

Making Your Own Brain-in-a-Binder!

Designing a System Just for You!

By Cindy Rushton

*Excerpted from our magazine **Homeschooling The Easy Way.***

Hope you enjoy!

Can you tell with this issue what has been on MY BRAIN? Yep! I am completely indulging myself in binders, storage containers, and even trash bags! I have been cleaning out and cleaning up. Making lists and checking them twice—well, more like fifty-five times!! Not one area of our home and business is being left untouched!

Actually, I have to be very honest. I am always like this! Every single year! This is the time of year that I am just Binder-Crazy! I actually began LAST year to get my binder ready for this New Year. I LOVE the freshness of a nice, clean, organized binder! I love actually being able to FIND information! If you do to, stick with me...this is YOUR article!

For the rest of you, you know those of you who LOVE binders but are deathly afraid of them and cannot explain why. You know, you buy a new one each year. You love the smell of leather. You love the fresh pages. BUT, something always happens that you cannot quite pinpoint that takes your joy sometime around January 25th of each year!

I don't know about you, but I always have "high-hopes." I mean, I begin every year with my precious leather binder full of wonderfully gorgeous calendar pages, renewed goals, brand new chore charts, new Bible Reading Charts (being checked off everyday!!), and even a freshly RE-COPIED address book. I just LOVE it! I almost want to sleep with it—Harold DOES take exception to that!

Well, except I had a problem that needed to be overcome! I noticed this last year. You may relate! I noticed that it never failed. Every single year I would have the same process. I began the year with my "perfect" binder—taking it EVERY place I went. I felt so "together" and much, much more "organized." My REAL brain could relax while my "brain-in-a-binder" did all of my remembering and thinking!

But...then, it would happen slowly. I inevitably found myself beginning to leave my binder in my car...then, it would be lost for weeks on end...then, by sometime around April every year, my binder would be lost...or WAS that the lump I always trip over going into the house????

Organizationally Challenged???

Yep! This was ME! I am now diagnosed AND the prescription has been working! Need help for this "condition" too? Here are some ideas that may help!

Take an Inventory of YOUR Needs...

First of all, think about what would really help YOU take a load off of your own brain? What would help to simplify your daily, monthly, and yearly tasks? What would help you to think out the

details of your life AND keep them close so they are near you WHEN you need them (keep in mind that what you carry needs JUST enough to help you, but not TOO much because you won't carry it if it is TOO heavy!)?

I have to keep up with SO much each and every day...week...month...and year! I have looked EVERYWHERE (trust me!) for a system that could really work for me. In fact, I have TRIED almost ALL of the systems out there! I could not find any system with pages that really were designed for all of the many areas that I balance each and every day. Most were full of pages that I did not need for anything. Then, even the most helpful systems were just not my "style." I found that they were either TOO PRETTY to use or they were SO PROFESSIONAL that I was almost scared that my "little notes" would mess things up! They were not friendly enough for me to ACTUALLY use as "MY brain in a binder!"

Relate??? Want to KNOW the solution?? Just take a look at what YOU need! If you only need a binder that includes a calendar, a notebook for jotting down your "to-do's," and an address book, then you will probably be much, much better off if you purchase the actual "notebook binder" and add the special things that you want individually. Plus, you won't be as confused or feel bad for not using it all!

You don't HAVE to buy a system and throw away MORE of it than you use! Rather, you can buy only the sections that will help you to uniquely design a binder that can meet your very own needs!

Check Out What is Out There for YOU!

Well, wondering how to KNOW what you need? Well, take an afternoon trip to your local office supply store or to your local Wal-Mart. There are MORE options than I could mention in a whole book. Decisions abound, often presenting yet another complication to getting organized and binderized! You can choose the type of binder case... number of rings in the binder... thickness of the binder... types of paper... sizes of paper... and a whole host of wonderful accessories ranging from Palm Top Computers and calculators to hole-punchers of various combinations to even Bible Studies to carry on your long commutes! See why it is SO important to know what you would want?

My greatest dilemma was choosing the style of my planner. I travel with my computer and SO many books and extra research material that I did not want to juggle one MORE thing, much less a binder with all of the goodies that "I" could stuff in a binder! I found that binders were available for people JUST like me!

Now, you can find a "purse planner." You can find styles that are designed to slip into your purse. Other styles are designed as briefcases. Still others look like an ordinary journal. You can even buy a simple three- ring binder for only a couple of dollars. Take a look at what is out there and decide on what is just right for YOU!

I Know, I Know! The BUDGET!!!

