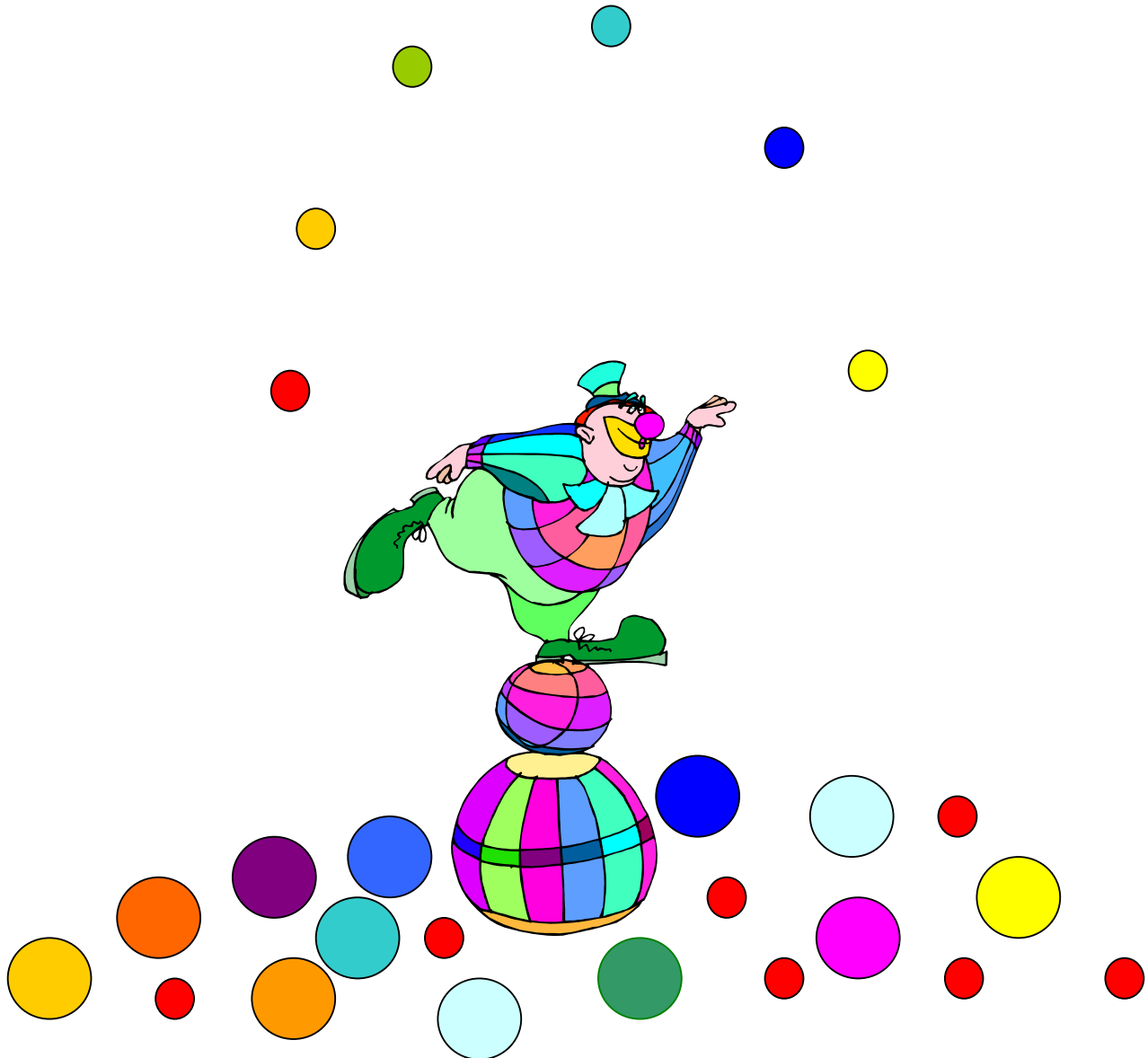


TIME MANAGEMENT FOR MOTHERS

Heather McEwan



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Introduction.

My mum taught me how to keep house. She has the twin advantages of being both house proud as well as time conscious. Sadly my natural tendency is to be lazy. When Rod and I were first married I could go for days without doing the dishes and never have it occur to me that I should be embarrassed if someone called in. Then to cap it off, I couldn't understand why Rod wasn't positively thrilled that I might have made a dress or spent time with a friend that day!

