



**loving
your
home**

*An Upbeat,
No-Nonsense
Guide to
Simplicity,
Order, & Care*

Mary Jane Preston
with Carol Showalter

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3D

*Loving Your Home: An Upbeat, No-Nonsense Guide to Simplicity,
Order, & Care*

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Foreword

MARY JANE PRESTON WAS IN OUR VERY FIRST 3D GROUP IN ROCHESTER, NEW YORK. At that time she was the chairwoman of the Christian education committee at church, as well as a school teacher in the public school system. She had a master's in elementary education. Those were her credentials, but my friend Mary Jane was oh so much more.

She was a caring, supporting friend who always found time to help at church doing anything that was asked or needed. As a young pastor's wife, I found in Mary Jane what every church should have for the minister's wife: a friend willing to do everything from teaching to cooking to cleaning to organizing an event. And then willing to come over and organize your linen closet or hang new drapes in the parsonage and bring her son and daughter to play with your kids!

My relationship with Mary Jane went beyond our eighteen years at the church in Rochester and we stayed friends until her untimely death two years ago.

She was an expert in details and a genius for organization. Today, our lives are fuller and faster than ever. We need what she knew and practiced now, perhaps more than we did back then.

In this beautiful book, Mary Jane will give you tips to clean up clutter (she was doing it long before Oprah's friend Peter Walsh took his tour on the road); she will help you plan your schedule so you can enjoy your home and your friends and family more; and she will give you self-confidence. You can do these things. I know, because she gave me the confidence way back when,

and these simple, practical steps have made all the difference in my life!

So you can know Mary Jane a little better, I will close with the story about her last days on this earth. Every day her sister would read her a psalm and then a passage from the devotional by Hal Helms, *Echoes of Eternity*. Mary Jane took great comfort in these inspiring, hopeful words. One day just about a week before she died, her family was buzzing around the house making dinner, getting ready for choir rehearsal and youth events at church. The house was literally buzzing with activity, all around Mary Jane, and everyone knew that Mary Jane was close to dying. She said to a friend, “When people say *She died with her family by her side*, I didn’t know it would be like this!” They both laughed. Mary Jane loved people, and loved to have a busy, beautiful home. It was exactly the way she lived her life and taught her husband and children to live: for others. What a testimony it was, that their lives were centered on family and church, the bedrock of a Christian home, as Mary Jane laid waiting for her Savior to take her to her heavenly home. No wonder she laughed—with joy.

My prayer is that God will use this book, *Loving Your Home: An Upbeat, No-Nonsense Guide to Simplicity, Order, and Care* as a real blessing to bring more peace and beauty into your life.

—Carol Showalter

How to Use This Book

OVING YOUR HOME IS DESIGNED AS A TWELVE-WEEK GUIDE FOR BRINGING ORDER INTO YOUR LIFE and creating a home that expresses your love for God, yourself, and others.

Although you can certainly use this book on your own, we recommend gathering a few friends and working through it together, as a group. In the process of making any life change, it's natural to feel overwhelmed or discouraged at times, and being part of a group will offer valuable support and encouragement.

If you have gone through *Your Whole Life: The 3D Plan for Eating Right, Living Well, and Loving God* in a group, this book can be your next step together. The 3D plan (Diet, Discipline, and Discipleship), a Christ-centered health program founded in 1972 by Carol Showalter, has helped over one million people. Remember, “living well” begins at home!

Each chapter has a goal for the week and step-by-step instructions for accomplishing that goal. At the beginning of each chapter, you'll find a weekly Scripture to strengthen and encourage you. And in the back of the book are weekly discussion questions for your group.

For additional resources, visit www.3DYourWholeLife.com. And contact our office anytime by calling 1-800-451-5006, or e-mailing mail@3DYourWholeLife.com.

Introduction

WHEN I LOOK BACK ON MY LIFE, IT IS EASY TO SEE GOD'S TREMENDOUS PATIENCE AND LOVE. At age twenty, I was so firm in developing what I thought of as a blueprint for my own life—which detailed my need to finish college, find exactly the right man, get married, and begin a teaching career—that I wonder how I would have handled anything else. God looked graciously on my plan, and soon I was a college graduate, and a month later I married a fellow student, an engineer named John. We moved to his hometown, Rochester, New York, and I began to teach sixth grade.

