

1001 TIMEMANAGEMENT

by Crystal Paine
with Amy Lynn Andrews



Money Saving Mom®

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Stop Trying to “Do It All”

In the past year, I’ve received numerous emails from women begging me for my “secrets” to time management. They ask me to please share how I manage to seemingly “do it all.”

Every time I get an email like that, I wish I could invite the woman to my home. Because seriously, I think it’s easy to make bloggers out to be someone they are not when you’re basing all your conclusions of them upon the little sliver of their life that they share on their blog.

I know, because I’ve been guilty of it myself. I’ll read a woman’s blog, see the pictures and ideas she shares, and begin to wonder if she might be Superwoman’s clone. And I feel badly because I don’t measure up to this blogger by any stretch of the imagination. When in reality, I know good

and well that every single woman has their strengths and weaknesses and no one has it all together.

I'm An Ordinary Person, Who Serves An Extraordinary God

I think some people somehow think that I actually do every deal I post about, shop at five stores and save \$200 on my grocery bill every week, cook six-course gourmet meals from scratch every single night, spend 10 hours of quality time with each of my children every single day, have my children involved in all sorts of extra-curricular activities, volunteer in our community at least five hours every week, hand-sew our clothes from the fabric I wove from the wool I spun from the sheep I sheared... okay, well, maybe not that last one.

But seriously, folks, I am just one person. I only have 24 hours in my day — just like you. And I don't have limitless energy or creativity. I often get tired, cranky and irritated. I sometimes go to bed feeling guilty that I'm not spending enough time with my children or feeding them healthfully enough. There are days I want to quit and give up.

Anything good you see in me is not me, but **God in me**. I'm just an ordinary person but I serve an extraordinary God. He is the One Who gives me strength to keep going when I want to quit. He's the One Who gives me joy when I'm feeling discouraged. He's the One Who gives me hope when life feels overwhelming.

I get up early — before my children — and spend time reading the Bible and praying. This quiet time encourages my heart and gives me strength

for the day. I also usually pray over my day and ask the Lord to bless my day and multiply my time. It might seem like a strange thing to ask, but when I ask the Lord to bless my day, I'm always amazed at how more peaceful and joyful my days are.

Determine Your Passions & Gifts

In addition to starting my day with God, one of the biggest things which has helped me to be a better manager of my time is to let go of perfectionism. Once I finally gave up and realized that I can't do it all so I should just stop trying, my life has been so much more calm and enjoyable.

It's easy to want to try to "do it all", but you can't. The truth is: you're not gifted in every area and you're not good at everything.

For instance, I stink at most anything which requires domestic creativity. Ask me a question about starting a business or marketing and I can give you a list of a hundred and one creative ideas. But ask me to decorate your home or plan a party and I've pretty much got nothin' for ya.

I used to wish I could be one of those women who whipped up hand-smocked petticoats for my girls' dolls on the fly and decorated three-tiered wedding cakes while in the middle of canning forty-two batches of pickles. I wanted to learn to quilt and knit and crochet and tat and make soap and candles. I pictured myself restoring antique furniture, owning a spinning wheel, planting a massive garden and sewing all our bedding.

But the reality is that I'm just not skilled in those areas. Oh, sure, I still try on occasion to improve my knitting or sewing skills, but I've learned to accept that I'll likely never be really proficient at most of those things.

Instead of beating myself up over what I can't do, I've been trying to focus on and exercise those areas in which I am gifted; and trying to appreciate the gifts God has given others instead of wishing I could "do it all."

I'm reading a great book right now called **168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think** and one of the key points the author makes in

Invest your life in those things which you're truly passionate about and gifted in.

the book is to focus on your core competencies. I really agree with her premise (though not everyone will!) in that it's pointless to spend a great deal of your life trying to do something which you don't excel at.

If possible, invest your life in those things which you're truly passionate about and gifted in. It will cause you to lead a much more productive and fulfilled life. At least, it's made a world of difference for me!

Once you've let go of perfectionism and determined your strengths, then it's much easier to prioritize and streamline your life. I'll talk about this more in the next chapter where I'll share my list of priorities and my promised list of many, many things I don't do!

Determine Your Priorities

In the last chapter, I encouraged you to stop trying to do it all. You only have 24 hours in your day and when you let go of trying to be Superwoman and just be content with being who God has made you to be, you'll find your life is so much more peaceful and calm.

In addition, if you want to be a better manager of your time, you need to determine what your priorities are.

I promised you I'd share my list of priorities and what I don't do. However, I want to remind everyone that this is just my own personal list for this current season of my life. Your list will likely look much different — and it should!

Everyone's list of priorities is going to look different because we're all different with different family situations, different needs, different commitments, different struggles and different strengths and weaknesses. What works for one person won't necessarily work for another. And what works in one season of our life might not work at all in another season.

My Current List of Priorities

1. Having a strong and vibrant relationship with the Lord. I make it a goal to spend around 30 minutes first thing in the morning reading God's Word and praying. In addition, I seek to continually be nurturing my relationship with the Lord by reading spiritually uplifting books, spending time with other Christians and being involved in our local church.

2. Having a wonderful, open, no-holds-barred relationship with my husband. My goal is to flirt with my husband at least once every day. I know it might seem trivial, but it's the little things which keep the spark going in a marriage. We try never to let anything come between us. So when we have disagreements or misunderstandings, we take the time to discuss these and talk things through until we reach a point of unity — even if it takes a long time! We try to set aside at least an hour to spend together one-on-one every day and then have at least one at-home date night each week and a monthly date where we leave our children and go out to dinner or on a fun outing.

3. Teaching and loving and enjoying my children. Next to the Lord and my husband, my children are my top priorities. In addition to homeschooling, reading, teaching, discipling and playing with them, I

try to spend at least 15 minutes with each child one-on-one every day. I also try to take one child with me on an outing every week and we rotate whose child's turn it is each week.

4. Staying healthy and energetic and constantly seeking to improve my mind. I've found that if I'm exhausted and burnt out, I'm not a good wife and mom. So I make my own health a big priority. I try to exercise at least four hours each week, get at least seven hours of sleep every night and eat healthfully. It's also important to me that I constantly seek to be improving my mind through reading, thinking through issues and learning new things; I don't want my brain to turn to "mush." My husband also encourages me to go somewhere by myself (to the coffee shop, grocery shopping, an evening with friends, etc.) for a few hours once a week as this refreshes me and energizes me as a wife and mom.

5. Keeping a fairly clean and orderly home. Our home is never perfect — and often far from perfect! — but I aim to have it completely picked up at least once a day, to stick with my cleaning and laundry schedule and always to keep it 45 minutes or less to "Company Ready." We don't have a lot of clutter, so this helps tremendously in keeping things more organized.

6. Running a blog. I really enjoy blogging — especially when I'm able to have my other priorities in order! — and it's also a way I can minister and help people from a laptop in my living room. So my husband and I feel it's something God has called me to do right now. That may change as my children grow older; we'll see how God leads! For now, I am

blessed to have **a team of six people working for me** to help shoulder this load so that it's not overly-burdensome to me.

7. Sticking to a cash budget. This involves, among other things, setting financial goals, looking for the best deals on items we're planning to buy, waiting until we have saved up enough to pay cash for something, and making sure we stay within the cash budgeted in our cash envelopes.

8. Ministering to people in our community. In this increasingly virtual world of social media, real-life relationships are very important to us. We try to open our home for hospitality at least once a month, and then I aim to minister in specific, practical ways to people in our church and community at least a few times each week. Usually this is something simple like having my children write notes or put together a care package for someone, getting together with a friend who's struggling, jotting a quick email to let someone know I'm praying for them, or taking a batch of rolls or a frozen casserole to someone who just had a baby.

