

EASY Homemaking Ideas For The Busy Homeschool Mom!

By Cindy Rushton



Homemaking...The word Homemaking brings back many fond memories of my childhood home. I can almost smell the homemade goodies that mom labored daily to make. I can almost feel the crisp, clean sheets from those Monday washings. Thinking back brings me sweet memories of my home-sweet-home mom!

I began homeschooling much like many of you. I had spent 6 years of marriage modeling after my dear mother. She always had the laundry out on the line, the entire house cleaned, lunch cooking, and dinner laid out all before 7:00 AM!

You can probably imagine my difficulties the first year of homeschooling as I tried to keep up this pace in my home. Oh, beloved! I did it! However, I was worn out... frustrated... and KNEW there must be a change! I prayed about my concerns and as usual the Lord gave His direction...His Plan. It would be to manage my home well but not at the expense of developing relationships with my husband and children or at the expense of homeschooling these treasures. Let me share some tips today that I have learned over the last few years that make homemaking a delight...

• **♥ Semi-Annual Cleanout...**

One thing that you can do today to get a handle on homemaking in your

homeschool is to stop what you are doing and do a big clean out! Yes, I am saying stop all that you are doing now... as you begin your new year. Stop and spend some time this week cleaning out and organizing. It will make all the difference in the world in the atmosphere of the home. Also, take a break in the Fall to do another real good cleanout. This helps me to keep overall order... even if our home is "lived in." Of course, another plan you might like better is the "Zone Cleaning" from Flylady. For those of you online, you may want to check out her wonderful website at www.flylady.net for all of her wonderful and easy tips for truly cleaning out and getting into a homemaking routine! I bought her new book *Sink Reflections* and it is better than her website—if that can happen! We have been taking her "baby-steps" to get our home and office completely decluttered and ready for another big travel season! It is so nice to have those papers in binders...those books organized on the shelf...those closets... well, we are still working! hehe! A semi-annual cleanout (or hitting those Zones!) will help you to get all in order

so that your family can only maintain order...this gives you a peace of mind so you can relax and enjoy teaching (and PLAYING)!

• Morning Chore Time...

After you have your home in order for the new year, all that will be needed is maintenance. We maintain our home by requiring a morning chore time. When the children were all young, I used to set myself a timer of one hour to clean and do chores. I would set the children's timer for 10-15 minutes and call for a *clutter drill*. (When they were real little I would have clutter drills at different times of the day so we kept their things straightened.) They would have to pick up everything they could before the buzzer went off. Usually all of our cleaning was done in about 5 minutes—it was amazing! If the work did not get done, I waited until the next day to do it. This worked well to keep our home from becoming a distraction from the important job of disciplining our children. Plus, it trained our entire family in the habit of doing their part in cleaning the house quickly. Now that my children are trained, the bulk of the housework is done by them during their morning chore time. Our chore time is first thing after our Quiet times. Everyone just gets busy doing their part... Elisabeth gets the laundry going, cleans the bathroom as needed, puts away any dishes, washes any dirty dishes, helps to feed the chickens and animals, cleans her room, vacuums, and

helps with any other chores that need to be done...Matthew takes care of feeding and caring for our bird, helps with the laundry that needs folding or putting away, dusts, straightens the kitchen and helps Elisabeth with the dishes, maintains the vehicles, helps Dad with any repairs or outside chores, and cleans his room. With them pitching in, all gets done efficiently so we can take care of the important things...family life!

• Standard of Excellence not Perfection...

You can imagine from my childhood that I came into homemaking with a pretty high standard. Actually it was called Perfectionism! I struggled so long with comparing my home to my mother's home... my children's assistance with that of older children... in doing so, I was setting myself up for failure! God does not want for us to compare ourselves. If we do, we find ourselves comparing our lives to the lives of our mothers who tucked the children off in school and COULD have a clean house because NO ONE WAS THERE! Of course, there are other dangers too. If we do, we find ourselves patting ourselves on the back when we have our homes nicer than "so-and-so." Our standards are not to be based on those around us...but on what brings glory and honor to God. We cannot all have a *Better Homes and Gardens* home, but we can have a standard of excellence. What we do can be eternal not for today! We can focus more on the people than what we

have. We can offer hospitality. These are truly the Excellent!

♥ Bulk Cooking...

One thing that I learned after that first year of homeschooling was to cook in bulk. Actually I call my plan, "Serve and Store." The first years of homeschooling I had a home business of sewing for the public. I would sew one day, cook one day. On the sewing days, we would have leftovers from my cooking day. In other words, I would cook and SERVE on one day...and sew and eat the food that we had STORED on the next day! It was a nice balance which enabled me to operate a successful sewing business while homeschooling and homemaking! From this, I developed a habit of cooking in bulk that has continued till today. It is easy to just buy double ingredients...usually it is cheaper! I just double my recipes and freeze the extra dish. Yesterday, I had the "fruit" of my labors as we had Lasagna already prepared last week that only needed to be popped in the oven and served with our fresh bread. You can be prepared at all times for those dropping in if you freeze a variety of foods as you cook them! Bulk Cooking redeems the time so you can stay busy with the important things in life...relationships!

♥ Eliminating the Distractors...

I tend to battle with two primary distracters in my life...*the Telephone and Too Much Going!* These tend to take the joy out of homeschooling and

homemaking! I have waged war on these two enemies! For our telephone enemy, I have set a goal to start my day earlier. I turn the phone off...yes, the ringer is off and there is no answering machine to nag at me either! I only turn the phone on when it is a good time to talk. This has helped me a lot because I find that no matter how much I tell others about our best times, they inevitably call right as we are all snuggled up with a great book...or just as I am in the midst of a great quiet-time! The "going" monster is not so easily maintained without much effort! Because of this, I try to utilize my going time wisely by doing drill work along the way...narrating along the way...or praising God in song as a family along the way! I have tried to limit feeding this monster by doing all my errands on the days that I am already in town. If I need something in between times out, I just give my husband a list or page him with my needs. He helps me to keep this monster under control!

♥ Do Something Every Day...

I read in a book by Emilie Barnes a while back that if we take one little job a day that we can keep up our homes better. I have implemented this into my home. I may just straighten one drawer...or the vanity...or a pile of papers...but, this helps to keep the home manageable without requiring me to be a slave to homemaking to-do's!

♥ **Set Up Learning Areas...**

I remember the motto of the mother of one of my best friends, "A place for everything and everything in its place." She was a real Proverbs 31 woman! She maintained her home beautifully and still had time to be a gracious wife of a U.S. Senator. As I began to homeschool, I saw the "stuff" take over! This motto of Mrs. Pickering became my motto. We set up learning areas that could be the "place" for our learning tools. We set up a children's library...game area...computer area...dress up bin...Nature Shelf...video area...so on. This has helped me to maintain a semblance of sanity amidst all the "stuff" stuffed into our little cottage!