Everything should have been perfect. I loved my teaching job and threw myself into it, talking about my “kids” morning, noon, and night. Lesson planning was a challenge, but I felt I was doing a good job and having a positive effect on many young lives.

Then, inevitably, “little” problems came up. I didn't seem to be able to control the class all the time. Why did they get so noisy when given a little freedom? I had a recurring “teacher's nightmare”: I dreamed about a room full of unruly students shooting arrows at me.

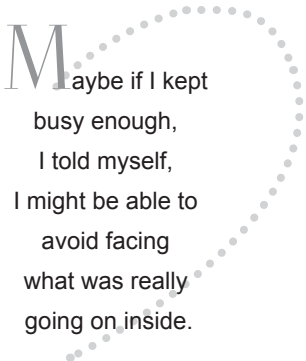
And I began gaining more weight. I had begun putting on the pounds in college, but it seemed to shift into high gear the minute the wedding was over. John was wonderful, I told myself. So stable, so secure—but also so quiet. We had a lovely new house, but we were all alone, the quiet, distracted listener and the constant talker. Nonetheless, I plunged ahead to fulfill my goals—my blueprint. Maybe things weren't perfect, but they were pretty good. Most of the time, I

was able to gloss over the rough spots. I tried to sweep concerns under the rug and moved on to the next step in my big plan: to have a baby and begin our family.

One morning about three years later, sitting alone in the basement folding diapers, I realized that I had come to the end of my blueprint. My mother and her contemporaries never had worked outside the home, and all my friends had given up their jobs once their children had come along. I had no role model to follow, no plan.

Inside, I started to unravel.

Desperately needing to prove my worth to myself and others, I sought out projects to involve me. Maybe if I kept busy enough, I told myself, I might be able to avoid facing what was really going on inside. By this time our family had grown to include two children.



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And what kind of housekeeper was I during this period? Obsessive: besides regular cleaning and spring cleaning, which I finished with scrupulous thoroughness by the end of February (long before others even knew spring was in the air), I worked every day to keep things exactly right. I picked up lint from the rug by hand. I put away every Lego and block just so. I may have been forty pounds overweight, but my house sparkled! And I made a reputation for myself as a consummate hostess, serving elegant, formal, six-course dinners. When company came, everything—even the laundry and ironing—was done. Entertaining, decorating, and housekeeping were where I shone, so I had to invite people over—otherwise, they might just think of me as an overweight, unemployed, stay-at-home mom.

It was then that our pastor's wife, Carol Showalter, called to ask me if I wanted to join a new group she was forming. It was called "Diet,



Discipline, and Discipleship” (3D, for short—a program that’s now called *Your Whole Life*). Carol developed the group for women with problems that they needed God’s help with in their lives.

At church, I had met a few women who spoke as though they knew Jesus personally. When some of these women joined the 3D group, they were candid in admitting their needs and open in expressing their desire for change. Hearing them, I was confused. What was going on? Here was the ultimate humiliation: to admit to others how messed up I felt inside. That meant giving up my blueprint. That meant not pretending. I was frightened.

As our little group began, we followed a basic commonsense diet and developed new perspectives on the need to “live well” in all areas of our lives. Most significant of all, we made a commitment to pray for each other throughout the week.

This business of serious praying was a new experience for me. Until that point, not counting occasional panicked prayers (for instance, when my car was sliding sideways on an icy expressway bridge), I hardly prayed at all. But as I began to pray each day, gradually I began to sense a number of changes in my heart. No longer was I just talking to my pillow or to the steering wheel. God really was *there* and really *cared*. That broke me up: God *loved* me.

But could I love myself? Could I make peace with my identity, my life as I lived it now? As a mother? a wife?

One night, in our 3D group, it dawned on me: I could not handle my problems on my own. I *needed* Jesus. Totally out of character, I told the group that I would try to trust God in the challenges of my daily life. There were no fireworks or angels singing, but I had finally admitted that I couldn’t handle my life on my own.