While you are shopping for the system and style that is just right for YOU, you may want to also consider what will work with your personal budget! I found that when I spent a whole lot of

money, I was less inclined to actually "use" my system. I was almost "saving" it for when I could be the best "steward" of my investment---yea, right! I was too afraid that I would mess it up to actually write in it! EEK! I first had to see the real value of using a planner for managing my time AND relieving my brain so I could be a better wife, mother, and business owner! Then, I had to work with my own personal budget!

If you have an unlimited budget, trust me you can spend it ALL on planners! I was absolutely shocked to find planners (sometimes just the actual binder!!!) were a hundred dollars or more! Yep! Beyond any budget of mine!

Not to mention my budget, but also I found that many systems were so expensive yet since they did not meet my personal needs, I was really wasting a lot of money and lugging around something that was useless. Some had pages and pages just for chores and housekeeping—it took longer to plan them than to just DO them! I did not have time for that! Others had unnecessary business forms that ALSO were completely useless. Even the very best homeschooling planners seemed to include a lot of fluff that kept me keeping records instead of making memories OR even getting around to actually teaching my little ones! In other words, sometimes building your OWN system within your budget is better financially AND it meets your real needs!

I decided to find a nice leather binder (I bought mine from Franklin Covey) that I could use MY OWN pages inside. I spent a bit more than usual on the binder this year, but this binder is holding up so much better than binders in the past.

I also decided to use "dated" calendar pages for the first time this year. In the past I have only bought "undated" pages that I could use ANY month or year. Well, sounds good huh? But, the sad truth is that the first couple of months were "dated" by me...I used them and things went great! Yet, I have years and years of unused "undated" calendars! What happened? TIME! While evaluating my past failures, I found that it is much, much better to have everything ready-to-use. I have no excuses NOT to use one that is ready-to-go!

Another thing that I have done for my personal "brain-in-a-binder" is to laminate pages that I will need from year-to-year. I laminated my divider pages, my page finders (I made several that have Bible Verses I am trying to memorize this year), my Bible prayers for my family, my goals for the new year, and my emergency information. This allows me to keep those pages in daily use throughout the whole year and possibly into the new year, saving time next year when I put together my new binder. Plus! They are soooo cute and they used what fit into my budget because I already had the supplies to "make" them at my house!

Think Through YOUR Essentials CONSTANTLY!

Although you can ALWAYS change things around, take out anything that does not work, or add new sections to meet any new need you will want to be sure that your most essential needs are met in the beginning...or lump-in-the-floor your beloved planner CAN become!

My personal "brain-in-a-binder" changes throughout the year. I balance many areas of life. There are a few sections that are MUSTS for all year round. Other sections demand more atten-

tion at times than others. So, often you will find my personal planner including different pages (I store extra sections or pages away in topical binders on my desk—old calendars, homeschool records, seminar details, planning pages, reading logs...). For example, during the early months of the year, I do more planning for my home for the year. My planner includes pages that help me organize my home, my overall schedule, and my business/family goals for the year.

During the spring, I usually spend more of my time planning out books that I work on and release during the year AND our wish list for the following school year. I can work on that type of planning while we travel to spring retreats and conventions. Plus, I have the early convention season to browse for the new picks for our following homeschool year so I can plan our lessons, field trips, and special events for the school year in advance! I also add my Mommy Journal pages (we now provide those through our business) for times along the way that I can really work through my "heart goals" for the next homeschool year.

Summer brings other changes to my planner. I usually keep basic details in my planner that help keep me on the right track. Summer finds me extremely busy. I tend to function off of "to-do lists," seminar planning forms (with all of my details for getting me from place to place AND to help me prepare for my speaking engagements). I usually pull out all of my "planning pages" or "bulk" during the summer just to make sure that I have plenty of room for those details that I need on the road—Convenient Bible Study, Contact Information, Daily Bible Reading Log, Year-at-a-glance, Monthly Calendars, Daily Pages, Extra "To-do" and "Note" Pages, etc.

I don't even produce some of my regular forms during the summer. For example, I don't need any of my menu planning forms because I simplify my kitchen duties to only take-out or easy dishes during the summer. Having too many forms was a hindrance to me in the past. It helps SO much to know what *I* really need and have ONLY that in my binder!

By Fall, I begin to focus more on writing again, so my planner begins to swell with more of my project notes, menu plans, and homemaking helps. I cannot put into words the importance of getting everything that is ESSENTIAL for YOU and eliminating everything—even if the pages are CUTE!!!—that you will not be using!

Ready? So...What DO You Need To Begin???

(Keep in mind that these instructions are written for those of you who choose our packets, but they will work with any system you find along the way!)

Three-ring Binder

The first thing that you MUST have to make your own Brain-in-a-Binder is a small 3-ring binder. Again, decide which kind of binder will work best for you and your budget. You can use a simple 3-ring binder. I recommend buying a nice binder that you can carry with you at all times.