The change God wrought in me did not happen overnight! It has been a continuing process over the years that won't be complete till death or the rapture! I still look for ways to be more efficient with the time that I have. When I was a kid I saw a movie called "Cheaper By the Dozen". Although it was an old black and white movie, something about it has stuck with me throughout the years.

It was an actual story about a family with twelve children living in the early nineteen hundreds. The father in the movie was one of the very first time and motion experts. In the movie he would continually study the time it took to complete actions. He would have his wife clock him on a stopwatch to see if it was faster to button his waistcoat from top to bottom or from bottom to top! Was it faster to put a sock and shoe onto one foot first (followed by the sock and shoe on the other foot) or two socks on two feet and two shoes on two feet?

The consciousness of time and motion that this left with me has led me to constantly be evaluating whether there is a faster or better way I can complete the things I do. I don't bother to redo the same things over and over at one time, but from one time to the next find ways to streamline.

Since I first prepared this article to present at a GEMS session in Perth, I found a copy of the book the movie was written from. I laughed till the tears came at some of the exploits of this family! Also I recognize just a little of ourselves in it's pages. I truly believe that the flipside to many human weaknesses can be positive traits. Reading this book provided me with the positive flipside to my natural laziness. When employed by a company to improve productivity, he would study the workers to find the laziest among them Then he would study those to see what they did on the job to conserve their own effort! From this I see that it is not a desire that "I must get lots done" that has fueled my own quest for efficiency, but rather to "get done what I must"!

Everyone is different. I'm not about to tell you to run your house the same as I do mine. Just to encourage you to know that if God is calling you to change or grow, that you can. If He can change me, He can change you! My nature is such that I crave quiet. I can feel overwhelmed at the enormity of a task and will procrastinate getting started whilst the panic builds inside me. I also crave peace and wish to be left alone to pursue my interests. Reading or painting or sewing.

He may call you to change nothing or only one small thing, or like He did with me, He may call you to radical change! So as you read, listen for HIM and see what He requires of you.

I'll share a summary of years of reading and experimenting that has mostly taken place over the last 10 years. Many of you will be doing much of this already but for any that might find this new, don't try and do it all at once! Find what God wants you to change first and concentrate on that. You can be sure He will move you on when He knows you are ready!

When we had our first 2 children 12 1/2 months apart, I started to drown under the weight of all I had to do. It was at this time that God showed me I had to change drastically. The keys for my change of attitude were the recognition that I needed to, and the willingness to do so.

I now cope better with the demands of my family of six kids, husband, big house, and loads of commitments than I did with one husband, two kids, a little house and no commitments.

Time management includes a whole bunch of topics, and every one could have an entire session devoted to it. We will briefly cover the following topics here.

Organization; Prioritization; Proportioning; Boundaries; Preparedness; Housekeeping

There is more information for you to read in the additional handouts, as there isn't time to do it all in one night.

Firstly, Why Be Organized?

Titus 2:5 Speaking of the older women training the younger women to "love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, busy at home". (NIV)

2 Thess 3:11 "Indeed we hear that some among you are disorderly[that they are passing their lives in idleness, neglectful of duty], being busy with other people's affairs instead of their own and doing no work (AMP)

1 Tim 5:14 Paul is advising the young widows to "marry, to have children, to manage their households, and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander."

Without even going to the dreaded Proverbs 31, these verses tell us as women with regard to our homes, that we are to be busy, ordered, responsible, hard workers, and home managers.

From the dictionary:

Manage; to bring about; to succeed in accomplishing; to take charge or care of; to handle, direct, control in action or in use; to handle or train; to conduct the affairs.

The word 'manage' speaks to me of thought, planning, care and action.

Then of course we come to Proverbs 31. She is an IDEAL. We don't have to be all that she is. However the principles that govern her actions should also govern ours.

I have written a list of her attributes. When I first looked at the finished list it occurred to me that all these things would be no easier for any one personality type to achieve than any other.

Therefore all of her attributes should be achievable to one degree or another, just some things will be harder for some women, and other things for other women.

