in clothing, I got rid of them. I was not even going to think about failing and needing them again. I kept working and going down in size, until I was at a happy weight. Then I knew I could start buying clothing again. I knew what I was comfortable wearing every day. This is the sort of thing that I keep in my closet. There are so many “cute” choices that it can become easy to want to accumulate more than you need. Especially if you are a thrifty shopper and see a “great deal.” I’ve learned that those outfits usually get lost in the closet or maybe worn only once or twice.

I stick to a color scheme for the majority of my clothing. Why? This makes shopping easier. I like brown. I know that if I stick to this color, when I find something that I like, I won’t have to wonder if I have

something else at home to go with it. I know I have a brown skirt, brown tank tops, brown leggings, and brown undershirts. Something will go with it.

Being at home most of the time, I have found what is most comfortable for me as a mom. I stay with that style and have a couple in rotation. I keep:

- 5 solid color tank tops---in different cuts for the neck, and in different shades of brown and orange---my main colors
- 5 solid color short sleeved tops---these are all different shades of brown. They work well to wear under lower cut tops or I can also wear them alone with a skirt.
- 5 solid color long sleeved shirts—these are all different shades of brown. They work to wear under things for those cooler months. I can also wear some alone with a scarf or bulky necklace.

The above, is what I wear under most all of my tops and dresses. I have a color to go with everything I purchase. I know if I go with a printed dress with browns in it, I have a shirt to wear underneath it no matter what the weather will be.

I then have my shirts and dresses that I wear every day. To me these have to be comfortable because I live in them each day. I also look for these things because I am a mom and am put into situations that are not what fashion designers have in mind:

- I bend a lot, I am picking up toys, messes, children, etc. I want something that doesn't expose my chest, while bending over. Do a check, lean forward and see how much exposes when you do that.
- Likewise, I don't want something creeping up my backside while bending over either. I stay away from mid-belly shirts that creep up while bending or fixing my pony tail.
- Tops with snaps, buttons, or zippers are great eye catchers for little children. They will find a way to expose you real quick.
- Tops that are $\frac{3}{4}$ or short sleeved are best because I am washing dishes and don't need to worry about sleeves getting wet.

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- Always wear one of your solid color undershirts under your main clothing. This helps prevent any embarrassing moments with your children.
- Skirts are great to wear but be careful when choosing which ones. Slits up the front are difficult for when you sit down and are not able to cover your knees because of a child climbing on you.
- Skirts that are flowing are pretty except when a breeze comes by and blows your skirt up and your hands are holding little ones across the parking lot.
- Always wear a pair of leggings underneath to avoid these situations.

When looking for the “right” outfit to wear consider:

- **Comfort**—you are going to be bending, lifting, moving, crawling all day. Does it feel comfortable when doing multiple maneuvers? Does it stay modest when doing the above moves?
- **Appropriate**---when trying on an outfit don’t look for the “hot or sexy” factor, leave those for your husband alone. Look for something that makes you look beautiful as a mom. If I have to “pull down or pull up” something and let that be on my mind constantly, skip it.

When I find a style that I like, I try and get most of my everyday outfits in the same cut. I look for:

- clothing that can be washed easily---no dry clean only
- hand wash is fine, if I have the time
- clothing that is not clingy---I need something to breathe—I work hard as a mom and don’t want to sweat.

It is warm climate where we live so I make sure to have 6 sleeveless dresses or long tops to wear in the summer months. These are ones that I can easily throw in the wash and have them each day. They are breathable, easy to wear at home doing multiple tasks, and nice enough to wear into town if needed.

I have six other longer sleeved dresses or tunic style tops to wear for the cooler times. Things that are comfortable, that I can wipe baby mess off of easily, something that moves with me, and for everyday use. These can easily be worn in town for shopping as well.

I keep a few nicer church outfits and date outfits for special occasions.

I have learned that when I do accumulate more clothing in my closet, I don't end up wearing what I love. Most of the time, it sits in there. Thinking I will one day wear it, but that day usually does not come. If I have some new outfits that I have found for cheap, I will force myself to put them in rotation. I can learn real quick if they are one of my favorites or not. If the arms are too tight, they don't move well with me, or I find that they are too short, I will get rid of them. I wear what is comfortable and what looks nice on me. I pay attention, if my husband thinks something is "over showing" I take note and skip the outfit. He is my biggest critic and will let me know if he wants other men seeing my body shape. That is a good thing. He loves his woman.

Avoiding frumpiness.

Being a mom and being pregnant every other year, it was easy to fall into this category. Our weight varies so much that it seems almost impossible to avoid looking frumpy. I have learned to pick clothing that is going to work for me especially when going through the different weight loss phases of having babies. I have found that wearing dresses are great before and after having babies because you can wear them for multiple sizes when going up and down. Simple A-line knit dresses work well when your belly is beginning to grow and shrinking afterwards. Plus it is more comfortable. Avoid anything that gathers at the waist. This will only make you look larger. The only reason I would not wear dresses is if I was nursing a baby. If that isn't an option, go with the dresses.

I didn't wear dresses daily until I stopped having babies. The few times I did, I would end up sitting in the bathroom nursing my baby so that I could wear my "A line" dress, while I was out, it wasn't convenient. You have to wear what is best for you and baby. Baby needs to be able to nurse on demand. Wear clothing that you can discreetly do that in.

I found that if I have a simple knit black skirt that it would go with anything. It was stretching enough in my waistline that I could wear it easily after babies and while trying to lose the weight and without looking frumpy at the same time. To me jean skirts, even maternity ones were constricting and did not feel comfortable at all, I avoided these. I chose knit ones that would work with me. The longer flowing western style skirts were cute and I could make my belly fit into these comfortable before and after baby. Choose a solid color to be able to match with multiple tops. If you have a few solid colored skirts that are comfortable then you can look at tops that are going to work for you.

If you are nursing, layer your tops. Put an undershirt on first and then layer with something cute. I would wear a solid color t-shirt and cut holes under my breast line to be able to nurse easily. This allowed me to wear many different style of looser tops and then when baby needed to eat, I could just lift up my top shirt but still keep my undershirt down to not expose my stomach. This worked well and saved me a lot of money because I did not buy “nursing tops.” Use nursing pads to help catch drips. I invested and bought some homemade ones. This was made out of the same material that cloth diapers would have been made from, so they worked well to stop leaks. It saved on having to purchase disposables and I just threw them in the babies laundry.

Everyone has their own style and sense of what they like. Pay attention to it. Stick with the basics and work with that. If you have a base of clothing--a couple of solid color skirts or tops and then you can branch out and find what is most comfortable for you. If you don't have fashion sense, pay attention to others and see what you like. Notice which style someone is wearing and look for that when you go to the store. Remember, just because we see it, might not mean it will work on us. Keep that in mind.

Be confident that you will be out of your frumpy time eventually with some consistency and working towards it. Don't get discouraged, this time of gaining weight and having babies is temporary. The time will come when you can have extra time to exercise and focus on losing the weight. Just enjoy this time with your little ones, they will grow up and you will be able to wear fitting clothing again.

Some tips I follow:

- Avoiding larger print materials---they only make you look bigger
- Focus on a solid color on your bottom. My skirt, leggings, socks, and shoes are dark. This creates a solid line to look “leaner.” It also brings attention up to your face, where you want it.
- Stripes are out when trying to slim down
- Stay away from knit type tops, they only “stick” to those post baby pounds
- Lots of gathers are bad—they seem to poof out more
- Don’t make your skirt or dress line be at mid calf—usually your thickest part, it makes you look stubbier. Go shorter or longer.

Organizing

As for your closet and organizing that space, look to see how much room do you have. If you have a smaller space, consider the clothing that must be hung up---those that wrinkle. Fold the rest of your items—pants and skirts—as they take up less space. Anything you put on shelves should be grouped with like items. Consider dividers at the top of your closet instead of shelves. This will allow for more room to fit things. Keep sweaters together, pants together, and shoes together. See if you can add drawers in your closets whether through a plastic storage bin or mounted drawers. This can be filled with socks and undergarments, which could eliminate the need for a dresser in your room. Thus freeing up space.

When placing items in your closet, go through them. Look through your undergarments, pajamas, leggings, socks etc. Weed out those that are old and worn. If you haven’t worn them in over a year it is time to get rid of them.

The same goes for your clothing. Hang or fold your like items together. This allows you to easily go through and see if you have “too much” of an item. Yes you may have 8 short sleeved tops, but look through them and see if they are all comfortable and wearable. One might be a tad shorter and you have to be careful in it, one might be stained, and one might fit

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tighter to expose more of your body. Get rid of those that have something wrong. Keep only what you will wear.

Saving my tops

I found that most all of my shirts for years would get grease looking stains in the front. How did that happen? Ummm, baby spit up, splatters from grease and cooking, and water stains from doing dishes. I made an easy change to my wardrobe and now I have no need to throw away tops each year. I bought an apron. Yes, just like in the olden days, but nowadays they have very cute ones. I can pick them up for under \$10 in styles that I like and now my clothing is protected. Each day before I begin in the kitchen, I put it on. Before I leave the house, or my husband comes home, I take it off and hang it back up for the next day. This has saved my clothing from getting stains on and I would definitely recommend it.

Storing clothing

If your closet isn't big enough to store all of your clothing, consider storing some out of the way in boxes under the bed.

If you need storage boxes, shoe boxes can be painted or covered in sticky paper. Just clearly label to show the items inside.

Shoes

Shoes can be placed in a behind the door shoe mounted rack. If you have the space you can purchase a small shoe rack for the floor of the closet. As with your clothing, go through your shoes. If some are too tight, or a little loose, or just not quite the color you need, get rid of them. Keep what you wear and that is all.

I always "thought" I liked the idea of wearing heeled shoes, but have realized that my feet only end up hurting from wearing them for long periods of time. I am mostly home and have no great need for multiple shoes. I own:

- A pair of flat bottomed boots. These are a solid color brown, match my purse and go with any of my outfits. I got rid of the

heeled boots that only caused me pain when wearing for long periods of time. These are my choice in the cooler months.

- A pair of ballet style shoes. These are a solid color brown, which match everything. These are inexpensive and easy to slip on without socks for everyday or dress up wearing.
- A pair of hiking/running shoes. These are a necessity where I live in the mountains. I invested in these and they have made all the difference in how my feet are protected during exercising and hiking.
- Cheap flip flops---these are for warmer months, going to the beach or slipping on for running outside in the yard.
- A couple of pair of nicer sandals. We have longer warmer months than colder so these get worn more. These I grab when we are going out to town, church, or out on date nights. I have different styles to have multiple looks.

Comfortable is the key in keeping shoes. If I notice that my feet hurt after wearing them for any extended period of time, they are out.

“WHAT’S IN MY VAN?”

Having ten children and doing many roads trips and traveling, I have learned what is important to keep in my van at all times. My husband is a man who enjoys just picking up and going. I, as the wife need to be prepared so that we can just go. If I want my life and unexpected circumstances to not go badly, I need to be ready. How do I do that? I keep my van stocked with essentials at all times.

In my cup holders, I always bring my water bottle and a cup of coffee when we go out. This saves on the temptation to stop and get one for when I feel I need it. I use stainless steel water and coffee cups to ensure that they stay cold when it is 100 degrees outside. I also always have a bottle of hand sanitizer in one of the compartments. It is standard and as soon as we get back in the van from every single store, we wash our hands. I have always done it since they have introduced hand sanitizer many years ago.

In the bottom of my cup holders is an open compartment. This stores:

- Package of wipes
- Dryer static sheets for static control
- Vehicle tag for the state park
- Phone charger and cord
- Container of mint gum

I have a plastic tub that I keep in between the front two seats, this is where I keep my purse as to not get it dirty. I can also put our bag of water bottles in this to keep them all standing up and not falling over. When we go anywhere, each person going fills up their water bottle and we take it with us. Standard procedure. If it isn't too hot outside, I just put them in a bag and carry them, if it is warm we put them in a smaller cooler with some ice packs.

In the cooler months, I keep a bag in the van with a couple of extra fleece blankets. This is for if we are stranded but also for if we go to a park unexpectedly and want something to sit on. Sometimes one of the children

might be colder than another, it is nice having these in case I forgot a heavier jacket.

I also keep in this bag a plastic freezer gallon bag full of mittens and gloves. This is for when we go to the parks and it is cold. Sometimes you will leave your home thinking it is nice, but get to the park and its chilly. Life in the mountains. I have learned that if I keep some in my van for those moments, we can still stay and play for a bit.

I keep a heavy duty plastic storage bin stocked with :

- Gallon of extra water. We have used this many times for filling up water bottles that were empty. We have used it after playing at the park and washing children's feet who were dirty. We used it to rinse off beach sand. I have given a bottle to someone who was needing it to pour water in their over-heating car. It is good to have on hand.
- Jumper cables. I have never needed them, but it is much better to have them with me instead of my husband driving home from work to pick them up and then coming to jump my van.
- Map of our area. GPS can fail and sometimes not work in some areas of the mountains. We do like our road trips, never had to use, but we keep it anyways.
- Screwdrivers, duct tape, electrical tape, plastic trash bag, and a flashlight---I asked my husband and this is what he told me to keep in there. I have used the trash bag to store wet clothes in after a long day. Never had to use the other items, but they are there if needed.
- Bag of quarters---we always have our cell phones with us when we drive anywhere. In case we were in the remote area of wherever and saw a pay phone(Yes they do still have these in some places), we could call.
- Extra clothing for the smaller children. I have two smaller boys and two smaller girls that could benefit from an extra outfit if needed. We keep a pair of underwear that will fit the older child and the younger child can wear too. I have a set of t-shirt and shorts for the boys and a dress for the girls. I change these out each season to make sure I have the correct sizes.

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- Granola bars. I keep these in for emergencies only. If we eat them, I refill the box. I almost always take a snack with me when we leave the home. Sometimes, when we are out longer than expected, the granola bars have helped tremendously with hungry children. I don't get ones with chocolate on them as they will melt. I do the harder granola type bars. We do the breakfast biscuits too as they store well in heat and cold.

When we first moved to the mountains, we kept an ice cream bucket in the van as my children would get car sick often. I have since removed this bucket because we are acclimated now. I would keep it with the lid on it to avoid having to smell vomit while driving.