Things Which Aren't On My Priority List Right Now

- Crafts
- Cooking gourmet meals
- Gardening
- Sewing
- Watching TV
- Decorating (*My sister is helping me decorate our house as I already told you this is an area I have absolutely zero giftings in!*)
- Ironing (*We try to buy mostly wrinkle-free items and my husband takes his work clothes to the dry cleaners.*)

- Frequent shopping trips (*I don't do that much shopping and I prefer to shop online whenever I can.*)
- **Elaborate Freezer Cooking**
- Lots of extra-curricular activities for my children
- Making homemade gifts & cards
- **Playing the drugstore game**
- And much, much more!

I also don't take care of any of the bill-paying/bookkeeping (my husband does this as he's excellent at it and loves it). We don't have pets to care for. I'm not in any regular play groups or Bible Studies. I'm not on any committees. I don't pack lunches for my husband to take to work. And I only make dinner four to five nights per week (we eat out once a week and we often go to extended family's homes for one to two dinners each week).

So yes, there's so much I don't do right now. And I believe this is one of my biggest keys to efficiency: I say "no" often and I try to carefully choose my activities and commitments so that I don't overload my plate.

Create a Time Budget (part 1)

This chapter is written by Amy Andrews, who helps with much of the behind-the-scenes work at Money Saving Mom® and blogs at BloggingWithAmy.com.

My name is Amy Andrews (not to be confused with the very classy [Amy McGuire of Amy's Finer Things](#) — the advertising/giveaway guru here at Money Saving Mom®). My husband Brian and I have been married for 13 1/2 years and we have 4 children.

Online, I blog at BloggingWithAmy.com which is aimed at teaching others how to start a money-making blog from scratch. I also do some blog consulting and I just released an ebook about time management called [Tell Your Time](#) which, incidentally, came to be after helping Crystal with her schedule.

Time Budgeting

If you've read Money Saving Mom® for any length of time, it's likely you have heard Crystal talk about the envelope system for money management. The goal of the envelope system is to pre-determine where you will spend your money so as not to overextend yourself financially.

Earlier this year when Crystal and I discussed how to make her schedule more workable, I told her about a similar concept which I refer to as "envelopes of time." They work the same way in that you pre-determine where you will spend your time so as not to overextend yourself commitmentally (is that a word?).

This is how the concept works (excerpt from *Tell Your Time*):

- Total up the hours in a day (or week). That's easy, 24 (or 168).
- Make a list of the activities you want to accomplish in that time (i.e. your envelopes).
- Divvy up your activities between your allotted time envelopes.
- If there isn't enough time in the day to cover one of your activities, you have four choices:
 - "Steal" time from one of your other activities.
 - Figure out a way to streamline so it takes less time.
 - Get someone else to do it for you.
 - Drop it completely.

In the ebook I move on to talk about how to determine your priorities/life goals and how to accomplish them by incorporating them into your daily schedule, but here I'll expand on the four choices we have when we don't seem to have enough time in the day.

1. Steal time

When the total hours of our daily activities exceed the number of hours we have in a day, it often results in us stealing time from other activities in our schedule.

For example, too much time on the computer might steal from my personal time, too much time studying for an exam might steal from my sleep or too much time shopping might steal from one-on-one time with my kids.

Often we steal time from other areas without even realizing it, or, we realize it only after it leaves a gaping hole. Life happens of course, and occasionally we have no choice but to steal time from other time envelopes. Stealing will happen, we just need to proactively make room for the deficit elsewhere.

Also, we need to remember that stealing time has a domino effect. Whenever we steal time from one area, another will always be affected.

2. Streamline

I am a streamliner. Whether I'm contemplating how to get from my house to the grocery store or thinking about a new giveaway entry system on Money Saving Mom®, I'm constantly thinking, "There must be a more efficient way to do this."

I'm on a never-ending quest to figure out how to do things quicker and cheaper. Streamlining is, no doubt, very handy when it comes to shaving off precious minutes in my schedule, but it can cause its own trouble too.

Streamlining itself takes time — time which must be accounted for. If I'm determined to find a faster route to the grocery store but I end up getting lost every time, streamlining doesn't really work in my favor at that point.

Another downside to streamlining is paring down your schedule just so you can pack more in. It's great to be productive, but if you're so productive that you end up cramming your day with things that do not help you accomplish your life goals, it's not benefiting you in the long run.

Streamlining is great when it reduces stress, however, if you're streamlining but your stress level remains the same, you might have to consider another option.

3. Get help from someone else

Another way to combat a too-full schedule is to figure out how to get others to do things for you. In our house, my husband and I take care of various responsibilities and our children are expected to help as well. We all work together to share the load.

I'm also in favor of looking to others outside our home for help. I loved what Crystal says about focusing on the things you're good at. I am guilty of trying to do everything because I'm either too cheap to pay someone else or too prideful to ask for help.

Granted, we are on a limited budget, so paying someone for help is not always an option, but I am 100% in favor of this idea. I see it as a win-

win — I am relieved of something I don't like to do or don't know how to do, and someone else gets to make a little money doing something they're skilled at.

But lack of money doesn't have to be prohibitive when it comes to getting outside help. Be creative! Bartering, swapping babysitting with another mom so you can go to the grocery store alone or making a few homemade pizzas to feed a group of friends willing to pitch in and paint your house are all great ways to get help without having to spend money.

And there are plenty of people who are more than willing to respond to a humble, un-reciprocated request for help. All you need to do is ask.

4. Drop It

You are only one person working within a limited amount of time. You can only do so much. If you're like me, you might simply need to let some of your commitments go. Gone. Finished. Done. Outta here.

Now, I'm the first to say this is not always easy, nor is it pleasant, but if you constantly feel overwhelmed and stressed out, it's likely you simply have too much on your plate.

For a long time, I kept looking for things to cut out of my schedule. The problem was, I couldn't find anything to cut! It took me a while to figure out that I was looking for the "bad" stuff to eliminate, but all the activities on my calendar were "good" things (church ministry, building my business, excellent learning opportunities for my children, etc.). It was freeing to realize that I could choose to let go of "good" stuff in order to make room for the "best" stuff.

This is how I said it in *Tell Your Time*:

Are your daily activities really helping you achieve your life goals, or have you gotten swept up in the tumult of your to-dos? Whether it's an inability to say "No," the fear of missing something, the need to keep up with the Joneses or just careless planning, many of us are masters at committing to things that sound like great ideas, but do nothing to get us closer to [reaching our life goals]. Frankly, if they're not getting us closer to [reaching our life goals], they're a waste of time...no matter how amazing they are.

Create a Time Budget (part 2)

For years, we've used **a cash envelope system** for much of our budgeting. For those unfamiliar with the concept, it basically works like this: We have different envelopes for each area of spending (for instance food, clothing, gifts and so forth) and we have a budgeted amount of cash that we put in them every month. That's the allotted money we have to spend on clothes and food and gifts and so forth.

Because we have a budget, we know where our money is going, we know how much money we have to spend in each category and we're able to make sure that we're spending our money on what matters to us — in-

stead of just letting it pass through our fingers like sand. Having a plan for our money and sticking to the plan gives us peace, allows us to make financial traction and frees us from a lot of worry and stress.

Budgeting our money is a no-brainer for us. But truth be told, I'd never considered how this concept could be applied to my time. To me, time management had always meant trying to find a way to be as productive as possible every day.