♥ **Slow Pace...**

The biggest enemy of a relaxed home atmosphere is the fast pace...the hurry! It is key to remember that everything has its season! Plus, remember that you can delegate! You can delegate many of the chores to the children...you can let others take their turns with the church responsibilities...you can do without that extra class or lesson! Genesis 33: 13-14 in the Amplified Bible says, "...You know, my lord, that the children are tender and delicate and need gentle care, and the flocks and herds with your are of concern to me; for it the men should overdrive them for a single day, the whole of the flocks would die. Let my Lord, I pray you, pass over before this

servant; and I will lead on slowly, governed by [consideration for] the livestock that set the pace before me and the endurance of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir." In this passage, Jacob (God's Man, God's Way) was met by Esau (the world, the world's way). Esau wanted Jacob to go along with him...in that fast pace! Jacob set an example for us to follow! An example of considering the slow pace...the true needs of our children! I don't know about you, but our children would prefer a calm, easy-going mom to the fast paced mom who provides all the "essential" opportunities! Trade in that pace for a slow, relaxed atmosphere...you won't regret it!

♥ **Don't Forget Ministry...**

One of the greatest means that we have for influencing our world for Christ is through our homes! Surprised? Well, think about those who have influenced you the most...How many ministered to you from their home? I treasure the lessons I learned about God's design for me as a wife and mother while sitting at the feet of Mamaw! I saw true submission modeled before me. I saw a love of home-making. I even learned to sew at her knee! It was sitting in her kitchen that God confirmed His call for me to write! All of the characteristics of the Proverbs 31 woman were modeled perfectly before me from the precious home of Mamaw. Much of who I am has been instilled through her quiet ministry...yes, the ministry within the

home does reap fruit! You can minister to the world through cooking... card-making... sewing... crafts... just by using those practical skills faithfully to teach and minister to others. You can fully utilize the spiritual gifts of everyone in your family. These gifts are a wonderful opportunity to minister to one another and to those who come into your home. Using gifts through practical service from your home-base is the perfect training ground for your little disciples!

All of these tips are designed for one purpose...to give you ideas which will help you to have time for the Beautiful! It may be more time for reading aloud...time to snuggle up with beautiful poetry...time for a long walk observing God's nature...time to take a long-hot bath and relax to Classical Music... or even time for tea! Homemaking in the Homeschool can be simplified so it is EASY! It can be simplified to give you time for the things God designed to nourish you and your family—treasured relationships and

- ♥ Take Time for the Beautiful...

Quick Homemaking Ideas...

- Utilize your help...Have a set chore time. Put everyone to work! You will have more time to enjoy your family and your home won't distract you along the way. Plus, everyone will learn how to serve others!
- Guard Your Time... Expect the unexpected...illnesses, bad days, delays, interruptions! Learn to say no so you will have more time for keeping homemaking simple! Turn off the TV--the best way to keep your little ones productive! Plan for free time--IT IS OK!
- Limit Your Time Spent on Cleaning! Let's face it, our homes will never stay spotless, so redeem the time to spend with our eternal treasures! Have "clutter-drills" during the day where the children pick up as much as possible in 5 minutes. Set a timer. In just five minutes most of the house can be cleaned back up! IT WORKS! Do semi-annual cleanout...fall and spring. This will help to get things back in order...to re-organize those places things are to be put...and to de-clutter. Then, the children can help you maintain the home IF THEY ARE TRAINED to help and not become part of the mess. Purchase servants for making your job easier—bread mixer...crock pots...blenders...dishwasher! These will save hours of time and do the job better as well!
- Keep meals simple...Use *easy meals* (Easy dishes like-tacos, burritos, enchiladas, nachos, salads, spaghetti, chicken pot pie, burgers, lasagna, granola and yogurt, shakes, muffins) or *big meals* that you can reheat or serve in a hurry (Soups, breads, casseroles).

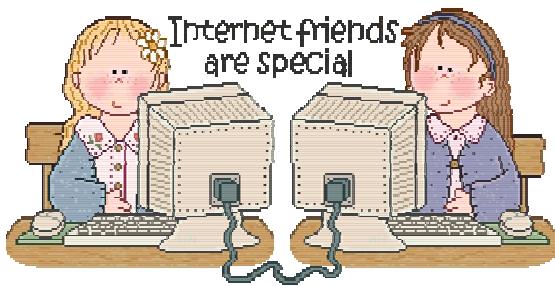


What About Children and Chores???

A Clip from Our
Mom2Mom Discussion Board

Check it out today!

<http://www.mom2momdiscussion.com>



Cindy said, "I agree with the am supposed to go clean the bathroom (which chores--although I DO find that somehow never seems to get done properly otherwise no matter who I delegate it to, or how my children have the same tendencies to slide by if I am doing much time I take for their training) but also something else! UGH! Whereas need to make sure the 2yo isn't taking that opportunity to make sure the 2yo isn't taking that opportunity to get into mom and dad's room or they REALLY enjoy chores more if we all work together. other places she shouldn't be - and make a

I imagined before I had children, that we mess or worse. Not to mention the boys start would have a together kind of lifestyle. I imaging to argue or irritate each other (probably imagined that my children would be helping me pre- subconsciously to avoid the chores).

pare meals, get the kitchen ready, etc. - that Every once in a while, I get it into my head we would work together and read together, and to do something completely different and re generally be together in the same room most of quire everyone to work together in one room the time.

In reality, I have found this to seldom be 2yo to be doing something semi-productive - the case, though I'm not sure why. The chil keeping the 4,6, and 8yo's on task - dealing dren would be playing or reading somewhere with the "but Mom, so and so isn't helping!" - when I went into the kitchen to prepare the directing those who are really helping as to meal and so I would do it mostly alone - or due what needs to be done next and trying to do to the fear of tripping over a little one on the enough cleaning myself so as to get things done way to the sink to drain a pot of spaghetti , the in a semi-reasonable time period and to not give children would end up in the next room with one the impression that I'm a lazy slave driver. of the olders watching the younger ones while Needless to say, this idea never lasts long. But again, I worked alone. There didn't seem to be I keep coming back to this, imagining that this a desire to stick around and talk to or work is how it's "supposed" to be - the ideal that I with mom - except in the case of baking in long for. So why doesn't it work? What am I which case EVERYONE wants to be there.

Cleaning has been mostly "delegate and divide and conquer" in method. I spend a few days training a child in how to do a chore, then that becomes their daily duty. When chore time comes, the girls empty trash cans then go off to clean their room, the boys go wherever they need to, to accomplish laundry, dishes, taking out the trash, vacuuming, and general pick up. I

Every once in a while, I get it into my head to do something completely different and require everyone to work together in one room until a room is done. Trying to supervise the

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- Heidi



Hi There!

What GREAT posts! Heidi, you ask the very best questions! This is SOOOO good! AND these great answers give such a wonderful peek into all of your homes--

HALLELUJAH!

To give you a bit of help from our home... that again!)...we usually take a day off from the each of us has our own chores each day. We began these when the children were little. Out of rest of life's demands and work together going through a room. That works SO well for us. We SURVIVAL for ME!

On BIG cleanouts (pretty much time for can hit a room and come out with it sparkling

Of course, one thing that I still stress clean in a portion of the time that we normally heavily with my children is that although a could work apart. I turn up the praise music and chore may be usually for someone in particular, we dig in! Of course, it helps to have all of our WE are always there to help that person if cleaning supplies and tools together. (another they are overwhelmed or too busy to do their great reason for working together) part. This is mainly because I have a high We also work together in the business. school junior who works for MY business, HIS Things go much easier and faster when the DAD'S business, AND has his OWN business. whole crew works at the same time. We kinda Sometimes the biggest blessing he could have "assembly-line" it! It is SO much better than is for his chores to just be done for him. Elisabeth has more of a tendency to not grasp that step of the process! Even when we take orders he is very busy...but, she is growing up too! She to the Post Office, each of us has a job to do is SO touched when she is running low on time and it goes sooo much more smoothly! Our and Matthew washes her puppy...or I do the postal workers laugh when just Elisabeth and I dishes for her. This is a lesson that we are trying to teach them now--the beauty of blessing major things like the delivery confirmations, others by doing something beyond what is on etc! ha!