We always kept a potty chair in the van for anyone who needed to use it. I have recently taken it out and “hope” we never need it. All of my children can safely make it to a bathroom quickly if needing to go. I have had to teach my girls how to use the bathroom out in the woods---that is a skill to master☺ Boys are easy.

“WHAT’S IN MY TRUNK?”

We own the typical large family vehicle. A white, fifteen passenger, Ford Econoline van. Having a large family means that we don’t have much trunk space in any vehicle that we own. Since, we don’t need all four rows in the van, we opt to keep the last bench seat out. We put it in when we have visitors and need the extra seats. This allows me much extra trunk space.

When we had lots of little ones, it was actually easier for me to keep out the front bench seat. This allowed me to get out of my driver’s seat, go back and nurse a baby before going into the store. I was able to easily change a child and have anyone use the potty chair with room to move. This also allowed me the ability to get everyone ready before venturing out of the van.

My children are all pretty self sufficient now, so we opt for the rear seat to be removed.

I currently keep the children’s fold up Razor Scooters in the trunk because we go to the park a lot. We have decided instead of doing bikes to ride, we do scooters. When we first started loading everyone’s bikes, it took up the entire trunk space. Many times we opted not to take them because we had no room. We have learned that scooters can fold up easily and be stored under the seats if needed. Every child has one. When we had a non-rider, we always kept the stroller in here.

For the most part, my trunk stays empty. This obviously changes when we have to do shopping. I take my four coolers and place them in the trunk along with a basket for breads and chips. We place our library bags in the trunk as well for library drop offs.

The coolers all have large freezer packs for each of them. We have four coolers. One red rectangle normal shaped cooler, one larger one on wheels, and two smaller ones that will fit water bottles for all 12 of us. The one on wheels is nice for taking to the parks and to the beach. We can fit an entire days worth of food in that blue wheeled cooler. The smaller ones are usually reserved for water bottles in one, and beach snacks—cheese, crackers, apple slices, etc in the other. I have the extra red rectangle one

because I needed one more to keep food cold in when I went shopping. This is also nice for taking warm foods to the park in. We have kept macaroni and cheese in this warm for a few hours many times.

When we head to the lake, our trunk gets filled with:

- The fold up wagon—this works great for carrying items to the lake easily.
- Bag full of beach towels—we purchased a set of large oversized towels to use ONLY for the lake. We hang them up as soon as we get home and don't use them for regular bath towels.
- A large 3 gallon bucket filled with beach toys—we only take shovels, small cups, and a few choice toys from younger ones.
- Life jackets for the four younger ones
- Any other blow up item we decide to take and pump if needed.
- Sport Brella to set up for a reprieve from the sun on a hot North Carolina summer day.
- A sheet used only for the lake.
- Fold up camping chairs to place in the shallow water to watch the children swim.
- We apply sunscreen before we leave the house but take some in case we need to reapply. We like the spray on kind instead of the rub on lotion kind.
- We always take a cooler full of water bottles and a snack.

If we are going to the lake for the day and decide to have a meal, we will take along the necessary food. That could include:

- a portable grill and propane or charcoal and a lighter
- tin foil and tongs
- a platter for cooked food
- all prepared foods
- all plates and necessary utensils
- paper towels and wipes
- two large trash bags—one for trash and one for wet bathing suits and towels

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To save on space in the cooler, I usually place all of our prepared foods in large gallon plastic bags. This makes them fit easily and allows for easier clean up. We just scoop food out and close the bags to keep out annoying pests. If we are going to have baked beans, I bring along a can opener and we place the opened can on top of the grill along with the meat to heat up.

A typical meal for us to take to the lake:

- hamburgers or hot dogs
- Italian noodle salad made from Radiatore pasta
- cut up watermelon or fruit salad
- baked beans
- cut up veges and hummus
- chips

Offering the same meal takes the guess work out of what I need to prepare. Everyone likes it, so we go with it. If something works, no need to change it.

When we arrive home from a long day at the lake, we empty the van immediately. All beach items, go on the deck and we will clean them in the morning. All coolers come inside. We wash out the water bottles, fill them back up, and place them in the refrigerator. All the food gets taken out and placed in the refrigerator. By using bags, I can just take them out and put them away. We do as much clean up at the lake to make home life easier. If we had leftover hotdogs or hamburgers, we usually make them up at the lake and put them back in the bun bag. This is good for the next day's lunch.

I wash all the towels and bathing suits right away and hang them up to dry. I don't put these in the dryer as they will not last as long. We use our swimsuits everyday here in the south. I need them to last. I hang them up on hangers and above the washer and dryer. The towels may go in the dryer or I hang them on the clothesline to dry.

The coolers get left opened over night to dry and then in the morning, I put the cotton ball with tea tree oil applied back inside and put them away in the front closet. The chairs are left open to make sure they are dried and

then put away in their proper place. We try and do this all at the lake but if items are wet, we wait until we get home to dry them.

By putting everything away where it goes, I know exactly where it is for next weekend's lake trip. This makes preparing easier and less stress when trying to get out the door.

CREATING A HOUSEHOLD BINDER

You have cookbooks to show you how to cook right? You may even have medical books to help you with basic first aid. One way that helped me when I was first starting out homemaking, was to create a household binder.

I took a regular three ring binder and added tabs inside. The tabs I used were the wipe off plastic kind, this way I could switch around things I wanted to change. On my tabs I had to decided what sort of information I wanted to place inside my binder. These were some to choose from:

- Finances current bills, budgets, and goals list
- Chores and seasonal cleaning checklists, morning checklists for children
- Menu planning and recipe ideas
- Household routine charts and schedules
- Personal information—children birthday and ideas, personal goals

Then I went to work building my binder.

I printed off my master menu list. This had an entire page of recipes that we had frequently made and enjoyed in our home. This was easy when I was stumped at what to make and plan for in our monthly menu. I also included any new recipes that I found and had printed off. When I went to plan, I could easily look and see if I had any new recipes to try and implemented them into my menu. I would keep conversion charts and common baking substitution items in here as well. I also would keep copies of our regular baking recipes for an easier reference. As time went on, I taped some of those recipes inside my cabinet doors for easy referrals when baking.

I kept copies of my checklists for the children's routines, main grocery shopping lists, and blank monthly menus. This helped so that I didn't have to keep turning on the printer and printing off what I needed at that moment.

When my children mentioned something that they wanted or I had thought about it, I wrote it down under their gift ideas. If I found some easy party games for us to play as a family, I wrote them down as well. When you have to have twelve parties a year, it is nice to have a rotation for birthday games. I also kept a list of everyone's favorite dinners and cake. On their birthdays, I let everyone choose what they want for a meal and what sort of dessert they like. The younger ones change their minds often, so I don't keep their ideas, but for the older ones who know what they like, I write it down. This way I can surprise them with their favorite meal, without having to ask.

When I was going through my magazines and tearing out articles that I wanted to read later on, I placed them in my binder. If I found neat decorating ideas, I placed them in here as well. Things that I wanted to accomplish at some future time, went into my binder. Then when I had a free moment to look through those articles, I knew exactly where they were at.

Having this sort of organizing has helped me to keep everything contained.

You can place any other items that you feel are important to reference on a daily or weekly basis in your binder. Having all that you need in one place to access is helpful when running a home. Just as my husband has reference manuals for running the large machines at work, so do I for running our large family at home!

Family life
and
children

NATURAL HOME REMEDIES FOR COMMON ILLNESSES

***Disclaimer: this section is not intended to replace any sound medical advice. It is just my experiences with common illness and ailments that I have come across in the last twenty years. Always follow your doctor OR get a second opinion if you don't feel comfortable with doing something.*

Being a mom of 10 children, we have come across our fair share of sicknesses. When my older ones were little, we would go to the doctors for every little occurrence. It seems antibiotics were prescribed for everything from a runny nose to a “possible” ear ache. Fast forward years later when new information about the dangers of becoming immune to antibiotics comes out and we as parents don’t always run for every sickness. We are taught other ways to help the “common cold” and other ailments.

My first baby was on antibiotics many times her first year of life. My last baby did not even go to the doctors for a sickness until he was 2 ½ years old. As with everything in life you live and learn. I have just had the ability to experience this ten times over. I have learned from being misinformed and hope to help those whether they have 1 or 15 children. Doctors are

important. I am very thankful for the care that we have had over the years from our family doctor. We have needed them for many situations and I am thankful for that. I am also thankful for a wise doctor who would

MEDICINE CABINET MUST HAVES

Thermometer—invest in the electronic kind
Tweezers
Adhesive band aids in different sizes
Gauze bandages
Butterfly strips
Antihistamine
Antiseptic cream
Pills for pain or fever (liquid for child)
Hydrocortisone cream for bites

Essential oils

Tea tree oil (heals wounds)
Eucalyptus oil(for respiratory problems) place in bathwater or just inhale the scent.
Chamomile tea is good for stomach and digestive ailments
Peppermint helps with nausea, vomiting.

rather see me help ease symptoms at home naturally instead of using prescriptions to cover them up.

This is when it is important to contact your doctor:

- **If the child is under 3 months:** Any fever of 100.4°F or higher. If the fever develops after office hours or on a weekend, go to the emergency room. Young babies have a limited ability to fight illness because their immune system aren't fully developed. Little babies can't tell you how they feel or if they are really sick. There could be some serious bacterial infections that they are more prone to. Don't even think twice about it, just go. It is not worth the risk.
- **A child 3 to 6 months:** A fever of 101°F or higher.
- **A child over 6 months:** A fever 103°F or higher.
- A fever in any age child measuring between 104°F or higher.
- A fever and sore throat that lasts more than 24 to 48 hours.
- You see signs of dehydration, such as a dry mouth, a sunken soft spot, or fewer wet diapers (less than one every 8 hours).
- If your young child has diarrhea multiple times, call your doctor.
- If your child has pain while urinating accompanied by a fever.
- Your child is lethargic, refuses to eat, has a rash, or is having difficulty breathing.
- If your child has ear pain that will not be comforted by an over the counter Motrin or other home remedy.

Many of us regularly use over the counter pills and potions to treat our illnesses. In the past, people turned to plants and natural products for relief. Today, clinical science and studies support many such remedies, confirming that a variety of ailments will respond to nature's help alone. Here are some common occurrences and things that you can do at home to help ease them.

Acid reflux

What you can do to help?

- Baking soda can neutralize excess stomach acid. Stir 1 teaspoon into a glass of warm water and drink. Don't use this method if you have high blood pressure.
- Eat a piece of dry white bread or toast to neutralize stomach acids. You can also eat 1 tablespoon of dry oatmeal.
- Sleep with your upper body slightly elevated at night to prevent acid from entering the esophagus. I did this with many of my pregnancies towards the end.
- Eat sensibly---avoid foods that you know will give you heartburn. Foods that are fatty, acidic, or chocolate.
- Avoid alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine: they increase gastric acid secretion to make it worse.
- Eat slowly and opt for smaller, more frequent portions.
- Watch your weight. If you are carrying excess pounds, this increases pressure inside your stomach which can contribute to having acid reflux.
- Eat early in the evening to give your stomach time to digest the meal.
- Don't lay down after a meal.

What is it?

In your digestive tract you have a trapdoor of muscular tissue called the lower esophageal sphincter which keeps your stomach acid where it belongs—down in your stomach. Heartburn or acid reflux occurs when the sphincter allows the contents of your stomach to flow back into your esophagus. This causes a burning pain behind the breastbone. The searing pain of heartburn can be brought about by eating spicy, fatty, or acidic foods. Sometimes this can happen just by eating them too quickly.

Acne

What can you do to help?

- Avoid touching your face throughout the day. Each time you rub your forehead, scratch your chin, or touch your cheeks you are transferring oils to it which can cause it. Constantly pay attention to **NOT** touching your face.
- Wash your face every evening and make sure to remove any makeup.
- Rinse your face in the morning by using cool water to help stimulate your pores.
- Use an astringent to help tighten pores. You can use Witch hazel, tea tree oil diluted in 1:4 proportion of water, or over the counter astringents.
- Use a facial scrub to help deep clean your face. If you do this too often it will irritate your oil glands, aim for once or twice per week.

What causes it?

If there was a secret formula for getting rid of acne, someone would be very rich! Acne or zits happen due to many different things going on in our bodies. It can occur due to hormonal changes which happens in puberty or times of stress. Plugged glands, sun exposure, medications, and oil based cosmetics can all contribute to an outbreak. Even eating too many greasy foods can make it happen.

Back pain

What can you do to help?

- An easy way to prevent back pain is by exercising. Strengthening your core is very important. Practice doing plank exercises each day. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat as many times as you can. Work to increase the time that you hold it for every day.

This is a common complaint in people at some point in their lives. Spending long periods of time slumped over in a chair, carrying items wrong, or just twisting and turning the wrong way are all common cause for back pain.

Large family living

- Keeping your weight under control. Being overweight is linked to back problems. Your spine is the centralized part of your body and if it has to hold up extra weight it is going to put strain on it.
- A short period of rest is beneficial. Staying in bed for days is not a good thing. Place a pillow rolled up under your legs so that your thighs point up and your knees are bent at a right angle to keep the strain off your spinal column.
- Gentle exercise like walking, cycling and swimming are all good to help prevent further problems.
- Applying a heat compress. A heating pad or over the counter capsaicin is a good choice for it. Capsaicin is the ingredient found in different types of hot peppers, such as cayenne peppers, that makes the peppers spicy hot. Apply this with a popsicle stick or some other disposable item. Do not get it on hands where you can spread it by touching. Think how a jalapeno pepper juice feels. It works very well and for days afterwards with just one dose.
- Taking a hot bath with Epsom salt added. Add one cup and soak. The magnesium rich salt promotes relaxation.
- Don't carry uneven loads. Lift heavy weights with your knees bent and always keep your back straight.
- Replace a saggy mattress. Flip your mattress every 6 months and look for one that is neither too firm nor too soft. A firm memory foam mattress is a good choice.
- If you are sitting for long periods of time, stand up and stretch every 30 minutes.
- Wear comfortable shoes and keep high heel wearing to a minimal amount of time.
- The "child's pose" or "cat stretch" in yoga can help relieve back pain.
- Being slumped over while nursing a baby can contribute to back pain. Invest in My Brest Friend Nursing pillow, which places the baby at the direct level of your nipple. This works much better than using a pillow or anything else to prop your baby up with.

