



**BLESSED IN THE
MESS**

**How to Have a Clean House
(Sort of) and Content Kids
(Most of the Time)**

CHRISTINE LEEB

Blessed in the Mess: How to Keep Your House Clean (Sort of) and Your Kids Content (Most of the Time)

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Requests for information should be addressed to:

4realmoms@4realmoms.com

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Thank you!

DEDICATION

To every parent who find blessings in their lives...one mess at a time!

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INTRODUCTION

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (NIV)

Colossians 3:12



No make-up on. No time for a shower. My daughter is crying about who knows what. My oldest is complaining about yet another thing that isn't right in his world. My youngest is drooling all over me. I probably smell. And my kitchen? Well, many would call it a mess. I call it my life...but I'm so blessed! Now, my house isn't always a mess, and my kids aren't always cranky, and I don't always look like an exhausted walking zombie, but sometimes, that's just how it is! That's life. That's real!

If you ever come over and visit me, I would definitely take the time to clean up for you—I don't want to subject you to my mess (but don't arrive early and whatever you do, don't open my mud room door...most likely if my house looks clean, I stuffed everything in there!) It seems that no matter how hard I try to keep up, I'm just surrounded by mess...messy dishes, messy floors, messy bedrooms, messy mirrors, messy faces, and lots of messy diapers.

Do I like the mess? No! Do I value a clean house? Yes! Do I have time to keep my house clean and organized all the time? No, not always. But I try, and that's all I can do in this stage of life and that's what being real is all about...accepting and admitting imperfection!

In a perfect world, I would spend as much time with my kids as they ask me to; I wouldn't have a speck of dust or a crumb anywhere; I wouldn't have dirty clothes soaking in the bathroom sink, and the laundry would wash, dry, fold and put away itself (hey, I said "in a perfect world.") But because this isn't even possible, no one should strive for any level of perfection. Instead, we should just do our best with the gifts that God has given us, find a level of balance that works best for us and for our families, and more importantly, love our kids and be blessed in the mess!

May God bless your life...one day...one mess at a time!

PRAY

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Philippians 4:6

Praying is the number one thing you can do in order to make real changes in your life. Little daily prayers or even minute by minute or second by second prayers can bring God's wisdom and guidance into your home. He cares about every detail of your life. There are a lot of books about how to be more organized. There are scads of resources online about decluttering your home, and those can be very helpful, but praying about it first is the most powerful thing you can do!

I pray all the time. The Lord and I are tight—especially after I became a parent. I rely on Him throughout my day, and when I have a busy day ahead of me, I pray before my feet even hit the floor in the morning. I ask for Him to help me find balance in my day of getting things checked off my to-do list and spending time with my kids.

Do you desire to be more organized? Pray. Do you seek to create a better routine for your kids? Pray. Do you feel you need more time-management skills? Pray. Start by praying and asking God to show you ways to find balance in your life and then go from there!

Thought Question: What is one area of your life that needs more balance? Pray right now for the Lord to show you how to find balance in that area.

COMMUNICATE

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord,

my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

When I pray, God answers. One word of advice He gave me when I was really struggling with finding balance in washing the pile of dishes that were about ready to fall out our front door and spending quality time with my kids: Communicate. First, I communicate to them that I need to take a little break and do my mommy duties. But the second part has been the most helpful. I tell them *why* I need to do those things and how it benefits *them!* I explain what would happen if mommy never did any dishes and how gross it would be. They love this game. I also have them imagine what would happen if I never dusted or vacuumed or cleaned the toilets or did the laundry or swept the floors or did any grocery shopping. They have so much fun picturing how our house would look or how empty our fridge would be. It's important to communicate to your children that in doing your household chores, you are showing them how much you love them!

Do you desire to find more balance in playing and cleaning? Communicate. Your kids will grow to understand your role as a mom and even find a new appreciation for all the ways you bless their lives.

Thought Question: What is one household chore that you do that your kids don't like? How can you communicate how this chore benefits them?

