

Directing God's Resources as a Homemaker

Many thanks to other homemakers, busy managing their houses and other responsibilities, who took the time to offer critique, advice and practical advice to share. May God richly reward your investment in this essay and my own life.

Several years ago, I hit rock bottom. At least in one area of life, and it happened to be one that affected not just me, but my entire family. This area, quite simply, was how to manage a home. I was pregnant with our 3rd baby, half sick from a toxin exposure, in physical therapy for an unstable joint (which made it very difficult to walk), and both the two year old and my eight month old were on very limited diets due to food allergies. Unfortunately, they didn't share the same allergies, and so I often ended up cooking two or three different meals. Simply surviving became my goal. I was desperate for any trick, any stratagem to manage my home. I didn't want to live with mold in my toilets and piles of laundry gracing my floors. I didn't want to cringe at the food I wasted or the sticky messes obscuring my windows. I researched and googled and read. What were the truly important cornerstones of running a house well, and what things were okay to let go in a tough season of life? I had limited time on my feet every day, so making every moment count was important. I wanted to know how to be efficient, and find some way to maximize every moment of my day. Some things I tried made drastic improvements to my routine and my home, while others simply did not work at all. Some things I'd never heard of, and other things I realized my mother had been right about all along. Slowly, managing a home for my unique people and circumstances found its rhythm. The truly important pieces became habits, and the habits connected into routines, which became well-worn, comfortable parts of each day. My little people were taken care of, and the big ones mostly were too. Even though I may not get everything done, it doesn't cause anxiety to knot up my stomach. I know the needs in my home have been met as well as I am able, and it's ok for the rest to wait. My household may not be perfect, but it is managed and cared for as I believe God has called me to do.

The Bible calls Christians to be stewards- *oikonomos*- which literally means "household managers", in God's household. We are used to hearing about stewardship in terms of being

responsible with money, or developing our God-given abilities. However, I believe this applies to far more of life than money or talents. It applies to anything we are given – our time, opportunities, possessions, and the things we are responsible for every day we are given to live. We are the managers of the things God entrusts to us, for we certainly did not create time, or anything we have.

In Matt 24:45-51, the steward is given resources and a clear responsibility for where those resources were to be used. Instead, he wasted those resources on himself. They were not primarily for him, although, since he was a servant of the king, we assume he was supposed to feed himself as well. His job description was to feed the other servants. But instead, he channeled everything he was given straight to his own gluttonous self, while other servants were hurt and not filled. The resources never reached the Lord's desired end. However, if we look at the unwise servant in parable of the talents, we find a similar condemnation. That servant kept the resource safe, at the expense of using it. The result was the same – resources not reaching the Lord's purposes.

Being a steward is actually very simple. We are in charge of transferring what God has given us, to the people He intends it to benefit. Matthew tells the story of those who were called to inherit the kingdom prepared for them, and yet they could not recall when they had ever fed, clothed, or shown kindness and hospitality to one of the least of these, and thus, to Jesus. Transferring resources from the King to the people around them was such a part of who they were, their normal everyday routine, that they didn't even realize they were doing anything special. This is the essence of a steward.

What are we as women given? Well, our resources vary greatly, from apartments and single-wide trailers, to spacious four-bedroom houses on ten acres. Our financial state is equally varied. Our season of life, whether we are single, married without children, busy moms or empty nesters, brings its own unique blend of time constraints, energy stores, and mental and emotional tolls, not to mention our personalities and abilities. Every woman's "plate" of resources is uniquely built by God to fit the responsibilities He has called her to.

Our responsibilities and callings in life vary as well. Yet through Scripture, God has given an overarching charge to women-kind, highlighting her place in the home. God thinks this role is important and highly valuable! Even though there may be other worthwhile and incredibly valuable places God calls women to fill, this is a responsibility given to every woman, important enough to rank a place in the Word of God itself. I believe this is likely because home is the

very basis of society. Home is where children learn the principles of life and find their sense of normal. Home is involved in almost any ministry God has given you – from hospitality to just having your own haven to recharge for the next day of service. Many churches, both in the Bible and in modern times, have started in a home. Home affects every person who comes there, especially the homemaker. Our home affects our own outlook on life in a real and tangible way.