I felt fulfilled when I helped a friend clean her basement and when our group made a quilt for a newly divorced young mother who felt alone and unloved.

As I made deep friendships in that group and the one that followed it, I became more involved in the lives of those around me. I began to care for and help others. I felt fulfilled when I helped a friend clean her basement and when our group made a quilt for a newly divorced young mother who felt alone and unloved.

I was never quite the same after that night in the group. I was more at peace and happy with my life. Gone were the terror-filled dreams. Gone, even, was the blueprint. And as John began to notice these changes and wonder what had happened to me, a whole new level of communication opened up for us. We began a new journey in our marriage.

And what about my obsession with housecleaning? I still liked to have things neat and clean, but I lost the compulsive drive to do it better than anyone else. I found I could entertain casually without too much notice and still do a great job; and I could now clean the house in a few hours, instead of over several days. Gradually, God opened up a whole new way of bringing order into my home—and my life.

Soon, friends began asking me to help them develop a plan for the seemingly daunting tasks involved in caring for a home. As word got around, I was invited to come over and walk through their homes and offer suggestions on making the cleaning more manageable.

Now, I've gathered these experiences into a book to share with you. Our daily lives and the pressures of the world may look different today than thirty years ago when I was just starting out, but our basic needs are the same. We all want to live in a place that blesses and nurtures us. We get tired of feeling stressed out and overwhelmed. And we want the

people who come into our home to feel welcomed and loved. We want to open our hearts and our homes to God.

This workbook will systematically guide you to a new understanding of what it takes to bring order into your home—and peace (dare we say, joy?) into your heart. You can use it on your own, or together with your community or *Your Whole Life* group. At the end of these twelve weeks, you'll walk away with lots of upbeat, practical ideas for loving your home and the people who come into it.

We all need a simple and approachable way to attend to our daily tasks. This book is my offering to help you on your way. You *can* do this!

—Mary Jane Preston

Week 1 Where Are You Coming From?

“To be a hostess,
I’m going to have to surrender my notions of
Good Housekeeping domestic perfection. . . .
This is tough: My mother set a high standard.
Her house is always immaculate,
most especially if she’s expecting company.
But if I wait for immaculate,
I will never have a guest.”

—Lauren Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath*

The Goal

- Discover your own housekeeping philosophy—
and what you hope for at the end of these
twelve weeks.

Weekly Scripture

- “Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.” —Psalm 139:23

WHETHER IT'S AN APARTMENT IN THE CITY, A HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS, OR A COZY BUNGALOW IN THE COUNTRY, YOU HAVE A HOME THAT YOU NEED TO TAKE CARE OF. You may have a job outside the home, you may be at home full-time with children, or you may be retired, but no matter the circumstances, most of us have to balance our responsibilities at home with all the other facets of our busy lives.

This can feel daunting, but there is hope! God loves you and cares about the things that are troubling you. The key is to ask God to shift your perspective so that you're no longer "managing" your home and frantically trying to keep up with the basic needs, but actually *loving* your home as an expression of care for yourself and others. As Christians, we are called to glorify God in all that we do—down to the most mundane details!

The first step is to imagine the home you want. If you lived in a beautiful space of order and calm, how would you feel? How would your day change, if you knew you were coming home at night to a welcoming haven rather than piles of clutter? Would you have people over more often? Would you spend more time doing the things you really love?

The next step is to find out what your personal obstacles are. After all, no one actually sets out to do a poor job. We mean well—but all kinds of things get in the way. **Time** is often a key problem; there just isn't enough of it.

Another factor in time may be our children, or caregiving for elderly parents, or even our pets. All of these need our time and attention, and often immediately. Small children and four-footed friends often seem to make messes faster than we can clean them up.

Ask God to shift your perspective so that you're no longer "managing" your home and frantically trying to keep up with the basic needs, but actually *loving* your home.