Allergies

What can you do to help lessen the atmosphere for a child who has allergies:

- Keep windows closed and use air conditioning in your home.
- Keep your bathroom free of mold and mildew which can cause allergy symptoms.
- Keep cats and dogs outside.
- Damp mop hard surface floors once per week.
- Enclose your fireplace and stay away from smoke and fumes.
- Don't store wood indoors.
- Fluff dry drapes and rugs in dryer to keep them dust free.
- See your allergist regularly.
- Get an ozone free air cleaner.
- Use an efficient kitchen exhaust fan.
- Don't hang clothing outdoors especially during allergy season.
- Limit children's fabric toys.
- Vacuum mattresses regularly.
- Cover your pillows with protective allergy cases.
- Limit outdoor activities during allergy season.
- Replace filters in your home heating and cooling system.
- Avoid odorous chemicals in cleaners and perfumes.
- Use wood or vinyl verses fabric furnishings.
- Vacuum the whole house at a minimum of once per week.
- Going to be outdoors during peak season for extended periods of time? Keep a saline nasal spray with you, and every couple of hours rinse your nasal passage.
- Invest in a Neti-pot to rinse our your nasal cavity every night. It is a different kind of item to get used to but does have some positive results.

Bladder and kidney problems.

What can you do to help?

- Having a weak bladder can be common in women having children. To help combat this, practice doing Kegal exercises daily. Kegal exercises are done by holding the muscles that control your urine. I promise it DOES make all the difference. I have birthed ten babies and at one point it would be hard to run or do jumping jacks without having to urinate. This helps a lot. Doing so every day is important. To remember, I do mine everyday as I drink my first cup of coffee. It happens each day and becomes part of my daily routine.
- Drink raspberry leaf tea every day. This is good to strengthen your muscles in that region.
- Keep proper amount of fluids washing through your body every day to help flush out toxins. This will help prevent kidney stones.
- Keep your fluids to water, herbal and fruit teas. Avoid drinking sugary drinks, which only contribute to bacterial growth.

What are the importance of these organs?

These are part of the urinary system which transports harmful wastes out of the body. To keep it functioning properly drink plenty of liquids to avoid a bladder infection . Dehydration is a key factor usually in bladder/kidney problems. Lack of fluids prevents mineral salts in urine from being dissolved. Keep hydrated!

If you do have a bladder or UTI infection, drink 100% cranberry juice or take a high strength cranberry supplement. Heat also can help. Soaking in a hot bath can help relieve pain as well.

One tip I have noticed is that little girls enjoy playing in bubble baths. This will cause irritation to their bottom area. I stopped giving my girls and boys bubble baths due to this. We may squirt a little in the tub occasionally, but I don't allow them to sit in it for too long.

** If you or your child are experiencing continuous pain that cannot be managed, contact your doctor immediately

Blood Pressure

If you keep a healthy lifestyle throughout your entire life you can help avoid high blood pressure which can lead to a stroke. Age, weight gain, lack of exercise, smoking, alcohol abuse, salt consumption, and consuming fatty, fried foods often are all factors to increase your risk of high blood pressure. Maintain good habits to help avoid this.

Bad breath

While having bad breath can be the cause of a tooth decay problem, there are some things you can do daily to help avoid the sometimes embarrassing occurrence of bad breath.

- Floss your teeth. Tiny bits of food can get stuck in back teeth and start to form bacteria which smells.
- Rinse your mouth with mouthwash after brushing your teeth or make a mix of water and peppermint oil and rinse. You can also rinse with apple cider vinegar. Mix one teaspoon to one cup of water.
- Apples and yogurt taste good and can help freshen breath.

Burns

This can occur commonly because of contact in the kitchen with hot objects. For a serious burn, see a doctor immediately. First degree burns are characterized by a reddened, painful skin and can be treated effectively with natural remedies. If there is any type of open wound treat it professionally.

When you burn your skin, immediately place it under cool running water. You can put it in a bowl and let it soak for at least 30 minutes. I have done longer and the burn went away much quicker.

If you have an aloe vera plant, cut a piece off and use the juice over top to help soothe.

A note of caution....never use an old remedy by placing butter over burns. This is a breeding ground for bacteria. If any blisters form, do not pop them as this can cause infection.

Common colds

What can you do to help?

- Make a pot of chicken soup. Grandma’s home remedy was actually true. Fill a big pot with chicken broth, cooked chicken pieces, onions, garlic and vegetables. You can throw in some frozen mixed vegetables or your favorite. Let that boil and then add some noodles. Add some pepper and plenty of garlic so that this helps soothe your throat.
- Drink plenty of fluids. You want to flush out this cold and stay hydrated. Herbal teas are good choices as well.
- Have plenty of Vitamin C. Mix packets with water or eat oranges.
- Mix the juice of a lemon and 1 tsp of honey in 1 cup of hot water and sip on it.
- If you sinuses are hurting, place a hot and moist compress to your forehead frequently. You can microwave a wet washcloth to do this.
- Flush your nasal cavity out with a nasal rinse .

Flu or common cold what’s the difference?

If symptoms like a sore throat, headache, achy limbs, coughing, runny nose, elevated or slight temperature come on gradually, you probably have a cold. The flu comes on suddenly and hard. You experience high fever and chills and you feel too ill to get up.

Why called the “common cold?”

Simple, because it is common and can happen frequently. Blocked noses, sore throats, aching limbs, and fever are all symptoms many of us encounter, usually during the winter months. Antibiotics are not helpful for this because it is a viral infection.

There isn’t some magic formula for avoiding sickness. But if you know you are going to be extra busy during a time, aim to get plenty of rest , exercise, and fresh air. Increase your intake of vitamin C and avoid stress,

nicotine, and alcohol. You can also take Echinacea, which is a natural remedy to help cut risk of getting a cold.

Constipation

What can you do to help?

- Drinking prune or elderberry juice in the morning can help stimulate and get bowels going again.
- Doing a stomach massage working in a clockwise direction can help stimulate a sluggish intestine. This works well for little babies.
- Make sure that you are hydrated and drink plenty of liquids to help things flow properly.
- Exercise or taking a walk can help loosen bowels.
- Eat yogurt containing acidophilus or taking a probiotic supplement may help keep the good bacteria in your intestine to keep things working properly.

Not eating enough fiber, lack of exercise and being under and overweight are some causes for irregular bowel movements.

Depression

What can you do to help?

- Fresh air and exposure to sunshine can help.
- Light and color can have effects on mood. Bright cheery colors can help lighten the mood while darker colors can deepen.
- Cut back on carbonated drinks and caffeine while experiencing depressing times.
- Get away for a few day or change your routine and give yourself a break.
- If you are stuck inside with a baby all day, ask someone to hold and watch them while you go outside and take a quick walk. Doing this for 15 minutes each day will make all the difference. If the weather is good, wrap the baby up and place in a sling or stroller.

Depression can be a serious medical issue and that shouldn't be overlooked. Some of us experience the "blues" once in a while. Especially those who just had a baby and are cooped up in the home for long periods of time.

Large family living

- Communicate your needs to someone else. I know it is hard to talk with friends when you are home with little ones every day. Express your needs to your husband, let him know what you are feeling and that you need to get away for a bit.

Diarrhea

**If your child is experiencing diarrhea consult your doctor if it happening multiple times throughout the day, especially if accompanied by a fever.

What can you do to help?

- Drink plenty of liquids to replace the electrolytes that are lost. Water or an electrolyte based sports drink are good choices.
- If you have a child who refuses to drink, try ice pops. You can make some with Gatorade sports drink in paper cups with popsicle sticks.
- Eat yogurt. This contains good bacteria to re-colonize your intestines. Look for yogurt that contains live bacterial cultures and probiotics.

Slowly introduce a bland diet when trying to introduce foods again. The BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast-plain) are ones that my pediatrician recommends. You want binding foods that are not hard to digest. After that is easily digested you can add vegetable broth and a light soup to your diet.

Avoid milk and dairy products as they are hard to digest. Also avoid coffee and alcohol which can irritate the intestine.

Ear ache

What can you do to help?

- Heat applied to the ear can help alleviate it. Pressing a warm wet washcloth that has been heated in the microwave and then wrapped with a dry cloth will work.

- Mixing 1 tablespoon warmed olive oil, a few drops of tea tree oil and then applying to the ear canal can also help.
- If you are feeling clogged in your ears and no pain you can apply over the counter ear drops to rinse out your ears. This is made from hydrogen peroxide. The kit includes a squeezer bulb which is helpful in rinsing.

Ear aches often originate in the middle ear, which is the tiny space located behind the eardrum. A thin tunnel called the Eustachian tube, runs from the middle ear to the back of the throat and allows fluid to drain. It is also the passage where the pressure inside your ear adjusts to meet external air pressure.

If you have a buildup of fluid, sometimes caused by a cold, higher elevation, or allergies this can accumulate in the Eustachian tube which causes significant pain.

Consult your doctor immediately if a child is experience pain, if there is discharge from the ear, or if an adults does not respond to any home treatments within a short time.

Eye problems

What can you do to help?

- Long hours at the computer can cause eye strain. Make sure to take breaks frequently.
- While reading make sure to do so in proper lighting.
- If you have red, irritated eyes apply cucumber slices to help with swollen eyelids and red eyes. Avoid rubbing to make worse. You can also press the back of a metal spoon that has been cooled in the refrigerator to the eyelids.
- Dry eyes can be treated with over the counter drops to help lubricate them.

Fatigue

It is normal to feel tired after a long strenuous day of working or when getting no sleep and taking care of children all day long. But if you are experiencing exhaustion constantly, then it is time to do something about it.

What can you do to help?

- When you get out of bed in the morning, splash some cool water on your face to help waken it up.
- Eat smaller meals, but be sure to eat regularly.
- Take a multi vitamin.
- Exercise is a huge component. If you are not used to it, you will be more tired the first week, but keep at it. Your body will get used to it and you will begin to have more energy as time goes on.
- Take a power nap during the day. By taking a “cat nap” and sleeping for 20-30 minutes in the afternoon will help boost your ability to continue on with your day.
- Make sure your iron levels are good. If your diet is low in iron, blood cells can’t carry the usual load of oxygen through your body to help keep your energy level up. Eat iron rich foods such as red meats liver, whole grains, garbanzo beans, and dark green leafy vegetables.
- Avoid sweets as this is only going to give you a quick elevated sugar level but then will crash you down.
- Drink plenty of water. Staying hydrated means your body doesn’t have to work “overtime” to keep it running properly.

If you have done all that you can and still are experiencing low levels of energy, consult your doctor for a blood write up. You could be lacking some vitamin or nutrient level.

Foot care

What can you do to help?

- Wearing proper fitting shoes can help avoid feet pain. Being on your feet for long periods of time can make them painful. A foot rub is a good way to help treat aching feet.
- Blisters can occur when shoes rub on area of the foot. To help prevent this, wear socks or tights with shoes. If you tend to get blisters, place adhesive bandages to areas to help prevent them.
- Athletes foot is a common condition when you have a moist environment. Fungal infections thrive in damp environments such

as swimming or sports. If you are involved in an activity where your feet are constantly damp from sweat, bring along a pair of socks to change throughout the day to help avoid this. If you are experiencing symptoms which include itching and red, painful spots on toes, wash feet and then apply some tea tree oil to the affected areas. Let dry and keep dry with fresh socks.

Hemorrhoids

What can you do help this?

- Try and avoid pushing too much while going to the bathroom.
- Drinking plenty of fluids and eating a fiber rich diet to avoid constipation can help.
- If you have one, after using the bathroom, gently wipe the area with a pad dipped in witch hazel. Let air dry and dress as usual.

Yuck! What is this?

This can be an embarrassing condition, but is fairly common for women who are pregnant. The extra weight strain in that area and the constipation issues due to pregnancy hormones can lead to having this. Basically it is a vein that comes out of your anus. It will subside and go back in when your body returns to normal.

Hay fever

Springtime and all of its pollen in the air is a time that this usually occurs.

What can you do to help?

- Doing a nasal rinse throughout the day if you are going to be outside during this time of year. There are over the counter saline sprays that you can squirt up and let drain out to help keep pollen and other irritants out of your nose. Do this every evening as well.
- Keep your windows closed during the day. Even though it is a beautiful breeze, it is just blowing pollen in to your home.
- Don't hang laundry outside, pollen will cling to it.
- The middle of the day is peak pollen time, try and stay indoors.

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- Change your clothes while being outside for long periods of time.
- Vacuum carpet and rugs with a good Hepa filter vacuum.
- Mop your floors regularly.
- Avoid having flowering plants in the home as they contain pollen.

Headaches

These are not necessarily an illness but a symptom of something. Try to find the cause of it.

Some common causes:

- Too much caffeine
- Not enough stabilization of blood sugar levels. Make sure to eat frequent meals.
- Stress can also be a cause of it.
- Hormonal influences can also cause it.
- Not enough rest and sleep.

Ways to help alleviate it

- Rest for a few minutes in a dark place where it is quiet.
- Place some pressure on your head to help relieve it.
- Regular exercise encourages circulation and reduces stress.
- Rub your temples in a clockwise direction to help relieve tension.

Insect bites

Most of the bites from insects are generally harmless. They may be accompanied by a red irritated bump but if not itched, will subside.

You can relieve bee stings by applying a cold ice pack to the area.

Some spiders such as the brown recluse and black widow are highly venomous and require an antivenin after being bit.

If you are bit and not sure what it was by, apply some antibiotic cream to the area and keep an eye on it. If you develop a rash or other symptom contact a doctor immediately. If you know it was one of those spiders go immediately to the emergency room.

Tick bites also have to be monitored. Remove the tick quickly and watch to make sure you don't develop a circle rash around the bite or a high fever. This can cause Lyme disease, which is a serious condition.

Muscle sprains

If you experience a sprain in an area, act quickly and place a cold compress to the area. Do this for 20 minutes at a time and remove for the same amount of time. Repeat 4-5 times per day to help lessen pain. If you have sprained your ankle, elevate it on a pillow and relax.