For my own personal planner, I purchased a nice, leather binder that I can take with me anywhere. Planning moments can be "snagged" at the oddest times. Inevitably, I need a telephone number or email address, or a detail about one of my speaking engagements at the most inconvenient times...well, unless I have my handy companion with me to do the thinking and remembering for

me! I like to have my binder with me so I can best use each moment and have help at the touch of my fingers!

Binders are limitless! We do not currently stock any types of binders, but they are available almost everywhere! Note that we punched our pages with SEVEN holes. This will allow us (or you if you buy our systems) to use any type of binder that you prefer.

When shopping for a binder, think about whether that binder will be comfortable to carry with you. I have had several different kinds through the years, but my preferences are still the real leather binders with zippers to hold in my "stuff" and plenty of pockets for cards, paper bits, and extra paper (directions, details, or separate lists that I need to work on!) I also have a wonderful tapestry binder that I LOVE for my Bible Study Binder.

Another thing that you may like if you are not carrying a lot of pages at a time is a simple leather "address" book from the office supply store. Mine has a plain front and back. I took out the pages that it came with it, added my Sermon Note Pages, and I was ready to slip it inside of my Bible Cover (I have a Bible Cover that zips up. It holds my Bible, Sermon Notebook, Pens, Highlighters, Stick-it-notes, and any Sunday School Material we are working on!) Find what will work for you! Find what you like! AND know that you can always change anything that does not work at any time!

WHICH Packets Do I Need?

If you have used other planners and reproducibles, you will notice that our MAKE YOUR OWN series is a bit different from others on the market. In our series, we have lots of different forms, but they are sold in separate packets. We designed them so you could mix and match to build a planner that would meet your own unique needs. All of our packets can be interchanged, so any of our packets can be used with as many other packets or all by itself to build YOUR very own BRAIN-IN-A-BINDER!

If you want to use our system, I suggest that you take a look at our listing of packets. Read through the descriptions. Mark those that you already use OR those that you really need. You can build your binder as you go along the way. My suggestion is to begin by meeting your greatest needs. For example, if you are needing to write down appointments for your entire year, take a look at our Monthly Calendars. Need a bit of help planning out your school year OR renewing your mind in the midst of a busy school year, try our Mommy Planner. Need help with those "Daily To-Do's?" Try our Daily Calendar Pages! They will help you plan in advance OR walk you through your day!

Some of these forms are great for planning out a new school year or business year. You may not want them in your Journal all year long. For those forms, I store mine away in an inexpensive binder (I like the small 3-ring binders that I can label on the spine. I keep my "used" pages in separate binders like I would separate files. For example, my Sermon Notes are kept in one binder that has dividers for the different "series" topics that my pastor teaches. I keep either one or two years (as much as can fit!) in each binder so I can easily find sermon notes that I am looking for! It is wonderful, especially when I am trying to look up a certain verse!

I use the same system with my business information that I keep in my binder. I cannot tell you how nice it is to go back to my binders from years before to find directions to a convention or email addresses and phone numbers for my contacts! Again, at the end of the year, I just divide off my business forms into their own storage binder (with a labeled spine for ease in locating the information) and add new ones into my binder! This same method works for other sections of my planner that I use like my "Daily Bible Reading Log," "Menu Planner" and my Homeschool "Mommy Journal" planner.

We homeschool our children. I also keep their records in this same format. Throughout the school year, I add "finished" pages to the binder so the one I carry all of the time stays most efficient. At the end of the year, I take out all of my calendars, reading logs, and other forms that are left to also add to that notebook. Of course, many moms like to keep everything in one place. That is fine too! The goal with our system is to work for YOU, not to work you! You can use our system any way that you prefer—after all, YOU are making your OWN BRAIN in your binder!!

Not to mention, I am so happy to offer our system in this particular format because I always have found that I run out of some pages faster than others. This system not only takes that into consideration, but plans for it from the very beginning! I hope that you will enjoy our format! Even if you do not choose our system, you may want to consider this for making-your-own-brain-in-a-binder using any other system.

Ready To Make YOUR OWN Brain-in-a-Binder????

A planner of your very own will become one of your best tools! It will become one of your beloved companions! Consider your "Brain-in-a-Binder" to be your friend walking alongside of you as you reflect, retreat, renew, re-organize, re-commit, and get ready for a new year and each new day! So, ready? Dig in and have FUN!

Happy Organizing!

How to Become a Christian

It takes F.A.I.T.H.

Forgiveness... Becoming a Christian is about receiving God's free gift of forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

Available...salvation is available to ALL. The Bible says that *"God is not willing that any should perish but everyone come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

Impossible for God to allow sin into heaven. The Bible says that *"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23) and that the penalty of our sins is separation from God (Romans 6:23). God is holy and He cannot allow sin in heaven.

