



Organization

For the Woman's Time, Space, and Stuff

Keeper'sBook™ series focuses on specific topics relevant to *Keepers at Home* readers. Our goal is to bring together talented writers who have passion for the subject and readers whose lives will be blessed by the information presented in each Keeper'sBook™.

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START ORGANIZING by folding your hands

DIANNA OVERHOLT

You are molded comfortably into a corner of the beige sofa. Baby's lashes flutter closed against your skin. Scratching at the remnants of dried banana on the cushion, you wonder if it's worth laying Baby down to get busy. To your left, a stained glass window awaits. (Stained with more of said banana.) To your right is a Mount Everest basket of laundry. Above is a gray-webbed ceiling fan, and beneath your feet is cracker-crumb carpet. A plastic cow stares vacantly at you from the rubble of a Lincoln Log barn.

And the kitchen? Crusted oatmeal bowls and dried spaghetti plates lounge on the counter. The floor, if excavated, would tell what you served for dinner three days ago. (Chicken gravy.)

It would be easier to keep on cuddling the baby...

Just stay there. Seriously. It won't hurt to take a longer break, and while you're at it, assume the best of the other three children as they cut and paste in the next room. If they trim the fur from the stuffed penguin, it's okay. (Grandma only paid a quarter for it, and anyway, she's bringing more stuffed animals at her next visit.)

Stay where you are. You can begin organizing right from your sofa!

Organize: *to put in working order.*

If Webster had been a woman, he might have defined "organize" as: *to put one's house in working order.* "I need to get organized!" women groan, and our kindred hearts know that they're referring to the order of their house or household.

But...does organizing one's life start by focusing on the house? What if, by focusing on something other than housework, we could align our lives in better working order?

It is difficult to *not* focus on the house when need stares from every direction! Perhaps you are energized by a to-do list that is the length of the afghan's unraveled string. Occasionally, I am. More often than not, if I face a needy house, and focus on it, I'm discouraged at all there is to do in so little time with not enough energy and if only I were more organized I wouldn't have to deal with this...

So, if it's not the house, what is the focus?

P-R-A-Y-E-R.

Prayer? Yes, prayer! I'm in all-seriousness...

More important than buying stackable bins for closets, more than color-coding hangers or alphabetizing spices, much more than deciding that you will clean the bathroom at 9:00 every Friday morning, is *keeping one's life in best working order through prayer.*

Close your eyes and envision yourself surrounded by all the jobs in your home. Then picture yourself looking upward to the Creator of the home. Organization should not begin by focusing on the jobs, but by focusing on the Creator of them!

I don't intend to downplay the host of practical things one must do to organize. But I do suggest that praying is the overlooked foundation of home organization.

Jesus Himself hints at this. Reach for your Bible, and find Luke 10:38-42.

It's very familiar. Jesus tells Martha, "Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Mary's first desire was to sit in Jesus' presence. Doesn't that define *prayer*? Though there is much serving to perform, Jesus wants us, as women, to first focus on Him.

(Unlike mopping a floor, only to see it "taken away" as soon as muddy feet traipse by, prayer is an act that will not be intruded upon. It is not "taken away" from us.)

But will prayer really, truly translate from words in the mind to practical actions that help with our housework?

I'll share my personal experience. Several years ago, after the birth of our fifth child, I felt so hungry for the Word that whenever I sat down to nurse the baby, I read only the Bible or expositional books. My mind was drawn to prayer. Upside-down circumstances, such as moving in freezing weather three weeks after the baby was born, drew me to God.

Maintaining my housework had always been difficult during the first year of our babies' lives. I couldn't seem to get to extra things, like unpacking stacked boxes. Instead of despairing over untouched work as I sat with Baby, I read God's Word. I prayed. And gradually, something began to dawn in my understanding.

Slowly I realized that *the expectations I had for myself were not God's expectations for me*. I wanted to be efficient, able to perform well even with a small baby. I wanted to run a model home. I thought that if only I were properly organized, I could accomplish my own work, plus reach out to others. I felt that I was disappointing God by the little I could show for a day's work.

But those weren't His expectations! His to-do list for me was quite different. More like a to-be list. Instead of stating, "Get up before the rest of the family, no matter how tired you are, so that you can start the day right," He said, "Wake with thoughts of Me. Begin your day knowing that I am with you every moment. Meditate on My love."

What a relief! I could still start a day RIGHT even if I overslept and found the children eating breakfast from the cookie jar!