I equated busyness with productivity. So I'd have these big, lofty plans and make these detailed schedules, but I'd always crash and burn quickly because I was trying to cram in about 32 hours' worth of projects into a 24-hour day.

When Amy Andrews shared the concept of creating a time budget with me, it completely revolutionized my life.

I'd never thought to approach my time like I approached my money. Instead of starting with everything I wanted to do in a day and then trying to find a way to fit it all in (it never did because my list was way too long to begin with!), for the first time, I started with the time I had and then divvied up my responsibilities and priorities into time brackets which equaled less than 24 hours.

My Daily Time Budget

- 30 minutes Bible reading/journaling
- 1 hour with Jesse
- 4 hours of homeschooling, reading and playing with the children
- 1 hour of exercise

- 30 minutes shower/dress
- 2 hours cleaning/home management
- 7 hours sleeping
- 2 hours meals/meal preparation
- 4 hours blogging/computer work
- 2 hours of extra/”margin” time

It probably goes without saying, but I’m going to repeat it anyway: Please remember that this is my time budget which currently works for me in this season of my life. Yours will likely look much different.

Do what works for you. Do not pattern your time budget after mine because it won’t work for you. I only share mine as an example, not to encourage you in anyway to emulate it — unless you want to try and get as much (or more!) sleep than I do, okay?

Keys to Success When Making a Time Budget

1. Make Sleep One of Your Highest Priorities

I used to think that burning the midnight oil would make me more productive, but I’ve actually found that I’m much more productive if I get at least seven hours of sleep almost every single night. I’ve found I’m most productive in the mornings so I make it my goal to go to bed by 10 p.m. and get up between 5 and 6 a.m.

You might be the other way around. Do what works best for you, but whatever you do, put getting enough rest high up on your priority list.

You'll feel better and more energetic and I'd wager to guess that you'll also find an extra hour or two of sleep at night helps you to be more productive than if you spent that time trying to pry your eyeballs open with toothpicks and get more work done!

2. Deduct at Least Two Hours for “Margin Time”

I know that there is a great temptation to fill up every single waking moment with something, but may I heartily encourage you to include at least two hours of margin time in your budget? It's sort of like our “blow” category for our cash envelope system; we can use it for those little incidental expenses which come up that we weren't expecting. Or, we can choose to “blow” it on something fun.

If you have margin built into your time budget, when you have someone knock at the door, or the phone rings, or the baby has a diaper blowout or the washer overflows and there's water all over the laundry room floor, your whole day didn't just go down the toilet. Instead, you can just stop what you were doing, deal with the unexpected interruption and then go back to what you were doing — and you know that you still have plenty of time to get everything done you needed to get done!

You know what else I love about including margin in my time budget? It means I have time to stop and really enjoy my children and seize teachable moments with them.

For instance, the other day I discovered a four-foot long black snake in our backyard. If I didn't know that I had a time cushion in my day, being the Type A person I am, I likely would have just run on to the next task.

But instead, I called the girls outside and we spent 45 minutes observing and taking pictures of the snake.

We emailed the pictures to Jesse and he looked up what kind of snake it was and researched more about it so that when he came home from work, he was prepared to give the girls an impromptu “lesson” on our backyard visitor — which they just lapped up and then enjoyed sharing with me and anyone who would listen for the next few days.

If our lives were so packed full that we didn’t have any margin in them, we would daily miss out on fun opportunities like this. Planning margin into our day gives us the freedom to be spontaneous.

3. Be Ruthless About Eliminating the Unnecessary

As Americans, I think we are sometimes addicted to busyness. We always have to be on the go-go-go. And I sometimes think we find fulfillment and self-worth in piling our plates too high. As if, the more busy we are, the more important it makes us feel.

In reality, I think our culture, by and large, is exhausted, overworked and overwhelmed. What’s the solution? It’s really very simple: just say “no.”

Stop doing things just because you feel obligated to do them by something or someone else. Stop doing things just because you’re afraid of what people might think of you if you don’t do them.

Stop over-committing yourself. Stop letting people manipulate you into a miserable existence. Just say “no”.

Make a Personalized Plan

Up until now, we've mostly talked about theories. We've discussed streamlining your life, determining your priorities, and creating a time budget. Now it's time to turn those theories into real-life applications.

I know. This is the hard part. But I promise that if you'll stick with it, it will pay off in incredible ways!

You Need a Plan

Just like you're never going to get control of your finances until you make a detailed budget and stick with it, so you're never going to be a good manager of your time unless you have a plan and stick with it. Without a

plan, you'll just aimlessly wonder through life, not knowing where you're going or what your final destination is.

A plan allows you to rise above the tyranny of the urgent and focus your efforts and energies on what is truly important. A plan gives you purpose, vision and momentum.

When it comes to our Daily Plan and Homemaking Plan, I've found that a plan gives me freedom, saves me a great deal of time and brings peace and order into our home. I can focus on the task at hand because I know the other tasks will get taken care of during their designated time in the day.

For instance, I can walk past the pile of laundry on my bed at noon because I know that I have a time slot at 3 p.m. to fold and put away laundry. I don't have to find myself stressing over "What's for dinner?" at 5 p.m. because I put together the main dish after breakfast and it's just waiting in the refrigerator for me to stick in the oven. I can enjoy reading a book or spending time online during the designated time slots for it because I know that my family's needs are met and my house is in order.

What Would a Perfect Day Look Like?

Find a quiet room sometime in the next few days and take a blank sheet of paper and a pencil and jot down a rough draft of what a perfect day would look like for you. This exercise is not meant to discourage you, but to get your creative juices flowing and to help you start to formulate a plan to improve the order and efficiency of your home and life.

Start With a Routine

After you've written out what a perfect day would look like, take your list of priorities and your time budget and start mapping out a realistic plan for your day. If you're new to the whole concept of routines, don't try to create this massively-regimented schedule.

In fact, I'd discourage you from making a strict schedule to begin with and would instead suggest you create a routine. This way, you're not setting yourself up for failure from the get-go. Once you become adept at a routine, then you can get a little more detailed, but don't bite off more than you can chew when you're first starting out.

I love many of the concepts from **FlyLady** and one of the things she encourages is to have a morning routine, an afternoon routine, and an evening routine. If you have no structure in your life right now, I'd encourage you to begin by writing down five things you want to do in the same order every morning and commit to getting up and doing these first thing every morning for three weeks.

My current morning routine:

- Get up, read Bible, journal, pray
- Check email, clean out email inbox, blogging work
- Exercise, start a load of laundry
- Get children up (if they aren't already up!), oversee their before-breakfast chores
- Shower, dress, make bed, clean up room

I've had a morning routine for a number of years, so mine is a little more than five things. But it's sort of meshed together so that I view each line as one "thing" and lump them together like that!

Don't try to add anything else new for the next three weeks; just stick with faithfully implementing a morning routine. Once you've consistently stuck with your morning routine for three weeks, then add in an afternoon routine for three weeks and then an evening routine for three weeks. At the end of nine weeks, you should start to feel some significant order in your life just by these simple routines!

Be Flexible; Life Happens!

Remember that your routines are not a slave master; they are guidelines to help you. If your children or husband needs help, or something else important comes up, take a detour from the routine and then come back to the next thing as soon as you are able.

The whole purpose of a routine or schedule is to benefit you and your family, not to be an excuse to bull-doze everyone over! If it isn't serving your family, it needs to be tweaked or changed.

Once you have some basic routines in place for your daily living, it's time to put it altogether and devise a Daily Plan and/or Weekly Plan and then branch out to planning for all areas you've determined to be your priorities.

