

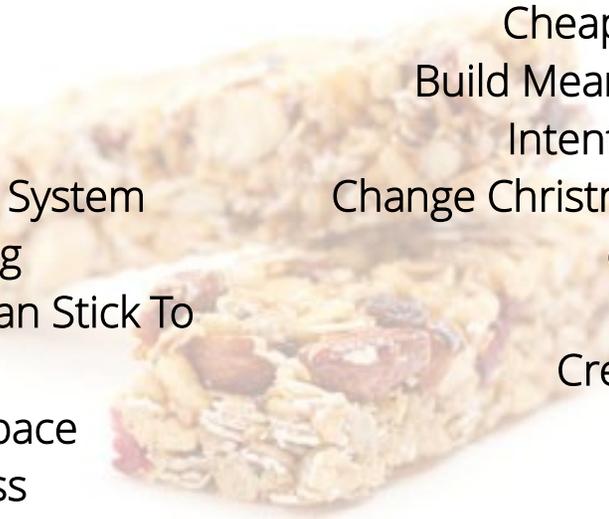
Everyday Crunchy

Simple & frugal ideas for everyday natural wellness



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Introduction

A few years ago, I heard the term crunchy applied to someone and I had no idea what it meant. Crunchy? Did they make a certain sound? Then I learned that it meant crunchy like granola – alternative, weird, hippie even.

Oh. It clicked and that's when I knew. I'm crunchy. Really crunchy. And I love it! See, to me, being crunchy is synonymous with being more intentional. About food, health, everything. As I became more intentional about finances, I got crunchier.

I started eating more food made from scratch. It started as a way to save money (we were getting out of debt), but quickly became something I did for its own sake because I love knowing what's in my food and where it comes from. Doing so also allowed me the opportunity to be more creative in the kitchen, since I wasn't just opening a boxed or canned meal and heating it up.

Soon, things spread into my health. I began learning more about midwifery, nutrition, herbs and essential oils and began being so much more intentional about how I took care of myself and my family. I started on a path to discover my calling soon after because I realized that physical health is only part of the equation. Being more intentional about my finances made me more intentional about my health – mind, body and soul. Thank you, Dave Ramsey, thank you!

So how do you do that? Simple, sustainable baby steps. And the beauty of all of these simple baby steps? Savings! The crunchier I get, the more money I save, because I'm not spending a lot of money on healthcare costs or pre-packaged "health" food. There's so much to gain from being more intentional. It's good to be crunchy every day!

Everyday Crunchy offers 30 ideas for becoming more intentional—about your finances, relationships, health and impact on the world. It's all about making natural wellness a part of everyday life. So pour a cup of tea, get cozy and dig in. Enjoy!

1. DIY Cleaners

As I became more frugal, I quickly realized that the cleaners I had been buying at the store were pretty costly. So I began researching ways to make my own. While I was researching, I learned that many commercial cleaners are full of toxic chemicals that are dangerous for us to breathe or get on our skin. Ones that aren't are even more expensive.

Now, DIY is my new motto and it applies to a lot of things in our house, including cleaners. Many of the ingredients can be combined in different ways to make different cleaners.

Borax—A disinfectant that kills germs, bacteria and fungi. Also deodorizes. Common ingredient in natural cleaners.

Washing soda—Neutralizes and eliminates odors. Degreases and removes stain. We use it in our laundry detergent.

Baking soda—Scrubs, whitens, deodorizes and cuts grease. We use it for cleaning and as shampoo.

Vinegar—Kills germs, cuts grease, deodorizes. Used in many cleaning recipes and as hair conditioner.

Essential oils—Many essential oils are antibacterial, antifungal, antibiotic and/or antiviral. My favorites for cleaning are lemon, eucalyptus, lavender and melaleuca.

Castile soap—This is a vegetable-based soap with many uses. We buy bulk liquid castile soap and use it for mopping, body wash and in several cleaner recipes. Bar soap is grated and used in our laundry detergent.

To find cleaning recipes, check out one of my favorite sites, [diyNatural](http://diyNatural.com). They have several free recipes posted, as well as a book full of natural cleaning recipes.



2. Essential Oils

When I began using essential oils, I thought that they were mainly meant to help things smell good. As I learned more about them, though, I found that many have healing properties and can be used to prevent illness.

I now use essential oils on a regular basis, but there are a few in my home that come out of my cupboard more frequently than others:

Lavender: We use lavender to promote rest and soothe the pain of burns. I also add it to my insect repellent to keep bugs off our skin and garden.

Peppermint: I use this oil for upset stomachs and headaches. It's also great added to honey simple syrup.

Lemon: This oil gets used a lot in our cleaning products. I also enjoy cooking with it and diffusing it in the air.

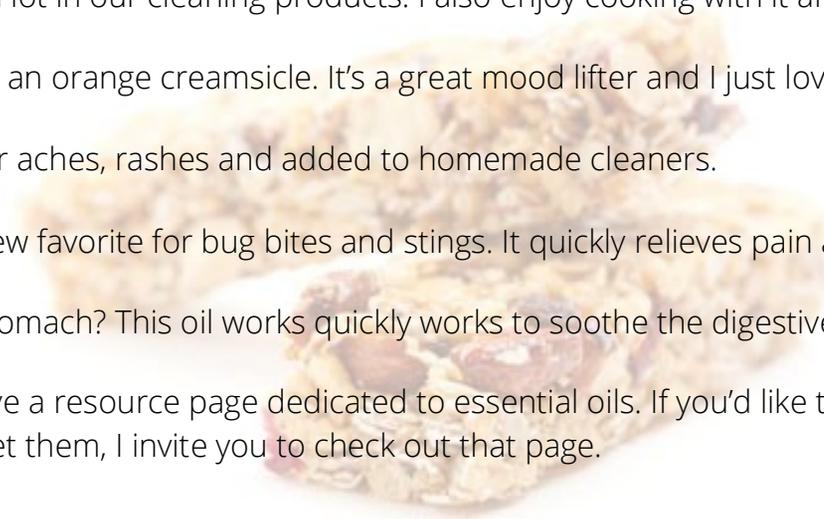
Citrus bliss: This smells like an orange creamsicle. It's a great mood lifter and I just love putting it on my skin.

Melaleuca: I use this for ear aches, rashes and added to homemade cleaners.

Frankincense: This is my new favorite for bug bites and stings. It quickly relieves pain and itching.

DigestZen: Got an upset stomach? This oil works quickly works to soothe the digestive system.

