

Stain-Free While Managing the Mess of Life

Isn't it amazing how quickly life can become a mess?

I mean sure, if your life is like mine, most of the time it's messy. But toss in a severe cold that takes out each family member a week at a time. Sprinkle in some unexpected choices your children make that throw you for a loop, and you've got quite the chaos!



I was contemplating our cluttered life the other day while trying to summit a mountain of dirty dishes that had formed overnight.

For the longest time, I have been extremely appreciative of our dishwasher. We fill it to the brim every day and hardly come close to finishing them all. And then, the next day it starts all over again.

Some of us (not all) are old enough to remember life without a dishwasher. My parents waited until all four of us graduated high school before buying both a dishwasher and microwave. My mother would say, "Why do I need a dishwasher? I have two-legged ones that work just fine!"

You never knew struggle as a child until you had to wash the

dishes by hand. Traumatic memories came from standing at the kitchen sink, peering over a heap of bubbles. Not only did my brother and I severely suffer from sibling rivalry. But then we had to work together to get every used dish in the house washed, rinsed, dried and put away. My mother (bless her heart!) was determined to train us in this. Miraculously, we came out on the other side well disciplined in how to keep the kitchen clean.

Dirtier Than These Dishes

As I scrape up the dried-on cereal and soak the coffee mug in my own kitchen sink, I think about how messy my heart gets when my life is all mucked up. The gunk of frustration rubs off on me when I am overtaxed. The sticky goo of impatience smears on to my mind when my boys decide not to listen. Pretty soon, my complicated life has spread it's filth on to my heart.

And the mess in my heart is much dirtier than these dishes.



Wouldn't it be nice if we could place our hearts through an automatic wash cycle?

Toying with the idea, I snickered to myself, the echo of dishes rattling in the rack of my dishwasher. In the next instant (*DING!*), a thought came to mind.

We **do** have a spiritual spin cycle for our heart. We **do** have

supernatural suds that wash the deepest stain away.

As I paused to contemplate the spiritual meaning of my daily duties, a couple verses popped into mind.

But if we walk in the light, as (God) is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." 1 John 1:7

A few lines later, John adds...

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Now many of you out there are nodding your heads, "Yes, yes... We know." The biggest deal of becoming a Christian is how Jesus' blood washes you "white as snow".

Yet, what we often tend to neglect in our regular, consistent, daily journey with God is the ritual of repentance. Each day, we trudge through this life, collecting smears of sin and the gunk of offense. As stinking layer upon layer loads up on us, we stumble. It interferes with the closeness God desires to have with us. It harms our relationships, as we fling it upon others.

Lately, I have found a freedom in beginning each morning with a Daily Prayer. I have no idea what this day will hold. I have no confidence that I will make it through in my own strength. So, before setting my feet on the ground, I surrender to God in prayer all that I am and have authority over. I return to Him, recognizing where I have failed. Remembering how I am wholly dependent on Him to be of any good today.



John Eldredge taught me the value of the Daily Prayer in my favorite book [Walking with God](#). There are a few different versions of the prayer you can find on his website [here](#).

The only way we can keep our hearts and lives stain-free is regularly returning to a place of renewal we find in repentant prayer.

Daily Prayer cleanses us and aligns us with God's plan and purposes for us.

Pressing the buttons on the dishwasher, beeps echo through my home. I smile in realizing I don't have to wait a while for the "wash cycle" of repentance to work on me. God's repentance is ready, instant and available any time I need it.

Suddenly, my youngest son rushes in the room. "Mom! I forgot that I need a costume for school tomorrow. And why cant I play video games? All my friends get to play as long as they want!"

Here comes another sticky mess!

Mr. Franklin's Advice 288 Years Later

As I mentioned in an [earlier post](#), our family enjoyed visiting the East Coast during the holidays. One of the highlights of the trip was when John and I toured the city of **Philadelphia** for a day.

What a beautiful and historic city!



Wandering around for a while, we found ourselves heading down an alley to the Ben Franklin Museum. The collection of items and stories about him was so impressive that I forgot to take pictures! (But you can see some photos of the museum [here](#).)

Just before our trip, I happened upon an interesting [article](#) on Mr. Franklin's writing schedule. At the museum, I found the very same quote that inspired me.



“What Good Have I Done Today?”



At the end of each day, he would take some time for self-reflection and ask himself this question.