On top of everything else, many of us struggle with feelings of guilt, lack of motivation, or simply feeling scattered or overwhelmed, which makes it hard even to get started, let alone to do a good job. It's amazing how many really important other things suddenly demand our attention when we get the urge to do something about the garage. Or the cabinet under the sink. Or whatever your personal “black hole” is. And then, how hard it is to keep going until the job is finished.

Finally, there's the problem of lack of knowledge—simply not knowing where to start, or what to do once you do start.

This book will show you how to schedule your time reasonably, make cleaning your home a manageable task, and still leave you ample time for yourself. What's more, your schedule will be personally tailored to your specific situation and will be flexible enough to change and adjust over the years, to best handle the shifting needs of your family and your other commitments. It *can* be done.

We all approach housekeeping with different ideas and feelings about the task, picked up from all the people we have known in our lives—parents, friends, relatives, in-laws, even people for whom we babysat as teenagers. Take a moment to step back and look at some of your own lifelong ideas. You may even want to list a few here.



When you were growing up, maybe you felt pretty good about the house and how cleaning and organizing was handled, and you decided to follow the path your mother or father, grandparent, or aunt used to keep house, wanting to be like them. On the other hand, maybe you were ashamed of your house and had the desire to do a better job than they did. Or you might have decided it wasn't really worth the effort; it simply wasn't that important to you. In any event, it is likely that whatever sort of homemaker you grew up with had a conscious or unconscious effect on how you wanted to be.

It is likely that whatever sort of homemaker you grew up with had a conscious or unconscious effect on how you wanted to be.

Now add to that the input you bring to housekeeping from the whole experience of your life: the gorgeous homes you see in magazines, with fresh-cut flowers in every room; the offhanded comment from your husband about how *his* mother made everything from scratch; the casual remark dropped by a friend about how she spent three hours cleaning her bathroom; the time your grandmother said that cleaning a floor didn't count unless you were down on your hands and knees.

My own housekeeping philosophy came from

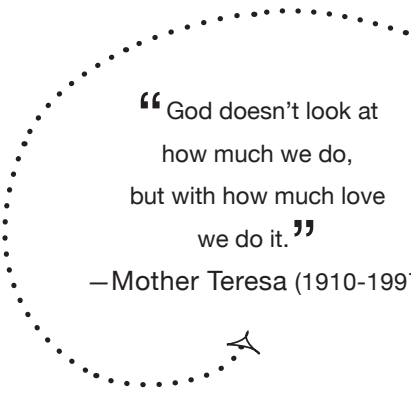
Before you get on with the business of loving your home, using this book as a twelve-week guide, it is important to take the time to **SEE** where your ideas are coming from. What expectations have you already put upon yourself? What opinions have you accepted as

truth? What have you consciously or subconsciously told yourself about how you will keep your home now? Be as honest as possible with yourself in answering these questions, and ask God to open up new insights.

TIP Clutter creates clutter. It sends a message that it doesn't matter. If one empty coffee cup, why not two, four, or six?

Today, what kind of housekeeper do you want to be? List some of your own specific ideas and practices necessary to be considered a “good housekeeper.”

Week 2 Your Strengths and Weaknesses



“God doesn’t look at
how much we do,
but with how much love
we do it.”

—Mother Teresa (1910-1997)

The Goal

- Identify your likes and dislikes in your housekeeping style.

Weekly Scripture

- “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.” —Ephesians 3:20

THERE ARE many excuses FOR NOT KEEPING A HOUSE IN ORDER:
“I COULD DO IT, IF I ONLY HAD THE TIME.”
“NO ONE EVER TAUGHT ME HOW.”
“I HAVE TO DO IT ALL ALONE—IT’S TOO MUCH FOR ONE PERSON.”
“THERE ARE SO MANY MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO.”

God calls us to care for our families, our homes, and our lives. Often the way we keep our home reflects what is going on inside of us. A disorderly home can be a sign that we feel depressed or overwhelmed, or that we believe God is asking too much of us.

Loving your home requires time and effort. And what you do with your time is a conscious choice. Even though you may feel you are trapped by the demands of your family, your house, and your job, you are actually making time-related choices constantly. You choose to sit down or to keep moving. You choose to fold clothes or to spend time with a friend or watch TV. Those choices are obvious, I know, but they also come more subtly. Helping your child with homework or cleaning. Spending time with a neighbor or sorting through a closet. Sometimes it’s a choice between two good things.