At ShalomMama.com, I have a resource page dedicated to essential oils. If you'd like to learn more about using essential oils and where to get them, I invite you to check out that page.



3. Date Night

In the last couple of years, we've made a point to be intentional about spending as much alone time together as we can. One way is by having a few date nights a month. They started out kinda blah—same thing over and over. But as we've gotten more practice, we've found ways to make them more fun. It just took some willingness to:

Explore

Try something new. It can be adventurous or just an activity you've never done together. We've had a blast snowshoeing, hiking, taking a brewery tour and strolling around a vineyard. Explore your city, a nearby town or the outdoors.

Bar Hop

Ok, so that's not exactly what I mean, but it's close. If there's more than one restaurant or pub or outdoor place that you want to go to, why not visit them all? You don't have to stay in one place the entire time.

Get creative

Dates don't have to be just dinner and a movie. Why not make dinner at home and ask a musician friend to come over and play music while you eat? Or hike somewhere and have a picnic?

Plan ... a little

I love spontaneity but I hate the, "What do you want to do? I don't know, what do you want to do" game. Instead, we like to have at least a little bit of our date planned, and if one of us gets a great idea while we're out, we can usually fit it in with what we're already doing. Or we plan to do it next time. Either way, having a rough plan can save you both a lot of frustration.

4. Eat Less Meat

When we started cutting back our budget, one of the first things I did was start buying cheaper meat. Then I started learning about all of the antibiotics and hormones that go into most meat at the grocery store and I knew that I didn't want to feed that to my family. Unfortunately, meat that is free of all that junk is pretty expensive, bulk or not.

Because of that, we've simply been eating less meat. I typically buy a few pounds of ground beef, a few pounds of chicken and a couple of whole chickens each month. Most of our meals are vegetarian, using beans and legumes for protein. When we do use meat in our meals, they usually contain lots of veggies, some gluten-free starches (rice, potatoes) and a little meat. Here's what we like to make:

Fajitas: We can easily stretch chicken by sautéing it with lots of onions, bell peppers and fresh, minced garlic. We like to serve it with beans and rice.

Stir Fry: Thanks to a friend who spent many years in Thailand, I know what the secret sauce is—fish sauce! We mince some fresh garlic into a wok with heated coconut oil, toss in carrots, broccoli, zucchini and cabbage in easy-to-cook chunks and stir fry. Near the end I add some gluten-free soy sauce and a few splashes of fish sauce. We like to serve it with jasmine rice, either plain or egg-fried.

Soup: I like to make soup with fresh chicken stock (we roast a chicken for dinner then use the bones for stock), whatever veggies we have on hand and a little bit of meat. Sometimes I'll throw in rice or potatoes. We like to serve it with fresh bread (gluten-free crackers for me).

Salad: There are so many yummy salads that you can throw together with veggies you have on hand and just a tiny bit of meat. Our current favorite is taco salad.



5. Eat Less Sugar

A few years ago, I made some dietary changes that made a huge impact on my health. I began cooking from scratch, started buying more natural, whole foods and gave up sugar because of its ill effects on health.

Giving up sugar was the hardest task for me. I love sweets. But then I discovered that giving up sugar didn't mean giving up sweets, because there are actually healthy alternatives out there that I can eat in moderation.

Maple Syrup: Pure maple syrup is an excellent natural sweetener, rich in zinc and manganese. But it has the potential to raise your blood sugar, so use it sparingly. It's much sweeter than sugar, so fortunately, a little goes a long way.

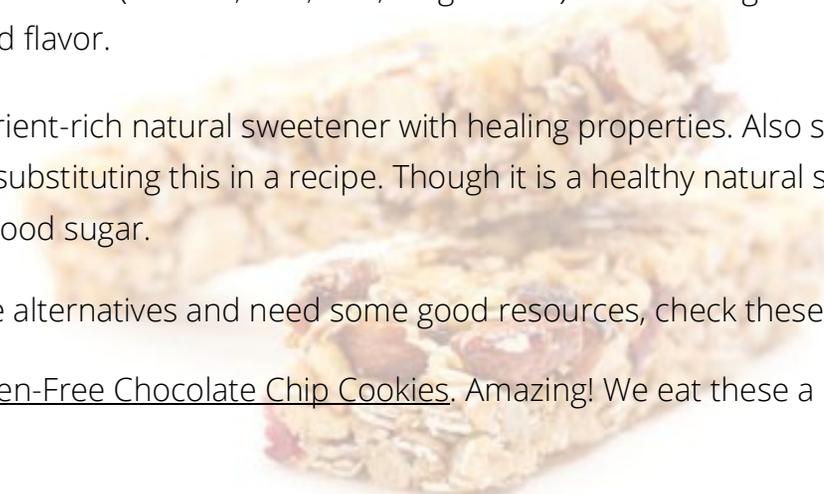
Sucanat: Also sold as Rapadura, Sucanat is pure granulated sugar cane juice. Therefore, it contains the natural occurring vitamins (A,B) and minerals (calcium, iron, zinc, magnesium) from the sugar cane. It also still contains molasses and has a rich color and flavor.

Honey: Raw honey is a nutrient-rich natural sweetener with healing properties. Also sweeter than sugar, less honey needs to be used if you're substituting this in a recipe. Though it is a healthy natural sweetener, use it in moderation because it will raise your blood sugar.

If you're new at using these alternatives and need some good resources, check these two out.

The first is this recipe: [Gluten-Free Chocolate Chip Cookies](#). Amazing! We eat these a lot, with or without chocolate chips.

[Treat Yourself Real Food Desserts](#) by Kate Tietje at Modern Alternative Mama. This is an entire cookbook dedicated to using these alternative sweeteners for desserts.



6. Pray & Meditate

Have you ever tried starting your day quietly, giving thanks and focusing on taking deep breaths? I started doing this recently and have noticed a huge difference in the way my day goes. This is something I've wanted to do for a long time, but always made the "I have four kids, it's impossible" excuse. Finally, I did it and noticed that if I got up before the kids, they weren't an issue. The practice itself only takes 5-10 minutes.

What works best for me is sitting on my yoga mat (I like to practice yoga for a little bit after I'm done) in my bedroom in my "zen corner." That's what I call the tiny corner by my closet that has a small round table and potted fern. It makes me feel peaceful. Then I get comfy, close my eyes and do the following:

Give thanks: I like to start off with gratitude. There is SO much in my life to be thankful for that I can just go on and on. Sometimes, though, I'm tired or grumpy and have a hard time getting started. So I start with simple things: air, food, shelter. It gets me warmed up so I can remember other things to be grateful for.