This thought has been a personal challenge for me recently. Many an evening would strike fear in my heart as my husband would come home and ask innocently, “What did you do today, honey?” Spending most of my time writing, reading and studying, I had nothing practical to show for the hours he had been gone.

My struggle with being disabled has revealed a flaw in my thinking. For many years now, I searched for my identity in being productive, in what I could accomplish each day. It feels good to prove that you have spent every last bit of

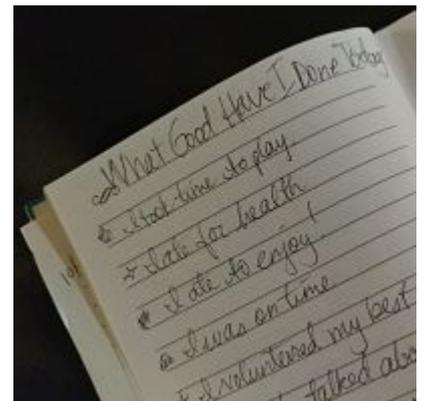
strength achieving something.

But I do not think this is what Mr. Franklin is asking here.

When I read this sentence, I hear the stress being placed on the word "**good**". When read that way, the question is not asking what you have accomplished, but what good has been done.

Any person can be productive. (And yes, even accomplishing something each day can be significant, right, my dear disabled friends?) But the significance is not in the accomplishing. The significance is in the good that comes from what is accomplished.

What do you see in your reflection?



Impressed with the many inventions and contributions Mr. Franklin brought to our world, I took to the task of reflecting each night as well. When I stop and think of my day, I don't think of the things I did (or didn't) do.

I think of the good that came through me. This brings a smile to my face and ideas flow easily as I write.

Doing this opens my eyes to many things that go beyond what you can put on a To-Do List. The many things more valuable than my own strength.

How about you? What would be on your list? I would love to hear your thoughts and questions. Feel free to use the comment section below to join the conversation.

It's a Wonderfully Disrupted Life

There I was, standing in the "Holiday Market" section at Fred Meyer. Glittering ornaments and lights all around, music commanding a happy holidays from every aisle, and people rushing about me to gather up the ugliest sweaters. The nauseated look I had on my face did not match the atmosphere.

"I need a vacation from this vacation."



This year, our Thanksgiving vacation extended into the end of the month while we were across the country. The trip was somewhat of a miniature tour of the east coast: Philadelphia, New Jersey, Times Square, Maryland, Washington DC. It was full of great memories with John's family, but by the 11th day, I

was ready to sleep in my own bed.

Before the wheels of the plane touched down on the tarmac from our 12-day trip through 8 states, Jackson had already asked when we were going to put up the Christmas tree. "I don't know," I muttered as my head spun with all we had to go through just to get back to my own bed.

Arriving to lights glittering throughout our neighborhood, we found the Christmas season had already started. Flopping suitcases onto the living room floor late in the evening Wednesday night, we quickly sent the kids to bed and off to school the next morning.

Welcome Home!

When you get back from a long trip, you need a few days to recover, work on laundry, get your life and world started up again. Returning home was a comfort, because we could return to our belongings where we placed them. We could manage our schedule how we want to arrange it. We can resume the familiar practices we have adopted there. It's predictable, it's comfortable and it's our world as we have established it.

Driving home from dismissal that day, I heard the dreaded sound every parent flinches at: *cough* *cough*. Rubbing his runny nose on his sleeve, Jackson answered the interview questions. I discovered he had developed a cold. Thankfully that was the only affliction we brought back with us.

Ushering him to bed early and finishing off the grocery list for an enormously empty fridge, I sent up a prayer for him and thanked God we could get back to our comfortable life again.

Except...

Waking in my own bed the next morning, I felt confident that things would finally get back to normal.

...Except for the fuzziness I felt in my throat,

...which developed into a scratchy feeling, the more I swallowed,

...which came with a lot of mucus (a LOT of mucus). Jackson had shared his cold with me.

Now, instead of resuming my life as usual, it was once again disrupted. After sending the boys off, I downed some medicine and headed off with grocery list in hand.

But, as I stood at the grocery store, willing myself to be in the Christmas spirit, all I wanted to do was go back to bed.



I love Christmas, I really do. What other time of the year do you hear songs praising God as you shop for rutabaga? What other time of the year can you find a lit up baby Jesus in random front yards around town? This time of year is PRIME TIME for drawing near to God and gaining a better understanding how richly He has blessed us.