OUR to-do list.

You sound like you are doing a great job!

Back to chores though...we began when they PLUS! I love the counsel in all of these other were young dividing up the to-do's each morning posts too (*take a look at them on our Mom-2-Mom Discussion Board: http://www.mom2momdiscussion.com!*) so that after quiet time, each person could do their chores so the day would be ready for school, business, ministry and family time. I Thanks for the great discussion. If you need simply could not concentrate or relax to enjoy more help, just ask! I love getting down to the the other aspects of life with a messy house. nitty-gritty!

Now, mostly we have everyone do their things to get ready for the day before we sit down to lessons.

Love ya!

Cindy

Check out our Mom-2-Mom Discussion Board Today!

Have questions? Need a bit of encouragement or mom-2-mom fellowship? That is what Mom-2-Mom is ALL ABOUT! Join us online today! All you need is a few quiet moments and a BIG CUP OF TEA!



Friendship knows no boundaries

Struggling to Teach My Children...

A Clip from Our
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I was just wondering, does anyone have any tips on how to homeschool 3 young children (even NOW as they are getting who all need my full attention sooo big!). It is still sooo much fun! We all grab ALL of the time? My boys are 7, a cup of tea (or something that we like) and a 6, and 4. I am trying very hard to school them, snack...settle in for a bit...and enjoy! but I am getting frustrated and I don't want to be that way. I just finished reading *Homeschooling the Easy Way*. It was excellent!! I loved it and plan to use many of the ideas in it. I am trying to take a more relaxed stance. But it is very difficult to even read to these guys because they don't want to sit and listen to a story. Help!! I am open to ANY suggestions!



HI!

What a wonderful thread! I appreciate your question Kim! AND...all of these wonderful answers are just priceless (*Take a peek at the other answers on our Mom-2-Mom Board! They are GREAT!*)! Thanks for jumping in and opening such an interesting thread!

After reading the other posts, I know that there are other great ideas for teaching multi-ages all at once (and keeping your sanity!). I just had one thing that I wanted to suggest about the reading time...

One thing that helped us more than anything was making our read aloud time each day at

the end of the day--as *a special family time*. We end each day with a great book and family cuddle time (even NOW as they are getting ALL of the time? My boys are 7, a cup of tea (or something that we like) and a 6, and 4. I am trying very hard to school them, snack...settle in for a bit...and enjoy! but I am getting frustrated and I don't want to be that way. I just finished reading *Homeschooling the Easy Way*. It was excellent!! I loved it and plan to use many of the ideas in it. I am trying to take a more relaxed stance. But it is very difficult to even read to these guys because they don't want to sit and listen to a story. Help!! I am open to ANY suggestions!

1...In the early years, allowing them something to **keep their hands busy**--legos...coloring pages (even paper to draw what they were thinking about as I was reading)...etc. Usually that "stilled" their busy little bodies and helped them to absorb amazing amounts of information from what we were reading.

2...Allowing them to have **teatime**...full bellies just helped them to not be as

distracted during the reading time.

3...**Choosing a time that was QUIET and as UNINTERRUPTED as possible.** Bedtime was our pick! It was the best time for our family to all settle down with the least number of interruptions. Interruptions just frustrated my children SO much--especially when we would take the time to read and little things barge into our family time. Carving out time FOR THEM has spoken volumes to them through the

years--communicating my priorities and it is even hard for us to have fun together because of my commitment to them.

Hope that these help!

Sounds like this will be the best year yet for you! Keep us posted!



I know what I want, I just can't seem to get there. What I really feel confident about my questions being answered here with you guys who are so experienced first is that we are trying to "reconstruct" our lives. I am talking about tv, computer, lazy, getting along, etc. My kids are obsessed with the tv and computer, and the fight like cats and dogs.

We do go out to the park ALOT, but not recently since I have been so sick. (I am preggo and due in December).

We are trying to eliminate the "electronic" distractions and focusing on togetherness. My problem is that I get REALLY frustrated when I suggest reading a book or doing something educational. The kids want to watch tv or play on the computer and I just don't have the focus that I want from them. It is like they don't want to learn anything. Sure we have conversations about things, like yesterday, we talked in the car about all the different things that lay eggs. That was a neat talk, but I am definitely not smart enough to have their education based on these talks. I never paid attention in school and have a lot to learn myself. I want to unschool/notebook/and stuff like that. Things that I can do with all of them. The only thing I truly insist on using curriculum for is math.

I really feel like I am blabbing on here, and I am confused and don't know what to do. Motivation, togetherness, education, fun, (yes,

Hey, just look at it this way, I can be a project for you guys to fix!!!

I finished reading HS the easy way, and just Love ya! bought the binder queen book and the work-Cindy shop cd. And the polite moments.

I am really reaching out here for help, and

judging from the responses to my post, I not seem to get there. What I really feel confident about my questions being should have devulgued to you answered here with you guys who are so experienced. Thank you. Kim



I have been where you are at a few pivotal moments in our journey too. Different story, but just as frustrating and scary! What happened?

Well, at one particular impasse, I was really worn out and at my end. I was talking with Harold about my insufficiency and my need to do something else QUICK!

It was sooo GOD what happened!

Elisabeth piped up and said, "OH! Mommy if you will just tell us what to do, we will do it!"

I knew immediately what the problem was. On good days when homeschooling was going good (ha! ANOTHER STORY), I would work, work, work. At those moments, it was catching up for the other days that we would be forced to clean up and catch up on life (because lessons would result in the house being turned upside down!). What was happening as a result was that the children were getting the impression that school could go on and on and on. That created a distaste for them AND ME! They had no clue of what it took to get finished with a lesson--because I DID NOT have that

planned out! Plus...we had no balance in our school lessons. It was 100% forward or nothing at all. Never bit-by-bit, precept-upon-precept, line-upon-line.

There were several things that I had to do to get things on a good track that would actually work...

♥ GET A PLAN...

I had to ask myself, "What DO we need to do each day to be a success?" "What are God's goals for teaching our children?" "What did we need to do to reach toward the goals?" "What needed to be part of each day to move toward the goals?" "What needed to be worked on to make it all happen?" This was pivotal to success. Otherwise, we see that nothing really gets done--remember how Scripture says that "Without a vision, the people perish"? This is hearing God for HIS VISION for your homeschool.

♥ DECIDE ON A DO-ABLE SCHEDULE...