Breathe: With so much stress and busyness in our lives, it's easy to forget to breathe deeply. How do you normally breathe? Short, shallow breaths or long, deep breaths? I bet they're long and deep now :). I try to focus on taking long, deep breaths during my prayer and meditation to help me feel calm and centered.

Pray for others: Usually I send prayers that are all about things I need in the moment. While this isn't bad, I tend to forget to pray for others. This is a great time to pray for your family, friends, enemies and others around the world.

Pray for yourself: I'm really good at "help me!" prayers. I also tend to be really hard on myself. This is a great time for me to remember that God made me just how he wants me. I try to ask to see myself how He does, for help in giving myself grace and to remember to give myself a little love.

7. Ditch Disposables

While recycling is a very good thing to do, I'm a much bigger fan of re-using. It's a great way to save money since you're no longer throwing money away every month with disposable items. This also lessens the environmental impact even more. Here are a few ideas for replacing disposables:

Diapers: Cloth diapers (and wipes) are easy to use, **chemical-free**, adorable and only cost a one-time investment, saving you hundreds to thousands of dollars since they can be used for more than one child.

Breastpads: Unfortunately, most of what you'll find in stores are disposable pads (that stick to you when they dry. ouch) or the super bulky, "everyone knows you breast feed without having to see your baby" reusable pads. I recommend checking [etsy](#) for some cute, comfortable, more discreet breast pads.

Toilet Paper: Just kidding! Well, not really. If you're into it, you can definitely save money on toilet paper by switching to "family cloth." These are just small washcloths that you use for, well, you know.

Water Bottles: I love mason jars for this (especially cool if you have a Cuppow). For the kids, I bought some stainless steel water bottles for Christmas one year at a huge discount using Groupon. There are lots of options out there.

Napkins and paper towels: Reusable napkins are so much more absorbent and much cheaper in the long run than disposable towels.

Shopping bags: Reusable bags hold lots of stuff. My favorites are the Trader Joes bags and the Flip and Tumble bags that roll into a little ball. Super handy and the company also makes reusable produce bags. The trick is to remember to take them into the store with you...

Feminine products: Let's face it, disposable pads and tampons are extremely wasteful. But what do you use instead? Let me introduce you to [mama cloth](#) and the [moon cup](#). Two fabulous, comfortable alternatives.

8. Rest

During the day, it's easy to get caught up in activities of daily living. Cooking, laundry, potty training accidents, obligations outside the home. Those all could keep me (and anybody, really) busy forever. Breaks are few and far between.

But rest is important. This constant busyness is not how it should be. Rest is important to prevent burnout. Adequate sleep is essential for proper brain functioning. (You know, so you don't put the leftovers away in the cabinet).

But sadly, many moms are lacking both and experiencing all of the grouchy, lazy, forgetful, embarrassing side effects. It must change. It's time to feel rested. For your sake and your family's.

Go to Bed Earlier: I know this sounds simple. And it is. That's why I love it. Turn off the TV (or you know, sell it), shut off the computer (my biggest time-suck) and hit the sheets. I notice that the farther away it is from midnight when I go to sleep, the better I feel the next day.

Practice the Ancient Art of the Siesta: Take a short power-nap in the middle of the day. It doesn't have to be long - twenty minutes is ideal - but it can really help recharge you for the rest of the day. Do this when the kids are napping, if you can.

Take breaks: We're cyclical creatures and our activity should reflect that. A constant state of go-go-go does no good for anyone. Instead, our energy lasts longer and we avoid burnout if we work in bursts and take quick, revitalizing breaks throughout the day.

Ditch Obligations: Look at your current obligations and make a list of the ones that energize you and the ones that drain you. You know what's coming, right? Cut the ones that drain you. They will get over it and find someone who thrives in that role. You don't need to be everything to everyone.

9. Declutter

A few years ago, I made the decision to declutter my home and it changed my life. It saved me so much time on cleaning, reduced my stress and made me realize that possessions don't make me happy. Sounds great, right?

It is! But before you dive into decluttering, there are a few things to know. Things that will save you some time, energy and serious frustration. Before you get started you'll need to:

Have a plan: *Specifically, you must decide what you will be doing with the stuff.* Are you going to sell your crap? Will you be donating most of it? Do you want your friends to come look through it? Is it going up for grabs on Freecycle?

Gather supplies: A couple of boxes and a garbage can. And maybe a cleaning rag. One box can be for stuff that you're donating, the other for stuff you're selling. One really small box can be for maybe stuff. Damaged stuff can go in the garbage or recycling and everything else can be put away in its proper place back in the room.

Set an end time: Set an end time (and let the people coming to get your stuff know what it is). Allot a certain amount of time for decluttering and another bit for *getting rid of the stuff*.

Clean the room: Start decluttering in a clean space whenever possible. *Make the effort to straighten up beforehand to make it easier.* It also reduces the risk of you accidentally getting rid of something you need.

Get a *small holding box*: If for some reason, there's something that you're just not sure about, put it in the small box and put it somewhere out of sight for a while. If it's not worth you going out to the shed or climbing into the attic to get, you can get rid of it. Trust me.

Bring motivation: Good music. A friend. A Pinterest picture of what you want your space to look like. Bring some motivation to keep you moving.

10. Buy in Bulk

Once upon a time, I would go to Costco and spend tons of money on food I didn't need. Then I learned how to shop smarter and can now go to the store and spend less than \$100—on food we use that will last us a month or more. One of the secrets to saving money on food is to buy in bulk.

Bulk bins: Many stores carry bulk bins full of things like nuts, grains, cereals, dried fruits and pastas. Some have even more than that. I love bulk bins for things like oats, salt, nuts, raisins, flour and granola as a special treat. I also get peanut butter and honey in bulk near those bins. (My favorite store ever had bulk bins for everything—maple syrup, olive oil, even tofu— I call it hippie heaven).

Buying clubs: Several small, locally-owned natural food stores offer buying clubs to their customers. This helps people get bulk food at a discount and adds to their food orders, getting them a better discount. Most have a \$50 minimum order, but they're usually placed once a week. Using this just for coconut oil saves me a lot of money.