All of these points can be turned around by attitude.

- Vs 11. TRUSTWORTHY
- Vs 12 .RESPECT AND HONOUR
- Vs 13. WILLING AND CHEERFUL
- Vs 14. ENTERPRISING
- Vs 15. ORGANISED, PREPARED
- Vs 16. WISDOM IN FINANCES
- Vs 17. OPPOSITE OF A SLUGGARD
- Vs 18 .a)KNOWS SHE'S DOING WELL
- Vs 20. GENEROUS
- Vs 21. PREPARED AHEAD OF TIME
- Vs 25. STRONG AND DIGNIFIED (BODY AND MIND)
- Vs 26. SPEAKS WITH WISDOM / INSTRUCTS FAITHFULLY
- Vs 27. a)IS WATCHFUL / KNOWS WHAT'S HAPPENING
b)HAS INTEGRITY
- Vs 30. FEARS THE LORD.

Those of you who are familiar with personality theory, might feel that all of these strengths are conflicting and therefore could not exist in the same person. But with the help of the Holy Spirit, bringing about the fruit of the Spirit, (in particular - self control) they can.

The worldly equivalent of self control is will power. As with everything else though, will power can only take us so far. To bring about a complete work, we must give this over to God and stay in step with Him. Will power is already ours. Self-control is a perfect gift from Him.

So does our attitude take us through the work day and leave us knowing at the end that we put in our best effort? Instead is it one of getting away with doing as little as possible? I read a quote recently that said:

Happiness is not so dependent on whether we
do what we like,
but rather,
whether we like what we do.

We put so much energy into doing the things that we like and avoiding the things that we don't like. We feel a huge sense of accomplishment when we complete things that need doing whether we like them or not, but feel guilty when we put our own interests first - often to the detriment of our responsibilities. So we come to the topic of:

Topic 1: Prioritization

To manage time efficiently, we must learn to prioritize. Prioritizing our duties and choices is not just a once-off life decision, nor even a daily decision, but a moment by moment process. There are so many areas of our lives that are good and important, trying to balance them all can leave our heads in a spin!

a) Big rocks and little rocks.

We all need to determine what are the “big and little” rocks in our lives. Imagine a large empty fishbowl on a table with twenty fist sized rocks beside it, and an icecream container full of small pebbles. The bowl represents time. The big rocks represent the major priorities of life (God, family, work etc). The small rocks represent the lesser priorities (reading, craft, time with friends etc).

Then imagine putting all the small rocks into the bowl. Then see how many big rocks fit in on top. Not too many! They will spill over, many not even coming close to fitting in. Now imagine it the other way round. Put in all the big rocks, then pour over the little rocks. As you give the bowl a shake and a wriggle the pebbles will trickle down through, finding spaces where you didn't know space existed.

Determine your “big rocks” from your “little rocks” and put the big ones in first. You still may not fit all the little ones, but if we fit the biggies in first we'll fit more, and have our priorities right.

*“The things which matter most
must never be at the mercy of the things which matter least.”*
Quote Stephen Covey

Most of you will be familiar with the well known priority list being God; family; others (or some would say, self). The Titus Two mum for this issue of Facets (Rita) gave me this more detailed list from her ‘Women’s Study Bible’.

b) Priority ranking from ‘Women’s Study Bible’.

1. Your personal relationship to Jesus Christ.
2. Your commitment to home and family - especially spouse and children, and even to the extended family.
3. Your responsibility to employer and tasks assigned.
4. Your service to God through ministries in the church and in the community.

Often the delineation between these points can be difficult. I know for me it's so easy to muddle in number 4 with number 1. And numbers 2 and 3 can get flipped around the wrong way!

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR MOTHERS

Because I am full time at home, I see my household tasks as my job. Therefore housekeeping ranks at number 3. It is not an afterthought, it is a major priority. In addition to that I have viewed housekeeping in the realm of relationship with my husband as our relationship is affected by the standard maintained in the home! (Consider the Love Language “Act of Service” before you react to that!) I encourage you to think of your biblically assigned occupation of “Home Manager” as priority 3.