Another self-expectation was to schedule my day. By 9:00 I should have all bedrooms and floors cleaned. By noon all laundry should be clothes-pinned outside. By 3:00 I should bring it in and begin supper.

Interruptions abounded. And so did frustration. Again,

His ways were not my ways. "I am planning your day," He said. "I know all about the interruptions that will come your way. Your work is important, but not nearly as important as how you are reacting to what I send you. Meet everything I send with thankfulness and My grace. If you do that, then you are accomplishing much."

What freedom! My day's productivity was not going to be measured by the amount of housework I performed, but by whether or not I had graciously received what the Lord sent my way.

Organization took on a new dimension. Even if my house was far from being a show home, my day still went "right" if my heart was in proper order. And with my heart in proper order, I actually found new strength to look at my housework. Instead of facing a job feeling behind and discouraged, I felt energized. Instead of pleading for God to rescue me from all my messes, I started praying for God to show me in His timing and His way how to specifically deal with problem areas.

Can you sense what prayer does for us? It brings order to our desires. It aligns our priorities with God's priorities. It opens the door for God to work. Prayer settles our hearts in the midst of chaos, putting us in the proper frame of mind for dealing with our house.

It wouldn't surprise me to hear that you're learning the same things. God works through prayer in all of our lives. We learn, and then relearn our lessons in a deeper way through prayer.

Why is it easier to get busy than to fold our hands in prayer? Somehow we feel better *doing* than *being*. But the being-at-rest, the praying, should come as the first resort. The doing will follow, and it will be all the better for having the heart in working order!

So right now take the time you need to tell your Lord all about your aspirations as a homemaker. Tell Him if you can't conquer the laundry or keep your floors clean. He cares, and wants to help you! He may send ideas your way. He may send someone to lend a hand. Or He may assure you that you are doing your best, and to rest in that. I don't know how or when He will answer, but He will.

Enjoy your time at Jesus' feet! May your life be a beautiful study in the art of heart organization!

Just don't forget that perhaps it's time to check on your scissor-wielding dears in the next room... ❀

life lessons from a lost duckling

STEPHANIE J LEINBACH



“**A**nd that’s how Little One Step found his mommy,” I said as I closed the book and looked down at my daughters. They were shouldered in next to me, their eyes content.

Jenica said, “Read it again, Mommy.” Tarica wiggled approval.

I opened to the beginning and began reading again. It was a story about three lost ducklings looking for their home. The smallest duckling was scared without his mama, and his legs grew too wobbly to walk. So his biggest brother showed him how to do One Step. “Lift one foot and say ‘one,’ then put it down in front of you and say ‘step.’ Do the same with the other foot. Keep doing it until we find Mama. One...Step...One...Step...One...Step.”

With a little practice, the smallest duckling learned to do One Step, and they set off for the river. They made good progress, the three of them, until the little duckling looked up at the tall trees around him. His legs grew wobbly again, and he had to sit down. His big brother asked him if he forgot to do One Step. With that reminder, Little One Step concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other and waddled all the way to the river with his brothers, where their mother was waiting for them.

Just a children’s book, I thought, but it contains some powerful truths about life.

Life is full of seasons. There is the season of a new baby, a productive garden, an illness, or a move to a new area. As each season fades away, I realize I have neglected other important areas of my life. Perhaps it’s organization, or child training, or cleaning. I look at my neglect and I feel lost. Where do I begin? I need to change. I need to get out of

these tall trees and down to the river, but the journey looks too long. My legs grow wobbly. I sit down in despair.

Perhaps while I’m sitting down, I need to read *Little One Step* again. It could teach me a few lessons.

• **Lesson: Change happens One Step at a time.** Little One Step’s journey to the river started with One Step. When I decide something needs to happen, too often I want to get to the river in a single bound. I forget that change is usually a process of small steps taken, not one gigantic leap forward.

Action: Break tasks down into a series of small steps. My goals must be realistic and manageable. For instance, instead of trying to clean and reorganize my entire kitchen today, I can choose to concentrate on one cupboard or one corner. Tomorrow, I can clean another cupboard or corner, making time for it amidst the other duties I call mine.

• **Lesson: Do not be overwhelmed by the journey.** Little One Step looked at the forest around him and felt so overwhelmed that he couldn’t go on. When I focus on all that remains undone—the mountains of laundry, the shelves holding more dust than books, the chaos in the closets—my legs grow wobbly, too. I become discouraged.