Turn from sin. The Bible word for *turn* is repent: *"But unless you repent you will also likewise perish"* (Luke 13: 3). It also says, *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9). To repent means that I make a choice to turn *from* my sins and turn *to* Jesus Christ. You do not have the power to remove your sins, but Christ does!

Heaven! Jesus said, *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am , you may be also"* (John 14:3). Jesus also promised, *"I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

FAITH can also mean **F**orsaking **A**ll **I** **T**rust **H**im. Would you like to receive God's free gift of forgiveness by trusting in Christ right NOW?

*Brought to you from our very own beloved church, First Baptist
Church of Florence, AL.*

Kitchen Korner!

This section of our magazine is always a blast to collect! So many of you are faithful homemakers, keeping your kitchen HOT as you create beloved dishes that not only fill the tummies of your loved ones with healthy foods, but also create precious memories as you spend your time with your family. MY FAMILY appreciates your ideas! Oh! Have a great recipe? Send it in! If we use it, we will extend your subscription by one more issue! Next issue we are looking for recipes that YOU love to share with your family for those precious **HOLIDAY TRADITIONS!!** Send your recipes in now!!

Easy Black Bean Dip

From Cherie Foss

Excerpted by permission from her newsletter *The Joyful Home*

This recipe makes a nice healthy snack. It is also a great way to get some beans, a great cancer fighting food, into your diet.

1 can black beans, drained
1 can green chili peppers, drained
¼ cup salsa
2 t. cumin
1 T. lemon juice

Place all ingredients in food processor and process until smooth.

Place it in a bowl and serve with your favorite tortilla chips. My favorite is the Sesame Blues that can be found in the health food section of the grocery store. I also love the homemade ones below.

Yummy Dip Chips

From Cherie Foss

Excerpted by permission from her newsletter *The Joyful Home*

4 pita bread, corn tortillas, or flour tortillas
non-stick spray

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Spray a cookie sheet generously with spray. Cut pitas or tortillas into 6 pieces. Place on cookie sheet and lightly spray tortillas. Bake for 8 minutes checking to make sure

they don't get too brown. Let cool and serve with
dip.

Indoor S'mores

From Julie Druck

(I recently made a batch of Indoor S'mores since Golden Grahams cereal was on sale and I had some coupons for it. I thought I would share the recipe in the newsletter as it's a quick and yummy one for a summer treat.)

2/3 C. light corn syrup
2 T. margarine or butter
1 1/2 C. chocolate chips
1 tsp. vanilla
1 - 13 oz. pkg. of Golden Grahams cereal
3 C. mini marshmallows

Grease a 13x9" pan and pour the cereal into a large mixing bowl. Heat corn syrup, margarine and chocolate chips to boiling, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Pour mixture over the cereal and toss quickly and completely. Fold in the marshmallows, 1 cup at a time. Press mixture evenly into pan. Let stand for at least 1 hour until firm then cut into squares.

Some Funnies Just to Lighten Your Heart...

...He who has a glad heart has a continual feast [regardless of circumstances].
Proverbs 15: 15

Children in Church...

Three-Year-old Reese: "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is his name, Amen."

A little boy was overheard praying, "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy...don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am."

Jason sobbed in the back seat all the way home from church. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, he replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys!"

I had been teaching my three-year-old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word right up to the end of the prayer. "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed. "but deliver us some email. Amen."

One four-year-old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets."

Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother Joel were sitting together. Joel giggled, sang, and talked. Finally, big sister had had enough. "You're NOT supposed to talk in church." "Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel asked. Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? They're hushers!"

HOW TO TREAT A WIFE

A mild mannered man was tired of his wife always bossing him around, so he decided to go to a psychiatrist. The doctor gave him an "assertive training" booklet. He read it on the way home.

When he walked through the door, his wife came to greet him. He slammed the door shut behind him and the windows rattled to announce his arrival. His wife stood before him, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Listen up," he told her "from now on, I'm the man of this home and my word is law. When I come home from work I want a hot dinner on the table and a cold drink in my hand! Now, get upstairs and lay out some clothes on the bed because I'm going out with the guys tonight. Then, draw my bath. And when I get out of the tub, guess who's going to dress me and comb my hair?"

"The undertaker."

Subject: Acts 2:38

An elderly woman had just returned to her home from an evening church service when she was startled by an intruder. She caught the burglar red-handed, and yelled, "*Stop! Acts 2:38!*" (meaning, *repent and be baptized...*)

The burglar stopped dead in his tracks. The woman then calmly called the police and explained what she had done.