1. Daily/Weekly Plan

Now, I know some of you are rolling your eyes saying, “Oh brother. Here we go again. I bet she’s one of those fanatics trying to put me on a strict schedule for each day. That will never work for me.”

Be encouraged! I am not suggesting you need to have a very regimented, down-to-the-minute schedule which you never deter from in order to manage your time well.

Yes, seriously.

Wanna know a secret? We don’t follow a strict schedule! Instead, we have a plan in place for all areas we’ve determined are our priorities. And we stick with a *flexible* routine.

That’s what I love about the Time Budget. In the past I’d make these elaborate schedules, but then I’d follow them for only a week or two because I’d get so flustered. The problem was I had crammed the schedules so full that the whole day would be thrown off whack with just one or two minor interruptions.

With a Time Budget and margin planned in the day, I’ve felt the freedom to shift things around as needed. So if the children are playing together really well in the morning, I might just let them play 30 minutes while I finish up a cleaning project. And then we’ll just skip or condense the cleaning/playtime in the afternoon.

I think it is really helpful to go ahead and make out a specific routine for your day or week using the time budget and priorities, but use it more

as a guide, not as a hard and fast must-follow-to-a-tee slave master. It's there to give you gentle direction and oversight, not to make your life miserable!

You can **see our written Daily Schedule here**. However, that's just the written schedule. We never follow it perfectly.

In fact, if you want to have a more accurate idea of what a day at our usually house looks like, it'd be more like this:

- Get up, read Bible, journal, pray
- Check email, clean out email inbox, blogging work
- Exercise, start a load of laundry
- Get children up (if they aren't already up!), oversee their before-breakfast chores
- Get children started on breakfast (we eat oatmeal pretty much every morning), shower, dressed, make bed, clean up room
- Quick clean up of kitchen (while the children play or finish their morning chores) and make main dish for dinner (this usually involves about one minute of pulling out chicken or fish from the freezer and marinating it)
- Baths, dressed, chores (if the children didn't finish their morning chores yet)
- Bible Time (We're going through Teach Me About God, a Bible story coloring book and Hymns for a Kid's Heart right now), Art (I eat a bowl of oatmeal sometime in here!)
- Kaitlynn and Silas usually go play nearby and I finish **My Father's World** with Kathrynne (this is a unit study curriculum which encompasses almost all subjects, though it's a little weak in some which is why we supplement).

- Kathrynne then works on her math lesson while I oversee and switch the laundry and finish any kitchen cleaning.
- Children watch a DVD or play while I do some blogging work
- Lunchtime and read a chapter from our current chapter book read-aloud
- Finish cleaning chores for the day
- Read to Kaitlynn and put her down for her afternoon nap (she sometimes just lies in her bed and looks at books for 45 minutes to an hour) or listens to a story CD. Recently, though, she's been taking a good 1.5 hour nap most afternoons — probably because she's been getting up earlier!
- Sing, rock and read with Silas and put him down for his nap.
- Return phone calls, extra projects or cleaning
- Clean out inbox, blogging (Kathrynne watches her school DVDs or plays.)
- Everyone help with folding and putting away laundry (I try to do at least one load from start to finish each day.)
- The children play together while I read, finish cleaning or extra projects.
- Finish dinner prep, set table and finish afternoon chores (if they weren't finished earlier), clean up house
- Read together (if time)
- Dinner, family time, read Bible together
- Children ready for bed/to bed (Jesse usually gets the children ready for bed and puts them to bed and sends me to put my feet up and read or blog! Yes, I know, I'm very spoiled!)
- Time with Jesse
- Bedtime

This loose schedule is only for Monday through Thursday, as we only follow the morning routine on Fridays and then leave the rest of the day open for extra projects, errands, hospitality, getting together with friends and/or field trips. We pick one “big” fun thing per Friday to do and then also usually tackle some extra loose ends.

Saturdays are much more relaxed at our house. Jesse usually takes the children out for a few hours while I have my Weekly Planning Retreat (which I’ll explain in detail in a moment), and then we just spend extra time hanging out together as a family, sometimes going out shopping or on a fun outing, sometimes just hanging out at home working on projects. We go to Jesse’s family’s house on Saturday evenings for dinner and our weekly “Family Night” (when everyone congregates to eat, catch up, play the Wii and laugh until our sides ache!).

Sundays are extremely laid back — well, apart from the last-minute rushing around to get to church on time! (One of these days we’re going to master getting three children out the door and everyone looking presentable at an early morning hour. We’re still getting the hang of that — and it seems like every time we’ve almost mastered it, we add another child to the mix.)

We usually hang around church until we’re the last ones there and then we head to Cracker Barrel or head home for a very simple lunch and afternoon naps. We spend Sunday evenings at my family’s house (usually all the extended family comes over and we eat, talk, laugh some more and

**We pick one
“big” fun thing
per Friday to do.**

just catch up on the past week). The only project I do try to accomplish on Sundays is a quick clean-up of the house and organizing my coupons (which I do while we're at my family's house).

And that's that — at least for now! Our schedule is always evolving and changing as our lives change, our children's needs change and as new responsibilities come along and old ones are set aside.

I share these details with you just to give you an example of how our family operates (and because so many of you begged to see our daily schedule). It goes without saying, but I'm still going to say it: please, please, please do not try to copy our schedule or feel like you have to do something similar to what we are doing.

What works for our family will not work for you. Find what works for your family — be that a full-fledged schedule, a simple routine, a different schedule for each day of the week, a different schedule for each week of the month, something in between or something totally different — and do that.

The key is to make a plan and loosely follow the plan. Because a plan doesn't work unless you do!

2. Homemaking Plan

In addition to a Daily/Weekly Plan, I've found it very helpful to have a Homemaking Plan. You can **[see my current homemaking plan here](#)**. There are also **[sheets available to download to create your own plan](#)**.

I don't always get to everything every week, but by getting to most things most weeks and keeping our home pretty streamlined of clutter, things stay in fairly good shape around here most of the time. (Now, if you drop by, I can't promise there won't be crumbs or fingerprints or toys on the floor, but our home usually can be "company-ready" in about 45 minutes. And I'm happy with that for now!)

You can **see my Daily Docket that I print and use each day here** (or download a **customizable Daily Docket here**). I normally print these on Saturday for the following week and keep them in my home management binder. I try to keep it simple and only assign five to eight things (or less) on the to-do section and one to two projects/ministries per day. Whatever doesn't get accomplished in a given day either gets bumped to the following day, or I decide to just cross it off the list.

I try to never have more than eight items on my daily to-do list, otherwise, I find that it can be discouraging and overwhelming from the get-go. I'd rather just have three items on the list and actually get them all finished, than 30 items and overwhelm myself and finish none.

3. Blogging Plan

During my Weekly Planning Retreat on Saturdays, I map out the blogging projects and posts for the upcoming week on Google calendar and prep anything that I can. I also prioritize things by posts and projects which must be done and those which I hope to get to, but aren't quite as imperative to write/finish.

To be honest, up until about six months ago, I mostly just blogged by the seat of my pants — without clear plan or purpose. Setting goals for my

blogging posts and projects each week and then revisiting them on Saturdays has helped me to be much more intentional in my blogging. And hopefully, this has also allowed me to do a better job at the actual act of blogging. In addition, it's helped me to actually follow through on my promises (most of the time, at least!).

4. Other Plans

Ministry Plans. On Saturdays, I also map out plans for ministry opportunities for the following week — picking out at least one to three different ways that I feel God wants me to serve or reach out to someone in our church or community. I don't always get to all of it, but having it planned, helps me to be more purposeful in exercising hospitality, serving and meeting needs.