Cough

A homemade cough syrup may help relieve the problem. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup lemon juice with 1 cup of honey in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup warm water. Take 2 Tablespoons every 3 hours.

Sunburn

Even though sunlight has many beneficial qualities we must also protect ourselves from problems caused by its harmful rays.

What can you do to help?

- Anything that will cool the skin will relieve the pain such as a wet t-shirt or a cool shower.
- Drink plenty of fluids while recovering from the burns.
- Avoid sunlight until the burns are gone.
- Cover as much skin as possible while being in the sun for long periods of time.

Cut and scrapes

What can you do to help?

- Clean the wound immediately.
- Use water, an antiseptic solution or antibiotic cream applied to the area.
- If the area continues to bleed, apply pressure with a clean towel until it stops.
- Twenty-four hours after the injury, the wound should close. If it does not, contact a doctor.
- Allow the cut and scrape to “breathe” at night in the air and if needed during the day, cover it up.
- Make sure that all your tetanus shots are up to date in case of an accident with a rusty item.

Sleep

Your “normal body” –I say normal because moms with little ones do not usually get the proper amount—is at least 7-8 hours of sleep a night. This will allow your body to function properly.

What can you do to help get a good night’s sleep?

- Keep your bedroom quiet and dark.
- Avoid keeping your bedroom too warm. A temperature of no more than 65 degrees is sufficient.
- Before going to bed make sure that your room has been thoroughly aired out.
- There should be no television or computer to stimulate brain activity.
- Going to bed and getting up at a regular time is crucial. It provides a healthy sleep rhythm and stabilizes your biological clock.
- Use sheets made of cotton to avoid sweating.
- Make sure your mattress is of good quality.

- Get lots of exercise during the day to be sure that you are tired at bedtime.
- Avoid a fatty food or “heavier” meal before bedtime
- Avoid eating after six o’clock. Your body needs time to digest food.
- Don’t consume alcohol or coffee, tea, or cola before bedtime.
- Avoid drinking extra water which causes you to have to get up during the night.
- Establish a calm night time routine. This is especially true for children.

Sore throat

What can you do to help?

- Allow 1 teaspoon of honey to run slowly down the throat several times a day.
- Gargling with 1 teaspoon of salt mixed in 1 cup warm water will help.
- Ice cream or homemade ice pops helps with children.
- Change your toothbrush especially after a severe sore throat sickness.

CHARACTER TRAITS TO STUDY AS A FAMILY

For many of us, just by having a heart that wants to serve the Lord, we will naturally exhibit many positive character traits that our children can learn to emulate in their own lives. By studying different character traits as a family and focusing on them, helps identify and realizing the importance of that trait to your children. In our family, we choose one per month to focus on. Any opportunity that we can “over emphasize” the character quality, we do. This helps the child recognize the need and importance of doing it.

Here are some examples:

- Explain why we do preventative maintenance on our home, appliances, and personal health in order to benefit it in the long run.
- We talk about how participation in certain activities and wearing certain clothing could attract the wrong friends and weaken the trust of authorities.
- How by doing seemingly harmless activities could lead to bad influences and wrong friends.
- How by practicing our character traits while we are out can save us from bad situations.
- Why it is important to save and pay for a purchase instead of buying it now and worrying about it later.
- The reasons we have signs and rules for driving to avoid dangerous situations.
- The importance of following safety rules while cooking to avoid danger.
- We use opportunities of animals in nature of being alert in order to protect themselves.
- We talk about different jobs and the importance of implementing the character traits we are studying in order to be successful in their jobs. For example, pilots must be alert to their surrounds or one minor mistake could cost them their lives.

- When Mom is talking and they need to ask something, they are to touch my arm and wait patiently until I am finished talking in my conversation.
- They are to come the “first time” when called. We practice this over and over while little and use small rewards like one M&M. If they do not come when first called, I go over to them and explain the importance of coming the first time when called and tell them I am going back to do it again. After they understand it, I will do it while they are engrossed in playtime. Diligently working will pay off. They come when you call. The reasons being for obedience one, and two for emergency situations. I use the story of one of our friends traveling in a vehicle and something had happened and there was immediate fire. The Mom yelled, “Get out!” Her children did so immediately. There was no one saying, “How come?” or “Why?” They just did so. Thankfully they got out in time and nothing had happened. This will help in many different life threatening situations if need be.
- We play “follow the directions” to help in their listening skills. Go find me one red and round toy. Find me something that is soft and square. This is also good for learning to do multiple tasks quickly.
- We practice self control by sitting on a bench without a lot of fidgeting. This helps to be able to sit during a church service for more than 10 minutes. No more moments of having to go out with your children. Practice each day, start out with 5 minutes at a time and work your way up. Don’t allow them to swing their legs, slouch on the bench, talk, be fidgety. I do this with the baby as well.
- Not allowing them to say, “What?” or “Just a minute!” They need to come and find you when called.
- If a child is not listening and having a hard time being quiet or playing nicely, we have them sit on a chair. This helps the child get back into “self control” mode. If they know the rules and are having a hard time following them, they need to sit to be able to practice getting their bodies under control.
- If two children want to play with the same toy, we use a timer and set it to allow both to play. As soon as their time is up, they are

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not allowed to “finish” what they were doing, they are to give it over nicely. If they are younger, we give a five minute warning.

- If your children are doing a lot of fighting and arguing over play, end the playtime and find something for them to do. Normally when children start bickering and fighting among each other, they are bored. They need your guidance as a parent to direct them to a task. I know when I leave my own to themselves, attitudes arise and fighting occurs. If I keep them working diligently throughout the day doing school and helping with household task, then when they do have “free time” they use it more constructively because they are ready for it. This is where scheduling your day comes into play. Children like routine and knowing what is going to happen at set times.
- When I have a child who would rather choose the biggest piece of the cake and never give anyone else the bigger piece, we work on being fair and kind. How exhibiting the Golden Rule is important in life. I will purposely set out to let her cut the dessert into two pieces and then let the other sibling choose which one to eat. I will set up playtimes with the two and have the other child choose what to play.
- We work on building older-younger sibling relationships. I do this by scheduling time in the day when the older ones are to spend time playing with younger children. This helps build special bonds with one another. My daughter remembers when her big sister would read books to her every day. My boys remember when my teenage son would play Legos and build the “coolest” vehicle ever with them!
- We teach them the importance of living a healthy lifestyle by keeping our bodies fit. We use daily examples and how we could make better choices at something we were doing, if we weren’t already.

Here is a list of character qualities that you can study in your family. Copy each word, definition, and bible verse on a piece of cardstock and hang on the wall. You can make pictures if needed. Repeat the words often throughout the week to help reinforce the behavior to your child.

Availability

- Being willing to attend to a need when I am called to help. Isaiah 6:8

Alertness

- Being keenly aware of what is taking place around me so I can be prepared with a right response. 1 Peter 5:8

Boldness

- Facing confrontations with the assurance that God will bless the outcome if I'm standing firm for truth. Proverbs 28:1

Compassion

- Being willing to expend effort to help alleviate the suffering of those in need. Proverbs 3:27

Contentment

- Realizing that God has given me all I need for my present happiness. Philippians 4:11-12

Dependability

- Honoring your word and responsibilities even if it means unexpected sacrifice. Psalm 15:3

Diligence

- Viewing each task given to me as a special duty and putting forth the effort to do my very best. Colossians 3:17

Endurance

- The inward strength to endure tribulation with determination. Philippians 4:5

Flexibility

- Cheerfully being willing to change my plans when circumstances beyond my control require it. Philippians 4:6-7

Forgiveness

- Picturing how Jesus died on the cross for my sins so that God's love can flow through me to others who have wronged me. Colossians 3:13

Generosity

- Giving unselfishly to the needs of others. Luke 6:38

Gratefulness

- Realizing that God has given me all I need and being appreciative to God and others. Ephesians 5:20

Hospitality

- Making those who visit our home feel comfortable. Romans 12:13

Humility

- Acknowledging that any good I have achieved is a gift from God and my life is to be used as an instrument in His hand. Micah 6:8

Initiative

- Seeing a need and taking responsibility to meet it without being asked. Ephesians 2:10

Joyfulness

- Is choosing to have a good attitude even when circumstances are tough to bear. Philippians 4:4

Kindness

- Treating others as you would like to be treated by them. Ephesians 4:32

Loyalty

- Committed to the welfare of those I serve even to the detriment of my own comforts. Proverbs 20:6

Love

- Giving unselfishly of myself to the needs of others. 1 John 3:18

Obedience

- Doing what is expected of me cheerfully, immediately, and thoroughly. Colossians 3:20

Orderliness

- Managing my life and my belongings in order to reach maximum potential. 1 Corinthians 14:40

Patience

- Waiting for God's timing with a happy heart. Hebrews 12:1

Punctuality

- Being prompt in all commitments, honoring the time of others. Colossians 4:5

Resourcefulness

- Using things which others might discard in a creative way. Colossians 3:23-24

Self-control

- Subjecting my own desire to the control of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 25:28

Wisdom

- Learning to see life from God's point of view. Psalm 90:12

After reading the list, you might be overwhelmed at all the different choices that you can teach your children. Start small. Choose one to study and go with it. During the month, you might realize the need to work on another topic, choose that for the next month. It might not be a character quality, but it may just be an obedience issue. Diligently work the entire month to help conquer it in your home. At the end of the year, you will be further ahead than you were at the beginning. Just by choosing to do something instead of nothing.

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TEACHING NEW CHORES

I remember when I read something somewhere about the importance of teaching children how to do chores. In my mind, I figured they have watched me their whole life, isn't it easy to "know" how to sweep a floor or wash the dishes? In reality, when training someone new for a task whether that be something simple or something complex, it is ALWAYS better to take the time and show them step by step how to complete it properly.

It is important to be thorough with your words. Even if it is something that we think is simple like dusting the furniture. It is important to tell them exactly what is expected, and why we do what we do to ensure the job is done properly. Like when we dust, we remove all objects off of the surface we are dusting, then spray our cloths---as to not get cleaner on anything else, and then wipe the surface. Pay attention to streaks and marks on the surface. Do the edges and all the crevices of that table. Take a step back and look at it from a different angle and see if all the dust and marks are removed. Carefully wipe off each object and place them back exactly where you picked them up from. Straighten anything else that needs to be straightened.

I know I have given a task haphazardly to my child like "wipe the mirrors" and then had come back and realized they did like a wipe through the middle and left fuzzies everywhere. I never specifically said to check the surface from a different angle to ensure it is wiped properly.

Other tips to teach them when training how to do chores:

- Vacuuming
 - Pay attention to the flow of air in the dirt canister. If it is not circulating around, then the canister needs to be emptied because it is too full.
 - Teach them why you can't suck up large objects—because they get stuck in the hose.
 - Not to vacuum up wet stuff--it will cause bacteria buildup inside the vacuum.

- Washing dishes
 - Why we use hot water to kill germs.
 - Why it is important to rinse the item thoroughly.
 - The importance of not placing sharp objects into a sink of hot water.
 - Not to place lids on containers that are still wet, to avoid mold growth-place slightly off the side to let dry thoroughly.
- Sweeping floors
 - Not to sweep across a “wet” object or food to spread further while sweeping.
 - Importance of getting right up to the crevices and corners of the room.
 - Working in a pattern while sweeping to ensure the entire floor swept.
 - If something doesn’t sweep up, get down and scrape it off the floor.
 - Important to move all objects when sweeping like chairs, etc.
 - How to carefully pick up a rug before sweeping and how to shake outside.
 - Being careful when dumping the dustpan in the trash so that the dust doesn’t go all over the floor.
- Emptying the trash
 - When emptying into the larger trash, being careful not to spill any on the floor.
 - Check the inside of the can and make sure all the trash is out and not stuck to the bottom.
 - If wet, make sure to dry before placing another bag inside.
 - If smelly, clean the inside with all purpose cleaner and wipe out thoroughly.
- Washing windows
 - Spray the window and wipe in one direction. On the insides wipe side to side. On the outside wipe up and down. They will be able to see if they missed some streaks by how they wiped.
 - If the rag is leaving a lot of fuzz, get a new one.

Large family living

- Wipe up into every corner.
- Stand back and look from different angles for anything they missed.
- Don't just wipe across where they "think" it is dirty, do the entire window.

This same method is put into effect when teaching them how to deep clean a room. I would print off all the tasks that needed to be done for a specific room when we were embarking on deep clean. I place the printed off page in a plastic sleeve and had them go through the list from the top to the bottom. This helped them to learn what had to be done and ensured that they completed everything I needed finished. This was what I would give to my teenagers as they were learning how to take care of a home.

This is a sample of how thorough I would be in training them how to deep clean a bathroom.

Deep cleaning bathroom checklist

Sink and Cabinets

- wipe all sink, faucets, counters, and backsplashes –do directly behind the sink as well
- wipe down all sides of the cabinets, pay special attention to knobs and pulls
- open drawers, remove objects, and wipe down insides
- clean hair off brushes and soak in hot water and alcohol to disinfect
- remove any loose hair inside of drawers
- wipe off any toothpaste from the tube and place the lid back on
- return any items that do not belong in this drawer
- refold towels or washcloths if needed

Toilet

- clean the inside of the toilet—deep into the shoot
- wipe the inside and outside rim of the toilet
- wipe the lid and pay attention to the hinged area

Amy Maryon

- wipe the entire bowl of the toilet and down the sides
- wipe the base of the toilet, around all the formations
- wipe the tank and handle of the toilet all the way around
- wipe the floor around the toilet, the back and use extra cleaner in the front
- wipe any walled areas around toilet including toilet paper holder

Shower

- remove items and place on tub floor
- scrub entire walls of the shower from the top ledge all down the sides.
- pay attention to the “ring” of the tub
- wipe all fixtures and remove any water stain build up
- swipe your fingers around the walls and bottom to make sure removed all grime
- return items back to proper place, replacing any near empty ones
- pick up soap scraps and throw away small pieces
- clean out drain with hair removal tool

Walls

- wipe all walls working from the top to the bottom of the bathroom
- wipe the baseboards
- pay attention around light switches
- wipe all light fixtures –do not directly wipe light bulbs while on, they will burst
- replace any hand towels

Floor

- empty trash and wipe can if needed
- last thing you do is wipe the entire floor, every corner –work from the furthest point inside and work your way backwards to the door

Large family living

If you use bleach when disinfecting, teach them the dangers and importance in how to use it properly. Explain that if they splash it on any article of clothing that it will bleach it. Explain that if they wipe the floor with it, not to step on it and transfer it to the carpeted area outside the bathroom.