BE CREATIVE

“Creative people are curious, flexible, persistent and independent with a tremendous spirit of adventure and a love of play.”

Henri Matisse

Giving kids a new appreciation for why you take time away from them to do laundry, cooking, and cleaning is important, but so is finding creative ways of including them in your cleaning and organizing tasks as much as possible. I have found some fun ways to play with my kids while cleaning...now that's a good day in my book! Here are a few examples:

- a. **Beat the Clock**—I set the timer for 5 minutes and see how much we can all clean up in that time.
- b. **Let's Race**—I race the kids to see if they can clean up their toys faster than I get the dishes done or see if they can clean up their rooms before I clean up mine. (helpful hint: I always set a consequence in advance for poor sportsmanship.)
- c. **20 On/20 Off**—I set the timer for 20 minutes and do nothing but play with the kids. Then the timer goes off, I tell them that it's their independent time. They go play while I get done whatever I need to get done. Then when the timer goes off, I stop and play with them again. I keep repeating this throughout the day if needed which allows me to have 20 minutes of focused time to accomplish a task as well as 20 minutes of focused time to play with the kids.
- d. **Laundry Sorting**—I know this doesn't sound like a fun game, but surprisingly the kids enjoy it. First, I have enough laundry baskets for each person in our family. I line the baskets up in order from oldest to youngest and I have the kids sort the clean laundry into each person's basket. If that isn't fun enough, after you throw five pieces of laundry into the proper basket, you get to throw the sixth piece of laundry at someone. I know. It's so silly, but they love it!

Do you desire to have fun with your kids while getting things accomplished at the same time? Be creative! Finding balance in parenting sometimes requires us to color outside of the lines a little.

Thought Question: What is one creative way you can get your kids more involved in helping out?

EMPOWER

Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.

Proverbs 22:6

Not everything in life is fun, so it's good for you to empower your kids to be helpful and responsible too. No games. No prizes. No money...just helping because it's the right thing to do as a member of your family. Take the time to teach your kids how to set the table or how to put toys away or how to unload the dishwasher or how to put away their laundry. Take the time to show them how to organize their clothes and toys and sort out what needs to be donated. It can't all be fun and games and I want to teach my children that their room and their stuff is their responsibility to help organize. I want to teach my children that helping out around the house is a way for them to serve their family.

Do you want your kids to feel valued and learn life skills? Empower them! Kids feel important when they learn how to do things. Guiding your kids in being a productive member of your family can be so beneficial to everyone. It also benefits your kids by giving them a sense of ownership and preparing them for being a responsible adult.

Thought Question: What is one way you already empower your kids? What are more ways you can empower them to help?

FAMILY NIGHT

We love because he first loved us.

1John 4:19

Empowering your kids to do their part to help take care of your home is wonderful. Having their help to check things off your check list can feel so good! But in order to find true balance in having a clean home and content kids, there has to be times when everything stops...the checklist gets put aside...and you just spend time as a family! We try to do something every night as a family. Don't panic. It's just little things like reading a book together, watching a show, playing a quick game, or just taking extra time to chat around the dinner table. But at least once a month, we have a special Family Night.

No matter how busy we get, I want our family to take time to enjoy each other. I want our kids to value spending time together. We keep Family Nights simple where we go on a picnic or go to a new park, or go bowling, or on a nice summer night, we may let the kids stay up late and catch fire flies or make s'mores! Kids don't need anything extravagant, but what they do need is time to build lasting memories, to be silly, to laugh, and to have fun. Write "Family Night" on your calendar each month and stick to it!

Do you want to instill the importance of quality family time with your kids? Have a family night—monthly, weekly or even something little daily! I guarantee that your kids will grow up remembering those nights more than having clean laundry or a clean house.

Thought Question: What most excites you about having a more regular family night?

SIMPLIFY

“Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated.”