Homeschooling Plans. Our homeschooling curriculum doesn't require much extra planning and preparation right now, but there are times when I spend at least a small chunk of time on Saturday planning out the projects, printing worksheets and getting things all ready so that come Monday, we're not scrambling.

Menu Plans. Since we're eating really simply right now, I just make sure that we have the ingredients on hand to have oatmeal for breakfast every morning, and simple lunches and dinners every day. I pick one meal off the list for dinner each night and write it on my Daily Docket the night before.

Plan XYZ. For me, I've found that if I have a good Daily Plan, Home-making Plan, Menu Plan, Blogging Plan, Ministry Plan and Homeschooling Plan, life flows along fairly smoothly and doesn't usually feel too

stressful or chaotic (though there are definitely those moments!). This is what is working for me at this season of our lives. I encourage you to examine what areas in your life could be benefited by regular planning and to set aside a small time block each week to plan. At first, it might be rough going, but over time, you'll likely really start to reap the fruit!

It's well been said that one minute of planning can save five minutes in execution. And it can also save your sanity and lower your stress levels, too!

Home Management

1. Streamline Your Homemaking Routines

Most of you know that my mantra is, “Keep it simple.” There’s no need to have an elaborate system if something really basic works for you (though, if an elaborate system works for you, more power to you!).

And there’s no need to feel like you have to scrub every little nook and cranny of your house all the time. Give yourself grace to let some stuff go.

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, stick with the basics. In our house, if we have clean laundry, sufficiently picked up rooms, clean bathrooms, the dishes are loaded into the dishwasher and the floors are swept, I consider things to be in pretty good shape.

I aim to complete the tasks on my Daily, Weekly and Monthly checklists , but I don't always get to all of them. However, I've found that if I shoot to get them done, even if I skip a few things every few days, the house stays in pretty good shape. It's never perfect, but it's usually 45 minutes to being company-ready. And I'm satisfied with that at this point in my life.

2. Take Time to Plan

I touched on this before , but I'm going to talk about it again. Without a plan, you don't know where you're supposed to be going. You're aimless and purposeless and you'll usually be more apt to just run around in circles putting out fires.

Planning one cleaning project to do each day and actually doing it, is much better than waking up with 447 projects in your head you feel you really should do but you're so overwhelmed that you end up doing nothing.

I encourage you to set aside time in your schedule each week to make a simple plan of action as well as goals for the coming week. I usually make out this list for the upcoming week on Saturdays and then try to review my list the following Saturday bumping whatever didn't get accomplished during the previous week to the next week.

Reviewing this weekly list of goals is always so encouraging to me because even on those weeks when it feels like nothing really got done, when I review my list at the end of the week I'll realize that yes, I really did accomplish some things — despite what it may have felt like!

I use **a list similar to FishMama's** (see image to the right), only mine's not so detailed. It just has sections for *Home, Jesse, Children, Personal, Ministry* and *Blogging*. I try to set 3-5 goals for each section each week.

CHECKING MY PRIORITIES		
	Goals	Actions
Child of God		
Wife		
Mother		
Teacher		
Housekeeper		
Cook		
Writer/Blogger		
Bookkeeper		
Daughter, sister		
Neighbor, friend		

In the home section, I might write an extra organizing or cleaning project and two cooking projects.

In Jesse's section, I might write to set a goal of writing him one note, doing something fun with him and a specific prayer request to pray for him daily.

In the children section, I might set a goal to finish a book we're reading together, do an extra craft project and plan one fun outing.

In the personal section, I usually set goals for Bible memory work, a book I want to finish and some other area I'm working on improving in (such as going to bed on time!).

For the ministry section, I might set a goal to have a friend over, write a card to someone and make food for someone.

And in the blogging section, I'll usually set goals for whatever posts or projects I'm hoping to finish that week.

Now obviously, I don't always do everything in every section every week. In fact, some weeks I only get a few things off my list done. But planning these at the beginning of the week and then referring to my list of goals as I make out my short daily to-do lists helps me to be a lot more purposeful in living my life.

3. Involve the Family

My husband and I are firm believers in families being a team. No one person in a family was designed to carry the load of everything; it should be shouldered by each individual member to the level of their ability.

Now, I know I am very, very blessed to be married to a man who doesn't shirk when it comes to work — whether that's in his professional role as an attorney or when he's at home changing a dirty diaper. He works from sun up to sun down and then some and I'm constantly challenged by his discipline and work ethic. [I often tell him, "Would you stop making me feel so lazy?!"]

My husband and I are a team through and through and we both contribute to our family economically as well as keeping up our home, training our children and doing the myriad of tasks, errands and chores which must be done to keep a home and family humming along. While I know our particular family dynamics wouldn't work for everyone, I do encourage you if you feel like you are shouldering too heavy of a load to talk openly with your family members about how to shift some of that load elsewhere so that it doesn't crush you!

We're also in the process of training our children to also be assets to our family. While we very much want them to enjoy their childhood and just revel in that carefree state, we also feel like one of the greatest gifts we can instill in them is a strong work ethic.

No matter where you end up in life, a hard-working, persevering attitude is always going to be a huge benefit. Plus, I believe it is so much more fulfilling to live a life of service, rather than a life of selfishness.

We have found that modeling hard work and servanthood before our children is one of the best ways for them to learn, as well as encouraging them to work alongside us from an early age. And we give them age-appropriate chores to accomplish each day, as well as encouraging them to take initiative in helping outside of their daily chore list. (By the way, you can **download some fun and free printable chore lists here**, if you're interested.)

We are still learning the practicalities of imparting this to our children in a Godly and balanced manner, so I won't give you any tips for what works. But ask me about 25 years from now, and hopefully I'll have some words of wisdom to share!

4. Clear the Clutter

You know one surefire way to add more time to your life? Get rid of excess stuff. I truly believe that the less you have, the less time you have to spend on upkeep, maintenance and cleaning. Either you control the clutter or the clutter will control you.

If you feel overwhelmed with clutter, don't throw your hands up in despair. Instead, create a realistic plan of attack. Take one room at a time and commit to working on it for 15 minutes five days each week until it is thoroughly gone through and then start on the next.

I've written quite a bit on this topic before, so I encourage you to go read my posts on **Dealing With Toy Overload** and **Five Ways to Cut Down on Clutter**.

5. Tame the Laundry Monster

While I might be pretty good at keeping on top of most of the clutter in our house, I struggle with keeping up with the laundry. In fact, after my third child was born, for a few months there was almost always a massive pile of clean laundry in our room waiting to be folded.

I never seemed to have the time or energy to tackle it. So, truth be told, most of the time it didn't get folded and put away; we just took the clothes straight out of the pile and wore them. (Does that make me Worst Home-maker of the Year?)

I constantly felt guilty about this and overwhelmed by laundry. It just seemed I could never come close to staying on top of it. And finally, I decided enough is enough. I don't want to spend the rest of my life overloaded by laundry. So I devised a plan (with my husband's help!).

Do a load of laundry from start to finish every day. My goal is that there is never a clean laundry pile of any sort in our room. This isn't always the case, but if I aim to do a load every day from start to finish (wash, dry, fold put away), I usually stay mostly on top of the laundry.

Get help. I mentioned before that, after our third child was born and I was struggling with postpartum depression, **we hired a girl from church to start coming over once a week and helping out.** One of the tasks she often helps with is doing a few loads of laundry.

It is such a huge relief and blessing to know that, if I get behind on laundry, someone else is going to help me get caught back up so I don't fall hopelessly behind and we resort back to piles of laundry in our room

again. I'm also teaching the children to help with laundry and we have a time block in our schedule where we all help fold and put away the laundry.