But I just was not feeling it.

In my inner wrestling these past few weeks, I felt like I had to catch up with the rest of the world or just hang on with the tips of my fingers to the season spinning out of control before me. I became frustrated with how Christmas wasn't going the way I wanted it. That frustration boiled into how my life hadn't turned out like I wanted it. I became so frustrated with being disrupted. I just wanted, for a moment, to forget that it was Christmas. I wanted my life to be normal, to get back to the usual way I had expected it to be.

But, you see, the instant this thought flashed through my mind, I caught a whisper, way in the back of my head, that said, "Disrupted, just like the first Christmas".

Disrupting the Universe

A LOT of things were disrupted when God became flesh and lived among us.



A merely teenage woman would conceive a child (she claimed was God) before her wedding.

A priest would meet an angel, and his elderly barren wife would give birth to a son. His life would be spent in preparation to announce Christ's coming.

An entire nation would have to return to their city of origin to be counted for a census.

Shepherds would awake to a divine choir announcing the arrival of Emmanuel, a tiny baby sleeping in a feeding trough.

Mary's plans for her child's birth... wealthy noblemen from the East looking for an adult king... an entire village of infants and toddlers slain before their mothers.

Disrupted, disrupted, disrupted.

None of these events occurred the way anyone expected them to. God broke through the flesh that so firmly kept us from him and immersed himself fully into the skin of a babe. And this story continues to disrupt our lives to this day.

Do We Need Disrupting?

In pondering such a tumultuous entry into our world, I realized that maybe our lives need some disrupting. Yes,

that's right. We need to be disrupted.

Left to ourselves, we carry on, day after day, stumbling step after step deeper into our selves and our worlds shrink smaller and smaller.

When Christ was born, light burst forth from the heavens and cracked into our world. The star shone on the Light of the World that would illuminate our darkness, our inability to see that we need rescuing.

And we do need rescuing, from our lives being all about what we want, from our worlds being all about how we want it and from our Christmases being all about the way that we want them.



What we hear more than happy greetings each year is “What do you want for Christmas?”

Is it about what I want? If it is, then I will get a delicious meal, some fun with family, practical gifts and a pretty tree.

If it's not about what I want, but about what God wants, then it is a lot more than that. It is about God breaking through life as I expect it and doing something miraculous. Today.

Our lives will be disrupted. You can count on that. What you have to ask yourself is, are you going to open your heart to God in the messiness and see what He has in mind?

I always love hearing your thoughts. If you have something to share or ask, please feel free to enter a comment in the form below.

Putting the “Fun” Back in Dysfunction This Holiday Season



With today’s technological advances, you can observe the comedy of maladjusted persons from the safety of your couch while enjoying a bowl of popcorn. Holiday movies are a unique goldmine of family flaws and mishaps. You may almost find it therapeutic to watch other people’s relatives experience funky dynamics and disastrous circumstances. How many books or movies can you name that dispense elaborate

stories of the chaos that ensues when generations gather around the table to celebrate the season?

I’d also like to ask, how well do you know your holiday movies? We are going to play a little game. Let’s see how well you know your dysfunctional families from Hollywood. Below are some random quotes from popular Christmas movies. Guess which movies they belong to and check your answers at the end. Along with the game, you will learn some helpful techniques to maneuver your way through gatherings of your own.

The holidays don’t have to be painful. With a little strategy and a lot of luck, you can navigate this time of year with laughter and maybe even some great memories.

10 Tips for Dodging the Dysfunction During the Holidays

#1. “You’re skipping Christmas? Isn’t that against the law?”

Go Do Something! Sitting around together can be prime opportunity for awkward moments and weird conversation. If you stay busy, then you can be focused on something else (and not the wart on Aunt Josephine’s nose). Some ideas: Museums, Science Center, Shopping, Concerts, Movies, Volunteering.

#2. “Merry Christmas, you wonderful old Building and Loan!”



Bring Out the Board Games! (*Caution: This only works if there isn’t past trauma associated with playing games together as a family.) A couple years ago, my son, Caleb, had discovered playing cards. One day, he was pestering me to play with him when I suggested he create a game of his own. Sitting on a large rug with diamond patterns in it, Caleb invented the game “Diamonds of Four”. On a trip to the grandparent’s house weeks later, we enjoyed teaching them and playing the game several times together.