Teach them about disinfecting the plunger when cleaning the toilet. Place inside and give a few plunges to clean the inside of it. Spray the top and twist in the toilet water to rinse off. Let air dry.

Show them how to shut off the toilet water in the event that the toilet is going to over flow. Teach them how to plunge the toilet, without spilling water over the sides.

Every area of the home that they were learning how to deep clean had a checklist to go through. I explained it the first time and walked them through cleaning it. They watched me as I did it and then I let them help. I didn't just hand them the page and expect them to do a good job. I had to physically do it and explain what I was doing and why I was doing it. I had to explain how urine can get splattered on the wall from boys and why it was important to wipe it off. I explained that when a bathroom is smelly, you can't just cover up the smell with spray. That you have to actually get down to the source and remove it. I explained why we scrub extra in the front of the toilet, it is typically where urine may get dripped down. I know all gross things, but again stuff they might not think about so it is important to explain.

Remember when teaching new chores to children, take the time and show them first. Then allow them to do some areas of it while you complete others. The next time give them more tasks to complete. Check each of their areas thoroughly and explain if they can do better in certain areas. Gently remind and encourage them if they did not do something correctly for the next time.

By doing this diligently, your children will eventually learn how to properly do the chore assigned. It all takes time. Eventually you will be very thankful for a home where you have extra hands to help.

HOSPITALITY AND FELLOWSHIP

This might seem like one of those “far off” dreams because of your circumstances, but I want to encourage you to fellowship and get together with other woman when you can. I didn’t do this much on my own when I had lots of little ones, but I had a dear friend who prodded until I would attend a homeschool picnic or attend a park day with others. It sure was a lot of work getting out the door, but it was a nice change for the children and I enjoyed the encouragement from other moms.

Since we have moved to a new state, I no longer have that friend to rely on for finding me things to do. I had to do that on my own. I started praying for the right opportunities. Our first year, we joined the local Farmers Market. My children sold lemonade and sandwiches to people coming home from work. We got to meet others in our community and we found another homeschooling mom through this who became good friends with us. We only made a little bit of money and some would think it was not worth the price, but it was a time of getting to know others in our community. Plus my children were learning how to serve and be hospitable to others. At the end of our season, we bought donuts, cider, and had pizza to give away to all of our customers. It was a memorable time in our lives.

Through the winter months, our librarian who was a homeschooled student, talked about how great it would be to have a gathering of other homeschooled children. Hmm, it got me thinking about starting a little group. We could meet at the library once or twice a month and it would help us find other families like us. We were already at the library during this time, my children were old enough that I didn’t have to give them much care. They could easily sit through while we did a craft or played a game. So we did.

I started writing a monthly newsletter to attract other moms to come to our gathering and we met each month. For the longest time, it was just myself and my other friend(who was new to homeschooling.) But we kept on and then shortly afterwards we had a couple other moms join in. Our little group has grown and we have enjoyed regular fellowship with one another. At first it wasn’t much work. We aimed for once a month so that it wasn’t

a big inconvenience. My daughter did a craft with the children while the moms talked and discussed different things we were dealing with for homeschooling. One month we focused on great books and videos. Another was easy recipes to help our lives be simpler. Every topic varied but it pertained to the struggles and helps in our lives.

Then summer rolled around and my daughter went away to work at a Christian girls camp. We had lost our craft maker. So we started meeting at my home which was real close to the library. We did Thursday afternoons. Everyone would bring something to share for a potluck lunch, and the children would play in the pool. It was a nice fellowship time, gave us a break, and my children looked forward to Thursdays.

We have since fellowshipped regularly each month by having a party at the library (depending upon the month or holiday), one field trip, and one gathering at our home. Last month we did a science experiment day and the children all made some flubber, a bouncy ball, and some homemade play dough. Stuff that we would never want to do because of the mess, but with everyone it was fun. This gives the children something different to look forward to and gives the moms a chance to fellowship and get out.

Other ideas to do with moms and children:

- Host a coffee gathering---set up a variety of coffee toppings and let the children play
- Have a potluck luncheon---do a nacho bar with everyone bringing a side
- Plan a craft day---everyone brings a craft and supplies to do with everyone
- Have a cookie exchange---this is good around the holidays
- Park days, field trips, look for free things to do in your area
- Host a speech day---let the children practice standing up in front of the group and presenting something. It may be something they have learned recently, a favorite book, or you can pick a topic and have everyone present on it.
- Service day---have everyone make thank you cards for volunteers in your community along with baking some easy treats. Take them

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to your local fire department or library as a “thank you” for their service.

Doing fellowship as a family is important as well. Talk with your husband about how often he would like to commit to doing it. You can make a list of people that you would like to invite over. Think neighbors, an older couple from church, or some other family you have been wanting to get together with. Commit to doing it and stick with it. Make the first weekend of every month your hospitality day. Plan a nice simple dinner and teach your children how to be hospitable. This is good teaching grounds. Let them know how to wait on a person, and teach them how to have conversations. This is a good time to go over those conversation starters to remember a couple of questions to ask to the other person. Let them know that it is more important to listen and to let the other person talk more during this time. Be a good listener.

Let your children do a good house pick up. Don't make this day be drudgery. Don't complain about how much work it is to get the house in order. Plan ahead, get your house cleaning done earlier in the week. Start making the food the day before if possible. Do all the things that you can do before your guests come. Focus on keeping the hour before they arrive calm and stress free. Have all your preparations done and you will have no need to be running around wildly. Take a few moments to pray and thank the Lord for this opportunity to be a blessing to someone else. Ask him for wisdom in your conversation and to keep it focused on being an uplifting time.

Keep a separate section in your household binder for gathering and party ideas. Keep special drink lists, food menu ideas, and simple ice breaker game ideas to do, if appropriate. Put away all phones or distractions during this time. Let your focus be on the person whom you invited over.

Make sure to sit down and listen to your guests. Don't run around doing tasks. Don't worry about that smudged window that you forgot to clean up. Focus on the words of the individual. Let your motivation be pure in heart. If your guests think you are so concerned with how messy your home is, then they are not going to feel welcome in your home. I have been to many different types of homes for dinner. The fellowship at times was not good even in the homes where everything shined and sparkled.

There were no real conversation. It all seemed fake and without heart. I have also been in homes that weren't that perfect and there might have been a slightly burned casserole, or the home had some clutter, but it didn't matter. The hostess made sure that they talked and shared eye contact with us. They tried to include everyone in the conversation and they genuinely seemed interested in having us over for dinner. That is the type of image you want to express. Have a willing, happy, and hospitable heart.

PLANNING SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Each year after the school year is completed, I start thinking about what we will do for the following years school. We always cover the basics: reading, writing, and arithmetic. That is a staple every year. I then start to evaluate each child's learning ability the past year, what their interests are, and what subjects they may have not learned yet. All these things play a factor in what we plan for the next school year.

I also know that if a child needs to work on something more the following year, we do so. I might have one that struggles with their penmanship. I make sure to have them copy verses or quotes every day.

Does your child struggle with learning their math facts? Then work for 5 minutes each day. We have done flash cards and speed tests over the years and those have been great. It was good until we lost flash cards and I ran out of the tests and had to reprint them off. I then discovered Xtramath.org. It is free and it drills your child in whatever math facts you choose. This has been the most effective way, I have found in teaching my children their facts.

By being diligent and consistent with where our children's struggles are goes a long way in helping them overcome those struggles.

We don't typically do science and social studies every year. Each year, as they mature and their interest grow, we take note of what we want to embark on as a family. This past year we wanted to do American history. We hadn't done it over the past few years, so I thought it would be a good time for the older one and the younger ones to be included. I first typed up a simple time line chart to list the specific areas of history we wanted to study. It included famous Americans and famous events that have happened. Then I started researching and reviewing different books that pertained to individual time periods. . I divided up the different main events and spaced them out so that each month we covered a different time.

September our focus was Native Americans

October was discovery and colonial period

November was Revolution, Declaration of Independence, and George Washington

December was Benjamin Franklin, Woman's Suffrage, Teddy Roosevelt, Elizabeth Blackwell, Thomas Edison, Thomas Jefferson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Florence Nightingale

January was the Civil War and Slavery

February was Lewis and Clark, Transcontinental Railroad, Gold Rush, The Orphan Trains, Immigration, and Child Labor

March was Great Depression, Dustbowl, World War I and II

April was Japanese Internment camps, Civil Rights, Vietnam

May was Modern day events—John Kennedy, Wilma Rudolph, Neil Armstrong, Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, Persian Gulf War, 911

Did we cover everything? Probably not, we may have missed a few people or events, this was just what our main focus was. We might find more people and events as we were studying but this was the main frame.

We like to read “living books” verses a dry textbook when learning. A “living book” can be effective because it can put the reader into the situation and time period that the author is trying to get across. I learned this from the Charlotte Mason method I once followed years ago. Her “theory” is that it is much easier for us to remember time periods and events when we can relate to them or remember a story verses a book about dates and facts that we were to memorize for history.

For example, we were just studying the gold rush that happened in California. I then came across some books about our state, North Carolina, and found that the actual first gold rush was here in our state. I had never heard that when I was growing up. I was taught the dates of when it happened, never all the interesting facts that we were going to learn. We just finished a book, that was written as a fictional account from the facts, of how gold was first discovered here. My children went away with

knowing what the first gold sold for and how much it was actually worth. We then went online and typed it how much the dollar was worth back in that time and converted it to about how much we would have received today. We looked at a map to see the town that it was discovered in. This led to further research on if gold is still found here today. How gold is formed and what to look for when searching. Dad is motivated to get us some pans so that we can try it out in our local creeks.

We learned a lot about that discovery and this happened from us reading a simple book that took us ½ hour one day. My children might not remember the specific year that it happened, but we do know it was 50 years before the textbook version of gold discovery in California. This is how we attempt our different time periods.

I also found some great documentaries on the events as well. Thank goodness for free speech in our country and the ability to share events and points of view that were typically hidden from us for years. I love that my children and I can learn things from a different point of view and perspective. Documentaries have been wonderful for this. My husband who is an avid learner, will watch and preview them before we show them to our children. Even if we may not agree with the creator of the video, we can surely use it as a tool to talk about people's different views on subjects. We have also watched reality shows of people who attempted to live like people of different eras. That allowed a springboard of information of how difficult that would have been.

For health and fitness we might focus on changing things in our own lives. I know this year, we have made it a regular thing to exercise each day. Sounds silly, but it is very easy when that colder weather comes to not want to do anything like exercise. This brought about much discussion of why it is important to do something every day. Why our muscles need to be moved and what happens to them if we don't. Why blood needs to be pumped through our heart and what it does in our bodies. We didn't do a formal textbook, but we looked up how the blood pumps through. We learned the different valves and arteries. We talk about muscles when exercising and which ones we are targeting. This helps us in learning what they are called.

Same goes for foods. We discuss why we need to eat a variety of them. This leads to the different vitamins and minerals and what they are found in. We talk about gluttony and living to eat instead of eating to live. Moderation in foods. What certain foods do to us internally. How food is digested. How certain ones clean out our insides and which ones clog them. My children know why it is more important to make homemade macaroni and cheese verses eating from a box. By taking this active and out of the box approach, information is stored much easily because it is lived out into practice.

When going about teaching your children, think outside the box of textbook learning. This type of method will go a long way in your child remembering things.

TEACHING YOUR CHILD TO READ

This has been something that I have learned to relax on over the years. When my first children came along and were “needing” to read, I stressed out more than I should have. We would sit for hours doing phonics drills over and over again trying to get it. I thought that they needed to be reading by a certain age or I was a failure. I have come to realize that ALL children are different and will mature at different ages but they will all eventually come to read in time. Boys typically will learn later than girls. Not all of them but most. Little boys are meant to run, play rough and be the boys God made them to be. They aren’t usually as interested as girls are sitting in a chair going through phonics drills. It is just not part of their nature. Let them play. Provide constructive play and lots of things for creativity. This will fuel and build their brains so much more than the piece of paper with letters on it. There will be a time when they will be able to sit and do schoolwork for longer periods, but don’t force it.

All of my boys, and a couple of girls, just did not comprehend the reading at a young age and that is okay. I still sat and read books to them. I would have read aloud story time and we would listen as a family to stories. My older ones still remember certain books that we read together. Those were good times. We didn’t have a formal school lesson in having them write a book report, but I would ask them questions about the book. If there was something that could relate to our own lives, I did expound on that. I worked at instilling a love of reading in them. I did this by reading to them each day. When my children were little, I would get stacks of books from the library and we did story time every afternoon. This is how children will learn.

As they were wanting to venture out and begin reading, we started working on phonics. I have a basic course for free on my blog, www.plainandnotsoplain.com that you can print off and work on doing with your child. It is a simple, and straight forward approach. You do only one page a day. Review it a couple of times throughout the day. It takes about 15 minutes or less. The key to learning is to be consistent. Set aside every day after breakfast to work with your new reader. Go through the phonics page together. When you get through a few months of practicing

that, then you can start getting simple beginner stories from your library. I mean simple. Think Dick and Jane books. Keep repetition and easy reading for them and they will eventually improve their skills. I keep beginner books in rotation each week for my early readers. If they can fly through the books on their own and not miss any words, then I start getting books at a higher level. We work our way up. I have a comprehensive list on my site as well, of different leveled readers. You can get them from your local library.

If you do this every day, they will improve dramatically. Starting and stopping and then going back on stuff will not improve them. Being consistent is when you are going to see a change. If you don't then as they get older and you "think" they should be at a certain level and they aren't, you are going to get frustrated and make it uncomfortable for them as they are struggling with reading. Do your part and work each and every day, Monday through Friday with this skill. They will improve.

Repetition and consistency is the key in teaching and training your children in ALL areas of life.

CLOTHING ORGANIZING FOR CHILDREN

One of the best ways that I have ever seen a family organize all of their children's clothing was to have a family closet. This was normally a small room off of the laundry room where everything was stored. This cut down hugely on the amount of time spent delivering laundry and putting away in the different rooms.