Maybe these solutions won't work for you (or quite possibly, you don't struggle with staying on top of the laundry like I do!), but I encourage you to evaluate areas in your homemaking which you struggle with and work on coming up with possible solutions. It might take you a few tries to find a solution, but you'll likely hit on something which works well in the process — or which at least helps you see some noticeable improvement!

6. Simplify Meals

Remember my mantra? *Keep it simple*. There's no need to over-complicate life any more than it already is.

If you love making six-course gourmet dinners and you have time to do so, than go for it! But if you're feeling stressed and overwhelmed with life, can I encourage you to give yourself freedom to keep meals simple?

In fact, if your family is okay with it, you might find it helpful to just have two weeks' worth of go-to quick and easy meals that you rotate. Or you might consider taking one day a month to prepare most of the food for your main dishes for the next month to stick in the freezer.

We stick with really basic meals around here and it works well for us at this season of our lives. Breakfasts are cereal or oatmeal, lunches are leftovers, sandwiches, salads or macaroni and cheese, dinners are some type of meat (fish, chicken or beef), some type of carb (bread, rice or potatoes) and a veggie. Most meals can be put together in 15 minutes or less, with pretty minimal clean up, too.

Having this simple plan and giving myself the grace to not feel like I needed to be making more than this (unless I was inspired and had time!) has really provided me a lot of freedom from guilt — and it's saved me a lot of time and energy, too!

7. Let Go of the Myth of a Perfect Balance

I've shared a lot of thoughts and tips on time management in this ebook, but I want to reiterate to you that, while things are so much better in our lives and my priorities are in order much of the time now, please don't get the impression that I have found a perfect balance in my life. There are still those days when I don't get enough sleep, the house looks like a tornado came through, I stay in my pajamas all day and Jesse brings home dinner.

As I've given myself grace and sought to **put the “big rocks” in first**, I've realized that it's okay if everything isn't perfect or even close to perfect. Life is full of disruptions, messes and curve balls.

At different times in your life, you're going to need to put more energy and effort into some things while other things are going to slide or be put on the back burner for the time being. Something's always going to be somewhat out of balance... and I believe that is perfectly okay!

True balance is not spending exactly equal amounts of time on every facet of your life, but it's making sure that, over the course of a few months, you are giving focused attention to each important area in your life and that the unimportant things aren't creeping in and crowding out what really matters.

Using a Simple Homemaking Binder

I was first introduced to the concept of a “Homemaking Binder” when I first started reading blogs almost seven years ago. I read about all these incredible and massively-detailed binders other women had put together and thought, this is it! This is going to solve my homemaking issues and help me have a beautifully organized home and life.

So I tried to make up an elaborate system but quickly discovered there was one major problem: The system wouldn't work unless I worked the system! And because I had bitten off more than I could chew and was trying to make someone else's system work for me, it left me more frustrated

than ever. To be honest, I even felt like a failure when I just couldn't make a Homemaking Binder work for me and it seemed it worked flawlessly for everyone else.

Over time, I've learned that it's okay to do what works for me — even if it's much different than what works for other people. So instead of trying to conform myself to another person's system, I've set out to create my own.

This video tutorial [<http://bit.ly/msmbinder>] walks you through what I've been using for the past four months. It's working really well for us right now, though I can't promise that it will be what I use for the rest of my life. I'm learning that tweaking and overhauling things as seasons and needs change is what works best.

But I share this in hopes it might inspire some of you. Please don't try to copy mine exactly (because it likely won't work for you!). But I hope those of you who are struggling with home management may be able to glean a few ideas from it.

By the way, all of the pages I use in my binder can be **downloaded for free here**.

HOW TO GET More Done in Less Time as a Blogger

I wanted to share some productivity tips for bloggers, as many of you asked about this. All of these won't work for you, but hopefully you can find two or three to implement and save yourself time and effort!

1. Create a Computer Time Budget

Just as I found it helpful to have a time budget for my daily activities, I've found it so helpful to have a time budget for my daily computer times, instead of just saying, "I'm going to spend four hours on computer and blogging work each day."

I currently have my computer time broken down into the following specific blocks:

- 45 minutes on substantive writing
- 1.5 hours posting time-sensitive deal posts
- 30 minutes on email
- 15 minutes on Facebook/Twitter
- 15 minutes on a writing project
- 45 minutes extra — placing online orders, reading blog posts, extra projects

I don't always follow these time blocks perfectly. Sometimes something comes up which requires I spend extra time working on a technical issue. Or occasionally I'll have a conference call scheduled. So I'll shift some things around in order to accommodate these extra things.

But having my computer time all budgeted out, instead of just getting on and doing whatever seemed most pressing, has helped me to get a lot more done in a lot less time. In fact, some days, I'm able to get everything done on my list — with time to spare!

2. Do One Thing At a Time

I know, I know! Multi-tasking can be a very efficient way to do many things. However, when it comes to most computer work, if you want to get concentrated work done in an efficient manner, you need to shut out all the noise and just focus on one thing at a time.

If it's your time to email, work on emailing. Go through your emails in order of priority and don't stop until your time is up. If it's your time to write blog posts, only work on drafting blog posts until your time is up.

If you're used to trying to post or email while you have a bunch of applications open and constantly dinging at you, you'll likely be surprised at just how much work you can get done in a distraction-free 20 to 30-minute concentrated block of time.

And once you get in the habit of doing one thing at a time, you'll learn where your fizzle out point is when you need to stop and take a break or stop for the day in order to come back to it refreshed and energized. Personally, I've found that I do best by working in 20-30 minute blocks and then rewarding myself with a short 5-minute break to check email or Facebook. If I'm working on an in-depth project which requires a lot of brain power, I'll often set the timer for 20 minutes and work on it and then set the timer for 15 minutes and work on cleaning up or doing laundry.

3. Tame the Email Monster

A. Eliminate Unnecessary Emails

Go into your Twitter account and change your settings so that you don't get notified when someone follows you.

Go into your Facebook settings and change your notifications so that you don't get emailed when anyone does anything but replies to one of your posts or sends you a private message.

Unsubscribe from all email lists which you don't actively read the emails and benefit from.

Turn off notifications when someone subscribes or unsubscribes from your YouTube or email newsletter service.

Set up a very comprehensive **Frequently Asked Questions** page which answers a large number of questions people routinely email you about. Put this in very conspicuous places on your site including smack-dab in the middle of your Contact page. While plenty of people will disregard this, I promise that it will at least cut down on some of your email load.

Have a search button in a very obvious place on the sidebar of your blog. This encourages people to search for that post or recipe themselves of emailing in to ask you for the link.

B. Don't Feel Obligated to Answer All Your Emails

State on your Contact page that you aren't able to answer much of your email . This frees you up from feeling obligated to answer every email which comes in.

C. Keep Your Inbox Cleaned Out

I shoot for having fewer than 10 emails in my inbox at all times. If they are in my inbox, it means they need to be dealt with within the next 24 hours.

When I check my email, **I deal with emails immediately**. I either respond, if I have a minute and only a sentence or two is required in response; I archive them if no response is necessary; or I file them in my "To Answer" file in Gmail if a response is necessary, but I don't have time

to respond at the moment. Once a week, usually on Saturdays, I try clean out the entire “To Answer” file so that it’s completely empty.

This system works well for me as it helps me to not be bogged down with a lot of emails not requiring an immediate response in my inbox. And it ensures — most of the time, at least! — that nothing highly important gets overlooked or lost in a sea of emails.

By the way, if you’re going to take the time to answer a question in more than a paragraph or two, consider turning it into a post. Then, you kill two birds with one stone — you answered an email and you wrote a post!