#3. “Since this is Aunt Bethany’s 80th Christmas, I think she should lead us in the saying of

Grace.” . . . “Grace? She passed away thirty years ago.”

Share Stories from the Past. Grandparents always love to tell stories. Some of my most treasured moments as a child were listening to the stories my grandparents told of when they were young. Hearing how they got into trouble as a child can help you feel more human and less embarrassed around them. If you feel the conversation is growing dull or the questions are too close for comfort, turn the spotlight on to them and see what they have to share. Some ideas: “What was the worst trouble you got into as a kid?” “What were your teachers like?” “How old were you when you learned to drive?”

#4. “Flick says he saw some grizzly bears near Pulaski’s candy store!”



Use Conversation Starters. After the initial “How are you” have worn off and the silence grows awkward, it may add some spice to the occasion to provide your own conversation starters. Our family enjoys the game **Would You Rather?** “Hey, grandma. Would you rather go to jail for 4 years for something you didn’t do or get away with something horrible you did, but always live in fear of getting caught?” For some more great conversation starter ideas, [click here](#).

#5. “Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night! And when I wake up in the morning, I’m getting a CAT scan!”

Stay Well Rested. One of the first things you lose when you are

traveling or having guests in your home is your rest. When you are not rested, you can grow irritable. This year, you don't have to suffer from a lack of sleep. Make plans ahead of time to take a nap or leave early to get more sleep at night. Take some extra time to wind down (read a book, listen to soft music). Napping also helps to get a break from conversation. □

#6. "Where ya been? We ate already."

Decide Ahead of Time to Be Flexible. It benefits everyone to have plans for your vacation, but flexibility invites grace and consideration to the activities. When you determine beforehand to change your plans if necessary, you will not be as stressed or disappointed when it happens. It also helps to have back-up plans for yourself when things fall through. You may end up enjoying a good book on your phone as you wait for others to adjust. Some ideas: games or books on a device, a pocket novel, knitting, sketchbook.

#7. "I made my family disappear!"



Allow for Quiet Time Together. With the abundant access we have to technology through televisions, computers, connected speakers and devices, our time with family can be boisterous and noisy. Requesting to share time together in quiet or with peaceful music can nurture a sense of calm unity and serenity everyone would benefit from. It may seem unusual at first, especially if the atmosphere in your family is a rowdy one, but you may start a new tradition that benefits the years

to come.

#8. “Aunt Clara had for years labored under the delusion that I was not only perpetually 4 years old, but also a girl.”

Remember Your Favorite Thing About Each Person. Oftentimes, the idea of being together with family members brings dread, because you only recall the things you dislike most about them. Sure! That’s understandable, but there are also reasons we have enjoyed being with these people in the past. (C’mon. Admit it!) You will have to put your “positive thinking caps” on for this one, but I promise it will help make the holidays a pleasant one.

#9. “It’s a one year membership to the Jelly of the Month Club. . . Clark, that’s the gift that keeps on giving the whole year.”

Share the Joy of Giving. Everyone likes getting and giving gifts. Okay, most of the time. (It depends on what you get.) But if you plan ahead to get (or even create) a little something for each person, it will add to the joy of the season and even nurture a sense of good will. Just take a second and think of how you would feel if each person showed up with a gift for you. If that gift were (at least) somewhat pleasant, you would feel considered and loved.

One of my favorite memories of holidays in the past is my grandmother making divinity for Christmas. If you have never tried it, you have missed out in a major way. This candy tastes like it is born from heaven and resembles something between a marshmallow and fudge. Each year, she would show up to an event with a tin of candies she had made by



hand. What a treat! Talking with her about the recipes and how she learned to make candy created fun memories I treasure.

#10. “Don’t ever say Hickory Honey Ham again!”

Make Sure There’s Always Something Good to Eat. If there’s no way possible to avoid the trauma of family fellowship this year, you can always nurse the pain with overeating. Scope out the food early on, offer to go for a (silent) drive to get whatever’s missing and mention the food whenever you have to divert the conversation away from inappropriate questions. You may have to loosen your belt a little, but burning the calories off won’t be half as painful as the trauma you’ve avoided.

How did you do?

Check the answers below and share your score, another favorite movie quote, some more ideas or holiday stories of your own in the comments section below. I’d love to hear from you!