I doubt I am alone when I say I had always appreciated and agreed with the theory of women's call to creating a well-functioning home, but the practical outworking of it was quite another matter. We often struggle to know exactly where to begin, how much is enough, and how exactly to make it all fit into our days. From various resources and talking to other veteran homemakers, I have found four areas that seem to keep coming up. I've concluded these areas are the core of a well-managed home.

1. The Stuff

A steward inevitably deals with a lot of "stuff"- the physical, tangible items of daily life. Each woman will have a little different way of organizing and using all these things. However, I think there is common longing in every woman to have an easy home – easy to use, easy to clean, and easy to generally maintain. The tangible things of everyday life often militate against this. Things get lost, things break, things seem to quietly multiply in our closets, and somehow we still find ourselves running to the store for just one thing (because we don't have the right thing!). Managing all our things well basically requires two things – effective tools and creating a home for each item.

Effective tools are simply tools that do their jobs well. This applies not only to the real tools in our homes but also to sentimental items as well. They have a job to do as well – unlocking memories and sparking stories to share. Everything in your home should be there for a reason. Does it do its job? If it does not, it needs to move on.

Creating a home for everything is simply being able to put everything back, quickly, easily, and close to where you will pull it out next time. If the shoes are constantly getting kicked off at the door, put the shoe bin exactly where they always land anyway. Make it easier to put away than to leave lying around.

Practical Tips from other homemakers

- I find that when I have too many, I don't have a favorite.
- Let the space or container you have dictate how many you keep.
- Always prioritize people over stuff. Does this thing serve me and my family well? Or is it hogging space meant for us, without earning its keep?
- Let go of things your "fantasy" self will do some day. I finally got rid of all my scrapbooking things. I might dream of having beautiful scrapbooks artfully capturing my children's growing up years, but the truth is, even with a broken leg, I will find three other things to do before I groan and pick up the scrapbooking supplies. Keeping the supplies won't make me the person I wish I was.
- Buy what you use. Thrift stores and yard sales offer temptations to bring home wonderful deals, even if they aren't things your family will actually use. If you don't need anything, don't go.
- Use what you buy. It is so tempting to "upgrade" or get a new scent or try something new, when I still have multiple bottles of cleaning spray, or whatever, still at home. Be conscious of bringing new things in when the old is still waiting to be used.
- Realize different people organize differently. I love things sorted in a "micro" organizing style. I keep multiple bins for different types of toys instead of one big toy box. But other people do better with "macro" style organizing. All the hats and gloves in one big bin by the door instead of a separate bin for each person. Also, some people want to be able to see their things out on a shelf, and others prefer everything tucked away out of sight in a closet or closed container. Knowing my style and what we can actually maintain without a second thought, is the difference between staying organized and beautiful, or everything rushing back to the old chaos.

2. The Food

I find it comforting that Jesus talks about a steward being responsible to feed people. A large part of a homemaker's life seems to revolve around food. Food is essential to life and health, and taking care of that basic need well somehow breathes life and warmth into a home, no matter if you are single and struggle to use food up, or if you are a mom of many watching vast crockpots and cookie sheets empty in the blink of an eye. Using His resources to meet such a basic daily need, and doing it well, receives recognition and reward.

Practical Tips from other homemakers

- Keep something extra on hand. I find I am much more relaxed and meal planning is much easier when I don't have to constantly run to the store for every little thing.
- Eat what you store, store what you eat. I find there's no point in picking up good deals my family struggles to use up.
- Taking 5 min to go through my fridge and make a list of what needs to get used this week keeps me from wasting so much food. Plus, it's a great way to start a creative menu for the week!
- I love taking one day to make one big mess in the kitchen, and then enjoy fewer pots and pans for the rest of the week. I can't do everything ahead, but every little bit helps!
- My dear mother-in-law taught me to keep one or two "emergency meals" on hand- something that requires little to no prep, and could be ready almost as soon as it was heated up. As a busy homeschooling minister's wife whose plans were regularly upended at a moment's notice, she always kept baked beans, instant mashed potatoes, hotdogs, baby carrots, and a cake mix on hand, even though her family didn't regularly eat most of those things. This way she was never more than about 10 minutes away from being able to feed her family before they had to run out the door.