As the officer cuffed the burglar, he asked, "*Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was yell a Scripture to you.*"

"*Scripture?*" replied the burglar, "*I thought she said she had an axe and two 38's!*"

DID YOU KNOW???

"The average man or woman laughs about 4 to 8 times a day. The average child laughs about 150 times a day." Don Colbert, MD

"Like a massage, a good belly laugh is able to stimulate all of the major organs." Don Colbert, MD

"Laughter is able to raise your energy level and pull you out of depression. It actually releases tension, anxiety, anger, fear, shame, and guilt and can completely change one's attitude." Don Colbert, MD

"He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." Proverbs 11:25

Look at your troubles from a different light. Find a wacky angle, a new twist..."Don't offer trouble the energy you should be using to train your boomerang arm. Offer trouble a little serious thought, then, turn it upside down and look at it through God-colored glasses. Chew on trouble's possibilities for making you smarter, better, stronger, kinder."

My journal while reading Barbara Johnson's book,
Boomerang Joy.

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 wore-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 track!" Think of the rat race we live in: one-hour print...ten-minute oil changes...instant cameras...instant potatoes...instant MICROWAVE meals! Our homes have dishwashers, slow-cookers (don't be fooled by the name—turn them on as you run out the door for work and have a healthy meal ready to serve at

the end of the day!), microwaves, and computers! Oh, and the computer thing! Yep, I am on my computer now (at our local coffee shop—yep, priorities are nice at times!) enjoying the benefits of my blessed computer complete with its battery, cd-writer, and all of the other MUSTS that I am so spoiled with! BUT! For heavens' sake...think of how spoiled we 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 our products so we don't have to wait for the 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 Sllllloooooowww DDDDoooooowwnnnnn?? 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 eliminating overload is simply not possible without slowing down!

Ephesians 5: 15-16 says, *"Look carefully then how you walk! Live purposefully and worthily and accurately, not as the unwise and witless, but as the wise (sensible, intelligent people), Making the very most of the time [buying up each opportunity], because the days are evil."* What does this look like? Well, let's go back to Genesis 33 for a look at the life of Jacob after he completely surrendered his entire life to the Lord. *"My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I WILL LEAD ON SOFTLY, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children BE ABLE TO ENDURE, until I come unto my lord at Seir."* Want to slow down, but how? Where do we begin? What can really make a significant difference? Try these:

- ♥ **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 ONLY I can do—or even more difficult, get rid of what is overloading me! I know that this is hard, but it is SO key! Take a deep look now at what you are doing. Is it really eternal? Is it the "main thing?" Is it essential? Can anyone

else do it? Is it hindering you from the very best? Decide what is most important. You won't be sorry!

- ♥ **Examine Your Lifestyle!** Take a little while to jot down a journal of what makes up your day? Your week? Your month? Your year? REALLY BE HONEST! Do those things count? What are the days filled with: things that are really important...or lots of fires to put out? Take a bit longer to write out what you would REALLY like 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 simply cannot trust our hearts. They will lead us astray every time! What really motivates us? What drives us? If we can determine this, we can evaluate activities and obligations much more effectively! So, what drives you? Ambition? Your life call? The desire to be in control? Don't trust others to do things? Passion? Guilt? Ego? Insecurity (Can't say "no?" Afraid that you 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?

Busyness does not mean that we are accomplishing. Nor does busyness guarantee fulfillment. Often, busyness is the very thing that keeps us from the very things that will bring us satisfaction, fulfillment, and contentment. Busyness, given the chance, will keep us from fulfilling our life purpose!

It is all up to us! We can choose which way to go! Enjoy the journey or wait to enjoy the brief delight of the destination? A wasted, bitter, defeated life or a life full of purpose and meaning? Burn out or real accomplishment? Deep, passionate relationships or very real regrets?

Why not slow down? Relax? Enjoy the whole journey—the process getting there AND the destination! Build deep relationships! Stick to those priorities! Simplify life so you reach for the very best! Seize each moment!

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 whisper sweetly in your ear to say that the problem is not that we do not have enough time...or that we are using time to the fullest...or even that we waste time. Rather, He would say that we need to make it our ambition to redeem the time—each and every moment we are given!

A few months back, my pastor taught a series of messages entitled **From Burnout to Balance**. In his series, he challenged us to look at time as a great big "bank account." He said that this account is one that we are guaranteed to have daily deposits made on our behalf by God each and every day. We each get our fair share. No one gets more. No one gets less.

Think of this awesome gift! Each and every day we are given a gift that can impact all of eternity—or be squandered away into oblivion. Each day we are given this gift without any regard to our stewardship from the day before! TWENTY-FOUR HOURS! ONE-THOUSAND, 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! But! 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 be faithful? Will we use it wisely? Will we make it count for eternity? Will we use our gift to 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 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 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.