Answers:

1. Christmas with the Kranks
 2. It’s a Wonderful Life
 3. National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation
 4. The Christmas Story
 5. The Santa Clause
 6. Home for the Holidays
 7. Home Alone
 8. The Christmas Story
 9. National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation
 10. Christmas with the Kranks
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5 Ways to Soften the “Back to School” Transition

That was a looooong summer!



With a record dry spell and sunny days almost the **entire** time, my boys were more than ready to go back to school this year. And I was more than ready to send them.

After seeing them off Wednesday morning at 8:03 am (exactly), I hooted and hollered before plopping down on the couch with a hot cup of tea. I didn't move for at least a couple of hours.

Now that we are in full “back to school” swing, I wanted to share some ideas on how to make your transition a successful one.

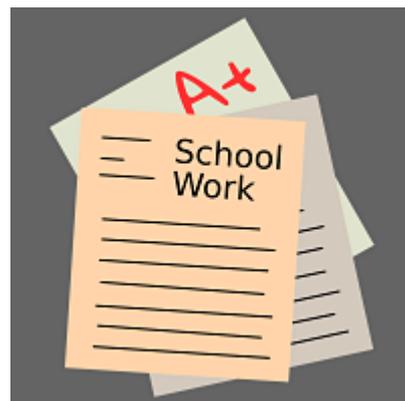
#1. Are You Ready to Be Home?

Being in the 8th and 2nd grades, I'm sure my boys are sick of hearing me ask. But this single 6-word question makes a world of difference in our household. You've heard the age-old adage “Everything has it's place, and a place for everything”. This is so true when it comes to transitions. The biggest struggle with going back to school is finding things. After hunting down lunch boxes, coats and library books much more than a few times, I realized that we needed a system to keep everything where it can be found.

Now, as soon as the boys come home, they are to empty papers

and folders on to the table and put shoes, lunchboxes, backpacks and coats where they belong before doing anything else. (Maybe using the bathroom is an exception.) There is a place where these things belong, so that when they are needed in the morning, they are easily found. Create this habit and I know mornings will go a whole lot easier for your family.

#2. Paper Management



Schoolwork produces a lot of papers! We are blessed to have paper to use for our children's learning, but what do you do with all of it?

First, you will have to decide for yourself what is worth keeping. Each year, I keep less and less, but set aside those treasures that will bless them when they move away. I use a large accordion file folder and make sure their name and date are on the paper before dropping it in.

Second, we have the refrigerator and dishwasher as a gallery of the latest works of art or high scores. I replace an old piece with the new piece so the appliances aren't overwhelmed.

Lastly, you have the orientation day stockpile/newsletters/forms/fundraiser paperwork that you must keep track of throughout the year. We purchased these [wall pocket organizers](#) for each of the boys that sit near the table in our kitchen. Whenever something important needs to be kept, I drop it in their pocket. Now, even the boys know where to

find it.

#3. Time to Connect as a Family

As Fall comes on, you may find your family scattered in many different directions. The busyness and lack of quality time can put a strain on your relationships. Even though children are excited to go back to school, they also feel anxious about making friends and the challenges of learning. You can provide a firm foundation of reassurance and stability when you are purposeful about guarding your family time.

Dinners together without distraction, board games or going on a hike are casual ways to come together as a family. Don't think that your time has to be organized or expensive. You just need the space to communicate and share experiences in relationship with one another.

In order to find the time, you will need to put it on the calendar or commit to a regular time together. You can also be more purposeful by setting out a jar and having family members write ideas on a slip of paper. Being spontaneous can make it more interesting!

#4. Less is More



With the new schedule, it can be tempting to take on more activities. Sports activities begin, churches start new programs and you can find yourself going in different

directions each hour of the evening. But what kids remember most about their childhood is the quality of relationship with their families, not the amount of activities they did.

When something comes up to be added to your schedule, ask yourself if this activity is going to benefit the family as a whole. Consider what your child would want to do with you and make it a priority to anything else you could add to your schedule. Your attention is what is most important to them.

#5. Fully Embrace Fall

Now that you have guarded your family time and worked hard to organize your home, **dive in to Fall!** Rake up a pile of leaves to jump in with the kids. Wander down to the local pumpkin farm and do some chunkin'. Volunteer in your child's classroom and see what is so wonderful about their new grade level. When you stop to think about what you enjoy most this time of year, make room to experience it with your family.

Now that I've shared helpful tips on transitioning into Fall, I'd love to hear from you!

What are your favorites of Fall? What helps make this time of year easier for your family?