3. The Cleaning

Cleaning is a central part of creating a home where people want to spend their time. A reasonably clean space is a welcoming one that whispers, I'm ready for you - ready to start a project, take a nap, sit down for a long conversation, or really anything. Since every home is different, it's no surprise that the way homemakers clean is as diverse as the way we cook and store food. Different seasons of life, different houses, health problems, there is no end to the things that affect how your house both looks and feels on any given day. But again, a clean home is a welcoming home.

Practical Tips from other homemakers

- Decluttering makes the cleaning easier. If it's not there, I don't have to clean it!
- A cleaning routine that works for *you* makes all the difference. Don't be afraid to change it up and try something else until you find your sweet spot.
- It's better to clean one thing a day, and never have your house totally clean or totally dirty, than try to clean everything at once for the lovely "clean house" feel, and fail every

time, week after week. Make your cleaning routine attainable for you, right now.

- Don't use too many different cleaners. It's much easier to use one good all-purpose spray for lots of things, instead of a special one for each surface or different mess in your home.

4. The Routine

Routines are an excellent way to navigate through knowing where to begin in any of these areas, and to know what matters the most. Often it is simply not realistic or fair to the people in your house to have everything perfect all the time. But a good routine gives a baseline to work from. A routine is simply a way we are used to doing things, a series of consecutive habits we no longer even think about doing. Routines can be as good or as bad as we make them. Make tiny changes, one habit at a time, and as those habits begin to connect into a routine, you will soon wear a comfortable groove that sets you up for a good productive day, every single day. Maybe taking your vitamins every day seems too small of a thing to be intentional about. But connected to the habits of getting up promptly when the alarm goes off, making your bed, combing your hair, getting dressed all the way to your shoes, drinking a full glass of water, praying for a certain length of time, or anything else you can dream up, you can create a powerful morning routine, or any other routine throughout your day. But it all starts with making that first tiny habit.

Practical Tips from other homemakers

- Taking the time to actually write down exactly what I wished was done every morning before school really helped me see what I ought to be doing, and what things weren't necessary.
- The problem wasn't that I wasn't doing things, but that I was doing the wrong things. They weren't bad, they just weren't the most important.
- I finally realized routines were simply a time management tool. I am so distracted and often interrupted. A routine helps me know where to start when I look around and wonder, now what was I doing?

When home runs efficiently, a world of opportunity opens up beyond the front door. Simplifying our homes and creating effective routines gives a homemaker both time and mental space to

use that beautiful welcoming home to bless everyone around her- from family and friends, to neighbors and beyond. Many churches were started in homes. I think of Lydia in Acts, who hosted a church in her house, and I presume faithfully prepared for every meeting, and cleaned up the mess afterwards. I think of a close friend whose husband's prominent ministry would never be possible if she were not at home, keeping everyday life running smoothly, efficiently, washing sheets for constant company, cooking his special gluten free diet, or staying up late just to listen to him unburden his heart. She gives him a base to work from, a place to relax, and recharge under his heavy load. Her ministry is taking care of him as he pours himself out again and again. I think of a single friend, who's beautiful, well-kept house was a haven for other singles, not to mention her table regularly stretched to host multiple families. I also think of mothers in the thick of potty-training who keep wiping up the bathroom floor, switching out flip-flops for boots, and reading story after story. They may think they have the lowest calling of all, but when I see the foster children who come to another friend's house, I shake my head and think how incredibly important a mommy's job is, providing a safe, healthy normal for such vulnerable little people.

Being a steward is very simple, yet it often takes years, if not a lifetime, to perfect. Its principles are simple, yet life offers us many ways to apply them. We are in charge of transferring what God has given us, to the people He intends it to benefit. A faithful homemaker is simply one who gives what her Lord has entrusted to her to everyone around her. Her cheerful, contented faithfulness truly changes people's lives. May God bless homemakers everywhere as they steward their gift, their resources from God to the world around them.