We must be careful to set a guard on our time to be sure that we do not flippantly do without thinking or take on too much that we forfeit the best! We need to purpose to really do those things that are "NEEDFUL" (remember Luke 10: 38-42?) and not just the "stuff" that we think MUST be done! We need to constantly evaluate our choices and weigh them to see if they are truly those things that help us to reach our life call.

Time...what do you think? Redeem this precious gift so our lives can be balanced? You bet!

Sell Out COMPLETELY To God's Will!

Does this scare you to death? Are you seeing visions of little grass huts...no electricity...bugs...complete with the stench of underarm odor?

Oh, beloved! My first image of total surrender 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 the same way that I thought of my life on earth totally surrendered to Him!

Now, as we move into our 11th year as a ministry (and Harold finishes up his 1st year FULL-TIME with us!), I HAVE to tell you that God has a very, very good plan for us! He does not call us, equip us, and then send us to an assignment that forfeits our trust and confidence in Him! In fact, one thing that I am thrilled to say is that although there IS work in our calling, there is delight and fulfillment that cannot be found in anything else under the sun! Seeing His provision is unbelievable. Watching His anointing fall is indescribable! Plus! No grass huts so far!

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

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 LIFE that we are really searching

for! As we grow in relationship with Christ, daily become LIKE HIM, we find security and LIFE! We find peace! We 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!

- ♥ **Be transformed by the daily renewal of your mind!** The last key to getting to know God's plan! However, this one is SO VITAL! If we truly want to live a balanced, abundant life, we must sell out to God's will. BUT, however much we want to sell out, unless we truly let Him change our life, we will just spin our wheels in the same ruts, never becoming all that God wants for us to become! How is our mind transformed? Life changed? This life transformation begins as we sit at the feet of Jesus. As we daily immerse ourselves in His Word, we will begin to be transformed. Then, we will soon have different priorities... different beliefs... different ambitions... and soon, we will be able to prove what is good, acceptable, and perfectly in the will of God. If we never experience this transformation, we will always find ourselves burdened under a yoke of bondage. We will always find ourselves looking in all the wrong places for direction, approval, meaning, purpose, and rest! We will constantly battle overload. We will find life bumpy and pulling us into life's "ditches!"

God has a precious plan EVEN for you! Surrender ALL to Him! Let Him have it all! Let Him do His work in you! Don't rush! Don't drag around! Don't run from it! Live EACH day letting Him have your ALL in complete abandonment! Balance will come—but, beloved there is so much more that will rush into your life! Purpose, meaning, abundant life! Go for it!

Build Margin—Breathing Room—Into Your Life!

Ever been at rock bottom? We see many of our favorite Bible characters that we get to know during good times, but I think my favorites are those that we get to see when they are rock bottom, with NO breathing room, at the point that my mother would have said, "I've HAD IT!" Ever just "HAD-IT?"

Imagine for yourself the grief and utter pain that Job was experiencing as he cried out in Job 3:26, **"I have NO peace, NO rest, NO quiet!"**

Drop into the conversation with Paul as he declared that he got to his "breaking point" in 2 Corinthians 1: 8-9, **"For we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about the affliction and oppressing distress which befell us in the province of Asia, how we were so utterly and unbearably weighed down and crushed that we despaired even of life itself. Indeed, we felt within ourselves that we had received the very sentence of death, but that was to keep us from trusting in and depending on ourselves instead of on God Who raises the dead."**

Finally, journey back to 1 Samuel as we are first introduced to Hannah at the point of utter desperation—you probably know a bit about her story. Barren. Broken. Taunted (by her husband's other WIFE!! Who had NO problem bearing children!). Empty. Crushed in soul. Oh, let's join her at the point that she had "HAD IT!"... **"Crushed in soul, Hannah prayed to God and cried and cried—inconsolably. Then, she made a vow: Oh, God-of-the-Angel-Armies, If you'll take a**

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 for moms to get help? Our children LOVE to be Mommy's helpers! We really steal their blessings when we do not delegate to them. Even tod-

dlers can help fold a load of laundry! Don't try to do it all by yourself! Delegate and you will find some of the stress dissipating!