Join the conversation below by leaving a comment with your ideas and stories.

Top 3 Best Parenting Tips I've Tried

Not much feels better than a piece of advice that works perfectly for you. Sometimes, out of the blue, parenting

advice can come from nowhere and be exactly what you need for your child.

In [last week's blog post](#), I shared three parenting tips that really didn't help us. Even maybe failed.

What can keep you sane while parenting are those times where you actually (almost accidentally) get something right.

The Top 3 Best Parenting Tips I've Tried

#3. Making the Baby Share a Room

Whoever invented the term "sleeping like a baby" never raised one. Babies sleep very lightly and can wake frequently during the



night. I actually celebrated the day Caleb started sleeping in his own crib. We had our bedroom back again!

So, when our second son came along, we had a major decision to make. Since we lived in a split-level home, we contemplated giving the baby the room next to ours and sending our 5-year-old to sleep downstairs. But, when I mentioned it to a dear friend, she told me her boys actually slept better sharing the same room.

We tried it, and the boys liked it. Easy enough for us. Now we didn't have to move any furniture downstairs. (Sweet!)

#2. Let Them Struggle.

This next one is something I have learned, not only in raising my own kids, but in teaching as well.

Kids **need** to struggle.

Yes. You heard me correctly Millennials of America! Clear away the clouds of entitlement that you are disillusioned with and listen up! Kids need to wrestle with challenges and learn how to do things by figuring it out on their own.



I regret not allowing our firstborn to struggle more. I was too wrapped up in him getting it right that I didn't just let him explore and try. As he got older, I learned how to loosen up. One of my favorite things to say now is "You're a smart guy. You can figure it out."

Our youngest son sure was a wake up call. From the first day, I knew he was going to be a fighter, and his struggles have made him one tough little guy. Every day he comes home with a new scrape or bruise to prove it.

#1. Tell Them You're Sorry and Ask for Forgiveness.

I wonder if as a parent we make more mistakes than our children do. Probably.

So, there has been plenty of opportunities for this one. If

anything, I don't think I've said sorry enough.



The best way to teach your child is to show them by example. They will naturally gravitate to following in your footsteps. When you show them your love by apologizing, it reveals how important they are to you. It also teaches them humility and how to take responsibility for their mistakes.

When I have come to them with an apology, my kids have always responded graciously with love, quick to forgive. One of the things I love most about kids is how immediately they make amends.

This tip will also come in handy for our children when they have their own to chase. And then you can smile that way all grandparents do when they see their adult child learning to parent, too.

What is some of the best advice you followed as a parent? Please share a comment below, and if you enjoyed this article, click on the star or share it with someone else.

Top 3 Worst Parenting Tips

I've Tried



Being a parent is one of the hardest things you will ever put your heart through.

From day one, your child is the most precious thing on earth. The color of their eyes, that curly lock behind their ear and the goofy things they say. You are head-over-heels in love.

On the other hand, they can drive you completely **MAD** with their repetitive questions, eye rolling and dragging their feet.

Parenting is tough! Some things go right, and it seems like a lot of things go wrong.

Of course, you can find parenting advice almost anywhere on just about anything you can try on your child. Each piece of advice is as varied and diverse as the children that they will be imposed upon.

But did you realize that parenting advice can teach you, the parent, a lesson too?

The Top 3 Worst Parenting Tips I've Tried

#3. Jiggle Your Baby to Sleep



I knew this one when I did it, and I did it anyway. Sometimes it was hard to get baby Caleb to go to sleep. He just didn't want me to put him down. During my pregnancy, the doctor told me he thought the baby would be a cuddly guy, and he is!

So, when it was time to go to sleep, I would stand at the crib, holding him in my arms, jiggling him to sleep (at least 20 minutes at a time). I had read some really great advice from a [parenting book](#) on soothing your child. It really worked, but it required that I do it every time. Every. Time.

Even though I should have tried something else, I can't say that I regret it now. I automatically shift into jiggle mode when I am holding someone else's baby. It's a nice reminder of that time, but I'm glad I don't have to do that now.

What I Learned: Some of the crazy things you do for your kids will be worth it.

#2. Make Them Clean Their Plate



As much as our youngest child is adventurous, our oldest child is determined. One day, he came home from school and declared he did not like blueberries. Someone at school told the class that he hated blueberries. Now, Caleb did too.