D. Set Up Canned Responses

I love **Gmail’s Canned Responses** feature and I highly recommend using it. You can set up responses for emails you often receive and with a click of a button insert them straight into an email.

For instance, I often receive emails asking for my address or how to start a blog. I have a canned response all set up for these questions, so I just click the appropriate Canned Response and it automatically inserts it and in a couple of seconds, the email is pretty much answered.

E. Enable Send and Archive

This is another cool tool in Gmail. You can change your “Send” button to “**Send & Archive**.” Instead of having to push send and then go and delete the message, you can do it with one click, saving yourself a couple seconds per email. When you are responding to dozens of emails each day, those little seconds add up!

4. Limit Time-Wasting Online Activities

There are so many ways to be productive online, but there are a thousand more ways to waste enormous amounts of time online. If you're struggling with being distracted online with time-wasting websites and activities, I'd encourage you to consider setting up safeguards. Here are some suggestions:

Parental Controls. On most computers, you can set up parental controls with a time limit, where say, you only have two hours a day on the computer and it shuts off when the limit it up. Or you can set it up so that your computer will only allow you to log on for certain hours of the day.

Leechblock. This [Firefox add-on](#) will block any time-wasting sites you choose either entirely or for designated time periods in order to help you get focused work done.

Rescue Time. Wondering where all your time is going online and why you're not getting anything done? [Rescue Time](#) will track your online activities and you can also set limits for how much time you can spend on individual sites.

5. Take a Computer Sabbatical Regularly

There are so many good things you can learn and read and share and do online, but I think all of us need to step back and step away from time to time and just relish media-free quiet. It clears your mind, it helps put things in perspective and it allows you to come back refreshed!

A few years ago, we implemented media-free Sundays at our house and this has been one of the best things for our family. We don't always 100% follow it as there are some Sundays when we break at a DVD for the children while Jesse and I spend time together or we'll need to turn the computer on for something or other, but I don't blog on Sundays and by and large the computers stay completely shut off.

This makes Sunday a very restful day at our home and allows us to spend extra time fellowshiping with friends and family at a leisurely pace. We also often get in Sunday afternoon naps!

6. Set Boundaries for Social Media

Twitter, Facebook and Skype have made it possible for us to have discussion and online interaction with dozens or even hundreds or thousands of people every day. If used wisely, social media can be a tool which helps to grow your blog and gives you an opportunity to minister and reach a wider audience. On the flip side, social media can suck up a great deal of time if not kept in check.

I've definitely struggled with this. As a stay-at-home, homeschooling mom of young children, I found that the lure of social media was great. Here I could talk and interact with other moms in similar situations, we could share our funny kid stories, encourage one another in potty-training and homemaking, share blogging ideas and so much more.

The problem was, I wasn't disciplined to shut it off. I constantly felt the need to check in on Skype or Twitter to see what I was missing out on.

Several months ago God really convicted me of the need to do a better job of prioritization, and I realized that I was spending too much time with online social media. So I took some drastic measures: I disabled my Skype account and disabled my Tweetdeck account.

I set up my posts to auto-tweet to Twitter and now only check Twitter itself once or twice a day. I respond to any necessary messages and end up spending less than five minutes a few times per week on Twitter. I've found I have a lot more time to focus on higher priorities now that I've really limited social media in my life — and it's been a good thing (though I do miss the fun conversations and camaraderie!). I've also found that by limiting social media, I've been a lot more apt to pick up the phone or spend more time on real-life relationships, which should always trump online stuff!

7. Say "No" Often

As women, we're often afraid to say no. We fear we might miss out on a big opportunity and we worry about what other people might think of us. I know, because I'm there a lot.

I just want to encourage you (and myself!) to guiltlessly say "no." If an opportunity is going to require time you don't have or going to oblige you in a way you don't feel comfortable with or is just not a good fit for you or your blog, say "no."

Before committing to anything, count the costs. What are you going to have to give up in order to do this thing or attend this event or write this post or participate in this series?

Is it worth what you're giving up? If you're not 100% sure that it is, than say "no."

8. Work Smarter, Not Harder

I'm a minimalist at heart and believe there's no reason to make blogging any harder than it needs to be. So I'm constantly looking for ways to be more efficient and work smarter, not harder.

Here are a few things which I find helpful:

Use Google Calendar. I find it very helpful to have a plan, but I rarely stick completely to the plan. With Google Calendar, I can map out the posts I'm planning to run during the upcoming week. But if something else comes up and they don't end up running, I can quickly and easily drag and drop things to another day or week or month.

Google calendars are also really helpful for planning out series, giveaways and blog projects. In addition, we use them for our family calendar and my husband's work calendar. It helps to be able to see both of our schedules at a glance!

Use Email Rather Than the Phone. Advertisers and other people often want to set up conference calls to discuss potential opportunities. I've found that you can spend a lot of unnecessary time on the phone only to discover that the opportunity isn't a good fit.

If a company contacts me and wants to set up a phone call, I email back and say that I prefer to correspond by email and if they give me more details on the proposal, I'll be glad to see if it's something I'm interested in. In most cases, they will send back the proposal and instead of having to

have a 20-minute phone call, it will instead only take me two minutes to review and respond.

I only set up phone calls when it is really merited and I feel like it'd be more productive and efficient to hammer out details by phone.

Set Up WordPress Templates. I just recently discovered **Article Templates**, a WordPress plugin, and I've been blown away by how much time I've wasted by not using these!

Since I post a lot of deals on my blog, I often have the same photos and wording in some posts each week. For instance, every Saturday evening, I post the best deals at CVS, Rite Aid and Walgreens for the upcoming week. I used to have to upload the image into the post and copy and paste the information about linking up at the bottom of the post.

Not anymore. I now have templates set up for Walgreens, CVS and Rite Aid and with just a click of a button, the photo is uploaded and the wording for the link-ups is there and I just have to add in the new deals for the week and the post is ready to go. If you have regular features on your blog, this can be a great timesaver for you!

Have a Weekly Planning/Writing Retreat. As I mentioned before, it's been said that one minute of planning saves five minutes in execution. And I agree with that statement. Making time to plan ahead, instead of living by the seat of your pants, is necessary if you want to manage your time well.

So I set aside a block of time on Saturday to have a mini "Planning Retreat" while my husband takes the children out to run errands or do

something fun. During this time, I plan out our upcoming week, map out my blog posts for the next week, tie up any loose ends on projects, place online orders, clean out my email “To Answer” file and just generally get things in order so that I can rest on Sunday and start with a clean slate on Monday. Taking this time to plan makes a world of difference in all areas of my life!

How to be Organized with Toddlers and Nursing Babies

Bridget, a Money Saving Mom® reader, asked the following question:

“The thought of getting up before my children seems impossible right now as my 6-month-old is still waking up in the night and I feel like I never get enough sleep. He has a feeding around 5 a.m. and then my 2-year-old is up and ready between 6:30-7 am... and I constantly feel like I’m run over by a train. I would love to be more organized but it’s just hard when you never get a set amount of sleep. Any tips would be appreciated!” ~Bridget

I realized after I wrote that chapter on time management that it's possible some people might think I was saying you needed to adopt a morning routine similar to mine. Or that you need to get up before your children do.

Please know that this is just what is working for me right now. And while it is really helpful, I certainly don't think it's for everyone. Nor would I be getting up when I do right now if I were up multiple times in the night with a baby or toddler!