Have you ever noticed how often husbands and wives butt heads because they have never sat down and discussed what their roles in marriage will be? Many of us as women react badly to

the very word “role”. I am not suggesting here, some preconceived societal role, imposed by generations of tradition - rather a sit down, nitty gritty discussion of talent, gifting and time allocation between husband and wife. We both come into marriage with preconceived ideas about who will do what and wind up frustrated , not realizing that the other’s expectations were different to our own.

Whether or not you have discussed this specifically with your husband, if you are at home full time and he is employed full time, you can be sure he views your time at home as your job. He does need to see fruit of your labour. In my mind, if husbands consistently return home from a full day at work, to find what they consider to be your workplace upside down, they have a right to be annoyed.

Now Proverbs 31 doesn’t say she NEVER gets behind on the washing, that there is NEVER any dust around and that she NEVER gets a priority out of order. It doesn’t say she is ALWAYS dressed perfectly, that her husband is ALWAYS happy with her performance, or that her children are so perfectly trained that they are ALWAYS there to do the dishes after every meal without prompting!

What we see is CHARACTERIZATION. God never expects us to be perfect. The Proverbs 31 woman isn’t in scripture to make us feel guilty. She’s there to give us something to aspire towards. Your house doesn’t have to be perfect, but is your home characterized by evidence of labour, or characterized by coffee drinking with friends or pursuing a personal interest?

I find *Vs 16a* in the Amplified, particularly compelling. *“She considers a (new) field before she buys or accepts it (expanding prudently and not courting neglect of her present duties by assuming other duties); with her savings (of time and strength) she plants fruitful vines in her vineyard.*

She doesn’t neglect her relationship with God or family, or her duties at home because she’s found a fantastic opportunity! She fits in the extra work around her existing priorities. (see savings of time)”

On a tape from Contact Mums recently I heard something that has been revolutionary to me. Sharon Carter said (something like)“Make your expectations your goals...that way your expectations don’t let you down.” She was speaking with regard to training your children, but the principle applies all over the place!

If I compare myself to Prov 31, I will be sorely disappointed but if I make the characterization of the woman in this passage my goal, I can be encouraged daily as I press on in my relationship with God and see his outworking in my life.

c) Seasons of Life

When we had our first two children, it used to feel that everything negative was permanent. I'd had no experience to tell me that a difficult stage would pass. All I could see were the mountains. It's taken me years to understand that nothing and no stage is permanent. Rita's mum has a saying "*And this too, will pass*". This is so true.

The way your life is now, will not be the way it will be when your children are one year older. Let alone when they're 5 years older. We need to make allowances for the stage of life we are in at any present time.

If you're getting up nightly to a newborn or a sick child, your house cannot be the way you might like it. If your marriage is in crisis, your ministry or community involvement should scale right down. Nothing is permanent. Neither where you are at now, nor the way something is if you give it up for a time. God will always restore and prosper **WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT**.

When children are little their physical care requires much time. We may need to give up an interest or a commitment, just to keep up. This is right and proper. If you think about how fast time passes, what will it cost to change something that you do for a month or six months or even a year?

I don't feel the least bit compelled to be overly involved at school. Rod is very involved and I do the best I can which isn't a lot! By the time all of our children go through we'll have been at this primary school for 19 years ! My time to help there more will come later!

A few years ago I taught a folk art class at a local church outreach group. I thoroughly enjoyed this but since then we've had two more babies. When approached recently to see if I might return to the group, it was well down my priority ranking. The season has to be right.

Luke 12 :48 says "to whom much is given, much is required".

"Much" in this verse could be time, money, responsibility, talent...any number of things. In certain seasons of our lives when time is scarce, God actually doesn't require all that much! We're already in His will by maintaining our relationship with Him and caring for our families. Don't let anyone put the 'guilts' on you because you're not at every church busy bee, or doing Sunday school, or fundraising at school or have your kids enrolled for 2 sports and an instrument each! Each thing will come in the right time. No stage is permanent.

d) Proportions

Sometimes it's not a matter of ruling something right out of our life even for a time, but rather seeing it in proportion to what should stay our priorities.