This may be an area where you are having trouble and you have come to this book looking for help. So the next step is to clearly identify your strengths and weaknesses.

There are many ways to handle the job of caring for your home. Maybe you feel totally undisciplined and let things go until the last possible moment, when they absolutely have to be done. Company is coming for dinner, and you madly rush around picking up the house for an hour before they arrive. Does this sound familiar?

Or are you the kind of person who takes on so many outside commitments that it often comes at the cost of neglecting your home? There are neighbors who need help, causes that ask for your time,

obligations that fill your days, but as a result dinner is late every night and the dishes are still piled by the sink the next morning.

TIP Instead of looking at housekeeping as a chore, think of it as a creative and loving act. Creating order and beauty is a way to express love and care toward yourself and others.

Maybe you work hard at home but never feel done, rarely having time for things you “want” to do or for relaxation. Your house is in good condition, but you haven’t sat down to play the piano or worked on a pottery project for months.

Some people find they flit around the house from job to job, never finishing anything. Others feel they do some jobs quite well but are terrible at others. Maybe you keep things up well from week to week but don’t get to deep (“spring”) cleaning. Or you may work hard but don’t ever feel good about what you have done.

Stewardship

■ “Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much . . .” —Luke 16:10

The Christian understanding of stewardship goes beyond what we offer to the church in the form of money, time, talents, and treasures. Jesus requires us to be good stewards of the precious property and people that have been entrusted

to us. In fact, the word “steward” comes from the Greek word *oikos*, which means “house.” Stewardship is taking care of household matters, and **being a good steward is a way to reflect God’s love and generosity toward us.**

Following is a worksheet that will help you determine your house-keeping style. This offers a starting point for a good look at how we approach our work and where our needs are greatest. Prayerfully consider in detail how you clean your living space, whether apartment or house. Look at each of the items below and check the appropriate boxes:

Determining Your Housekeeping Style

	<i>Things I like to do</i>	<i>Things I don't like to do</i>	<i>Things I do well</i>	<i>Things I neglect</i>	<i>Things I need help to learn</i>
Daily pick-up					
Weekly cleaning					
bathrooms					
bedrooms					
kitchen					
living-dining room					
family room					
"Spring" cleaning					
storage area					
walls					
windows					
floors, rugs					
Grocery shopping					
Laundry					
Wardrobe updating					
Finances					
Meal preparation					
Yard work					
Special projects					
Hobbies					
Helping others					
Relaxation					
Prayer and meditation					
Personal care					
Exercise					

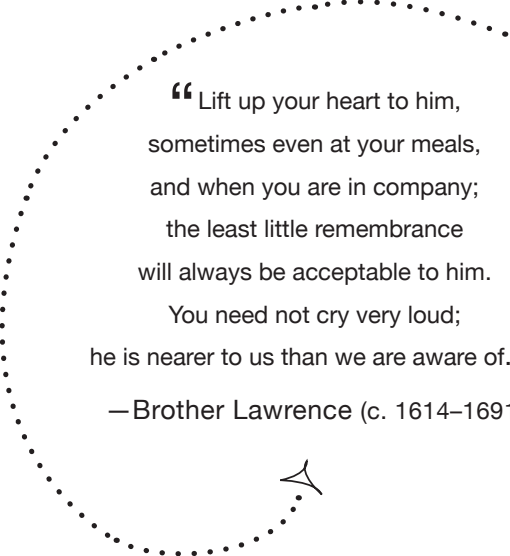
Now you have looked fully at the blemishes as well as the beauty marks. You probably have noted places that have room for improvement. As you look over the chart and indicators, trust that God knows both your tasks as well as your available time. Present your concerns to God as, later in this book, you create a schedule for daily tasks.

Next, after you have reflected on your ideas about housekeeping and identified your personal strengths and weaknesses, consider your emotions related to caring for a home.

What emotions trouble me in relation to my housekeeping?
(Do I feel anger? guilt? hopelessness? envy of other people's homes? frustration?)