Though he had never struggled downing blueberries in the past, now he noticed every little blue dot. Even if it was surrounded with muffin or cake.

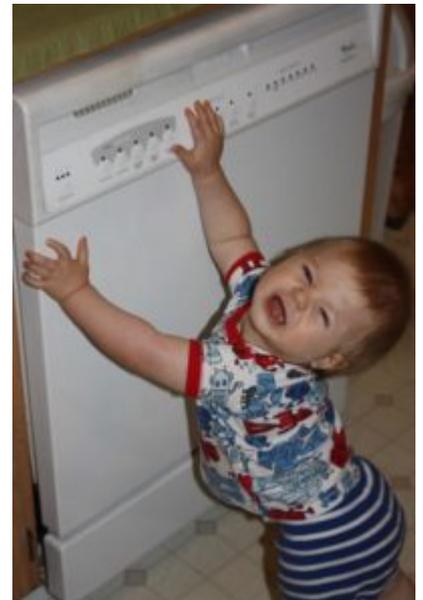
Being the determined mother that I was, I decided he was going

to grow up properly nourished whether he liked it or not. Dinner battle after dinner battle resulted in a weary mother. After talking it over with my husband a few times, we decided it wasn't worth fighting over. Caleb could decide how much he wanted after "trying" the food out.

I soon realized my child was learning food preferences and what it feels like to be full and satisfied. Giving him some control over what he wanted to eat and how much taught him healthy eating habits.

What I Learned: If they didn't get enough to eat for dinner, I would be happy to make them a large breakfast in the morning.

#1. Removing Door Stopper Springs



From the time Jackson was 18 months to 3 years old, I constantly held my breath. His nickname was "Mr. Adventure", and I told people that when I was an old woman, he would send me postcards from the Himalayas. That kid loves to climb!

So when he started cruising around the house, I heard that parents should remove the door stopper springs so it wouldn't pinch their fingers. I quickly went around the house unscrewing every single one and moving the dangerous tools far away from my delicate child.

That was a big mistake! That boy has done significantly more

damage to our home since then, and multiple times he got his fingers squashed in between the door and the frame. Take note of this, new parents: Your child will pinch their fingers...multiple times. No matter what you do.

What I Learned: Pain can help kids learn not to do it again.

Next week, I will talk about the BEST parenting advice I received. In the meantime, feel free to share your stories of bad parenting tips in the comments below.

A Sonnet for Mom's Bonnet



Today I pray a special blessing for my mom,
As I struggle to remain calm,
As I wrestle with the desire to flee,
As I scream deep inside of me.
A home is hard to care for.

Plucking me out of a public mud bath,

Dealing with the baking aftermath,
She always made sure I was well taken care of,
And filled our home with her acts of love.

She is a great mom and more.

My youngest is always somehow getting hurt,
And his every crevasse filled with dirt.

My oldest is quoting a random fact,
Instead of putting his schoolwork back.

Who knows how i can keep score?

Speaking for moms, far and wide,

What makes us every day decide

To care for the families we love so much,
Is the little bit of insanity that we touch
When we find that we love them and more.

-Shanna Lyn

The Anxiety of “Out to Eat”



“Can we go out to eat?”

Anyone who has ever been a parent knows the wild storm of emotion that this question can instantly erupt.

Whether it is your spouse asking or the young spawn you created, your heart and mind can be jerked into all sorts of directions at the sound of these six simple words.

Sure! You would LOVE to eat a meal that you didn't have to give a second thought to how it was prepared. . . that was exactly what you wanted. . . and just walk away from the atomic bomb of a mess your kids leave behind.

BUT. . . could you stand it?

Vivid memories come to mind of dirty looks you get from other patrons as your child chucks something out of the booth. . .

. . .of continual bickering and hard feelings that turn into passive aggression between your kids when they don't get to sit where they want. . .

. . . of Each. Painful. Minute. that it takes to distract your kids from eating out of the salt and pepper shakers as you

wait for your food.

Last year sometime, the feeling of anxiety began to well up in my gut again. Just as Jackson reached for the hot sauce bottle, I had an idea.

“Let’s play a game...”

That day, we started what would be a regular family tradition of playing this game almost every time we went out.

The game is called “**Who Am I?**”

Each person takes a turn and thinks of what living creature they are. When they have something in mind, they ask everyone, “Who Am I?” We each take a turn asking a “Yes” or “No” question, trying to figure out what they are. The person who discovers it gets to be next.