I do feel that time for ourselves is important. Time for ourselves will be different for you than me. It might be a sport, craft, time with a friend or time alone. I went to a craft party recently where I had not seen some of the products before. Having been renowned for my hobby interests overtaking my life and time, I could feel my creative juices starting to flow! I stopped myself in my tracks by thinking "what proportion of my life, time and spare time (each allotment becoming smaller and smaller) can I afford to spend doing this?" Then too, the natural progression of "Given the small amount of time I can spend on this, what proportion of my spare cash will it consume if I let it?" I saved myself a fair amount of money that day!

Topic 2: Boundaries

Once you have set your priorities, you will need some boundaries to help you keep them. "Jesus Himself said "no" to some seemingly good requests for His time, when it did not fit with the overall plan of His ministry." (Women's Study Bible)

People will be persistent with you as they were with Jesus. People will resist, persist, cajole, pout and otherwise disapprove or disregard your wishes. You must be convinced of the rightness of your decisions in order to stand firm!

People will try and invade your boundaries, and they'll try and convince you to come out of them. Any new boundary is sure to be tested. Try placing a 12 month old in a playpen when they've never seen one before! They'll scream, shout and shake that thing until you or it caves in!

For GKGW parents, "couch time" should be a priority. To have couch time though, you have to set boundaries with your children.

Our church has a brand new minister. He has put out a program for the congregation to know where and when he can be reached. Every day between 2.45 and 7pm, he has blocked off as "Family Time". A minister's job is unlike any other in terms of his necessary availability to people, so to maintain his priority of family, he has set a boundary with the church. I think it's fantastic but you can be sure that those whose priorities differ, will disregard this boundary.

Single friends with no children will have the biggest battle understanding the priority of your family. Tread gently with them... they have no way of understanding the time and energy that a family requires.

One way we are dealing with this is the answering machine...On at 5, not off again till 8pm every day. In that time the family need us more than anyone else does. Some can't believe we do this! Others know but disregard this, thinking if we hear their particular voice that we'll pick up! Regardless of time, we do not answer the phone in meal times.

If I'm asked to baby-sit (as happens pretty regularly) during the day, the incoming children have to fit in with our own kid's routines. With the number of our own kids and the model we are seeking to set for them, others have to fit with us if they want my help!

Two last thoughts here come from the principle of couch time.

Firstly, I try and have a special time each week with our school age children (The younger ones naturally get that anyway). The others go to bed a little earlier and I spend 45 minutes doing whatever the child wants to do. Play a game, read together, or just sit on the couch and cuddle and chat. All the children know that each one is special and to respect the other's time with me. They love to know that they are more important in that time than anyone who might phone or any of the other things I might have been doing.

Secondly, just as our kids need to see the husband/wife relationship is steady, they need to see us in relationship to God. Set some boundaries with your kids and have your quiet time when they're awake.

Topic 3: Be Prepared.

This is where we get a little more specific.

Several of the verses in Prov 31 show that this woman is prepared ahead of time. Sure there are days when we do have to muddle on through. But doesn't life travel much more smoothly when we are ready for the day?

a) Be up before your children. You need to start out a step ahead, or you will play catch up all the day long.

b) Use a diary or calendar and check it every night. Keep it by the phone and write everything into it as it arises. Check it before you say yes to anything else.

c) Have a place for everything and keep every thing in it's place. How much time do we waste searching for things? One idea that I'll share now from the attached handouts has saved me heaps. Mark a manila folder for each month of the year. Place into these any doctors referrals, invitations, tickets, appointment cards etc. for the month that you will need it. Write the date and event into your diary or calendar and you'll always know where that important piece of paper is when the time comes.

Last here - teach kids to put away properly. (Not being able to find a shoe or what ever else it is that's missing is a discipline issue at our house. If it can't be found, it wasn't dealt with properly in the first place.)

d) Keep your house kid user-friendly. Adjust unattainable standards for a season. You cannot transfer responsibility if you never give responsibility, and they're not going to get it right without a whole lot of practice. There is plenty that kids can do to help, and save you time. Arrange cupboards so they can reach and help fetch, carry and put away.

e) Make your kids house-friendly. Take the time to explain and show them where things belong. Teach children how appliances work. Oven on (marker for non readers), stove burners off. Dialing the phone. All these things might only save you moments, but even moments can be precious at times!

f) Keep things where you use them.eg We keep a hair basket in the family room instead of each child having to run off to their bedroom or the bathroom.Keep cleaning items in a bathroom cupboard. Bibs in the kitchen rather than the linen press. It may be worth doubling up on some items to save time fetching and carrying. Whatever you need always seems to be in the other place!

g) Finish things properly. Anything left becomes more work later. Dirty dishes dry and become harder to wash. Washing unfolded crumples, and is harder to fold or needs ironing.

h) Think ahead to the next step of a task and make it easier for yourself.