I had to find a way to set up my day so I could get what I wanted done each day? This is very, very individual. For me, it took a bit of thinking through what was going on that was working and what was creating the confusion:

- ⇒ looking at what some of my distractions were
- ⇒ finding a way to get things done without distractions stopping us each day
- ⇒ figuring out what could reach my children so I could be sure to teach them most effectively
- ⇒ setting up the day so that we could have as close to a family life with a learning lifestyle as possible

- ⇒ structuring it all so it could be done EVERYDAY
- ⇒ developing habits of learning so that stress was reduced (by having all of the decisions made ahead of time) and habits were developed for life (giving me AND them incentive to just DO it knowing that this would get easier as habits became a lifestyle)

How can you be sure to get what you want done? What is frustrating you? What gets things off course? I do not believe that TV and computers are bad things--well, as long as WORK is done first. We have taught our children over and over that "if you don't work, you don't eat" (scriptural principle), but we apply it as "if you don't work, you don't stop to enjoy the treats from work--TV, Computer, play, etc." Make sense? In turn, they know that the first thing that we do each day is get all of the work done. The earlier that work is completed, the more time we have to pursue the things that we truly delight in. I love what one book I read recently is entitled, "EAT THAT FROG." (it is about time management--this is what the real issue is here) So, teach your children to go ahead and "eat that frog" so the rest of the day can be more delightful. Make sense?

♥ MAKE SCHOOLING EASY AND WITH PURPOSE...

You said that you have been reading some of my books. I am SO glad. My heartbeat is to get back to the "old paths" that will make things easier for you. You can trust these old ways, they REALLY WORK! We are enjoying the fruit of these "good old ways" during

these fun years of homeschooling. It is truly worth it all to stick by the old paths. Do what it takes to teach your children the skills of learning and to instill a love of learning. These are your toughest days. Remembering that will help you to stay the course! I can almost promise you that your children are going to challenge you in this at first! If not, well... We just have this little flaw in us that resists discipline and training. YET! Once it is part of our life, we love it! Remember this and stick it out! You will love where you will be in just six months! Get a vision for that and get ready to ride the waves of this tough time. It will be SO worth it! Your children will also LOVE it as they learn with the simplified, easy and meaningful methods that have worked for all time. Just make it all as easy and simple as possible. Make sure that everything has a purpose (we all desire to KNOW that what we are doing has MEANING and PURPOSE and that it is not wasting our time and energy). It will all begin to fall into place and become easier for you and your children.

rial on TV or on the computer. BUT! As great as that material is, it can never compare to books, developing deep studies, or hands-on learning. Sooo, we have created limits on TV/Computer/radio. Again, if they do not work, they do not get these treats. If it becomes an issue, they lose the privilege completely. Usually that is enough to tighten them up. Yes, I have had to pull the plug before to help them "fast" from their "Fast-mindfood" that was leading them astray. It was very hard. But, it did not take long before they had regained their focus. It only took a few weeks and they were addicted to notebooking--they LOVED seeing their work add up so quickly. Read alouds became easier as we stopped the interruptions (we read aloud before bedtime) and made it a nightly family time. It all began to fit together. It will for you too!

• FINALLY, WHAT IF THEY ARE RESISTANT?

This is the toughest part! They probably WILL BE! I know of very few children that just naturally gravitate toward learning without the disciplines instilled in them from an early age. I am not saying to take away TV, computers, etc. My children love them too. BUT! They know that they cannot have them unless their work is done. Have they done it anyway? Oh! YES! And Cindy that always is a jolt for me to tighten back up. There is a lot of great mate-

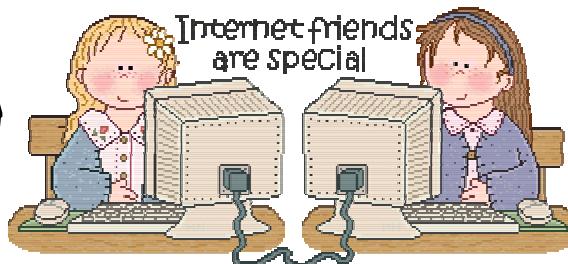
Sooo, I hope that this helps a bit! My heart goes out to you! I KNOW that things are going to get easier for you. It is going to be worth it all! I know that right now things are driving you crazy, but KNOW that it is not going to take long to get things back on track!

Well, more later! I am sure that there will be LOTS of great ideas from other moms too (and there were! Take a peek today at our Mom2Mom Discussion Board! [Http://www.mom2momdiscussion.com](http://www.mom2momdiscussion.com))!

Have a great day!

With Much Love,

Mom2Mom Discussion



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Once-A-Month-Cooking: How to Make Your Plan Work

By Mrs. Crystal Paine

As one of the oldest children in a family of nine, I know that cooking for a crowd can almost be a full-time job. Once-a-month-cooking has been a lifesaver for our family. In the beginning though, when we first heard of cooking 30 meals in one day, it sounded rather impossible. It was not until we had tried it, though, that we found it is not only possible, but it can even be quite simple and fun!

Blessings

If you are skeptical about taking on what might seem like an overwhelming task to you, let me first share some of the blessings which have resulted for our family from once-a-month-cooking.

- It has saved us many hours of trying to figure out what to have for dinner and answered the infamous question, "What's for dinner?"
- We have been more readily able to show hospitality to other families when the main dish is already made and in the freezer. (We usually plan ahead for this by doubling or tripling seven to ten of the recipes on cooking day to cooking day. I usually start planning at least a week in advance. First, pick which day will be nearer, it is much easier to bring meals to your cooking day. Clear your schedule that day. Needy families when you have casseroles.) Proper planning is essential for a successful use as "company meals.") In like manner, it is much easier to bring meals to your cooking day. Clear your schedule that day. You will want to focus your energies entirely

roles in the freezer ready to be pulled out and heated at the drop of a hat. (We also plan for this by preparing many of the dishes in disposable pans.)

- It saves time (You only have to do mountains of dishes one day a month, not every day! You also don't have to start dinner at 4:30 p.m. or earlier everyday... just pull dinner out to thaw in the morning.) and money (You can usually save quite a bit by buying in bulk).
- We are brought closer together as we spend a special day as a family cooking these meals.
- This is an excellent lesson in Home Economics for your children. Mom always has the oldest girls plan the menu, grocery list, and strategy for the cooking day. She often has us do the grocery shopping, as well.

Planning

on cooking.

many cups need to be cooked and diced, how many chicken breasts need to be cooked and

Menu Planning: After you have chosen your left whole, how many need to be left frozen, cooking day, begin menu planning. Go through etc.). your cookbooks and find recipes suitable for freezing. Strive for variety. My list usually includes: one-dish dinners, meatloaf, meatballs, layered casseroles, soups, chili, hamburgers, meatless dishes, and so on. Make sure that you include a number of family favorites, in addition to any new recipes you may be trying out.

You will also want to make sure you have plenty of freezer bags and foil on hand. These will be basic cooking day strategy of what you will do You will also want to make sure you have plenty of freezer bags and foil on hand. These will be basic cooking day strategy of what you will do

You do not want to fill your freezer with meals when. This does not need to be an exhaustive list, but it will save you time and effort if you your family won't find appetizing! When you write down your menu, make sure and write down the cookbook and page number the recipe came from. In addition, mark whether you are planning to double or triple the recipe.

have planned the basic order of what you will be cooking when. If you are going to be working together as a family on cooking, plan who is responsible for what tasks.

Although everyone will need to be flexible, it will definitely save

Make Your Grocery List: Using your menu list, write down the quantities of ingredients needed for each recipe. I like to categorize

like ingredients on five to seven different lists **Shopping:** The day before you begin cooking, (meats, vegetables, cheese, pasta, spices, do your grocery shopping. Make sure you do etc.). Take these lists and combine all like ingredients onto a final list. For example, if there are fifteen recipes calling for one pound of ground beef, you will write "15 pounds ground beef" on your final grocery list.

