

## Organizational Tidbits

Many of the organizational tips that I've put into practice over the years have come as a result of praying about certain frustrations: How can I stop the children from squabbling over who gets the front seat every time we go somewhere? What can I do to reduce clutter on the kitchen counters? How can I streamline our shopping trips? God cares about every detail of our lives. He is a god of order. And because we're made in His image, we like order too. He desires that we come to Him with our struggles, no matter how trivial. That's how we learn to trust Him for the larger matters. He is indeed faithful. I am thankful for those moms who have shared ideas with me and have helped me think "outside the box" when it comes to managing a household. With the number of personalities and activities to manage, the task is often overwhelming. But I've learned that sometimes making one larger decision can eliminate the need for a zillion other smaller decisions that can clutter my mind. Here are some organizational changes we've made over the years that have helped in our household.

**We assigned each child a day.** Carrie's day is Tuesday, Nathan's is Friday etc. On the child's day, he has certain privileges and certain responsibilities. He gets to answer the phone all day. He gets to lead worship time by choosing the songs we'll sing, reading his choice of scripture and deciding who will pray and in what order. He gets to go to the road for our mail when it arrives. It's this child's responsibility to clear the table and counters after dinner and put all the food away. If we go to town that day, the "child of the day" gets to sit in the front passenger seat. (Obviously, this changed when the "child of the day" became a driver!) But the younger ones still insist on sitting up front on their days. This "child of the day" decision helped eliminate the numerous decisions required by me each day as the children vied for the privileged tasks.

When we first got a computer, all of the children would beg for computer time every day, several times each. That's nine children, multiplied by, say, a minimum of three requests each per day, times 7 days per week equals 189 decisions needed from me in one week, simply concerning computer time! It drove me nuts. So now, the only one who can ask to use the computer is the one whose day it is, and then only after 3:30pm. This time was randomly chosen by me. I still consider most computer activities a complete waste of time and can't see allowing the children to do recreational computer during the "heart" of the day. We've had to make adjustments in these rules as the older ones are reaching adulthood and actually have some needs for the computer. But these family rules have helped for many years and still apply to the younger children.

**We installed a drinking fountain.** A fun little Nehemiah project that required many years of praying and waiting is our little drinking fountain. I was so frustrated with the number of drinking cups used in a day at our house. We use nearly 30 just for meals! Then add those used for between-meal drinks and the number climbs. We tried having one cup each with the person's name on it, but they always got lost or sticky or dropped or licked by the dog....anyway, that didn't seem to work. Using paper cups didn't work either: too expensive to begin with, and too much clutter. No one had the guts to throw them out after only one mid-morning drink of water. So they'd clutter the counters. Anyway, somewhere along the way, I stumbled upon the idea of having a drinking fountain installed (I think the idea came from Don Aslett's book, Make Your House Do the Housework. Excellent Book!). I prayed and waited and prayed and waited and forgot about it. Then one day, while on a business trip with Tom, I was browsing at a thrift shop, and there, for a whopping \$5, was the cutest little drinking fountain and stand. We brought it home, and a friend from church showed the children how to hook it up. So now, anyone can have a drink any time of the day, without making more dirty dishes! I love it. And I still praise God whenever I think about this wonderful answer to prayer!

**I use a wall calendar and a weekly to-do list.** These two are invaluable. I usually make up my to-do list on Sunday evenings, and try to check the calendar each evening before bed.

**I have a Favorite Meals list and a pre-printed Grocery list.** Every two weeks, when we're ready to do our big grocery shopping, I get out our master list of meals that we wrote down a few years ago. It includes perhaps 75 meals, from Taco Salad to Hot Venison Sandwiches to Cajun Red Beans

and Rice or Grilled Cheese. I ask one of the children to help me pick the 14 main courses for the next pay period. They choose their favorites and I try to help keep things balanced. On our computer, I have another master list of foods and items that we typically purchase each shopping day. The items are listed according to how they are laid out in our grocery store. So when we have our menu ready, I print off a copy of this grocery items list and make a mark next to the ingredients we need for those meals. Then I check to see which household items we're low on, and mark those for purchase too. When we get to the store, we're all set. The children have been shopping with us for years, so we now can tear the list into four parts, divide into teams and tackle the shopping in ¼ the time. We've even started taking our grocery budget money and buying gift cards with it. So now we can give the gift cards and the list to our older children and they can do the shopping for us! I don't have to be there to sign a check. It has worked well and the children have learned to be good shoppers.

**I keep a 3-ring binder on the bar in my kitchen.** This “control journal” idea is from [www.flylady.net](http://www.flylady.net), which is an excellent site for learning to get rid of clutter and to organize a household. In my control journal I keep the list of meals, copies of the grocery list, and this week's to-do list. I also have a zippered pencil case in there to keep those little items we were always misplacing, such as, the needle for the pumping up the football, fingernail clippers, the neighbor's extra house key, stamps, etc. I also tend to put school papers, certificates and announcements in/on this notebook, so it needs decluttering occasionally. But it's a good place to locate these necessary organizational tools.

**We eat supper together.** This may not seem like an organizational tool. It is simply a family habit we have maintained without question. But it's here that we see how everyone's doing and what their plans are for the next day. The calendar is close by, so we consult that or add items as needed. Designing time to be together is extremely important for family organization.

**We ask God's help in finding lost items.** No matter how well organized a household is, there will inevitably be things that get lost in the shuffle. At our house it's usually “half a pair of shoes” that can't be found as we're leaving for town. After searching and asking everyone in the household, I can get pretty frustrated. But fussing and getting upset never help and really are quite useless, especially since we know the One who knows everything. We have learned that this is an excellent opportunity to go to the Lord for help. He knows exactly where the lost item is. If I can calm down enough to ask Him, “Lord, where is Lauren's pink shoe?” and be still for a moment to listen, we usually find it. Someone will suddenly remember seeing it in some odd place, or I'll move a book or toy and there it is right in front of me. Occasionally I'll have a clear answer that it's in some strange place and I can go straight there and find it. If God doesn't seem to answer, we assume that He did not want her to wear that pair and we do something else. But it's a rare occasion that we don't find what we're looking for when we take the time to pray specifically.

**We start the day with prayer.** Many of these organizational tips would still be useless if we didn't start our days with prayer. We meet together before breakfast for singing, prayer and scripture. On days that we're short on time, we at least do a circle prayer and someone prays about the events of the day. I used to think that this was just a good spiritual discipline and it is. But it also reminds everyone of what events are coming up that day. So we're all up to speed before the activities get underway. God's word says, “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” So we acknowledge often that no matter what we've planned, God may have something else in mind for us.

When Nehemiah began the task of organizing the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, his first step was prayer, then planning. This planning included taking time to look over the situation. Nehemiah Moms need time to look over the situation every once in a while too. Take a fresh look at the workings of your household. Write down what you're thankful for and write down the little frustrations. Then take them to the Lord in prayer and ask for wisdom. Our God is a god of order and design. And He's interested in every little detail of our lives. He organized the whole universe! Yet He cares about helping us organize our own families. What a wonderful Heavenly Father!