Membership stores: When used strategically, stores like Costco and Sam's Club can save you a lot of money. Each month, I set aside \$4 for the annual membership fee, so it doesn't sneak up on us. When I shop at Costco, I always go with a list. And there are only certain foods that I'll buy there, ones that are expensive enough elsewhere that it warrants buying the membership. I also save on ink refills and photo printing there.

Farm direct: Want to get fruit at a really great price? Buy it in season from a local farm. Some farms also offer u-pick, allowing you to pick fruit for yourself at an even lower price. We've taken advantage of this for berries and apples.

Wholesale groceries: We have a Cash & Carry in a large town nearby and use it to buy Asian food supplies. In grocery stores, rice noodles are about \$5, there, they cost less than \$1.50. These stores offer bulk food for restaurants, so the savings are really good.

11. Boost Your Immune System

One of the best ways to stay healthy is to prevent illness. You can do this by boosting your immune system, the body's natural defense against illness. Since switching our focus to prevention through immune-system boosting, we've noticed that we are rarely sick. This saves us a lot of money, too, because it also means we rarely use the healthcare system. How do we do this? With some simple, natural solutions:

Rest: Rest is a huge component in a healthy lifestyle. Your body needs plenty of rest in order to heal and repair itself. At night, your body takes advantage of you not doing anything and gets to work, getting things back in order so that you'll feel better. Rest is important during the day, too. That's because we need to rest periodically to recharge and function at full capacity.

Avoid sugar: Sugar is devoid of nutrients, causing a nutrient deficit in our bodies when we eat it. Healthy foods contain nutrients, vitamins, minerals, that help your body to digest it. Foods without these nutrients, like bleached white sugar, pull from your body's nutrient stores in order to be digested. This puts your body at a deficit, leaving it prone to illness.

Garlic: Garlic reduces cholesterol, helps lower blood pressure, prevents cancer and successfully treats bronchial and pulmonary disorders. It also boosts the immune system response and fights infections. Cooking with garlic is easily done and can be a preventative measure against illness. However, boiled garlic and garlic heated to above 130 degrees has greatly reduced healing properties.

Astragalus root: Astragalus is a Chinese herb often used to boost the immune system and combat cancer. Research has shown that astragalus reduces the intensity and frequency of the common cold. It also increases white blood cells and stimulates T-cells, helping to return the immune systems of cancer patients to a healthy state. Take it in a capsule, tincture or glycerite, or simply add it to soup.

12. Stop Shopping

After my initial decluttering session in 2009 (where I got rid of half of our possessions), I discovered that I would have to repeat it every six months or so if I didn't address one major issue. Shopping. Shopping had been such a major part of my life (sad, right?). I would shop if I needed something. I would shop when I was bored. I would shop when I was stressed about not having any money. Seriously, what was I thinking? Shopping was just what I did.

I had hoped that getting rid of everything would solve the problem. Unfortunately, like many things, clutter was just a symptom of something deeper. I had to examine why I was shopping. It forced me to create new habits so that I would fill my time with more fulfilling, meaningful hobbies. And I had to learn how to shop all over again:

Now, I have guidelines that I try to stick to when I have a need for something. They're simple and effective and have really diminished the amount of stuff that comes into my home.

Go without: If I decide that I need something now, I make myself wait. I give myself a week to cool off from that initial desire to see if it's truly a need. Many times, it isn't, so I don't buy anything.

Find it used: If it turns out that I do need it, I try to find it used. This usually entails a post on Facebook or an email asking my friends if they're getting rid of what I need. If they don't, I search Craigslist or go to a few thrift stores. (Sometimes, someone will have the item and I can just borrow it when I need it. Win.)

Go without ... again: If it appears that I'm going to have to suck it up and buy it new, I'll wait it out a little longer. Seriously, I really don't want anything coming into my house that I'm just going to get rid of in a couple months. And I'm not wasting all my time thinking about it, either.

Buy it new: When I decide that I just have to have it, I'll go to buy it. Thankfully, it can usually be found at a place that we have a gift card to (thanks Ian's dad) and we can get it free.

13. Create a Budget You Can Stick To

Deciding to get out of debt was the catalyst for our crunchy lifestyle. The first step we had to make? Creating a budget. *It got a lot easier when we realized that it's not meant to restrict us forever, but to offer us boundaries so that we could enjoy more freedom in the future.* Still, learning to stick to a budget was difficult at first. Here are some ideas we used to help make it easier:

Goals: Why are you setting a budget in the first place? To get out of debt? To have more money to give and save? To live more simply? All of these are awesome goals. Put these goals somewhere you can see them so that you know why you're putting in this extra work and sacrifice.

Break big goals down into smaller, more attainable goals. When you reach one, celebrate. Within your budget, of course.

Fun Money: This is essential to staying on your budget. Creating a budget without fun money is like creating a budget without food money. It's unrealistic and will only set you up for failure. Instead, figure out what you can live with and stick to it. Frankly, we're still working on this one and it's been anywhere from \$35 - \$75 per month.

Cheap Ideas: This is a lifestyle change, there's no way around it. But it's a good lifestyle change. With it, I highly suggest finding more creative ways to stretch your budget. Make a list of fun things that you can do that require little to no money. Chances are, there are several that you've never thought of before. Ask friends and family for suggestions if you're having a hard time thinking of things.

Track Progress: Keeping track of how far you've gotten is a great way to motivate you to continued success. What good is a budget if you can't actually see that it's helping you? Setting those goals I mentioned earlier is a great way for you to look at where you started see how far you've come.

14. Clean Less

Keeping my house in order is essential for my sanity. Clutter makes me feel really anxious and I can't relax with a mess around me. Thankfully, I've discovered some simple ways to keep my house in a clean-enough state without spending all of my time picking up messes:

Declutter: The number one way to spend less time cleaning. The less stuff you have, the less you have to clean. You may be nodding your head in enthusiastic agreement, and if you are, proceed to number 2. If not, maybe it's time to get rid of some stuff. Like the toys the kids never play with or your second set of dishes or the clothes in your closet that you never wear.

Get laser-focused: If I know that I need to get something done and I only have a certain amount of time to do it in, I zoom through it with laser focus. And then I wonder why I don't do that everyday... This is great when it comes to cleaning (especially if you've done the decluttering part). Some people call this White Tornado as a fun way to motivate the kids to clean up.

Pick a certain amount of time (a time crunch is a good motivator (we do 30 min) and get to work. Upbeat music helps a lot, too, and makes it more fun. When time is up, the dishes have been done, floors and counters cleaned and the rest of the house has been straightened. Then there's plenty of time to hang out, watch a movie and read stories before bed.