- ♥ **Get enough rest!** Oh! This one is soooo tough for me! But, let's honestly look at what happens in our families when we get tired: don't get enough sleep>get cranky>don't enjoy life>not too great to be around> others get cranky> irritates you more>get more tired... Why not simply get that rest?? Sleep AND that rest in body, spirit, and soul!
- ♥ **Self-control!** Hummmm... Such a challenge! However, we will find ourselves constantly stressed out until we learn to say "NO" to those activities, commitments, all that stuff! Bit-by-bit, they wear us down. Saying, "NO" eliminates the whole threat of stress from the onset!
- ♥ **Keep it simple!** Don't overload! We already KNOW we cannot do everything, but we have to remember this when choices are there to be made! Always look at anything new, whether an activity or a possession, judging its importance by what you are willing to swap for it. This works for everything—shoes, books, activities, commitments. Keep it simple! You can't do or have everything, so go for the very best!
- ♥ **Give yourself a break!** Don't pick yourself to death NOR let others pick you to death either! It is so easy to focus on the negative, get overwhelmed by the weaknesses and inadequacies, and get frustrated about how far you have to go! Then, PEOPLE sure do not help! Let another person loose in your life with the license to critique you or your situation and you will be ready for the nut-farm! Give yourself a break! See this thing as a process—you will not arrive until it is all over but the shoutin' so relax, enjoy life, and give yourself a break!
- ♥ **Find ways to fill your cup!** We are each wired so very different. Certain things stress some of us that do not bother others. Likewise, certain things just fill our cup! STOP! Step back! Shift into low gear -or reverse! Do what it takes to DE-STRESS! Rest! Relax! Rejuvenate! Renew! Refill! Whatever it takes, find those things that fill YOU back up! Oh! The benefits go beyond de-stressing and restoring balance—you finally have living water to pour forth into the lives of others!
- ♥ **Make the most of EVERY minute!** Cherish this time! Make sweet memories! Take time for the most important—the best things! Your husband! Your children! Your family life! Don't let life just slip by! Look at life and decide what you would do if this were your last year...last month...last week...last day? Would you go to the park to enjoy watching them play? Would you cuddle up and read a great book? Would you take off to the beach? Why not make those things YOUR thing? Oh, and probably find that education can be EASY along the way too!

De-stress! Crawl up into the great big comfy arms of our loving Heavenly Father! Let Him hold you during the most turbulent or trivial stresses of life! Let Him restore your spirit! What you are doing is vital! Your enemy wants you stressed out, overloaded, out of balance! He is defeated! When he snarls, throws forth his darts, and lies to you, just snuggle up closer to your Lord! Give Him the struggles! Give Him expectations! Give Him every single burden! You won't be sorry!

Get Back To the Main Thing! Relationships!

Remember Matthew 22: 37-40? Jesus was asked, "What IS the most important thing? The bottom line? The main thing?" I love Jesus' ability to summarize ALL of life in ONE response! He summed up the main thing in three commands: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and body... to love others as ourselves...and obviously, to love ourselves! Do you see this? The MAIN THING... the BOTTOM LINE..THE most important thing was relationships! However, when we get overloaded, the very first thing that we skimp on is relationships!

Want to restore balance and get rid of all of that overload? Take a deep look at the MAIN THING! Anytime things are out of balance, take a look to see how relationships are doing? Are they being "put off" until the pressures go away? Are they quiet while the rest of the "stuff" screams, demands, and pulls you to pieces?

Ask God to constantly keep you attuned to relationships in which you are charged with ministry. Ask God to show you ways that you can love and minister to Him. Ask Him to quicken you all along the way with ideas and precious opportunities for ministering to those you are called to minister to—your husband, your children, your parents, your siblings, those that come within your sphere of influence. Cry out to Him to help you guard your time so moments do not slip away leaving a hole in this vital area of life!

So...What Do You Think???

Ready to get out of this rat race? Ready to restore balance? Make life really count? Sit at the feet of Jesus! Snuggle up close! Listen for each beat of His heart! Let Him pull you back from that "stuff." Let Him show you how to let go of those GOOD things and grab onto the very best! Give Him a chance to restore balance and set us on the path to leaving a legacy!



OH! This article is an excerpt from Cindy's upcoming book **Organization 101: HELP! For the MESSY Mom!** Look for it in the near future! We think you will love it!

67 Ways To Reduce Stress

(not an exhaustive list!)
By Christie Berry

Many of these ideas may help you reduce stress!