Action: Find satisfaction in taking One Step. I need to see each day’s accomplishments as One Step in the right direction. I should rejoice in my progress, slow though it may be. Instead of being hard on myself for not doing more, I must relax and accept my limitations, taking One Step at a time.

• **Lesson: Encouragement is contagious.** All the ducklings had to do One Step, and biggest brother helped little brother keep going. In fact, his big brother was such an

encouragement that Little One Step was leading the way by the time they reached the river and their mama.

Action: Find someone who needs encouragement. Listen to their troubles. Offer help if they need it. Compassion strengthens wobbly legs, including my own.

• **Lesson: It may take a long time to reach the river.** Although the journey was long and hard for a small duckling, Little One Step could not give up.

Action: Be persistent and patient. I need to accept that it takes time to turn chaos into order, bad habits into good, unruly children into well-behaved ones. I myself am a work in progress. I cannot give up just because it's taking me a long time to reach my destination.

The Chinese have a proverb: *The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.* Sometimes I feel I have fallen a thousand miles behind, and the tall trees of despair rise up around me. It's hard work to be wife and mother, cook and laundress, housekeeper and organizer, follower of God and servant to others. In some ways, my work will never be done.

I hope the lessons of *Little One Step* stay with me in my journey. I want to find joy in my travels, not despair. I want to be grateful for my duties, not overwhelmed by them. When I get to the river, I want to look back at a life well-lived—One Step at a time. ❀

Amidst the hustle day to day,
With much to do and lots to say,
Our minds are oft in disarray;
But constantly along the way—
Be the moment fair or gray—
Just slow down—take time to pray.

Marching down routine's path all hours,
Our work so tall about us towers;
The pooch avoids our strides and cowers,
Wrens hold their breath from leafy bowers,
Have we forgotten Higher Powers?
Just slow down—and smell the flowers.

When others messed up once again,
We fuss and fume how wrong they've been,
We can't forget—it looks so grim...
But are our own lives all so prim?
Now who commits the greater sin?
Just slow down—and look within.

Our neighbors we give little heed,
As busy hectic lives we lead;
Making our living—oh, indeed!
When folks from burdens would be freed?
Oh, lift them with a kindly deed,
Just slow down—help those in need.

We're comfy in our world and then
Life deals some blows to fellow men.
Are we too wrapped up to extend
Compassion as in friend to friend?
Tho' words be few, do go again;
Just slow down—be there for them.

We must slow down before too late,
And practice love instead of hate.
How we use time determines fate.
Prioritize—oh, do not wait!
Lest in our blinding haste so great
We rush past God and Glory's gate.

Just Slow Down

A SISTER



Faithful over a Few Things

ANONYMOUS

It was a balmy summer evening. My husband, Tim, and I were heading over to our neighbors' place for the evening. Since my husband was a carpenter, he often got called out to his many farmer friends to lend a hand with fix-it jobs around the farm. Kyle, our two-year-old son, and I were going along too, as we had many times before. We were good friends with neighbor Daniels by now, after living just down the road from them for several years, and even Kyle always looked forward to playing with his friends, Becky and Jacob.

A few minutes later, Kyle and I walked up to the Yoders' well-kept bungalow. I surveyed Denise's immaculate flower beds with a twinge of jealousy. Her flowers were blooming beautifully, despite the record-breaking dry weather we'd been having. I thought briefly of my own tired-looking petunias at home and was ashamed. *I guess I just don't have a green thumb like some people*, I thought.

"Hello, there," Denise's cheerful voice interrupted my thoughts. After we exchanged greetings on the porch, she remarked, "I hope you don't mind if I do a bit of watering yet tonight. It seems the flowers can never get enough water, especially the ones in planters."

"Yes, it is certainly a dry season," I replied. "You can go ahead and water, and maybe I'll just tag along and admire all your nice flowers."

"Oh, they're nothing out of the ordinary," Denise replied breezily, as she turned on the hose. "The first few weeks they looked pretty droopy, but now they're picking up a little."

I cringed as I thought of what Denise would say if she saw my limp impatiens. Even though several weeks had passed since they'd been transplanted into the flower bed, they had hardly grown noticeably, and the few flowers that had blossomed looked pretty droopy. *I guess maybe if I'd water more faithfully, like Denise, mine would look better too*, I thought to myself.