Get help: Our focus lately has been on teaching the kids how to help around the house. And we've found something interesting: *when we let them do the chores they like to do, they're much more willing to help out.* So rather than trying to force them to do everything, we're letting them work in their strengths. Win for everyone!

It took a few training sessions, but we have helpers who actually like folding and putting away laundry (most of it), cleaning the toilets (oh thank goodness) and washing the dishes (especially Isaiah who usually ends up soaked).

15. Create Sacred Space

I mentioned before that I have a zen corner in my bedroom, made up of only a small table and a potted fern. Before I did some re-arranging, my zen place was my office. It had minimal furniture, a few peaceful pictures and space for me to do yoga and pray. I love having little sanctuaries in my home.

Why was I so intentional about creating little places of refuge? Because, frankly, they keep me from being a total spaz. I need a place I can retreat to quickly when I'm feeling tense and need a break (sometimes, my kids do make me a little crazy). Creating that sacred space in a small corner of my home makes it easy to get to and makes me feel peaceful when I look at it. In addition to creating a sacred space, I also had to create some rules around that space:

Clutter-free: Clutter makes me super anxious. I have to make sure my sacred space is kept clear of things like papers, toys and clothing. Otherwise, it's no longer a refuge; it's just another place that's been attacked by chaos. Do your best to keep your sacred space free of things that don't make you feel peaceful.

Minimal stuff: Another thing to remember is to use minimal stuff. If you incorporate everything that makes you feel peaceful, you'll soon find that your sacred space has become cluttered. Not so peaceful. Instead, choose one or two things—some art, a plant, a chair, a pillow—to make your place feel cozy.

Nature: There's something about nature that makes me feel so alive. I want to invite that feeling into my sacred space so I make sure to incorporate some aspect of nature. Plants are great for this—one or two small potted plants or a vase of flowers. Paintings or photographs of nature can also help calm you.



16. Simplify Fitness

I live being active. But the truth is, I tend to be lazy. If it's not fun or simple, I'll find any excuse not to do it. Thankfully, I've found several ways to make fitness a regular thing in my life:

Make fitness part of everyday life: Walking. Hiking. Playing outside with your kids. These are all enjoyable and they burn calories. Go on leisurely bike rides with your family. Get used to moving your body and enjoying it. You don't have to feel like you're about to die after every workout to get fit.

Don't do this alone: When Ian and I started working out together and making fitness a bigger priority, we started having a lot more fun. And we both stuck to it. Our dates got more active with hikes and snowshoeing and long walks. We're also reaping the benefits in the bedroom – I feel so confident about my body now, which he loves.

Do stuff you love: The chances of sticking to something, no matter how awesome the program is, are dismal if you can't stand it. Being active should be fun. Choose activities that you love doing. For instance, I have a great time with kickboxing. So I tend to choose kickboxing workouts or make up my own using kickboxing moves. Yes, I am a nerd like that.

You don't have to invest a lot of money: I've had numerous gym memberships. They usually did nothing more than drain my pocket book. My workouts now consist of yoga, youtube videos and lots of pushups and squats. I usually use my own body weight, but I also have a set of dumbbells and a resistance band. That's it. I even workout bare-foot most of the time. Fancy clothing and equipment just isn't necessary.

17. Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude

You may not be where you want to be, but I'm willing to bet that there are many things in your life that you are thankful for. It's hard to feel down with an incredibly grateful heart.

One of the most effective ways for lifting your mood is to be grateful. If you're in a bad mood because your husband lost \$50 of gas money that you really needed (I'm not bitter, really...we eventually found it), and you just can't say thank you for him right now, then start small.

You're grateful for air, right? And food? Like bacon, maybe? Oh yeah. What about puppies or miniature ponies. Ah, yes, be grateful for those. And babies, definitely be grateful for wonderful little babies.

Give thanks for the small stuff and then you'll feel that little shift in your heart toward forgiveness. Now you can give thanks for your partner. And those kids. Open up the floodgates of gratefulness.

Give thanks for it all and relish in the joy that you feel as a result. Cultivating this habit will prepare you for the day when you have achieved what you are aiming for. There will be even more to be grateful for then. An open and grateful heart invites success.

Action step: Find a small stone to carry in your pocket. Every time you stick your hand in your pocket and feel this, give thanks for something. Feeling that stone will help cement the new habit and put you in a constant state of gratefulness. (If you find yourself frequently wearing clothing sans pockets, wear a necklace with some kind of pendant to remind you. I have used not having pockets as an excuse to ignore this before. No bueno.)

18. Create

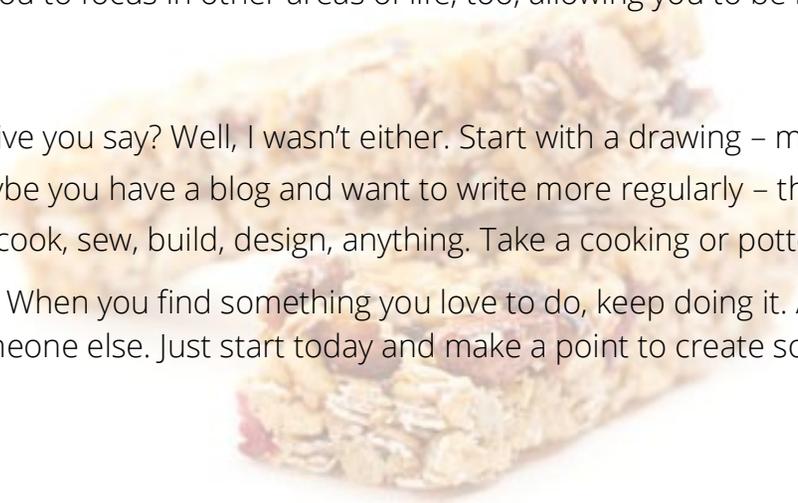
Creativity is a wonderful thing. The more creative you are, the more creative you become. When you intentionally apply your creativity every day, you find that it becomes easier and easier to do. And what good does that do? It opens your brain up to more creative solutions. You begin looking at things and thinking, "Hmmm, I think there is a better way."

Creating on a consistent basis will also help your focus. Have you ever noticed how hard it is to check your email or read a new website without jumping over to Facebook and then another website? When you create something that you really enjoy, be it writing, painting or making something with your hands, you naturally focus on what you are doing because you love it.