Perhaps now you can see the journey in front of you a little more clearly. Ask God to free you from preconceived ideas or emotional blocks you may have, so you can go forward and be open to whatever God has in store for you in this area. Remember, every day is a new beginning!

Week 3 What Clean Means



“Lift up your heart to him,
sometimes even at your meals,
and when you are in company;
the least little remembrance
will always be acceptable to him.
You need not cry very loud;
he is nearer to us than we are aware of.”

—Brother Lawrence (c. 1614–1691)



The Goal

- Create a “Plan of Attack” for the things that bother you most about your home.

Weekly Scripture

- “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.” —Psalm 133:1

WHAT DOES *CLEAN* MEAN, TO YOU AND TO THE OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD? No two people agree totally. But before you can dig in and get that housework done, you need to state clearly what your goals are.

What bothers you the most? Use the chart on page 17 to list the things that you find most annoying and the little jobs you feel you do and redo fifty times a week. Often it's the small things—drawers left open in the bedroom, papers on the kitchen counter—that grate on our nerves and wear us down emotionally. Identifying the trouble spots is the first step to wiping them out.

“Housekeeping ain’t no joke.”

—Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888)

Decide on a Plan of Attack

After many years of being bothered when things around the house weren't straightened up my way, I finally stepped back and thought about my realistic alternatives. That's when I decided I have four possible plans of attack:

one I CAN GIVE IT UP.

If my preference is that the dishwasher is stacked just so, with glasses on top and bowls underneath, can I step back and ask what real difference it makes? Can I let it go—thankful, perhaps, that someone loaded the dishes at all?



two I CAN DO IT MYSELF.

When my children were young, I tried to teach them that a room looks neater when closet doors are shut; however, they often didn't quite close them all the way. Since it bothered only me, I just closed the doors as I moved around the house.

three I CAN ENLIST THE HELP OF THE FAMILY.

We used to have a shower curtain problem. Since we had a large family and only one bathtub, the tub saw frequent use. If the curtain is always left at one end, it eventually gets mold inside the folds. For a long while, I felt as if I was the only one who pulled the curtain across the tub, so I decided it was worth the time and effort to explain the issue to each family member, one by one, and ask her or him to help out. When I told my family why I cared about it, they were willing to do it my way.

four I CAN ASSIGN IT TO SOMEONE ELSE.

The overstuffed kitchen trash bin constantly snuck up on me, so I assigned its removal to my son.

Now, next to each item on your list, under "Plan of Attack," write the number of the **action** you'll take (1, 2, 3, or 4) to solve the problems that annoy you.

You've identified the things that bother you the most in your household, and you've also made clear decisions about how to handle them. You're on your way to a more peaceful state of mind and a more orderly system for running your home!

Next, talk with others in your household. What bothers the people you live with? Sit down with them to hear what they think. In this process, you'll discover that there are annoyances and there are areas of conflict. We encourage you to work on these conflict areas as soon as possible—you'll find that many of them can be solved quickly and easily and will make a big difference in your home.

For example, in many homes laundry is a real bone of contention—it seems that everyone's always running out of clean clothes, and the laundry piles up faster than it gets done. In other homes, there may be conflicts about TV watching or resentment about the toys that end up strewn all over the house. Or there may be disagreements about larger projects—you want to re-do the guest bedroom, but your husband doesn't want to spend the money.

Because we're human, these ordinary conflicts can divide a household and cause tension. Whatever you do, discuss your concerns thoroughly before rushing to make any changes. It's important to be at peace with those you live with. The key is to keep your lines of communication open, both with those you live with and with God. Pray about what to do next, and look for direction. God really does care!

After talking, jot down a few of the strategies you've agreed on together:

Week 4 Everything in Its Place

“Clutter gets in the way of beauty.

If we have too many things and tasks in front of us, we may not notice what is beautiful about them. The contrast is simplicity; by paring away excesses, we make an opening for splendor.”

—Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat,
SpiritualityandPractice.com

The Goal

- Identify storage problems and solutions around your home.

Weekly Scripture

- “Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.” —Psalm 84:4