Cooking

The sooner you can start in the morning, the better. Begin by cooking the meats, grating cheese, chopping the onions, or whatever you might already have on hand. You bulk preparations your "food preparation list" probably have most of the seasonings. But be sure that if you need four teaspoons of garlic powder, you actually have that much in the jar. I have not checked thoroughly before, and it has been real headache.

Cooking the meat is one of the most time-consuming projects and you will probably find you end up browning ground beef and boiling chicken most of the day! As much as is possible, use all of the burners on your stove at the same time. the items which I need large quantities (Such as, if one the items on your list is "20 pounds of chicken breasts," note beside that item how Keep soapy water in the sink at all times and

take turns being on "dish duty." As soon as a dish is used, wash it. This will save you from having an enormous mess at the end of the day. You might also find it helpful to take a five-minute kitchen cleaning break every hour or so to wipe down the counters and put things away which you are no longer using.

Freezing

What do you do with the completed dishes? Here are some guidelines for freezing:

- We always designate the kitchen table as our "finished recipe" zone. We often have someone who is specifically just working on labeling things and taking them to the freezer from the kitchen table.
 - Proper labeling is a key factor in making sure you know what you have in freezer. Make sure you label the containers with the recipe, the cookbook it came from, the page number, how many it serves, and any additional instructions for the dish. Also write out a list with all of the recipes you make start and freeze and how many they serve on the outside of your freezer.
 - Transfer soup to a big bowl and cool for about an hour. You can either place the soup in plastic freezer bags or plastic containers with lids (32 oz. cont-
- I wholeheartedly encourage you to give once-a-month-cooking a try. If you are like us, you will soon wonder how you ever lived without cooking this way! You could also simplify this plan and just cook for two weeks at a time to start.
- For further information, ideas, and recipes, I highly recommend you read *Once-A-Month Cooking* by Mimi Wilson and Mary Beth Lagerborg and *Dinner's in the Freezer* by Jill Bond.
- Happy Cooking!



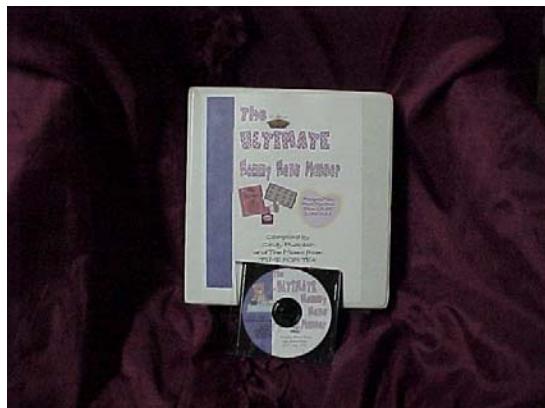
About Crystal...

Crystal Paine is a 23-year-old homeschool graduate from Topeka, Kansas. She wrote this article while she was still single. She married her beloved husband Jesse in January 2003. They are eagerly expecting their first child in a few months. Crystal and Jesse operate www.CovenantWeddingSource.com out of their home--an online business dedicated to promoting God-honoring weddings and assisting parents to wisely prepare their children for marriage. Crystal is the author of *The Merchant Maiden: Earning an Income Without Compromising Convictions* (available in book form or e-book format from Covenant Wedding Source). More articles from Crystal in future issues--don't miss them! Sign up now!

tage cheese and yogurt containers (work well for this).

- Most other recipes can be transferred to plastic freezer bags. Do not fill the bags very full, as foods expand when frozen. Do not put anything which is still hot into bags. You will likely split the bag at the seams and have a gigantic mess to deal with!
- Use smaller labeled bags for cheese or anything else to be sprinkled on top once the dish is cooked. Make sure you keep these in a very accessible place in the freezer.
- If the recipe is something like lasagna which cannot be frozen in a plastic bag, freeze it in the size of pan the recipe calls for, cover with foil, and label.

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Restoring Balance To Completely Overloaded Lives!

By Cindy Rushton



Ever had an "unbalanced tire?" Recently, I had a tire that was driving me crazy! It made the ride horribly rough. I was worn-out just from trying to drive to town because it kept pulling me off the road—obviously in the wrong direction! Just a simple trip to town was completely stressful. My hands were blistered from trying to hold on to the steering wheel the whole way to town and back! I was certain that my car was about to blow up...that something was permanently wrong! Imagine my relief to find that my problem was from one tire that was out of balance! Easy to fix. The smooth ride only took a few moments to restore.

Ever had an "unbalanced life?" Well, the similarities are unbelievable! Talk about a rough ride! Talk about a pull in the wrong direction! Talk about stress! Sure it is easy to fix—but, oh so hard to do!

We are overloaded! Every area of our lives suffers from overload: commitments... possessions... work... information... relationships!

We are a culture that can be characterized as overloaded! We are busy. Hurried. Overworked. Stressed. Rushed. We exceed our limits. We take on WAY TOO MUCH! As my pastor says, "We write checks that our body and mind cannot cash!" Our productivity suffers. Our bodies suffer! Our vital relationships suffer. We no longer can hear God as He whispers direction, encouragement, and wisdom along our path. We miss the best! We wonder why we end our days empty and without meaning or accomplishment.

We forget what is most important—or at minimum, put it

off for another day. The important seldom screams for attention, but the urgent, often insignificant, constantly screams for MORE and more! We get so busy and distracted doing the urgent and demanding in life that we lose the opportunity to impact the important, that in which we are given to leave a legacy!

So, how on earth do we get out of this rat race? How are we to restore balance? If we could restore balance, how could we maintain balance? How could we make life really count for something? Here are some things that the Lord has been teaching me this year as He has pulled me back from so many GOOD things to restore balance and keep me on the path to leaving a legacy!

SLOW DOWN!

Does that one hurt or what?

We are so fast paced! We live on the "fast nating overload is simply not possible without track!" Think of the rat race we live in: one- slowing down! hour print...ten-minute oil changes...instant cameras...instant potatoes...instant MICRO-WAVE meals! Our homes have dishwashers, *worthily and accurately, not as the unwise slow-cookers (don't be fooled by the name— and witless, but as the wise (sensible, turn them on as you run out the door for work intelligent people), Making the very most of and have a healthy meal ready to serve at the the time [buying up each opportunity], end of the day!), microwaves, and computers!* *because the days are evil.*" What does this Oh, and the computer thing! Yep, I am on my look like? Well, let's go back to Genesis 33 for computer now (at our local coffee shop—yep, a look at the life of Jacob after he completely priorities are nice at times!) enjoying the surrendered his entire life to the Lord. *"My benefits of my blessed computer complete lord knoweth that the children are tender, with its battery, cd-writer, and all of the and the flocks and herds with young are other MUSTS that I am so spoiled with! BUT! with me: and if men should overdrive them For heavens' sake...think of how spoiled we one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, REALLY are! The computer age has taken over sweet little country stores! We have the Internet (which has faced the demand to have MORE instant connections—remember all of those ads this summer?), E-mail (to instantly communicate!), E-books (to instantly receive but how? Where do we begin? What can really our products so we don't have to wait for the make a significant difference? Try these: dreaded postal service to deliver!!), E-zines, Auto-responders (didn't REALLY think those were REAL people there all hours of the day and night??!!), Auto-processing of orders/credit cards, and don't forget Instant Messenger—for those who find Email to be too slow! We have "Drive-Thru's" for EVERYTHING—food, cleaners, pharmacies, oil changes, and even (PLEASE GASP WITH ME!) funeral homes! Well...that is where I drew the line! Drive-thru funeral homes! Where are we as a culture? On the fast track!*