But, the reality is, not everyone has an "extra" room for a family closet. Nor, do the teenage girls want to keep their clothing in a room where the baby stuff is. We have had to do multiple ways over the years due to the home we lived in. When we had six little children, all of the clothing was in one large closet. That was easy. It was a good way to keep track of everything, it was easy to get everyone dressed, and it was easy for me to put it all away. I took the doors off the closet and stored things hanging up and in plastic storage drawers. I then let the older girls have theirs in their own closet. They were responsible enough to put their own away as well as the two older boys.

As we have moved, we are now able to keep the two little boys clothing together in one room, where they sleep. My two older boys, take care of their own laundry in their rooms. My older daughter does her own so it does not affect us. Then my four younger girls all share a closet area. We constructed an unused space under the stairs with PVC pipe to erect various heights of clothing bar storage. This works well. Each girl has about the same amount of space at various heights. We then use storage cubes to hold items like:

- under clothes
- socks
- pajamas
- leggings

Each girl has four cubes to keep their items organized. It works well, I don't worry about them keeping them folded neatly. Even though some do. I am more concerned about them learning to help put their own clothes away.

We hang up all dresses and shirts. My older girls fold their undershirts and skirts and use a cube for that. The two little ones, it is easier to put the skirts on the hangers with the tops so they know what outfit goes with what.

I have learned to simplify over the years. We receive many hand me downs which I am very thankful for. But I also realize that I can become gluttonous when it comes to clothing. Just because we received beautiful dresses does not mean that we need to keep them all. My girls only can wear so many. If their clothing bar which is about 28 inches across, is too stuffed full of clothing, it is time to weed out. We keep a few dresses for church and then everyday dresses. I make sure they are comfortable and something they will want to wear. We are at home a lot and they wear the same things each day. There is no need to have tons of clothing that is not going to get worn. We have people, whom we can pass along clothing to and that works. My husband can use the stained clothing as a rag in the shop. Nothing goes to waste. It all gets used.

How do I keep straight whose clothing is whose? I write their initial on the tag. If you have a lot of children in different sizes, it helps to label clothing with a number. Then as you pass down each item, that new child gets a new number. For our family, I typically only label leggings for the girls. Each girl is in a different size and it is hard to tell whose is whose when separating laundry. It has helped me to use a permanent marker and write their initial on the tag. When I purchase new underwear for the girls whose sizes are all one after the other, I buy different brands so that they each have a different pattern or color scheme. I know that the youngest ones are all patterns, the next might be neon colors, and the next all pastels. This helps me to quickly separate them without having to look at sizes. At one time when they were in different sock sizes, I did the same thing. One child got one brand or style and another a different one. This helped hugely in separation of weekly laundry. Now all socks go into one bin because they can all wear the same size. Pajamas are the same way. We use over sized t-shirts with their daily leggings or shorts for night time. The dresses and tops I can usually remember, and there aren't many of that to mistake. Sometimes I have to ask, "Whose dress is this?"

For the little boys, I do the same thing. There are only two little ones, so I just purchase one theme of underwear for one and another theme for the other boy. One year they both wanted the same thing and they were only one size apart. It was constant struggle for me trying to figure out which pair went to which boy because they were so similar in size. Then after the tag got washed away, it was even more difficult. I learned that year, and bought different ones. I do the same for socks. Even though they both wear black socks, one has the name printed on the toes and the other pair is just solid black. I mark their pants and tops as well with the initials because they are only about a size apart, I do mistake those often. A quick look at the tag and that helps.

I do the same thing for socks for my husband and son who both like white socks. One purchases the low cut no show socks and the other gets ankle socks. The other son likes black, I am thankful for. If everyone gets their own styles, it is much easier for the person who has to separate the laundry. Underwear styles are the same way. Certain cuts go for different people, it makes separation day much easier. It also helps me to label shirt tags. I couldn't remember if it was my husband's shirt or my older sons shirt. By marking the tags, it helps to ensure that everyone gets their own clothing.

Shoes can be another issue. I try and keep one pair of each of the following:

- dress shoes
- hiking/gym shoes
- dress boots
- flip flops
- nicer sandals

Sometimes we don't always have every one of these shoes on hand, I keep my eyes out for discounted shoes and deals. As long as they have a pair of hiking shoes, flip flops, and one nice pair then I am happy. Those are the necessities, but it is nice to have a couple extra pairs for whenever one decides to get lost or ruined.

Each year in the fall we do a family undergarment shopping trip. Everyone gets new underwear, we don't hand down this item. I get a package of new socks for each child. Some of them can share and we do that. My children

don't like socks and spend their time barefoot if possible. But there are times they need socks. I try and chose something that will look nice in a pair of dress shoes for church. The boys get black socks because they are boys and white would get dirty quickly. The girls are mostly white.

We also buy any leggings for the girls. Normally last year's leggings become this year's pair of shorts. I cut them off, no hemming needed and we wear them under skirts and dresses. Many trips to the park and I realize the importance of modesty especially in younger girls. Teach them it is important to keeping their bottoms clothed. Especially when swinging, sliding down slides, and doing gymnastics.

The boys follow the same similar pattern. Boys are harder on their clothing, so I tend to keep a few extra pants and tops for them knowing some are going to become rags before too long. I keep their shirts all hung up. Pants or shorts are stacked on a shelf above that. We keep a plastic drawer in their closet and that holds, underwear, socks, and pajamas. Each boy has his own drawer of separate items. This makes it much easier for them to go get a new pair of underwear or a pair of pajama pants. Simplify your life and don't have too much shoved into a drawer, or you will have a mess when they are "looking" for that certain item.

The boys shoes are stored in the closets. They have plenty of room on the floor where they are lined up. The girls don't have a lot of floor space, so we made an area in our mudroom that has a coat rack above it and a bench below it. The bench has cubes in it and each one has a different girls shoes inside. They are required when they get home to not just leave their shoes at the front door but to grab any socks they may have taken off, their shoes, and take them directly to their designated areas. This keeps the shoe population down at my front door. It can get overwhelming if I don't remind them. In the summer months, we keep a pair of flip flops for everyone outside the door.

If I don't diligently keep up on going through the clothing and shoe situation often, it will become overwhelming. We will have too much. It is important for us to go through these areas at least every few months to control the clutter.

GIVING INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION IN A LARGE FAMILY

As a Mom, we want to be that supermom that can do it all. We want to be the best wife and we want each and every one of our children to feel loved. We try and spend time with everybody equally, but sometimes it is hard. This is especially true when we have a lot of children to have to spread out our love to. How do you find time to focus on everyone in your family? This can be tough especially if you are the main caregiver and Dad is busy working at providing for the family. It isn't impossible, it just takes some creativity.

One way we accomplished this was to have times during the day that the older ones were to spend time with the little ones. This gave me a break from having to "do it all." As well as help teach the older ones how to be responsible, how to interact with little ones, and how to do something for someone else.

I started scheduling different times throughout the day that each child would get to spend time with a sibling. In our home, I made sure to get a rotation of everyone getting one on one time with the others each week. For example Lauren's schedule at one time would have been:

- Monday during naptime, her and Jadyn would work on a sewing project. This allowed Jadyn to learn a new skill that I was not able to take the time and do, plus it gave Lauren the chance to work on her projects as well.
- Tuesday she would do Autumn's kindergarten work with her. It freed up my time so that I could do something else.
- Wednesday she and Brooklyn would bake something. This helped me and it helped her to bond with her sister.
- Thursdays she would take the two little boys outside to play. Boys need to be outside and play to run off energy.
- Friday her and Evan would play a board game together.

This was only schedule for a ½ hour every day. If she wanted to do longer, she could. This gave her a chance to bond with her siblings individually.

Sometime we scheduled it so that every day from 10:00 until noon, we rotated different children playing with each other in ½ hour time frames. This worked well for the winter months when we were stuck inside for long periods of time. This made the day go much quicker. The playtime wasn't careless, it was intentional. Certain age groups could play games together. I even scheduled the baby to be with some of the older children. I have many pictures of older ones reading books to the littliest ones. This was something I wanted to do each day, but did not have time. I am thankful that it was able to get done in such a meaningful way. Autumn still remembers Ashlyn reading books to her each day.

Sometimes it was hard to figure out what to do with younger children. Especially if you are a preteen boy and don't know how to play with a toddler. I would keep a list of activities that were only allowed for this time. Some of these activities were ones that would have been way too messy to do with everyone, but having it be supervised with an older child allowed them to do it.

- Play dough
- puzzles
- paper cutting and gluing
- blocks
- Go fish
- Candy land
- paint with water books

I also scheduled in time for myself to be with the children. This might be so that mom could play dollhouse with one of the girls. Or that I sat and did play dough with a toddler. Things that I did not get to do often because I was busy. But if it was scheduled and I knew it was on my list, it would get accomplished.

I would often schedule a kitchen helper for me on different days. This allowed the specific child to help me with all the work involved in making a meal. That child got to crack the eggs, mix the batter, and help serve the dinner. This allowed more one on one time with Mom. Plus I was already doing that job but by adding in one helper, I spent individualized and quality time with them.

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I had them play in various parts of the home so that they would not be interrupted. The preschooler was not allowed to interrupt the toddler and older boy playing blocks. They were scheduled to do something else. If I had to keep my eye on some of them, especially those stronger willed children, I kept them near where I was working. This helped me to keep a watchful eye in case troubles arised.

As my younger ones are older now, I can divide up the time that the older children spend with them as well. Now they enjoy playing things like board games as a group, going outside to play catch, or playing red light green light. My boys love when older brother Evan, builds them creations out of Legos. It may seem simple, but it is a time that they get to build some bonding time with the younger ones and at the same time, I can know everyone is doing something constructive while I am busy working.

My little ones look forward to the day and often ask, “Who gets me today?” If you haven’t implemented this before in your large family, expect your older ones to grumble and complain a bit. I had the eye rolls, the staring at the clock—in hopes of their time to fly by, and a couple of verbal complaints in the beginning. I just kept it positive and said, “Wow, you really did a good job playing with Stephen today. He really looks forward to the time you spend with him.” Build them up. Let them know that what they are doing is making a lasting impression upon their younger siblings. Be consistent. Continue doing it every day.

Don’t let them feel that because they grew up in a large family that life is burdensome or that they always had to take care of a sibling. Teach them to build relationships, grow bonds of friendship among each other, and to instill good character traits among one another. We are training up our children to have compassion for one another, to help when there is a need, and to learn how to interact with little ones. We are NOT having more children so that they can take the brunt of the work that God has given to us. We don’t have large families so that we can still be “comfortable” and have “me time.” We are building bonds within the family structure.

ESTABLISHING MORNING AND NIGHTTIME ROUTINES FOR YOUR CHILDREN

As my children were growing up, I made them morning routine check off charts. This helped me from having to tell them what to do each morning. It listed the basics:

- making bed
- pick up all dirty laundry/quick clean of your room
- brush teeth/floss
- brush hair
- wash face and hands
- feed dog
- empty all household trash
- do your daily chore---see list on wall
- do Extra Math.org
- begin school pages

I made it in a chart form with a space to check off for two weeks worth. I left off Sunday, as we didn't do any chores on this day. I printed off multiple copies so that I could get a new one out as I needed. It looked like this:

Evan's morning routine	M	T	W	TH	F	S		M	T	W	TH	F	S
make bed							X						
pick up dirty laundry							X						
brush teeth							X						
feed dog							X						
empty trash							X						
							X						
							X						

For my younger set who couldn't read yet, I made them a picture morning schedule chart. I didn't do a chart that they could mark off, because I realized that they enjoyed making marks all over the paper?!?! I just let them go and see what their next chore was. It looked like this:



If you have a way to laminate it or place it in a paper sleeve protector, I would recommend this, otherwise you will be changing it frequently.

This helped a lot in me not having to ask over and over if someone brushed their teeth that morning. It helped in my children learning some self sufficiency and taking responsibility for themselves. It was one of those things where I found myself constantly asking seven children if they did their morning routine. I grew tired of it. When you grow tired and are finding that you are frustrated, it is time to change the way you do something. Fix whatever need you may have in your home.

If you homeschool and your children are responsible for doing certain subjects each day, you can write them out in a check off list as well. We

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keep all of our school work in a three ring binder. Each month, I place all the required pages in order of what they have to complete. If there is something else that they have to do extra, I place a sheet with those requirements on the first page. For example, each day they have to read for ½ hour, do math facts on XtraMath.org, watch video, do maps book, and complete pages. Place it in a plastic sleeve to protect it and I place in the front of their notebook. This helps me from having to repeat myself of what tasks they have to do each day.

I then made them an evening routine chart. I like to keep our evenings unscheduled, but there are certain things that they need to do. I wrote down when they had to take a bath, when to cut nails, and clean ears. If I didn't write it down, it may get forgotten. Having a chart has solved me reminding them. It looked like this:

Evan's nighttime routine	M	T	W	TH	F	S		M	T	W	TH	F	S
brush teeth							X						
wash face/hands							X						
clean up bathroom mess							X						
read devotional							X						
take a bath/cut nails/clean ears	X		X		X		X	X		X		X	
feed dog and bring her in													

As they got older, they started remembering their routines and I would have no need for this chart. This helps the ones that are learning to establish them.

BIRTHDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

In our home, we get many times per year to celebrate something. Between anniversaries and birthdates, we almost have one every single month. How do we go about celebrating and making each child feel special without being overloaded with parties? We plan ahead.

For every birthday, we purchase streamers and a pack of balloons and decorate the home before the birthday child wakes up. We write something special to the recipient on the marker board and will make banners if we can.

The birthday child gets the day off from doing chores. The other children help out by doing some of their work.

The child also gets to choose what they would like to eat for the day. Some may choose pancakes for breakfast, while some older ones want “sugar” cereal. This is a treat as we don’t ever buy it. Lunch is their choice as well. Some choose processed foods and that is fine. If it is a more expensive item for everyone to have, then I will just get it for the birthday child. Dinner, they can choose to either go out and eat or we make their favorites at home. If they go out and eat, it cuts into our birthday budget, so it is encouraged to eat at home. I might take the birthday girl out for a Happy Meal for lunch to have a special treat.