Creating this habit will help you to focus in other areas of life, too, allowing you to be more productive and less frazzled.

Action Step: You're not creative you say? Well, I wasn't either. Start with a drawing – my favorite is sketching a layout of my tiny dream house. Maybe you have a blog and want to write more regularly – this could be a profitable habit. Or you could paint, crochet, cook, sew, build, design, anything. Take a cooking or pottery class.

The possibilities are endless. When you find something you love to do, keep doing it. And then find a way to use your creativity to benefit someone else. Just start today and make a point to create something every day, no matter how small.



19. Have More Fun with Your Spouse

After nine years of marriage and a ton of bumps in the road, I can honestly say that marriage can be fun, exciting and deeply fulfilling. And it happens by simple, intentional actions. Here are some of my favorite ideas for having more fun in your relationship:

Sock wrestle. Who can get the other person's socks off first? A huge thanks to our friends Megan and Justin for this fun game. Warning: you will laugh A LOT. Try not to pee your pants.

Hide and seek. The kids found this pretty purple rock and were convinced that I should love it. Ian decided to use it for a game. He hides it in my pocket when I'm completely distracted, and waits until I find it. He can usually tell by the huge grin on my face when I find it. Then I try to hide it in his pocket. Simple. Fun. Reminds me that I'm blessed.

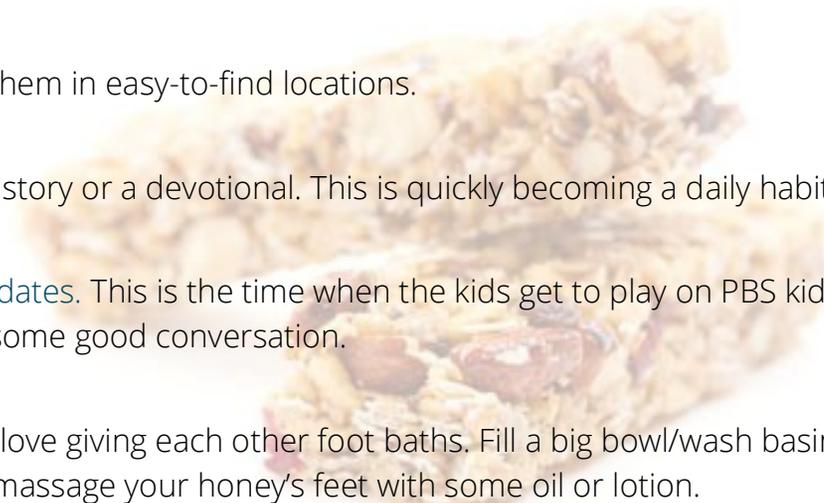
Write love notes. And hide them in easy-to-find locations.

Read to each other. A good story or a devotional. This is quickly becoming a daily habit that I really enjoy.

Have mid-afternoon coffee dates. This is the time when the kids get to play on PBS kids for thirty minutes. Brew some goodness and enjoy some good conversation.

Wash each other's feet. We love giving each other foot baths. Fill a big bowl/wash basin with warm water and add essential oils if you like. Then massage your honey's feet with some oil or lotion.

Find more ideas [here](#).



20. Avoid Processed Food.

My definition of processed food is anything that's previously prepared, (even organic stuff). Frozen pizzas, cookies, Jif (there is so much more than peanuts going on in there). Many processed foods have also been refined – bleached or stripped of nutrients – and then are fortified with artificial vitamins and minerals.

Real food eventually rots. It has a life-cycle. Foods are best purchased as close to their original state as possible. Processed food doesn't go bad. Thanks to preservatives that increase shelf life, you can eat packaged cereal for years after its "best if used by" date. It just tastes a little stale. Processed foods are full of harmful ingredients - all stuff that's meant to make it "safer", last longer and taste irresistible. But guess what? It's so, so bad for your body.

MSG: Research shows that MSG is an excitotoxin, meaning it stimulates, or excites, the neurons in your brain *to death*. At low doses, the neurons themselves won't die, but the synapses linking them together will. (Also bad news).

MSG doesn't just go by mono-sodium glutamate. In fact, this addictive, flavor-enhancing food-additive has several other names: Textured protein; Autolyzed yeast; Yeast extract; Yeast food; Glutamate; Glutamic acid; Autolyzed plant protein; Sodium caseinate; Calcium caseinate; Hydrolyzed protein (in vaccines); Hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP); Hydrolyzed plant protein (HPP); Soy protein extract; Natural flavors.

High Fructose Corn Syrup: Unlike glucose, which is broken down in your gut, fructose is broken down in the liver. Duke University researcher, Manal Abdelmalek, *"found that increased consumption of high fructose corn syrup was associated with scarring in the liver, or fibrosis, among patients with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease."* Her latest research also links high-fructose corn syrup to the progression of liver injury.

Sugar: When sugar is made, the sugar cane is ground and bleached, leaving nothing but granular sweetness. When you eat it, the body must pull from its own energy stores to process the sugar, because it has none, leaving your body temporarily depleted, especially if you have a habit of eating junk food. This hit to the immune system leaves your guard down for up to four hours, leaving you prone to illness.

21. Take a Time-Out

Regular breaks are crucial to my functioning as a caring, competent mother. Without them, I quickly become grumpy, resentful and lose all desire to be creative. My husband realizes this and makes sure that I get time-outs on a regular basis to recharge.

When I first started taking “time-outs”, I mostly shopped. But I found that I came back without any sense of fulfillment. *It made me desperate for my next outing because I wasn't taking the time to truly recharge.* So, for those of you who don't know what to do with yourself when you aren't doing the mommy thing, here are a few ideas:

Take a Journal: Scribbling things down on paper helps me to sort through what I'm feeling – whether I'm overwhelmed by things at home or jotting down ideas for something exciting – it's helpful for me to put it on paper.

Invite a Friend: We're relational people and I know that there are times when I'm just desperate for someone to talk to.

Enjoy Nature: Take a walk in a park. Sip a cup of tea on a patio overlooking a river. Go hiking on a wooded trail. The possibilities are endless. Taking the time to be in nature is a great way to wind down and clear your mind.

Get Inspired: I love being inspired. And I love that I can be inspired in so many ways. Next time you have time to yourself; make a point to bring along something that will inspire you – a great story, motivational non-fiction, a podcast, beautiful music. Go to a coffee shop, order something tasty, sit and enjoy.