What do we do? Why not Sllllloooooowwww DDDDoooooowwwnnnnn??? I am not advocating that we STOP using technology. Rather, we should use those tools to make life easier and to make the most of our time. HOWEVER, where it really matters—relationships, home, family, homeschooling, our witness, life...where it REALLY matters, we must slow down! Restoring balance and elimi-

► Decide what is **MOST** important! Think over life for a little while! What is it that only YOU can do in this life? Why did God create YOU? What is your life purpose? What is it that God created YOU to do? What can go? Just as our house cannot be cleaned without getting rid of the clutter—otherwise all we are doing is shuffling the clutter around—likewise, we must take an occasional inventory to de-clutter our life! I find this to be a battle JUST as many of you probably do and trust me, this is a life principle that I really stick to! Long ago, God impressed upon my heart that if I were going to be able to truly fulfill my calling that He had for my life, I would HAVE to only do the things that *ONLY I* could do—if it were something that anyone else on earth could do, it would have to go! Still, I will go

through periods of my life and begin to get overloaded again only to find when I evaluate the value of all that I do, there are things that sneak into my schedule that vie for my focus and energy! Usually that requires that I take out those really tough pruning shears again to cut back—either by delegating the tasks to someone else so I can be more productive at what accomplishing. Nor does busyness guarantee ONLY I can do—or even more difficult, fulfillment. Often, busyness is the very thing get rid of what is overloading me! I know that keeps us from the very things that will that this is hard, but it is SO key! Take a bring us satisfaction, fulfillment, and deep look now at what you are doing. Is it contentment. Busyness, given the chance, will really eternal? Is it the "main thing?" Is it keep us from fulfilling our life purpose! essential? Can anyone else do it? Is it It is all up to us! We can choose which way hindering you from the very best? Decide to go! Enjoy the journey or wait to enjoy the what is most important. You won't be sorry! brief delight of the destination? A wasted, bitter, defeated life or a life full of purpose

have no value unless you are "seen" busy?) Constantly trying to please others? Revenge? Money? Oh, I could go on and on...motives are so very deceptive and there are so many. What is your motive? What drives you to do all you do?

- **Examine Your Lifestyle!** Take a little and meaning? Burn out or real while to jot down a journal of what makes accomplishment? Deep, passionate up your day? Your week? Your month? Your relationships or very real regrets? year? REALLY BE HONEST! Do those Why not slow down? Relax? Enjoy the things count? What are the days filled whole journey—the process getting there AND with: things that are really important...or the destination! Build deep relationships! Stick lots of fires to put out? Take a bit longer to those priorities! Simplify life so you reach to write out what you would REALLY like for the very best! Seize each moment! to be accomplishing. What do you think that a "perfect day," if it were possible, would look like? How can you change your day to really slow it down so your life really counts?
- **Examine Your Motives!** Motives will fool us in a heartbeat! Scripture is so very true as it warns us to beware of our heart. We that one, that you will also find that God will simply cannot trust our hearts. They will whisper sweetly in your ear to say that the lead us astray every time! What really problem is not that we do not have enough motivates us? What drives us? If we can time...or that we are using time to the fullest... determine this, we can evaluate activities or even that we waste time. Rather, He would and obligations much more effectively! So, say that we need to make it our ambition to what drives you? Ambition? Your life call? redeem the time—each and every moment we The desire to be in control? Don't trust are given! others to do things? Passion? Guilt? Ego? Insecurity (Can't say "no?" Afraid that you ries of messages entitled *From Burnout to*

Redeem The Time!

Time! Friend or foe? Have enough time in your day? Or are you a truly kindred spirit, asking God for just a few good 80-hour days and the energy to use them to the fullest? Ha! I have a good feeling that if your prayer is for that one, that you will also find that God will simply cannot trust our hearts. They will whisper sweetly in your ear to say that the lead us astray every time! What really problem is not that we do not have enough motivates us? What drives us? If we can time...or that we are using time to the fullest... determine this, we can evaluate activities or even that we waste time. Rather, He would and obligations much more effectively! So, say that we need to make it our ambition to what drives you? Ambition? Your life call? redeem the time—each and every moment we The desire to be in control? Don't trust are given! others to do things? Passion? Guilt? Ego? Insecurity (Can't say "no?" Afraid that you ries of messages entitled *From Burnout to*

Balance. In his series, he challenged us to time to be sure that we do not flippantly do look at time as a great big "bank account." He without thinking or take on too much that we said that this account is one that we are guaranteed the best! We need to purpose to anted to have daily deposits made on our behalf—really do those things that are half by God each and every day. We each get "NEEDFUL" (remember Luke 10: 38-42?) and our fair share. No one gets more. No one gets not just the "stuff" that we think MUST be done! We need to constantly evaluate our less.

Think of this awesome gift! Each and every choices and weigh them to see if they are day we are given a gift that can impact all of truly those things that help us to reach our eternity—or be squandered away into oblivion. life call.

Each day we are given this gift without any regard to our stewardship from the day before! TWENTY-FOUR HOURS! ONE-THOUSAND, TWENTY-FOUR HOURS! ONE-THOUSAND, bet!

FOUR HUNDRED, FORTY MINUTES! EIGHTY-SIX THOUSAND, FOUR HUNDRED SECONDS! Deposited in our "account" each

and every day!

And...with this gift, we are free to use it in any way we choose. We can waste it or use it wisely. We can make a difference---or misuse it!

One thing is guaranteed each day with all that is deposited on our behalf—it must be used up before the end of the day...it cannot be carried into tomorrow!

We all have 24 hours put into our spending account each and every day. What we do with that time is in our hands! Will we use it wisely? Will we use it for the fullest? Will we use our gift for what really counts?

If we want to live a life of balance, we must guard this precious gift! We must measure our time as one of our greatest resources we have to invest in this life! This requires that we go back to our precious Giver and seek HIM for how we can most faithfully invest TIME with us!), I HAVE to tell you that God has a very, very good plan for us! He does not let us down! He calls us, equip us, and then send us to an assignment that forfeits our trust and confidence in that we go back to our precious Giver and seek HIM! In fact, one thing that I am thrilled to say is that although there IS work in our call—each moment! We must let Him be the Lord of our schedule, our to-do's, our calendar. We must commit our way---ALL OF OUR WAY—to Seeing His provision is unbelievable. Watching Him from our work to our studies that we pursue to our commitments to our books that we read to the activities that we participate.

Give your ALL to God! Sell out! Don't hold anything in reserve! Abandon ALL for the call!

We must be careful to set a guard on our

Sell Out COMPLETELY To God's Will!

Does this scare you to death? Are you seeing visions of little grass huts...no electricity...

...complete with the stench of underarm odor?