Everyone also chooses their favorite birthday dessert. Not everyone chooses cake and ice cream. Here are some that have been chosen:

- strawberry pretzel dessert
- chocolate éclair dessert
- brownies and ice cream
- ice cream sandwich dessert
- angel food cake

The child will usually tell us what they would like for their birthday. Every child is different. If we are able to do the gift they requested, then we do. One child wanted their ears pierced this year and we did. Another child wanted a baby doll that cost a lot of money. She knew that would be the

only gift she received. She was content on that. One of my daughters wanted to go out to dinner and to a concert for her birthday, so we did that instead of gifts. My son and husband usually go on a fishing trip for the day. We do whatever is going to be special for that child.

For holidays we plan games and special activities to help celebrate the holiday as well. For Valentine's Day, I buy candy or make homemade chocolate treats for everyone. For the 4th of July, we will make a "flag cake" out of Cool whip topping with strawberries and blueberries lined up as a flag. Easter time we will do the Resurrection rolls or Empty Tomb cookies. For Christmas time, we make a Happy Birthday Jesus cake. All these ideas, I have documented on my blog.

We also try and plan to have some party games with each celebration. When I come across a neat game idea, I add it to my household binder under celebrations. This way when birthday time rolls around, I can look through my list of games to play. Most all of the games only use items that we have in our home already. This makes it easier. This is something that the younger ones look forward to doing and we make it a point to have everyone participate, to help celebrate with the child.

We have played the following games over the years:

- Drop clothespins into a quart jar while kneeling on a chair
- Pin the tail on the donkey or based on your party
 - pin the lips on the Valentine heart lady
 - pin the nose on the snowman
 - pin the gobble on the turkey
- Pass the parcel—wrap small prizes like candy and novelty toys inside of plastic wrap to form a ball. One person starts unwrapping as much as they can and the person next to them rolls the dice. When they get doubles, they take the ball and start unwrapping. This continues on around the circle.
- Musical chairs
- Hot potato
- How tall of a tower can they make in one minute out of conversation hearts or wrapped Starburst candies without it falling.

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- Place wrapped foil chocolates in a bowl and have each person put on a pair of gloves to see if they can unwrap the chocolates. Do in a relay race type form to see which team wins.
- We set up an obstacle course in the yard for our summer celebrations. We have teams race through riding big wheels, throwing water balloons at a target, stacking blocks, squeezing water out of one bucket into another, sliding down the slide, and racing to the finish line.
- We have done scavenger hunts around the house and in the yard.
- How many stacks of three mini marshmallows can they stack in one minute. They have to stack three to form a snowman.
- Charades---it helps to type up ideas beforehand. For Christmas, we will type of different Christmas activities to try and act out. For example: baking cookies, wrapping presents, setting up the tree, etc.
- Stacking cups contest. Do this with cups and see who can do it the fastest.
- After your cups are stacked, you can try and see who can knock down the most with a rolled up sock.
- Take three ice cream buckets and see who can throw the most rolled socks into the buckets.
- Water balloon toss.
- Make a homemade piñata.
- Make a bean bag toss game out of an appliance box and some paints.
- Fill a bowl with dried rice and safety pins. Blindfold the person and see how many pins they can find.
- Egg toss game.
- Make a snowman—two teams compete to make a person become a snowman out of a roll of toilet paper, paper cut out buttons, a carrot and a snow hat.
- The straw game. Give each child a cupcake liner and about 10 M&M candies along with a straw. The goal is for the child to “suck up” and hold the candies without any hands to the straw and transfer them to the cupcake liner.
- BINGO

Our goal is to make the birthday child feel special. Everyone participates to make them feel special. Children will all work on making cards for the birthday child and some older ones may make or purchase a small gift. Celebrations don't have to cost a lot, they can be made special by doing fun things together.

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIME

This was always a daunting task. I felt like we had to do this legalistically, by the book session with our children and it was a little frightening. I can honestly say I wasn't sure of what to do for family worship. Our good family friends, the Bakers would share with us their family devotional time when they would come visit and we have come to adapt that in our own families.

This is a special time that all my children look forward to. It can take anywhere from ½ hour to 1 hour. We start out with songs. One child will choose someone and they will pick out their favorite song to sing and we all sing it. Some of our favorites are:

- Father Abraham
- Jesus loves me
- Jesus loves the little children
- This little light of mine
- The B.I.B.L.E
- I am a CHRISTIAN
- He's got the whole world in his hands
- I've got the joy, joy, joy down in my heart
- Happy all the time
- I'm in the Lords Army
- God is so good
- Zaccheus
- You're a peach of a Savior

We choose some regular praise and worship songs like: Amazing Grace, Ocean's Wide, Jesus Lover of my Soul, Our God is an Awesome God. There are many that we can choose from. Those are just the favorites.

If we have extra time we might say one thing that we are thankful to God for. We go around and have everyone share.

After a time of worshipping and singing, we read our Bible. We are working on reading a chapter per day in the New Testament. We read from

an easier to understand version for children. ESV is a good version without many “thee’s or thou’s”.

Then it is time for prayer. Everyone gets a chance for a prayer request. Try and teach your children to choose and pray for someone else whom they love and want to see improve in their lives. This might be a sick friend, someone not walking with the Lord, or a child that they met at the park that day. Dad or Mom will lead a prayer for everyone and we all say Amen.

If you want to start seeing changes in your home, start by having family devotion time. If your husband won’t lead it or doesn’t want to do it, do it during the day time. Start after breakfast time. Your children will learn to love your time together.

Don’t be a nagging wife and “wish“ that your husband would lead your family. If this is something that God has shown you to do, do it at a time that won’t be offensive to your husband. Let the Lord work on him. But you do everything that you are supposed to do. That includes honoring your husband. Not reminding him that he isn’t leading the family. This comes from personal experience. It is best for you to do as God would want YOU to do and let God do what HE needs to do.

PEACEFUL HOME

Creating a peaceful home starts with you, the Mom. How we decide to structure, run, and interact in our homes determines whether there is a peaceful atmosphere or not. If our homes are full of clutter and mess, it will cause stress. You will grow tired of looking at the “stuff.” Your husband will grow tired of looking through things trying to find his tools. He will grow tired of having to move everything whenever there is a project to be done. You will get sick of tripping over things. Each time you walk into your child’s room it will look like a tornado went through it. You will have to pick through and find the proper tools needed when you want to bake things. You will grow weary and that doesn’t need to happen.

Even if your home is small, it can be organized and clutter free. We have lived in many different sized homes. Each time, I had to reorganize our home to make it work our situation. There were many things that I had to get rid of because there was no room to store them. You have to lose that emotional attachment to things. Things that you are not going to do anything with. Things that are going to sit in an attic or basement and do nothing. If you aren’t going to use it, get rid of it. It may be great that you have an entire collection of things, but if you can’t display them what good are they doing in a box? Keep a few of the things you love, display them, and get rid of the rest.

Decide what it is that makes you want to keep your “stuff.” Evaluate your feelings as to why you keep things. Maybe you never had things in your childhood so you want your child to have every toy or article of clothing that you can. This is great if you have a big house to contain it, if you don’t, it is just going to create stress. You are going to be stressed trying to keep it clean. Your child is going to be stressed when you tell them to keep their rooms cleaned. If they don’t have a simple way to keep it organized it becomes overwhelming. Your husband will grow tired of coming home from work each day and seeing a big mess all the time. If people come over to visit, you will get stressed by the mess that you have to contain. Having less stuff creates more time to enjoy those fewer things that we have.

Same things apply for other areas of your home. If you have a lot of clothing and most of it unworn it is work to keep it up. You have to work at stuffing new things into your closet and trying to make them fit. You might not even put your clothing away due to not having enough space in your closet to keep it. This is stress. If you husband has to push clothing aside and sort through trying to find his work clothes, that creates unnecessary stress.

If you look around at your home and notice all of the dirt and mess that need to be cleaned up and your husband wants to go out for the day, but you choose to stay home and clean, that creates stress. If you set up your cleaning system, follow it, and get it done during the week, you will have time for your husband and family on the days he is off. You won't have to worry about tasks piling up, because you know that your floors are going to get vacuumed on Monday because that is when they are scheduled.

When your mind starts to think about all the things that you have to do and have let get undone, that creates stress. If you set up your days for specific tasks you know things will get accomplished. When your mind is thinking about shopping, ordering library books, the piles of laundry, and the need to bake some muffins for the week that can get overwhelming and cause stress. If I know that on Wednesday I will get my baking done, Thursday I will get those library books ordered, and Friday we will go shopping, then I have a plan and my mind can rest.

No matter what is going on in our life or how we feel we should remember to place a smile on our faces for our family to see. Even when going through the arduous tasks of taking care of children, take the time to smile. Take times throughout your day to bend down and get right on their level when talking to them. I remember an exercise when I was in high school and our teacher stood up on a desk to teach us. How difficult it was to look up all the time at her. She also had us hold our hands up like we would do when holding a hand for a little one. That is hard to do all the time. Put yourself in their situation. Get down on their level and look them in the eyes when they are talking to you. Give them kisses and hugs often. Smile and laugh at silly things said. Even if you don't feel like it, take the time and do it. Create a happy home where they feel loved and secured.

Watch your tone of voice. It is very easy when you are stressed to yell. Yell because no one came the first time you called. Yelling because you are stressed out and have exploded. Don't get to the point of yelling. Yelling shows a spirit of out control in yourself. If multiple things are happening and going wrong, find out the reason for it. If a child needs discipline, do it right away. Don't wait until you get to the point of stress and then do something about it. Deal with it immediately. I know I would do a lot of yelling when my children didn't come when I called them. Finally I realized they need to learn to come the first time I call no matter what. We started training and working on it. Yes, it was more work. Yes it took more time, but eventually they knew what was expected of them. If they disobeyed and did not come the first time I called them, it would be more work on my part to have to go get them and discipline them. But in the long run, they know it is expected of them. If I just let that go, then I would constantly be angry because they didn't listen.

Pay attention to what makes you yell or what makes you stressed and fix it. You can carry this onto your husband and children as well. Talk to your husband and ask him if there is anything that he wants you to do differently in the home. Maybe he gets frustrated when there is no coffee for him when he wakes up. Make it a point to make sure he has coffee each day before leaving. If you are yelling at your children because their closet is messy, find a solution to the problem. Is there too much clothing to deal with? Is there a better way to organize it? Find the source and fix it. Don't just keep letting things pile up, take the time as the keeper of the home and fix it.

One way to conquer your yelling voice is to whisper. When you are tempted to raise your voice, actually lower it. Your children will have to stop talking and actually tune in to what you are saying. It is good practice for you to learn not to raise your voice. When we would eat dinner, every child would begin talking and it was loud. I would wait until it escalated and then burst out in a loud voice. Then I finally started speaking quietly, whispering words to my children. They had to stop and tune into what I was saying. It did lower the level of loudness at the table.

Moms, it begins with something that we need to do in our lives. It is an area that we need to evaluate and make changes in. Find out what is

stressing you or causing you to yell and work at changing it. Ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance in this area of life.

Our homes should be a peaceful haven of rest and comfort. It should be a place that our husbands want to spend time in. A place that our children feel loved and secure in. A place where we can encourage a friend and not have to be embarrassed of the mess around us. This all begins with you, the Mom, the keeper of the home.

FAMILY FAVORITE RECIPES

These are a collection of the many family recipes that we have mentioned in this book. They are all tried, true, and our families favorites. Many have pictures and step by step instructions over on our family blog. Enjoy!

Apple dapple cake

3 eggs
 1 1/2 cups oil
 2 tsp vanilla
 2 cups sugar
 2 3/4 cups flour
 1 tsp baking soda
 1 tsp salt
 1 tsp ground cinnamon
 1 tsp nutmeg
 3 cups apples chopped
 TOPPING
 1/3 cup butter
 1 cup brown sugar
 1/4 c milk
 1 tsp vanilla
 2 cups powdered sugar

Mix the first four ingredients until well combined with mixer. Then add all of your dry ingredients. Fold in your chopped apples. Pour into a greased 9x13 baking pan. Bake 350 for 45 minutes. When finished take out of the oven and prepare topping. Melt butter and sugar in saucepan and boil for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in the rest. Immediately pour over warm cake.

Baked French toast

1 1/2 sticks butter
 1 cup brown sugar
 1 1/2 tsp cinnamon
 12 slices of bread
 2 cups of milk
 10 eggs

What I do first, is to melt my sticks of butter in a 9x13 pan.

While that is melting I mix up my eggs and milk. After the butter is melted, I stir into it 1 cup of brown sugar. Spread it across the bottom of your pan to cover. I then sprinkle it with cinnamon.

Place 12 slices of bread on top of the sugar mixture. Put bread 2 slices high in pan. Pour your egg/milk mixture over top of your bread. Wrap in foil and then refrigerate overnight. In the morning or evening, depending upon when you are going to serve your meal, place in 350 oven and cook for 45 minutes. This will puff right up out of the pan.

Beef stroganoff

In Crockpot, add about 1 lb shredded chopped leftover roast. Cover meat with water, add beef bouillon to taste— about 1-2 Tablespoons, one chopped onion, and 2 cans of cream of mushroom soup. If you don't have roast, you can substitute cooked ground beef. Cook 2 packages of wide curly ribbon noodles till almost but not quite done. Add to Crockpot, then turn on low for 2 hours. Mix together, then add 1-16 oz container of sour cream before serving.

Black beans and rice

1 cup canned black beans
1 c rice
1/8 c oil
1 lg clove garlic
2 chicken bouillon cubes
1/2 tsp salt
1/8 tsp parsley
1/8 tsp thyme
1/8 tsp cayenne pepper

Smash garlic and onion, sauté in oil. Add beans and sauté for a few minutes. Add bouillon cubes, spices and water to beans. Add rice. Bring to a boil, stir and cover. Simmer for 20 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes.

Burrito casserole

2-pkg 8-10 count whole wheat fajita tortillas
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1-16 oz container of sour cream
1 lb hamburger, cooked
1 pkg taco seasoning
1-16 oz can refried beans
1-24 oz jar salsa
2 cups shredded cheese
toppings, lettuce, tomatoes, salsa, sour cream

Mix the cream of mushroom soup and sour cream in a small mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, mix the cooked hamburger, taco seasoning, refried beans, and salsa. In a 9×13 pan spread 1/2 of your cream mixture on the bottom of it. Place a scoop of the meat mixture in a tortilla and then roll it up. Place side by side in pan. Spread rest of the cream mixture on top. Top with shredded cheese. Bake in 350 oven for 30 minutes.