- Get everything you need from the pantry or fridge at once.
- Sort your wet washing into baskets of what belongs to who at night, ready to hang in the morning. Sort it further as you hang- jumpers together, T shirts in a row, socks paired up. Fold back into individual baskets in sorted stacks ready to take to the right room. (See handout)

Topic 4: Master the Time You Have

a) Streamline everything you do.

Some of these things may only save you a minute or two, but added together in the course of a day might amount to half an hour or more. That's half an hour to get ahead with something else or spend on a hobby, chat on the phone or soak in the bath. Half an hour you might otherwise not have.

- Personal: Think about the clothes you buy. Do you spend ages mixing and matching? Ironing? Trying on outfits? Have an easy hairstyle. Use a one step shampoo. Use simple makeup (One step foundation).
- Kitchen: Stock some conveniences for 'emergencies'. Freezer meals. Cut out non-essentials like dish drying. Cover clean dishes with a clean tea towel and put them away in the morning.
- Cleaning: Buy good cleaning products. Use cleaning items that suit your home. e.g. Industrial size broom for large tiled areas.

b) Watch out for time stealers:

"Primping"	TV / Phone	Friends	Too much sleep
Interests (Prioritize and limit time)			Forgetfulness

c) Be realistic.

Don't try and cram too much into one day. Set reasonable goals- break up a task. E.g. Before children I could cut and sew a complete outfit in a day. Now I am happy if I cut out one day, sew to fitting stage on another and finish off on another day still.

d) Quit procrastinating.

There are all sorts of things that only take a moment or two to do, but often never get done because of procrastination and then forgetting. Write that note, pray for that friend, sew that button, fill in the slip for school, find the book to lend, get the meat out of the freezer, make that phone call, and do it NOW!

e) Fit ministry and community work into time at home rather than time out.

Choose things that you can volunteer for that can be done at times that suit you at home rather than at a prescribed time elsewhere.

f) Double your time.

Watch for ways that you can make double use of time. Peel vegies for tea while you oversee homework. Use a cordless phone so you can keep working when you're on a call.

Use the car as teaching time with your children. If one child needs a discussion on something (not a private or discipline issue), have them in the front seat and talk as you go. Save some subjects (post it notes on the dash as reminders) for open discussion. I use driving as "physical touch and closeness" time. Hold hands when safe as you drive.

Have a child help you with a task. They're learning a skill as well as having 'talk time' with you.

To help you remember and be consistent, attach a spiritual activity to the routine things that you do. Pray God's blessing for safety as you walk out the door. Pray with or for a child as you brush their hair. I have most of my own prayer time in the shower and as I hang the washing. Keep a Bible near the dining table, and have a family reading as the last of the little ones finish eating. (Food keeps the little ones quiet and the older ones can discuss and ask questions). Pray for

purity and future marriage partners when they're in the bath. Thank God for a brand new day of grace and mercy during grace at breakfast. A lot of this can be silent, family, friends and onlookers don't need you in their face the whole time!

Sharon Carter (US CM) uses press seal bags containing sections of the Bible to memorize when she has a bath! I've used her idea and written a prayer which I have in the shower!

I keep a tape deck in the laundry to listen to teaching as I fold on rainy days. You can do the same in the kitchen for when it's quiet enough.

I heard some years ago that children are the most receptive to what you say, last thing at night and first thing in the morning. I use this lovely sleepy time at night to encourage them in something from the day. 95% of the time I try and keep it positive, but if you do have a negative situation, make use of this time to impact their little hearts.

g) Watch out for "Little Minutes".