- ♥ Sit on a swing/porch swing and swing with a vengeance.
- ♥ Take a long bubble bath with candles and a good book.
- ♥ Get a massage.
- ♥ Chat on the phone with a friend.
- ♥ Write, keep a journal, poetry, email a friend.
- ♥ Go to a pool and swim laps.
- ♥ Read something funny—laughter is full of endorphins.
- ♥ Rock a child or baby.
- ♥ Tell the dog all about your stress! He listens intently and will lick you to make it better.
- ♥ Go to yard/garage sales, thrift stores, ebay!
- ♥ Make a gum wrapper chain (the kids usually have lots of wrappers).
- ♥ Do handwork: embroidery, crochet, tat, knit, hem something, etc.
- ♥ Clean your house with all your energy!
- ♥ Do laundry.
- ♥ Eat jello with your toddler—or with a teen only you have to feed each other with LARGE bites!
- ♥ Bake bread (kneading helps relieve stress)
- ♥ Work in the garden, pull weeds, talk to your plants (they don't talk back!!).
- ♥ Sit in the quiet of your garden.
- ♥ Sort papers, email, socks...
- ♥ Play music or a musical instrument—match your mood to your music, if you want to change your mood, change the music.
- ♥ Read email from friends, lists, message boards.
- ♥ Sing—LOUDLY!
- ♥ Strive for alone time.
- ♥ Put yourself in 'time-out' (lock yourself in your room for a few minutes or have your husband send you to your room if you need a break when he gets home).
- ♥ Any physical exercise: swim, jog, run, walk, hike, roller blade, yoga, join a gym, lift weights, aerobics, bike ride, running to the fridge!
- ♥ Eat stress food: chocolate, chewy (tootsie rolls), more chocolate!
- ♥ Go to the library.
- ♥ Relax after everyone else is in bed—cup of cocoa or tea, private stash of chocolate! (have a required bedtime no matter what our children's age...quiet time!)

- ♥ Go to the card section of the store and read the funny ones.
- ♥ Burn candles.
- ♥ Learn about and use aromatherapy.
- ♥ Play, be silly with the kids, or a friend!
- ♥ Find a hobby—painting, pottery, photography, scrapbooking, writing, cooking, refinishing furniture, ceramics, sewing quilting, making jewelry, candles, soap—the art of creation relieves stress and gives the feeling of accomplishment.
- ♥ Take a drive in the country—a Sunday drive (not necessarily on Sunday!).
- ♥ Scream!!! (best to do this outside, or askd the kids to join you inside)
- ♥ List all of the stressors in your life—see if there are any you can change or eliminate.
- ♥ Declutter and organize your home—www.flylady.com
- ♥ Go to the movies—a comedy or escape theme, popcorn, and chocolate!
- ♥ Reconnect with old friends, family—write a letter, call or send an email.
- ♥ Lay on floor and throw a temper tantrum with the kids!
- ♥ Schedule in 'ME' time everyday at least for $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour—and a couple of times a month with a friend.
- ♥ Go to Walmart at night by yourself when there are no crowds and walk through all the aisles window shopping (wear comfortable shoes).
- ♥ Take time away from house to do something you enjoy.
- ♥ Deep breathing.
- ♥ Stimulate your mind: take a class, attend a discussion, do some research.
- ♥ Do something with likeminded friends "When I really need to distress, I have to talk with someone who 'gets' what I'm going through" Emotional support.
- ♥ Go on a date with hubby, get a sitter, and work on 'adults only relationships.'
- ♥ Get enough sleep: declare a quiet time in the afternoon and take a short nap with toddlers (everyone else can read quietly in bed or watch a quiet movie on TV).
- ♥ Watch mindless TV.
- ♥ Find a support group (real life or on the internet).
- ♥ Surf the web, look up things of interest or learn something new.
- ♥ Hire help. Can't afford it?? Check again! Cleaning help once a week or share child care with another mom to get a break!
- ♥ Start a girl's night out (or lunch).
- ♥ Take a few days by yourself, a vacation, retreat, visit a friend.
- ♥ Do something with one of your children that is fun for both of you and doesn't take much planning (ice cream parlor, do a puzzle, play a game, chase each other around the house.
- ♥ Find the family activities—parks, lake, camping, zoo, (away from the daily busy-ness).
- ♥ Have a spa day with friends, do facials, foot soaks, manicures, (remember being a teen?).
- ♥ Move, leave no forwarding address, become a hermit, join the convent, never return!
- ♥ Think about choosing to have/adopt your children all over again, take comfort in knowing God makes NO MISTAKES!
- ♥ Look for opportunities for respite care—churches, mom's day out, UCP clinic.
- ♥ Find a marriage retreat weekend and a sitter!
- ♥ Don't stress over the house cleaning, take time to lay on the floor and play with the kids.
- ♥ Find a high school student that can come once a week and work with your special needs child or a mom whose children are in public school that wouldn't mind earning a little extra or helping out a few hours a week.

- ♥ Create a loose schedule so that when things get off track you have something to look at and try to get back on track so you don't lose the whole day and feel that nothing got done.
- ♥ Break problems into small manageable and solvable pieces.
- ♥ Improve your nutrition.
- ♥ Last, and of course not least, give it to God and let Him carry it. Have a quiet time each day. Include prayer, Scripture, and meditation.