My feelings of inferiority increased as we strolled around the yard. At every flower bed (and there were a lot!) the plants just seemed to burst with blossoms, and everything looked hardy and healthy. Denise and I chatted pleasantly, though, and I thoroughly enjoyed our visit. When the watering was done, we sat on the porch, watching the children drive their tricycles on the pavement in front of the garage, and chatting about everyday things.

The shadows were growing long, and the sun had almost disappeared when Tim pulled up to the house with our car. "Well, here comes Daddy," I said to Kyle. "We'd better help Becky and Jacob put away their toys." I grabbed a trike and a toy car and followed Denise to the garage.

"You're so organized," I remarked to Denise. "Kyle's trike always gets left outside, rain or shine. I should be more faithful in putting things away, I guess. But we don't have a garage..."

"Oh," Denise scoffed, "I would gladly let the toys lay out all the time. But the children always left their things right in front of the garage door. Now we try to remember to put them away, because one time I drove over a bike." Denise made a face at the memory.

"Well, you're so organized in other areas, I'm not surprised that you always get the outdoor toys picked up, too," I said, pushing the trike into the garage behind her.

Denise laughed. "Oh, things around here sure aren't always perfect, either. Thanks for coming along," she called after us, as Kyle and I headed for the car.

"Oh, anytime. We were glad to come," I replied. I strapped Kyle into his car seat, and after a final wave to Denise and the children, we pulled away. As we drove out the lane, we passed another neatly edged flower bed.

"My, she's got the flowers, doesn't she?" commented Tim.

I groaned. "Even you noticed? I've been battling jealousy all evening because of how her flowers look, and mine don't!"

Tim laughed. "Oh, come on. Yours aren't that bad. Give them a bit of time, and they'll grow too."

"Well, we'll see. It takes a green thumb to make flowers look like that, and I think my thumb is just plain purple."

Tim chuckled at my lame attempt at humor, and I sighed morosely. This wasn't the first time I had felt envious of Denise. Her talents were not limited to her flower beds. She enjoyed sewing too, and the things she made were always neat and attractive. Cooking was another area where she excelled, as we well knew. We had been guests at their table many times, and the food was not just good, but exceptional. Besides all that, I didn't think we had ever been in their house when it wasn't mostly cleaned up and tidy. And on top of it all, Denise was a farmer's wife who helped with the barn chores twice a day!

My thoughts wandered on in a self-pitying manner. I enjoyed sewing too, but somehow the finished product never looked quite as good as Denise's. Cooking and food preparation was one of my favorite things to do. I knew there was nothing wrong with the food I prepared, but it wasn't outstanding either. And as for a clean house, well, even though I had no farm chores to do, it seemed I never found time to keep after all the clutter in our house.

As we pulled into the drive at home, I shook my head. *Come on, Self. Get out of the self-pity rut. You're not all bad!* As we headed for the house, I resolved to think more positively... *and* to water my flowers a little more faithfully.

One evening a few days later, I settled into the rocking chair with my Bible. I opened to Matthew 25, and started reading the parable of the talents. As I read, I found it interesting to note that the Lord had exactly the same words for the two men who had gained their talents, whether it was five or two. *Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord* (Matthew 25:21). As I pondered this, I suddenly thought of Denise. It certainly appeared that she had had many talents bestowed upon her. No doubt, she had more than I did. But according to what I had just read, we would both hear the same words from our Lord on Judgment Day, on one condition: that we were faithful with what we had. It was of no profit to me at all to compare my talents with those of others! What I needed to concentrate on was being faithful. Another verse came to my mind: *But they measuring themselves*

by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Corinthians 10:12b). Truly, I felt God was trying to show me something. I had been spending far too much energy comparing myself with others, and that was not wise! With a silent prayer to God, I thanked Him for showing me my error, and asked for help to fulfill my requirement—to be faithful! ❁

Time for My Hon

LAURA OVERHOLT

I love to make lists
And plan my days.
My hon grins and says,
"Why write down do dishes
When you can see
The stacks sitting there
Needing to be cleaned?"
It gives me a feeling
Of a job complete
When I cross off my chores
At the end of the day.
Did I use my time wisely?
Did I waste a minute?

Then one day,
What's this I see?
In neat little writing,
My hon added a chore for me!
"Make breakfast," it says.
His favorite meal, I know.
But with restless nights
From baby dear,
I sleep in the morning,
Past dawn's early light!

I think this is my hon's
Quiet way of saying,
"Take time for me!"