

## 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:

- 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 ½ 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 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 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.

Excerpt from Large Family Mothering by Amy Maryon