- There are times in most days where we might have time that feels like it's being wasted. It might be just a few minutes waiting to pick up children from school or sport. It might be lengthy periods waiting in a doctor's surgery. Watch for these times and make use of them. It's amazing what you can do in these slots.
- If it's at home, don't start anything too ambitious, just straighten a drawer or shelf in a cupboard. Set the table for tea. Put in a load of washing. Think of your husband's or kid's love languages and do something quick. (Put a flower in their room, a note under a pillow.)
- Keep a short daily devotional in the loo and read a section whenever you're there. Put scriptures on the wall and memorize! Keep a note pad and pen to jot down things you remember you need to do!
- Fold nappies while you monitor a young one in the bath.
- Keep some kids books in the car and read to your toddler while you wait. Bring any child onto your knee for a cuddle and a talk. Have some teaching tapes in the car and listen in catches throughout the week when you have your pre-talkers with you!
- The remaining ideas can be for home, car, waiting rooms, at the playground while kids play or where ever. (See attached handout)
- Somewhere handy, keep a manila sized hardcover folder with a writing pad and pen inside. Place any letters that need answering into this. You can then grab this folder at a moment's notice when headed out the door. Take it with you to doctor's appointments or other places where you might have a lengthy wait on your hands. Answer those letters, write your husband a love letter, write to your children, surprise an old friend. Turn dead time into useful time.
- Place into a manila sized envelope anything you want to read, but do not have time for immediately. Publications, newsletters, catalogues etc. Take this folder with you when expecting a shorter wait. (in the school carpark) Keep a red felt pen in this folder to mark anything you want to refer back to and be able to find quickly.

- There was a mum of four at our school when I only had three. I was already pretty organized at that time and used to think in a somewhat superior manner that she must be frightfully disorganized! Whenever we arrived at a school activity, she would be doing her makeup in the rear vision mirror, or changing the baby's nappy in the back of the van. I now see that she was making use of "Little Minutes" rather than spending those extra few at home.
- I've been known to take babies' mushy weetbix to school to feed in the car while we wait for kindy at 9am. The others have to be there by 8.45, so there is 15 minutes of dead time. Also I keep breakfast bars handy for the odd extra early start, so they can eat on the run!

h) Enlist some help.

Most of us don't have servant girls as in Prov 31 :15, but we do have some, all, or the possibility of, the following.

- Kids- teach them to work, it will be worth the time you invest.
- Husband-doesn't hurt to ask occasionally. He can't do what he doesn't know. (QUALIFY)
- Friends- you don't necessarily have to stop what you're doing if a friend calls in. A couple of years ago, a friend of mine who came regularly so that we could pray together, made a ritual of helping me fold washing.
- Paid help or task swapping. What is the bane of your life? Can you afford to pay for your most hated task? (One friend of mine decided to pay to send her ironing out and then decided as she'd like to earn a bit of money, to pay herself to do the ironing!!!) If not, swap with a friend or lessen the pain by meeting with a friend and working together.
- Prov 31:15 Appliances. Look after your appliances. Most of us have the basics, washing machine, vacuum. Is it possible to work it into your budget to get a dishwasher? A dryer? A breadmaker? Keep them in good working order.
- Service people- Incorporated into the cost of living, are the wages of the people that serve us one way or another. Go to the service station rather than the self-serve for your petrol and use the time it takes to fill the tank as a "Little Minute"(As discussed above). Get the girls at the deli counter or butcher to bag up your purchases in smaller lots to save you time at home. Ask at the grocery store for help to the car or use the parcel pick-up.(Especially if you've done a big shop, or if it's raining or stinking hot, you have children with you or additional packages to carry.) Some grocery stores will make up orders and arrange deliveries(Sometimes free, sometimes for a small charge).

Ask for help in the store if you need it. They're on paid time, you're not. Doesn't hurt to ask. The smallish owner operated stores want to keep your business and will be very helpful. The big chain stores will also be helpful, they have plenty of staff and also want your business. The real budget places are not so willing, they're on a budget themselves.

i) Don't leave a room empty handed –

always check to see if there is something that needs to be taken where you are going.

j) Have an essentials plan.