This game has been a lot of fun for our family. We pull it out now when we have extra time wherever we go.

How about you? Any fun games you played as a family to pass the time? Any tips on how to handle the kids when out in public?

Please share in the comments below.

5 Pain-Free Meal Planning

Tips

I admit it... I love food.



I love eating food, I love thinking about food, I love talking about food and I love making delicious things to eat. I think I can fairly say that everyone loves eating something yummy. And we all get the opportunity to do that multiple times a day. (Yay!)

Because I love to think about food, it isn't hard to pick what meals I want to make for my family. The trouble comes when you have to make that decision over and over and over again, every...single...day.

After 15 years of marriage and 11,700 meals prepared (3 meals a day x at least 5 days a week x 52 weeks x 15 years), you can imagine that meal planning has become somewhat of a **chore**. I've heard from friends about how they struggle with what to put on the table each week and how frustrating it can be to go to the grocery store and figure out something to satisfy everyone in the house. That can be so discouraging.

The challenge of meal planning each week can really put a strain on your family. It can consume valuable time and energy, only to be met with unpleasant comments by our children.

It doesn't have to be that way.

Over the years, our family has developed a system that reduces the amount of rigor required to produce nutritious, satisfying meals each week. My tech savvy husband and I have streamlined our grocery shopping and created a large resource of meals to draw from for future lists. Let me share with you what we have learned to help make the process a lot less painful and (almost) pleasant.

5 Family Meal Planning Tips

#1. Begin Collecting Recipes

It is a whole lot easier to choose meals for your family when you have a stash of recipes ready to pick from. Now, I don't expect you to adopt recipe collecting as a hobby (and be a food nerd like me), but when you set aside recipes based on what your family likes and the ease of making it, you can filter through them pretty quickly come planning time.

Some Ways to Collect Recipes:

- Food Magazine Clippings – This is my favorite way of collecting ideas for new meals. I think it is the satisfying sound that comes from ripping out the pages. ☐ I have a massive 3-ring binder of newspaper and magazine clippings I have collected over the years. (Taste of Home and Cook's Country are the ones I recommend.)
- Pinterest Boards – Digitally collecting recipes can be a lot easier and faster. You can sign up for a free account on [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) and create boards for any category you want. My favorite board (and the one I pin to the most) is [Delectable Desserts](#). If you are feeling adventurous, you can get the [Pinterest extension](#) for your browser and create pins for any recipe

Some categories to choose from: Pasta, Soup, Sandwiches, Casserole, Rice, Salads, Slow Cooker

Families are most satisfied when a different type of main dish is created each night. Pasta is quick and easy to pair with most foods, but more than 3 times a week can be too much (although I'm sure my boys would disagree). Also, when you are looking for meals, you can narrow down your search by reviewing your menu to see which category you have not chosen yet.

#3. Review Your Schedule and Plan Accordingly

Another consideration to make when meal planning is your family's schedule. Some nights, you won't have much time to make a meal, and pasta would be the quickest choice. On Sunday evenings you may have more time to prepare dinner and may choose to make a casserole. To save time, you may want to cook two meals on one night and refrigerate the casserole to throw in the oven when you get home the next day. Also, to take full advantage of the nutrients in your food, you can make recipes with fresh foods earlier in the week and save the recipes with canned or frozen foods for later in the week.

#4. Build your grocery list as you pick your meals.

Some of you have noticed that I didn't mention the second tool on my [*Freebies* Page](#). The single most thing that has made our family meal planning almost painless was invented by my husband. We use an [Excel Grocery List](#) which is organized by aisles and stores. That may not sound so great, but the most wonderful thing about it is that he and I use it on [Google Sheets](#) and can access it from any of our devices. Whenever I think of something, I just pop it on the list. I can print the list out by grocery store, or whip out my phone when I am shopping. I will go back to it when I am ready to start a new list, clear out the items I don't need anymore and leave any items we will need to get again. So simple, easy and

accessible!

#5. Don't throw away those menus!

My last tip is a bit of encouragement for all the hard work you have gone through to build healthy meals for your family. Keep your menus to use as a future reference and build a "Family Favorites" stash of ideas for the future. Reward yourself for the effort you are making for your family and each time it will get a little bit easier.

If you can put some of these tips into practice, I'm sure you will find that you don't have to dread meal planning anymore.

What about you? Do you have any tips or tricks to share? Please let us know in the comment section below.