Confucius

Parents try to do too much. Clubs, activities, sports, groups, meetings, events—and that’s sometimes just for the kids. Then you add all the stuff that parents do in the home, at work, in their church, and in their community, and it can be one crazy calendar! Your calendar shouldn’t rule your life. What can be removed? Yes, even the good stuff can be taken off your calendar and replaced with some down time or some family time. Or, hey, I’ve got an idea that most parents tend to forget about! How about some time just for yourself or for a date night? That’s right. Just “you” time...alone time...anything you want to do time! Taking time for just YOU—doing yoga, reading, taking a walk, spending quiet time with God, getting a massage, volunteering, or just simply taking a nap! Take time to refresh yourself so that you will be able to do all that parenthood is calling you to do! That means taking things off of your plate. That means removing things from your to-do list. That means saying “no” to things you may want to do, but just don’t need to do right now.

Do you want to live a life full of rushing and busyness? No way! Simplify. Simplifying your life can restore balance and give you a lot more breathing room. Saying “no” shows focus and maturity.

Thought Question: What is one thing you can completely remove from your calendar?

ASK FOR HELP

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

Even when you simplify your life, it can still feel overwhelming at times. Admit it...too often, you try to do it all, even when it's not possible. I'm not sure why God didn't make parents with eight arms like the octopus, but He didn't, and so you must ask for help—from your kids, spouse, friend, neighbor, parent, or another family member. Parenthood is exhausting, and it was never meant to be done completely alone. It's ok to say that you need help. It's ok to delegate. It's ok to take some things off of your plate and ask to put it on someone else's.

Do you often try to be Super Parent? Ask for help instead. Allowing someone else to lend a helping hand shows strength and courage!

Thought Question: In what way could someone in your life be helpful to you? Who can you ask for help right now?

TRICKS UP YOUR SLEEVE

“I love cleaning up messes I didn’t make...so I became a mom.”

Unknown

Parenthood is just too overwhelming to do on your own. Sometimes it takes the help of a good spouse or friend. And sometimes, all you need is a good laundry basket! To clean up quickly before someone stops by, I run around like a crazy lady throwing every random sock, lego piece, and toy into my “Catch-All Basket” and hide it in my mudroom or closet. I also do what I call “Sneak Cleanings” where I sneak into the kids’ bedrooms at night and put away their laundry or dust after I kiss them goodnight. When they’re in the bathtub, I quickly clean the toilet and sink. When they are all occupied eating at the breakfast table, I finish my breakfast quickly so I can sneak in a fast sweeping. Having simple tricks for cleaning up and finding little pockets of time to clean throughout the goings-on of life has been incredibly life-changing for me.

Do you have the time and energy to clean your house from top to bottom all the time? Me neither! I encourage you to come up with quick and easy tricks to have up your sleeve for keeping the house looking clean. It’s a great way to overcome the constant mess of parenthood and life!

Thought Question: What cleaning tricks can you implement to make cleaning up less burdensome?

HAVE PEOPLE OVER

“Hospitality is when someone feels at home in your presence.”

Unknown

Having quick little cleaning secrets are great, but what motivates you to do the rest of the cleaning that needs to be done? For me? It's inviting people over. If I don't have guests in my home on a regular basis, I can easily get lazy on some of the things I need to get done, however, when I have a friend over, I am much more motivated to do more than just decluttering. I will sweep, vacuum, dust, and clean the bathroom too. Having friends come for dinner or even hosting a party gives me the push I need to do other bigger projects too like updating the pictures in the frames, cleaning out the microwave or refrigerator, pulling weeds, etc. As an added bonus, when you invite people into your home, you set the example of hospitality to your kids. You serve others outside of your family, and you enjoy fun and fellowship.

Do you need to be motivated to get your house cleaned more often? Invite people over. I always want my home to be the place where people feel welcomed and want to gather, and if it helps my house be cleaner, that's awesome too!

Thought Question: What would be the first thing you would do to your house if you hosted a party?

LET THINGS GO

“Talk with your children and you will hear their voice. Walk with them through life and you will feel their heart.”