Do Nothing: Sometimes the best thing to do is nothing. There is nothing wrong with spending your alone time at home – as long as you don't do any cleaning! Ask your husband to take the kids to a park or a friend's house and use the time to take a nap or have a long, hot bath. I give you permission to rest.

22. Green Your Kitchen

Over the past few years, I've made lots of changes in my home to cut my budget and make it more eco-friendly. Like most gradual changes, I'm pretty used to what I've done and it all seems so normal to me now. So when someone asks me how to make their home more green, I have to think on it a while. Thankfully, I don't have to ponder for too long, because as I look around my kitchen, green ideas jump out at me from everywhere:

Use glass jars for storage: Gallon-size jars are great for storing bulk items, homemade stock and home-brewed kombucha. Quart-size jars come in handy for other pantry items as well as many leftover foods. The

Use your own cleaning solution: Store-bought cleaners are full of toxic chemicals. "Green" cleaning products usually aren't, but you can easily make them yourself, minus the expensive price tag and plastic container. Here's an [easy](#) recipe that'll clean your counters without giving you a nasty headache.

Use your dish towels instead of paper towels: Instead of drying our hands on paper towels, we use the dish towels that we were given when we got married. For wiping up messes, we use a dish cloth.

Make your own dishwashing detergent: It was going to be handwash your dishes, but I know a lot of people just aren't down with that. Yet... Even though we use our dishwasher as a drying rack, we still run it about twice a month to keep it from getting nasty. When we do, we use our [homemade dishwashing detergent](#).

Reduce food waste: Turns out, our kids were wasting a lot of food so I started giving them smaller portions. I also try to plan a menu that has a lot of foods I know they love. Meal planning is a great way to make a plan for those leftovers and to keep you from buying foods you won't eat.

Reuse plastic storage bags: We've been reusing the same bags, oh, forever. We just wash them in soap and water with our other dishes. My windowsill aloe vera plant is the perfect drying rack for them.

23. Siesta

One year, my family went on vacation to Mexico to visit family and hang out. We were out shopping after lunch one day and I noticed something weird – almost all of the shops were closed. Confused, I asked my dad about it. He shrugged his shoulders and said, “It’s siesta time. Around here, they take time in the afternoons to rest.”

It was a foreign concept to me at the time. Now? I think it’s time to get back to my roots by practicing the ancient art of the siesta.

As I’m sure you’ve guessed, taking care of four young kids can be exhausting. Add to that cleaning, learning and a business, and there are times I find myself in a half-asleep stupor by noon. You know, eyelids drooping, chin slack and a one-word response to any question. I do that look really well.

Naturally, I look for any opportunity to take a nap be more intentional about how I spend my time, so I’ve been thinking about implementing a siesta time lately. It’s great for a number of reasons:

Re-energizing: Taking breaks throughout the day is one of the best ways to re-energize yourself. I’ve tried time and again to push past the feeling that I should rest, only to be met with an “I just can’t do anymore” wall in the middle of the day. Resting periodically prevents that. It also keeps you from getting grouchy. Not that I ever get grouchy...

Maximizing productivity: It’s hard to be productive when you hit a wall. But when you alternate between activity and rest, it’s easy to get a lot done. For instance, I try to think of it like this: “If I’m super focused for an hour, then I can curl up with a cup of tea for 15 minutes without feeling guilty.”

Just being: We tend to get so busy with everyday things. Teaching kids. Cleaning house. Cooking. Creating. Catching up on Facebook. How often are we encouraged to just be? Not often enough, I think.

24. Simple Faith

I've simplified so much in my life and my faith is no exception. It's a little sad, because my faith used to be so simple and fulfilling. Thankfully, through introspection and prayer, I am grateful to say that there is now a connection between my heart and head. Yes, there is still a battle that takes place where I struggle with past beliefs, but my faith is becoming a stronger version of the simple beauty it used to be. Faith does not grow through spending one day a week in church. It takes daily action:

Pray Throughout the Day: Praying throughout my day kept me connected to God in a way that following rules couldn't. It comforts me, gives me strength and lifts my burden for feeling like I need to be perfect at everything.

Practice Gratitude: *Find things in your life to be grateful for and give thanks often.* Blessings abound all around us and it is much better to focus on them than anything negative.

Make it About Relationship, Not Rules: Any relationship must be approached intentionally – pursuing the person, getting to know them and continuing to discover more about them – it's the same here.

Serve Others: Take the focus off yourself and take care of someone else. Giving your time to others helps take your mind off your own problems and shift your perspective. When possible, let your kids see you in action. Better yet, let them join you.

Live Out Your Beliefs, Simply: If you believe that loving others is important and you talk about it at great length without doing anything, then it really isn't a belief. It's a delusion. And I'm just as guilty of doing that.

Turn your beliefs into actions in simple ways: Loving others doesn't have to be complicated: Send an encouraging letter. Help your neighbor plant their garden. Take a new mom a meal.

The options are endless. You can live what you believe. *Just act.*

25. Cheap Entertainment

Over the years, we've learned how to spend less and less money on entertainment. While we love going to our favorite pub on a date (which we budget for), there are lots of other things we do that cost little to no money.

Enjoy the outdoors: Hike, walk, swim, play together. Outside.

Family game night: Swap with other families every month if you get tired of what you've got.

Redbox or Netflix: Our computer is our TV so we stream movies with Netflix. When we have time to watch movies. Or I use the free code I get once a month to get a movie at Redbox. Just remember to take it back on time so it stays free...

Dinner and a movie...at the same time: We have a McMenamins nearby that offers this awesome luxury. Dinner is pretty inexpensive, movie admittance is \$3 and they have our favorite beer. Win-win-win.

Get pampered at home: Ask a culinary student to make you an awesome dinner using ingredients you have on hand (buy ones that you need). My brother is in culinary school and he did this for our anniversary. Holy yum. He even cleaned up.

Swap babysitting: We swap child care (even overnight!) with our awesome friends a few times a month so we can go on kid-free dates.

Go festing: As in festivals with free admission and music. Take your own food.

Enjoy free days: Museums and zoos often have free admission days. If you can handle the crowds, pack a picnic lunch and hit them up.



26. Build Meaningful Relationships

Relationships are a crucial part of a life of purpose, which is why I've become so intentional about building meaningful relationships. I have to admit, though, it's challenging. I'm naturally pretty quiet. Ok, painfully shy and introverted. But I'm done with that. If I could come out of my shell, there was no reason why I couldn't enjoy the beautiful abundance that is a life full of meaningful relationships. And you can, too. It just takes a little intentional action:

Decide who: Who do you want to be friends with? I know this sounds weird, but think about it. Who do you normally mesh really well with? That's not to say you can't develop friendships with people who are different than that "ideal" but if you want to make new friends, it helps to know what you're looking for.