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Caramel corn

- 1 cup butter
- 2 cups brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup corn syrup
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 8 cups popped popcorn

In a small saucepan combine butter, sugar, salt, and corn syrup. Over medium heat stir and bring to a boil. Continue boiling on low heat for 5 minutes stirring occasionally. Shut off heat and stir in baking soda. It will foam up and help the ingredients stick together. While your ingredients are heating up, pop your popcorn. You need at least 8 cups of popped popcorn. We filled up our turkey roaster pan and found that sufficient. After your mixture has boiled and you added the baking soda, pour it immediately over the popcorn and stir until well coated. You can add peanuts to your mixture if you enjoy it. Bake in 200 degree oven for about 45 minutes. Every 15 minutes gently stir the popcorn. Remove from oven and cool. Store in closed containers.

Cheeseburger casserole

- 2 boxes radiatore, cooked
- 1 large onion, minced
- 2 T minced garlic
- 2 lb cooked ground beef
- 1 tsp salt and pepper
- 1 small can of tomato sauce
- 2-28 oz cans of diced tomatoes
- 4 T mustard
- 4 cups cheddar cheese

Pickles served on the side

This is real simple, one of those 1 pot dishes. Mix everything together in a skillet. Heat till warm and serve.

Chili

- 2 (30 oz) cans of pinto beans
- 2 quarts diced tomatoes
- 1 can corn
- 3 (15 oz) cans chili beans
- 1 (7oz) green chilies
- 1 lb ground beef, cooked
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 pkt ranch powder
- 1 pkt taco seasoning

Mix all the ingredients and set in a pot to cook on med- low for an hour. Serve with lettuce, corn chips, ranch, and cheese.

Amy Maryon

Chocolate chip pumpkin muffins

3 eggs, well beaten
3/4 cups oil
2 cups sugar
2 1/4 cups canned pumpkin

BEAT THE ABOVE TOGETHER

2 1/2 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
1 1/2 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp nutmeg

SIFT TOGETHER THE DRY INGREDIENTS AND THEN BLEND IN

add 1 pkg chocolate chips to mixture

Scoop into greased cupcake pans and bake 350 for 30 minutes until done

Chocolate éclair dessert

1 pkg of graham crackers
2 pkg of instant vanilla pudding
3 cups of milk
1-8oz container of cool whip
1 container of chocolate frosting

Place 1/3 of your graham crackers in the bottom of a 9x13 pan. Mix the pudding and milk together until combined. Add cool whip. Place 1/2 of the mixture on top of the crackers. Then top with 1/3 more crackers and the rest of the pudding mixture. Add your final crackers to the top. Melt your chocolate frosting in the microwave on low until a pourable consistency. Pour and spread over top of desert. Place in freezer overnight. Remove a few minutes before serving.

Energy bites

1 cup oatmeal
1/2 cup peanut butter
1/3 cup honey
1 cup unsweetened coconut
1/2 cup flax seed
1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

Mix the peanut butter and honey until well combined. In a separate mixing bowl add the rest of the ingredients. Pour the liquid into the dry. Mix until well combined. Form into golf ball sized balls and place on cookie sheet. Place in freezer to harden. Store in freezer and take out however many you want for a snack at a time.

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Garlic beef enchiladas

In a saucepan add the following:

- 1 pound cooked hamburger
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 2 Tablespoons flour
- 1 Tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 can stewed , diced, pureed tomatoes

Let cook and simmer to mix flavors.

In a separate small sauepan mix:

- 1/3 cup butter sautéed with 5 cloves minced garlic
- Add 1/2 cup flour and make a paste

Mix in:

- 2 cups beef broth
- 1- 14 oz can tomato sauce
- 1 Tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cumin

To assemble, cover the bottom of a 9x 13 pan with sauce. Fill mixture into tortillas and roll up. Set on top of sauce. Depending upon how gooey you want this, you can top with remaining sauce or just top with cheese. We don't like it very gooey, so we just topped ours with cheese. Bake 350 for 30 minutes.

Granola bars

- 20 oz mini marshmallows
- 3/4 cups butter
- 1/4 cups oil
- 1/4 cups honey
- 1/4 cups peanut butter
- 5 cups oatmeal
- 4 1/2 cups Rice Krispies
- 1 pkg graham crackers crushed
- 1 cup chocolate chips

Melt the first five ingredients over medium-low heat, just until melted. Meanwhile in a large mixing bowl, combine the rest of the ingredients. Pour the melted mixture over the dry mixture. Stir until combined. Pour into a jelly style roll pan and press down firmly with your hands. Let cool and then cut into bars.

Amy Maryon

Haystacks

Very simple dinner to make. Make bowls of the following:

rice
taco meat
refried beans
salsa
lettuce, chopped
onion, diced
green pepper, diced
nacho cheese, optional—depending upon if you want the extra
shredded cheese
diced tomatoes
sour cream

Let your guests create their own “haystack” on plates. This feeds a crowd well.

Honey whole wheat bread

3 pkg yeast
5 cups warm water
1 T plus 2/3 cups honey
2/3 cups oil
1/2 cup sugar
2 t salt
4 c flour
1 c wheat germ
6-8 cups more flour

First get your yeast mixture going. I add 1 cup warm tap water, 3 pkg yeast (or 3 T if you are using the bulk mix), and 1 T honey. While your yeast is rising, I add 4 cups warm water, 2/3 cups honey, 2/3 cups oil(I use coconut), 1/2 c sugar(I use raw), 2 t salt, 4 c flour(I use white whole wheat) and 1 c wheat germ into a large mixing bowl. Mix it with your mixer, a whisk, anything that you have will work. After you have mixed it for about 3 minutes you can add the rest of your flour, 1-2 cups at a time. Keep mixing in the dough. You want to be turning the dough with your hands or wooden spoon. I knead it right in the bowl, no need to mess up your countertops. You want a nice spongy dough. Transfer to a greased bowl and flip it, to coat the top of the dough. Let it set and rise for an hour or more, just keep punching it down until you are ready to form into loaves.

Grease your bread pans and. Let rise until the dough almost fills the pan. Then you can preheat your oven to 350 degrees. Place in the oven for 40 minutes. When done let sit on counter for about 10 minutes. Then I pop them out of the pans, if they do not come out right away I just set them on their sides and they will release as they cool.

*you can see a step by step tutorial on how I do this on my blog www.plainandnotsoplain.com

Hummus

2 cans garbanzo beans
4 teaspoons of minced cloves of garlic, less if you don't want it so garlicky
1/4 cup lemon juice
2 T olive oil
4 T peanut butter
1 teaspoon cumin

In a food processor or blender add 2 cans of garbanzo beans, drain one can and leave the other can full of liquid. Add the rest of the ingredients and blend until well combined .

Large family living

Ice cream sandwich dessert

Place in the bottom of a 9x13 pan, one layer of ice cream sandwiches. Top with ½ container of cool whip. Drizzle chocolate and caramel syrup over top. Chop up your favorite candy bars and place half on this layer. Then repeat the same layers. Cover and place in freezer overnight. To serve cut and slice.

Italian noodle salad

1 box radiatore noodles, cooked, rinsed in cold water, drained
3 mini seedless cucumbers diced up
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup diced chicken lunchmeat
2 green onions sliced
1 bottle of Italian dressing with 2 T sugar mixed in to cut the sweetness
Mix all ingredients and let sit overnight for best flavor.

Lasagna

Maryon's spaghetti sauce recipe—see below

1-16 oz container of ricotta cheese
2 cups mozzarella cheese
1/2 cup parmesan cheese
1 pkg lasagna noodles—cooked and sitting in cold water to avoid sticking
Mix the cheese together in a bowl. Layer in your crockpot the following:
1/3 sauce
noodles
1/3 cheese mixture
noodles
1/3 sauce
noodles
cheese mixture
noodles
rest of sauce

I like to sprinkle some parmesan cheese on the top of my lasagna. I put this on low for about 2 hours. If you really need to stretch it you can put on warm for 4 hours.

Lentil rice casserole

In Crockpot put the following:

1 # package lentils
1 cup brown rice
4 T minced, dried onions
6 cups water with 2 T chicken bouillon
1/2 tsp oregano
1/2 tsp thyme
2 T minced garlic

Cook on high for 2-3 hours until liquid is dissolved or low for 4-6 until dissolved.

Amy Maryon

Meatloaf

Mix 3 lbs of raw meat, 3 eggs, 1 cup oatmeal, salt, pepper, and about 1/2 cup of chopped onion.

I press down half of the mixture into a 9x13 pan. Top with ketchup and mustard. Slice some pickles on. Then top with cheese slices. Add the remaining hamburger on top. Bake 350 for about 1 hour or until done.

Monster cookies

1/2 cup white sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup butter
2 cups peanut butter
4 eggs
1 tsp vanilla
6 cups oatmeal
2 1/2 tsp baking soda

2 cups mixed baking chips***at the Amish bulk food store I used to shop at this mixture included white chocolate, semi sweet chocolate, milk chocolate, peanut butter chips, butterscotch chips and m & m candies. For myself I would use a package of chocolate chips and butterscotch and then some M&Ms. I would split it up to make 2 cups for this recipe.

Pancake muffins

3 cups flour
1 T baking powder
3 T sugar
3/4 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups of milk mixed with 1 T vinegar to make sour milk
2 eggs
1 T maple flavoring
4 T butter melted

Mix all the ingredients together to make your pancake batter and then you can start filling those tins.

We like to make mini blueberry pancake muffins. After we filled the tins with batter ¾ full, we added three blueberries per tin. Bake in 400 oven for 10 minutes. We have also done where we added chopped breakfast sausage to the pancake mixture. It reminded me of the expensive pancakes on a stick we used to purchase.

Pineapple salsa chicken

Mix the following:
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup vinegar
3 T garlic
2 T soy sauce
1 can pineapple chunks in juice
1/2 cup salsa

Place that into a Crockpot and set in your chicken pieces. Cook on medium until cooked thoroughly.

Large family living

Pizza crust

2 pkg yeast
2 2/3 cups water
3 T sugar
3 T vegetable oil
1 tsp salt
6 1/2 cups to 7 cups of flour

Combine yeast, water, and sugar. Let stand for 5 minutes. Stir in the remainder ingredients. Knead until smooth and let rise until double. Punch down and roll out into pan. Bake at 425 for 8 minutes before adding toppings. This gives you 2 large pizzas.

Poor boy subs

In a small mixing bowl combine with a mixer 1 pkg cream cheese, 1/2 stick butter, 2 T minced garlic, and 2 squirts of mustard. This is the sauce that will be spread on your bread. Get the large Italian loaves from your local store. Spread about 4 Tablespoons of the mixture on half of your bread. Then layer ham, salami, and Swiss cheese. We also like chicken, bacon, and salami. Place together and cover completely in foil. Let heat in a 350 oven for about 20 minutes. To serve you can then add shredded lettuce, tomatoes, mild pepper rings, and pickles.

Puppy chow

2 boxes of Chex cereal
1-jar of 18 oz peanut butter
1 pkg chocolate chips
2 T coconut oil or butter
32 ounces of powdered sugar

Mix the first three ingredients over low heat. Stir until melted and pour over cereal in a large bowl. Mix until well combined. Then pour powdered sugar on top and coat the cereal. Store in a covered container.

Rice krispy treats

1 box crispy rice cereal
2 -10 oz bags of marshmallows
6 T butter or margarine

In a large pot place your butter and then add your marshmallows. Turn on medium low heat. Continue stirring until melted. Once melted, pour in your box of cereal. Mix it up good. Spray two jelly roll style pans with nonstick cooking spray. Pour your mixture into both pans evenly. I then wet my hands just a bit to avoid sticking. Press down and form into pan. Let sit for about an hour and then cut up.

Amy Maryon

Sausage, red beans, and rice

1 pkg smoked sausage
2 cans diced tomatoes
2 cans chili beans
2 -8oz cans of tomato sauce
2 lb package of rice
½ chopped onion

Slice your sausage into coin shapes. Cook in your skillet with onions until they are soft. Then add beans and sauce. Stir until combined and cook over medium-low heat for 10 minutes. Make up rice according to package directions. Serve bean mixture over rice.

Spaghetti

1 lb hamburger, cooked

3 pints pureed tomatoes
1 pint tomato sauce—I buy the large supersize can of this for around \$3 and then split it up into smaller pint containers and freeze

2 cloves minced garlic
1 teaspoon basil and oregano
1 t dried minced onion
1 t dried green pepper
2 T sugar

We freeze our pureed tomatoes and tomato sauce, so we just put all of the above ingredients into a pot and cook on medium low heat until melted and then I let it simmer for an hour or so depending upon my day. I cook my pot of spaghetti noodles to go with this and you have Maryon's spaghetti sauce.

Strawberry pretzel dessert

1-16 oz pkg pretzels—you will use about 3/4 of the bag, finely crush them in food processor.
1 cup butter, melted
6 T sugar

Mix the above all together and pat in a 9x 13 pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes. Let cool completely.

Then you will need to: blend 1 pkg cream cheese and 1 cup sugar
When thoroughly combined add 1-8oz container of cool whip and combine well. Spread this over top of your cooled pretzel crust.

Slice up 2 pkg of strawberries and place on top of cream cheese mixture. Refrigerate while you are waiting for your next step, Jello, to set up.

Make according to package directions 3 packages of strawberry jello. Let sit in refrigerator until partially set up. You want to be able to pour it but not completely liquid or it will seep down through your desert. Once partially set up, pour over top of strawberries and refrigerate your desert for a few more hours, or overnight.

Large family living

Tater tot casserole

1 pound ground beef cooked and flavored with onions
1 pkg tater tots
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 can of milk

Place your ground beef on the bottom of a 9x13 pan and top with tater tots. Combine the soups, 1 can of milk, and mix. Pour over top of tater tots. Bake in a 350 degree oven for 30-40 minutes until bubbly. We like to add slices of American cheese to the top about 10 minutes before bake time is done.