Loo, sweep, spot wash, mirrors (guests will see the zit spots), shut net curtains if the windows can't be cleaned in time.

k) Buy effort savers –

Long handled dustpan and brush to save bending and reaching under the table. We eat in our dining room every night and have a teatime trolley to load everything on to -only needing one trip.

l) Write a lists for yourself, prioritize it and stick to it.

m) Keep structure in your day...

even with older children. Kids are fractious with too much free time, and happier in free time if kept well occupied at other times. (Terrific Toddlers 1 & 2)

n) Use lists and charts for your children –

for various times of the day and include job descriptions e.g. Our 4 and 6 year olds set the table with the help of a placemat that had the correct setting drawn onto it. Saves your time repeating instructions, cuts down discussion time on whose turn for whatever and helps them take responsibility.

o) Teach children to help each other.

Older to help, younger to comply. You do have to watch out a bit with this as certain children enjoy this little patch of 'authority' and will want to hold on to it.

p) Don't do what your kids can and should.

I read of one mother of seven who said that her children do almost all the housework, leaving her to be involved and interested in all of their activities! Now I'm not saying that is necessarily correct, but I think western society in general, vastly underestimates what children can do for themselves!

GFI sells a book called "What Every Child Should Know Along the Way". It lists age appropriate tasks for kids. Don't be doing what they should. A kindy child is capable of putting his apple and drink in his bag and at the door ready to go. A grade one child is capable of making sure their lunchbox is emptied of rubbish and on the sink to be washed every afternoon. It may seem like an uphill battle to get a child to take on a new responsibility, but it is easier to do that, than try and get them to take one that you have carried for them for too long.

Have things that you expect of them at certain times of the day. Use the 5 minute warning. Have a set time for additional chores rather than interrupting their free play time and run the risk of exasperating them.

Do be reasonable . They are still kids.

Conclusion

Somewhere along the way I've realized that my perception of time has changed. At the start of motherhood I used to count how many times I'd been up if I had a disturbed night. I knew how many hours of sleep I'd had and compared it to the amount of missing hours feeling terribly sorry for myself.

I used to feel that my time was my own and saw my responsibilities in an unfavorable light as detracting from what I really wanted to be doing.

I now see time as the reverse. That time is not my own. That I have responsibilities to fulfill that are non-negotiable. That instead of the time I don't have, I see all the smaller chunks of time that I do have. These are my own once my priorities are fulfilled. It's like a photo negative. The reverse image of the exact same thing. But now I see what I do have, instead of what I don't.

There were once three stonecutters at work. A stranger approached and asked the first "What are you doing?" He received a sharp reply "Cutting stone, can't you see?" The stranger asked the same question of the second man. He answered with barely a smile "Making a living." When the question was asked of the third stone cutter, he looked up with dedication and a smile on his face and replied "I'm building a cathedral".

The third stonecutter had vision and foresight. As mothers we need that kind of a vision of the value of what we are doing. *Prov 31:18a (In the Message) Says "She senses the worth of her work".*

We need to keep our eyes on the big picture. It's so easy to get weighed down by the mundane.

Take some time to encourage yourself by remembering where you have come from.

Galations 6:4 (AMP)

*"But let every person
carefully scrutinize and examine and test his own conduct
and his own work.
He can then have the personal satisfaction and joy
of doing something commendable(in itself alone)
without (resorting to) boastful comparison
with his neighbour."*

Finally, a little caution. Certain temperaments can carry being organized too far. They make the people around them miserable and they miss out on some beautiful moments with their families.

In the effort of keeping balance, I'll finish with a poem that may seem to go against the grain of some of what I've said. However it reminds us of what's precious rather than urgent. And of the seasons of life which will change all too fast.

Song for a Fifth Child

Mother, oh mother, come shake out your cloth!
Empty the dustpan and poison the moth,
Hang out the washing and butter the bread,
Sew on a button and make up a bed.
Where is the mother whose house is so shocking?
She's up in the nursery, blissfully rocking.

Oh, I've grown as shiftless as little boy blue
Dishes are waiting and bills are past due
The shopping's not done and there's nothing for stew.
And out in the yard is a hullabaloo.
But I'm playing Kanga and this is my Roo.
Look! Aren't her eyes the most wonderful hue?

Oh, cleaning and scrubbing will wait till tomorrow,
But children grow up as I've learned to my sorrow.
So quiet down cobwebs, dust go to sleep.
I'm rocking my baby. Babies don't keep.

Ruth Hulburt Hamilton
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