I'm at an easier season of life right now. I'm not pregnant, Kathrynne is old enough to help me with quite a few different things, Kaitlynn is learning how to help and can do a number of things by herself, Silas is almost weaned, and all three of my children are sleeping through the night most every night. So, what works for me won't work for you because you're at a very different — and much more difficult! — season of life right now.

However, I can very much relate to where you're at because Silas did not sleep through the night for the entire first year of his life. In fact, for 12 months, the longest stretch of sleep I got was six hours — twice. It was hard, especially because Kaitlynn wasn't even two when he was born and she was still waking up at night on occasion for that first year of his life.

Here are some things which helped me. They may or may not be helpful to you. Take what helps you and leave the rest!

Give Up the Expectation of a Good Night's Sleep

Instead of getting frustrated over how little sleep I was getting or how often my sleep was being interrupted, I gave up my expectation of being able to get a good night's sleep and asked the Lord to please give me grace and bless and supernaturally multiply whatever sleep I was able to get. This was hugely helpful to me to realize that God knows how much sleep I need, He's not confined by a clock and I can trust Him to provide what I need.

Make Sleep Your Priority

At the same time, I think it's vitally important to do everything you can to make sleep a priority. Let the dishes sit in the sink, turn off the computer and go to bed as soon as you can at night.

I know the temptation is great to use that quiet, uninterrupted time to tackle your list of 997 things you haven't gotten to in the last six months, but your body needs sleep. If you can squeeze in a nap in the afternoon or on the weekends when your husband is home, snatch the opportunity. Sometimes even a 10 or 15-minute catnap can do wonders!

Lower Your Expectations

This is not the time for tackling big projects, volunteering for ministry opportunities or doing detailed, in-depth cleaning. Stick with the basics and lower your expectations. If your family has clean laundry and food in their bellies, most of the other stuff can wait.

Develop a Simple Routine

Don't worry about specific times, just make a basic list of 10-12 things you want to accomplish every day in the same (or similar order). Such as:

- Get up, read Bible
- Breakfast
- Start a load of laundry and load the dishwasher
- Take the children out on a walk.
- Morning naptime for baby, toddler play with a special toy box or basket in the playpen — put the laundry in the dryer, do one cleaning project (**see note on next page*), thaw something for dinner
- Lunchtime
- Read picture books and play with the children.
- 2-year-old watch DVD, baby in swing while you fold and put away laundry
- Afternoon naptime (everyone naps, including mom!)
- Quick pick up of the house, finish dinner prep
- Dinner
- Bedtime

I've found that just having a basic routine mapped out is so helpful. It keeps things calm and more structured and everyone knows what to expect next. Plus, it ensures that the most important tasks get done every day.

*Consider coming up with five homemaking tasks — one for each day of the week — and tackle one per day. Something like:

Monday Vacuuming

Tuesday Bathrooms

Wednesday Mop floors

Thursday Dusting

Friday General straightening and clutter removal

Give Yourself Grace

Don't beat yourself up over what you're not doing. Don't compare yourself to other seeming "supermoms." Don't stress over what's being left undone.

It's just a short season. Now's the time to just love your little ones, take care of your health and keep your marriage strong. The dust bunnies will still be there waiting for you whenever you're ready to attack them!

Laugh Often

Learn to laugh instead of cry and things will be much better all round. Find the humor in every situation that you can. Surround yourself with positive people and encouraging messages to help build you up.

Don't Neglect Your Health

Make sure that the foods you are putting in your body are nourishing you — especially as a nursing mother. It's worth it to spend a little more at

the grocery store to stock your refrigerator with healthful foods you can grab for snacks — such as fresh fruits and veggies. In addition, make sure you are drinking plenty of water, eating plenty of good protein and whole grains and taking a good multi-vitamin.

I've found that I feel so much better when I eat a big salad at least once a day, drink 8-10 glasses of water, take my vitamins and get fresh air and exercise.

Enjoy Your Family

Your babies are only little once. Take time to just enjoy them, to stare into their faces, to soak up their cuddles and smiles and giggles and firsts. Stop and listen to them, talk with them, love on them. Cherish them.

And don't neglect your husband, either. You might not have a lot of energy left at the end of the day, but at least meet him at the door with a kiss and a smile. Ask him how he's doing. Make time for him.

This stuff is so much more important than a clean house or an organized kitchen. And if you've got to choose between cleaning or cuddling, always choose the cuddling. I promise you won't regret it at the end of your life!

Guest Posts in this Series

Taming the Teenage Schedule

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2010/12/taming-the-teenage-schedule-2.html>

Managing Your Time When It's Just You

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2010/12/managing-your-time-when-its-just-you.html>

5 Time Management Tips for Busy Families

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2011/01/5-time-management-tips-for-busy-families.html>

Time Management Tips for Parents With Special-Needs Kids

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2011/01/time-management-tips-for-parents-with-special-needs-kids.html>

7 Time Management Tips For the Working Woman

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2011/01/7-time-management-tips-for-the-working-woman.html>

How to Manage Your Time (and Sanity!) as a Military Mom

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2011/01/how-to-manage-your-time-and-sanity-as-a-military-mom.html>

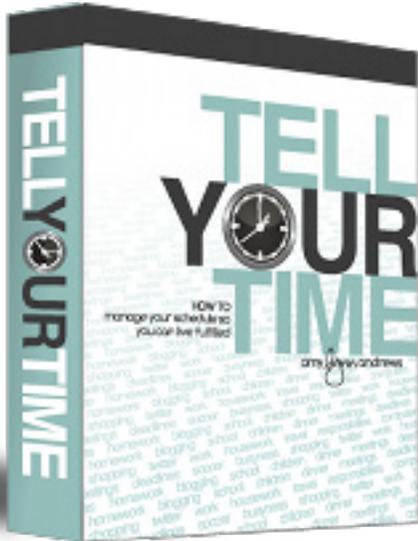
Time Management Tips for the Single Mom

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2011/01/time-for-three-and-me.html>

Time Management Tips for the Work-Outside-The-Home Mom

<http://moneysavingmom.com/2011/02/time-management-tips-for-the-work-outside-the-home-mom.html>

Helpful Resources



Tell Your Time: How to Manage Your Schedule So You Can Live Fulfilled

The tips and tricks in this ebook by Amy Andrews have revolutionized my life and our home. I cannot recommend this ebook enough. It's simple, concise and packs a powerful punch. It has helped me streamline my life so that I'm not rushing through my days like a chicken with its head cut off. You'll learn how to

plan margin into your day, make long-term goals and strategies and focus your time and energies on what really matters.

■ **Order the ebook here.** [<http://bit.ly/msmyt>]

Motivated Moms Chore Planner I have used this in the past and really liked it as it tells you exactly what you need to do each day to keep your home organized and running smoothly. If you struggle with coming up with a plan for home organization, I'd definitely recommend trying it out and seeing if it works for your family. There are sample pages to check out at the bottom of the products page.

■ **Order the planner here.** [<http://bit.ly/msmmotivated>]



Organizing Your Life as Mom This 125-page ebook is written by my friend Jessica over at Life As Mom — a mom of six who knows more than a thing or two about organization! It walks you through how to create a personalized household notebook to keep your home and life running more smoothly. Some of the worksheets are even customizable.

Here's a peek at what's included:

- worksheets to help you think through your jobs at home
- calendars that cover all the bases: daily, weekly, monthly, yearly
- planning sheets for the holidays, your budget, your mealtimes — your life

■ **Download free 15-page sample here.** [<http://bit.ly/olamsample>]

■ **Order the ebook here.** [<http://bit.ly/olamorder>]



About the Author

Crystal Paine is a child of God, wife, homeschooling mom of three, bargain shopper and owner of **MoneySavingMom.com.**