Geoff Reese

Lower your standards. Life is too short to spend every waking moment cleaning or organizing or trying to be Super Parent. Don't try to do everything. It's ok to let some things go! Trust me...I had to! Kids grow up so quickly, so I want to encourage you to always seek to find a good balance between a clean house and spending time with your family. Kids are such a blessing. Take time to enjoy them!

Are your expectations of yourself too high? Let things go! My husband always reminds me that I'll never regret not having a clean house, but I will regret not spending quality time with my kids. Amen!

Thought Question: What are some expectations of your kids or of yourself that you can lower?

ENJOY LIFE IN THE MIDST OF THE MESS

“(Parenthood) is not a hobby, it is a calling.

It is not something to do if you can squeeze the time in. It is what God gave you time for.”

Neil L. Anderson

In the midst of completing this book, I was actually doing the 20 On/20 Off game with my 2 youngest. During my 20 minutes of “me” time, I heard my four year old daughter shout that my youngest had a poopy. Great. Just as I was on a roll. Oh well, right? Motherhood calls. That’s the beauty of being a work-at-home mom. I can work, but also be there to take care of my kids when they need me. Well, a poopy diaper needed to be changed, so off I went to find my little poop monster.

As I walked into the family room, a stronger than usual odor filled the air. Then I noticed a little something brown on the floor. Then another little something brown. Then another and another until I saw him standing there--hand in his diaper with a puzzled look on his face. “Poopy.” he says with a smile. Oh my goodness! Yes it was! I have seen and conquered the infant blow-outs, but I had never seen a two year old blow out before! It was epic! It was down his leg, all over his clothes, under his fingernails and on my carpet. Time to get to work. After three kids, I’ve mastered the art of changing a poopy diaper with just one wipe. On occasion, if it’s a giant poopy, I may have to use two or three, but on this particular occasion, it was 15...yes, 15 wipes. Looking back, I should have just put him in the bath tub, but oh well. This is my life.

Sometimes it’s a mess. Sometimes it’s inconvenient. Sometimes it interrupts what I’m doing. Sometimes it’s frustrating. Sometimes it’s just plain exhausting, but I want to love and serve my family and love and serve the Lord to the best of my ability. So, I keep moving forward. Even if I do nothing on my to-do list; even if I have no trick up my sleeve; even if when my head hits the pillow at night, my house is a complete disaster; even if I make mistakes and lose my patience; even if I have to take the time to change a 15 wipe poopy right in the middle of writing a book, that’s awesome! I always want to remind myself of 4 things:

- God’s grace is always there.
- Tomorrow is a new day.
- Being a parent is a gift to treasure.
- Be blessed in my mess!

Just know that I’m in this with you! I will pray for you as you humbly care for and unconditionally love your family too. May the Lord give you strength, energy, patience, and understanding. May He bring balance to your home and give you wisdom in all you do as a parent. Being a good parent is so hard. May He give you the courage to be real and admit how hard it is and the boldness to move forward every day learning to be the best parent God created you to be...one day...one mess at a time!

Be blessed in your mess!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Christine Leeb is a motivational speaker and the founder of an educational ministry called 4Real Moms--providing moms and families with real solutions for real life. She is known as The Real Mom because she doesn't pretend to be perfect--she loses her patience, hides brownies from her kids, and forgets why she walked into a room. But she also believes that homes are the most important classrooms and that parents are the most powerful teachers. Christine is passionate about taking her experiences as a wife, mom, and former teacher and administrator and turning them into a lesson plan to equip families to be the best that God created them to be. Get real with Christine on the 4Real Moms Facebook page or at 4realmoms.com

Other books and resources by Christine:

- *In His Light: Facing Fear with Faith*
- *22 Ways to Love Your Husband Like a Boyfriend Again.*
- *Best In-Home Date Nights That Don't Involve the TV.*
- *Meal-Planning for the Mom Who Hates Meal-Planning*
- *Stop the Mealtime Madness: How to Get Your Kids to Eat Anything*