Oh, beloved! My first image of total submission to God admittedly envisioned life on a continent that was far, far away from all of the comforts of home. Still have no idea if

there is a continent that could be as disgusting as my visions were. Sure, I trusted God for eternity, but never thought of heaven in earth totally surrendered to Him!

Now, as we move into our 11th year as a ministry (and Harold finishes up his 1st year FULL-

has a very, very good plan for us! He does not let us down! He calls us, equip us, and then send us to an assignment that forfeits our trust and confidence in that we go back to our precious Giver and seek HIM! In fact, one thing that I am thrilled to say is that although there IS work in our call—each moment! We must let Him be the Lord of our schedule, our to-do's, our calendar. We must commit our way---ALL OF OUR WAY—to Seeing His provision is unbelievable. Watching Him from our work to our studies that we pursue to our commitments to our books that we read to the activities that we participate.

Give your ALL to God! Sell out! Don't hold

Scared? Just give Him a try! Take a look at Jeremiah 29 in *The Message Bible*. God says to us, "I know what I'm doing, I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed." Oh, beloved, not only will you never, ever be disappointed, but you will find that His GOOD plan will be truly good--satisfactory for you, satisfying, fulfilling, completely sufficient!

Wonder JUST WHAT could YOU do? Too young? Too old? Too poor? Not qualified—or so you think? Well, beloved! Know that God has called each and everyone of us to function in His Body. We are the mouthpieces here on earth for Him. We are the feet for Him. We are the hands here in our community for Him! He has called and equipped each and every one of us to be a part of His Body here on earth! We each have talents, spiritual gifts, natural bents and interests, and experiences that can minister to those that are growing in the Body AND those that need to join the Body of Christ! God needs ALL of us working and functioning properly if His Kingdom—His way of doing things—will come to earth! He needs for us to be that light that shines in the darkness to bring others to Him. Just go into a dark, dark room... Light one candle... See what a difference YOU can make right where you are!

Have no idea what His plan is for you? Take a look at Romans 12: 1-2. He promises in verse two that YOU can know His good, perfect, and acceptable will for you! Yes, YOU can know that plan! How? Going back through this passage, we see how:

♥ Become a living sacrifice—EVERYDAY!

Completely yielded. Completely dedicated. Completely committed to Him and His Way! Giving Him our ALL! All that we are: our plans...gifts...bents...talents... ambitions... ideas... methods... techniques... fears... delights...concerns... all presented to God as a living sacrifice EVERY SINGLE DAY! If we truly desire to know the good, acceptable, perfect will of God for ourselves or our children, we must first obediently present ourselves as a complete, living sacrifice. There may be things in our lives (things that are very precious and difficult to get rid of) that must be burnt up as a sacrifice for us to be prepared to receive God's very best OR we may find that what we bring to sacrifice before the Lord is acceptable in His sight and can return home with us (like Abraham as he willingly prepared to sacrifice his beloved Isaac). However, the key is not in what God does with our sacrifice, it is in our heart coming before Him daily, presenting ourselves and all that we have before His throne!

♥ Don't not conform to the world; but conform to Christ!! Yep! We either conform to the world or to Christ! We cannot live for one without forsaking the other! Want to know God's plan? Let go of the world's standards, the world's ways, the world's requirements, the world's traditions, and the world's bondage. Let go of the lies of the world! We must stop serving the world at the expense of becoming ALL that God wants for us to become! If we want to live an abundant life—a balanced life—the world's way will never work! Only God's way brings

balance, freedom, and true, abundant around! Don't run from it! Live EACH day LIFE that we are really searching for! letting Him have your ALL in complete As we grow in relationship with Christ, abandonment! Balance will come—but, beloved daily become LIKE HIM, we find there is so much more that will rush into your security and LIFE! We find peace! We life! Purpose, meaning, abundant life! Go for it! find hope! We find the direction that we have been looking for all along the way! We find freedom to become ALL that God designed for us to become! Talk about LIFE! We move beyond balance to abundant life!

Build Margin—Breathing Room— Into Your Life!

- ♥ Be transformed by the daily renewal of your mind! The last key to getting they are rock bottom, with NO breathing to know God's plan! However, this one room, at the point that my mother would have is SO VITAL! If we truly want to live said, "I've HAD IT!" Ever just "HAD-IT?" a balanced, abundant life, we must sell out to God's will. BUT, however much pain that Job was experiencing as he cried out we want to sell out, unless we truly let in Job 3:26, "**I have NO peace, NO rest, Him change our life, we will just spin NO quiet!**"

our wheels in the same ruts, never becoming all that God wants for us to declared that he got to his "breaking point" in become! How is our mind transformed? 2 Corinthians 1: 8-9, "For we do not want you Life changed? This life transformation to be uninformed, brethren, about the begins as we sit at the feet of Jesus. affliction and oppressing distress which As we daily immerse ourselves in His befall us in the province of Asia, how we Word, we will begin to be transformed. were so utterly and unbearably weighed Then, we will soon have different down and crushed that we despaired even of priorities... different beliefs... life itself. Indeed, we felt within ourselves different ambitions... and soon, we will that we had received the very sentence of be able to prove what is good, death, but that was to keep us from acceptable, and perfectly in the will of trusting in and depending on ourselves God. If we never experience this instead of on God Who raises the dead." transformation, we will always find Finally, journey back to 1 Samuel as we ourselves burdened under a yoke of are first introduced to Hannah at the point of bondage. We will always find ourselves utter desperation—you probably know a bit looking in all the wrong places for about her story. Barren. Broken. Taunted (by direction, approval, meaning, purpose, her husband's other WIFE!! Who had NO and rest! We will constantly battle problem bearing children!). Empty. Crushed in overload. We will find life bumpy and soul. Oh, let's join her at the point that she pulling us into life's "ditches!"

God has a precious plan EVEN for you! Surrender ALL to Him! Let Him have it all! Let God-of-the-Angel-Armies, If you'll take a Him do His work in you! Don't rush! Don't drag good, hard look at my pain, if you'll quit

neglecting me and go into action for me by giving me a son, I'll give him completely, unreservedly to you. I'll set him apart for a life of holy discipline..." As she was praying, she sunk even lower as she was completely misunderstood by the priest, who thought she was DRUNK! We hear more of her heart in her reply to him... "Oh no, sir—please! I'm a woman hard used. I haven't been drinking. Not a drop of wine or beer. The only thing I've been pouring out is my heart, pouring it out to God. Don't for a minute think I'm a bad woman. It's because I'm so desperately unhappy and in such pain that I've stayed here so long!"

Relate? I know that these precious vessels were crying out in the midst of trials and life events that were too much. However, I don't think that we find ourselves at the point of desperation without first pushing limits for quite some time! We haven't got margin to deal with the daily-ness of life—much less those life struggles, crisis situations, losses, and persecutions that inevitably knock most of us off our "rocker" into despair!

Think about it...if you are the average person in our society today, you live on fast-food, crazy hours, no sleep. You are chronically rushed (or late), overworked, exhausted, overloaded! What is the solution? Build MARGIN! Build some BREATHING ROOM! Simplify life so there is room for change... space for disruptions. How? Here are some suggestions that I am trying to implement in my own life:

- Accept HUMAN Limitations! Can you sense how HARD that is for ME to type? Oh, here it where it gets harder, it is not MY idea, it is the Word of God too: "I have seen that EVERYTHING HUMAN has its limits and end no matter how extensive, noble, and excellent." (Psalm 119: 96a) OUCH! If there is a battle for balance (and YOU KNOW there is!), this is

one of the biggies! We ALL have limits! But, where we need more margin is that we don't say "NO" when we face limitations! As I shared above, we "write checks our body and mind cannot cash!" The world says, "You can have it ALL!" "You can do it all!" Even the church gives the illusion that "I can do ALL THINGS through Jesus Christ." However, the Bible is very clear that we can ONLY DO those things that are HIS THINGS—HIS WILL! WE have limits! We have space limits. We have body limits. We have emotional limits. Jesus does not give us a blank check to do ALL THINGS. Much less, Jesus WILL NOT empower us to do ALL THINGS. He only empowers us to do those things that HE CALLS us to do. He never gives us anything that is beyond our abilities and resources to do. One clear way to judge what we are called to do from those things that we are not called to do is to look at our limitations: our red lights, shut downs, overloads, crashes. We need to look at those warning signs: pain, fatigue, stress, irritability, frustrations. Our human limitations are God's boundaries in our lives that help us to know that we are overextended and writing checks our bodies and minds cannot cash. Respecting human limitations will restore balance to even the most overloaded life!

Expect Interruptions! Proverbs 22:3 says, "A prudent man sees trouble coming and ducks—a simpleton walks in blindly and is clobbered!" If there is one thing in life that is FOR SURE, we can be sure that life seldom goes as planned. Life cannot be predicted. Just think about it...what truly messes up your schedule? Traffic? Car trouble? Delays? Crisis situations? Special needs along the way? We must plan for interruptions or our lives will constantly be out of balance, our schedules

will never work, and much of life will be squandered! Expect interruptions and plan room for them into every day!

- ♥ **Put SPACE Into Your Schedule!** Ever had your PDA/Planner/Calendar/ Briefcase complain about an overstuffed schedule? Actually my planner looks so much more "professional" when it is PACKED OUT! Only I don't handle it so well! For the last few years, I have really evaluated what I was doing that was causing me to get off my schedule and not get around to all of my to-do's. Now, granted, some days it is ME or my darling little ones! But, overall, 95% of my schedule woes are also the culprit behind life getting just way too busy—OVER-SCHEDULING! Schedules, like daily life, only work when there is SPACE in each day! Just like we see with the life of Christ (see Matthew 5-10), our life is filled with distractions, interruptions, crisis situations. We can battle against these OR we can add margin (space) into our lives that gives us room to use these as THE MAIN THING—opportunities for ministry, opportunities for the very best lessons, teachable moments, hands-on discipleship! Not only are we able to step up to the call as it beckons us, but we are less likely to spin out of balance constantly!

- ♥ **Prune Life To Yield MORE Fruit!** Several years ago, one of my dearest friends bought her DREAM land. Every time that I go to visit her, our family laughs because just driving up her driveway I begin to see a view that rivals that of the gorgeous view on *The Sound of Music*, thus tempting me to begin to sing—"The HILLS ARE ALIVE...with the sound of music..." The land is gorgeous. But it is more than that. It is also productive! However, at first it wasn't. Rhea bought the land,

complete with an orchard. Sound ready to go? Well, not exactly! Needing a bit of help with her fruit trees, she called in a professional. To her shock, she looked outside to find her precious orchard looking like a bunch of sticks in the dirt. Pruning began to have a whole new meaning! What looked like devastation actually was the key to those best fruit ever! Bigger fruit! Sweeter fruit! MORE fruit! I remember the year that Rhea was getting her first fruits after the pruning. It was a year that I needed that practical example of pruning just so I would have the nerve to let God loose with His pruning shears! I can't say it was easy! It was probably one of the most challenging times in my entire life. I had lived my life pretty much just without much thought. However, God was wanting for me to yield up EVERYTHING so He could prune back all that was diseased...all that was broken...all that was zapping my strength...all that was causing double-vision...all that was keeping me from bearing the fruit He had planned from the foundation of the earth. 1 Corinthians 6: 12a says, "**Everything is permissible (allowable and lawful) for me; but not all things are helpful (good for me to do, expedient and profitable when considered with other things).**" There are many GOOD things that God would not have a problem if I were to do them. However, those good things can keep me from producing all of the fruit that I can bear. It becomes a *choice* thing for me. I can choose whether I will allow Him total control of my entire life—even the schedule... commitments... my going... my doing. I am the ONE who can sit down, yield to the shears, and stay ready to bear more and more fruit. Likewise, I can also resist. But...I don't really like that alternative!

At the end? At your limit constantly? "HAD IT?" Take a good look look at life! Check for margin! Not enough? Build margin! Create space! Watch what happens!

DE-STRESS!

Yep! Gulp! De-stress! This one got you out of whack before too? You are not alone, beloved!

Want to know the #1 complaint in our culture? What about among homeschool moms? The booger behind despair? The reason that most quit? The reason that many never begin? You have got it! The stress! The chaos! The mess! The lack of organization or ability to "keep it together." Want to battle for balance? This little devil will give you quite a challenge!

Yep! If there is a need among the body of Christ, this JUST might be it! But, how? Here are some quick tips for restoring balance when it all gets bumpy from the stresses of life...

- **Find Your Stressors!** What throws YOU for a loop? What takes you into a "nose-dive?" What "stalls" your flight? What are your biggest stressors? What causes YOUR stress? Identify the REAL culprit—HINT: it is NOT your husband (!!) or your children (!!) or God (!!). Look at your life honestly! What REALLY stresses you out? Holding onto your stress? Carrying a burden you do not have to carry? Anxiousness? Discontent? Strife? Expectations? Willfulness instead of willingness and total surrender and total abandonment? Find YOUR stressors! Know what REALLY "punches" your buttons!

- **PLAN!** Plan ahead! Well in advance! One saying that always pops into my head when I think of the word plan is, "If we fail to plan, we really plan to fail!" Nothing brings

MORE stress than living life without direction, without a plan, always under "crisis" management, making decisions on a moment-by-moment basis. If this is stressing you out, try to plan ahead! Plan out your goals. Plan out your schedule. EVEN the mundane things—plan out those daily routines, even going so far as to write them out! How does this help? Well, decisions are made, saving those precious brain-cells for other uses! Trust me this works WONDERS! So, plan! Plan well! Don't wait until the last minute! Plan...then, you can settle in to go a slow pace!

- **Write it DOWN!** Give your brain a rest! Talk about stressing out—our brains will stress out if we are keeping all of our to-do's...plans...goals...heartbeats...EVERYTHING on our brain! Write it down! Not only will it help to keep things from slipping between the cracks, but it will also help us to evaluate where we have come from and where we have to go. Plus, the best yet! We will have a sense of accomplishment when we look back!

- **Watch that attitude!** There are going to be some life-stresses that quite honestly cannot be changed! However, we need not walk in a life of defeat and stress! Instead, when we recognize life-stresses that cannot change, that is the time to sit right down at the feet of Jesus! Ask Him to show the purpose. At minimum, KNOW that victory is guaranteed! There is no temptation or trial that is original with any of us! Nor is there anything that we are allowed to walk in that is not first filtered through the loving hands of God. He always guarantees VICTORY! So, watch that attitude! When things cannot change, change what can—that perspective...that attitude!!

- **Delegate!** What is it that makes it so hard