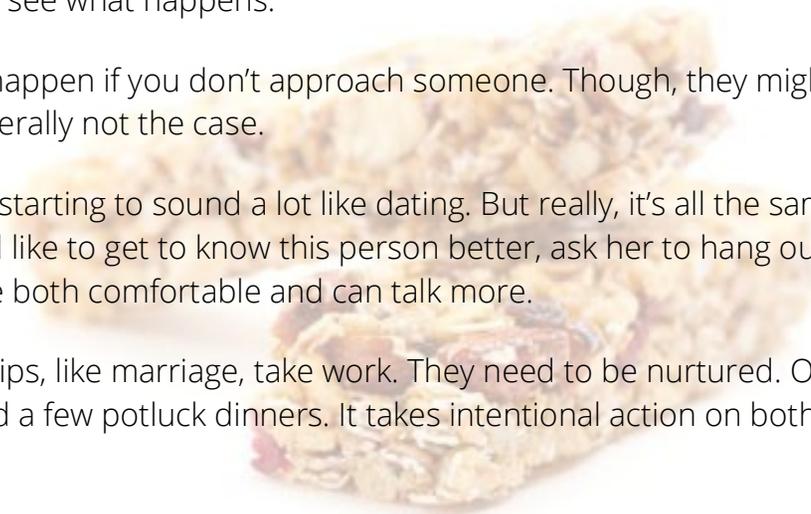
Find them: Ok, this is why you need to know who you're looking for, because that will help you find them. Are they taking their kiddos to library story time? Or are they hanging out at farmers markets or a local coffee shop? Make a point to hang out there and see what happens.

Say hello: Yep, nothing will happen if you don't approach someone. Though, they might approach you (like Megan approached me), this is generally not the case.

Extend an invitation: This is starting to sound a lot like dating. But really, it's all the same. If you say hello and chat a bit and think that you would like to get to know this person better, ask her to hang out for coffee. Or go to the park. Or some place where you're both comfortable and can talk more.

Keep working at it: Friendships, like marriage, take work. They need to be nurtured. One cup of coffee must become ten cups of coffee and a few potluck dinners. It takes intentional action on both sides. Otherwise, they'll just fade away.

Repeat.



27. Intentional Parenting

A few years ago, I realized my dream of being a stay-at-home mom. Recently, though, I realized that why I was at home with my kids, I wasn't spending much time with that. How was that even possible? I was busy. Cooking, cleaning, writing, cleaning—there was just so much to do that I didn't make time for one-on-one fun with them.

So I decided to spend more time with my kids. But then, I had a problem. I didn't know what to do. Playing comes naturally to my husband, but for me, it's hard. Thankfully, I was able to find and implement a lot of ideas that helped me be more intentional as a mom:

Play games/puzzles together

Snuggle

Read stories

Mama & kiddo "coffee" date

Play tag at the park

Dig for worms together (I'd much rather catch frogs, though)

Build forts with the bunk beds

Play hide and seek

Cook together (without stressing about it)

Science experiments (we're particularly fond of baking soda and vinegar)

Photo shoot (my kids love taking pictures, too)

Make a book

Bake cupcakes and share them with neighbors

Have a tea party

Plant a garden

The possibilities are endless.



28. Change Christmas (and other gift-giving occasions)

Ian and I enjoy giving gifts. We do not, however, like the idea of our kids growing up and equating Christmas with lots of presents. We want them to think of Jesus. And giving. And relationship. Therefore, we (I say we, but many times I threw something out and Ian shrugged and said, “sure”) decided that we would change the way gift giving was done at Christmas:

Less gifts: This one was pretty simple to decide on. How many, though? We finally settled on 3, with our basis being the three gifts the wise men presented to Jesus. This was really hard the first year, but it’s getting easier.

Meaningful gifts: In the past, I’ve purchased things for the kids or others simply because I had a specific number of gifts in mind that I wanted to purchase. I didn’t put any thought into the gifts and now that I think of it, they usually weren’t used. Therefore, I like to put some thought and prayer into what gifts to give our loved ones. I look at their needs, hobbies, favorite sports teams, food preferences and go from there. It never hurts to ask them for ideas.

Useful gifts: The people who know exactly what they want and request it, oh, six times, are great. If your father-in-law mentions how much he wants a Home Depot gift card for all of his home improvement projects, get him one. Other suggestions I have on this are gift cards to the college bookstore for students, amazon.com gift cards for Kindle purchases or gift certificates for babysitting for a family member. The important thing is to really think about the recipient and what would bring them the most joy.

Homemade gifts: A few words of advice for making gifts: start early, earlier than you think necessary, keep a list of gifts you’re making and when you want them to be finished by and keep it simple. Use the time that you’re making the gift to think of the recipient and pray for them. And just because something is homemade doesn’t mean it needs to be a scarf or hat or fruitcake. There are so many gifts you can make yourself that can bring delight to a loved one. There are TONS of ideas on Pinterest.

29. Unplug

Thanks to technology, we live in a very connected world. Whenever we want, we can log onto the Internet and shop, learn and connect with our friends and family. I love it. However, it's also really easy to get sucked in. Between cell phones and computers, video games and TV shows, we can easily spend our days "connected" without connecting with anyone at all.

Unplugging on a regular basis gives you a chance to engage in the real world and build on those existing relationships that mean so much to you. Face it, there's nothing like coffee or beer (mocha porter?) in person with a friend. So how do you unplug? Here are a few ideas:

Digital Sabbath: I tried this after a friend's suggestion and enjoyed it. My Digital Sabbath started at sundown on Saturday and ended at sundown on Sunday. Really, this could be any day of the week, but I like making Sunday a day of rest.

Digital Sabbatical: Maybe you need to unplug longer. While a Digital Sabbath is a good thing to do on a regular basis, sometimes it's refreshing to do it longer. Take a Digital Sabbatical for a week or a month. Choose to go without Facebook for 40 days, or vow to stay offline for 2 weeks. It's up to you.

No devices after a certain time: Unplugging at a certain time each day is also a good practice. Maybe it's no devices after 8 pm or nothing before 9 am. You can choose to use that time to pray, meditate, read or connect with your family.

Only at a certain time: Maybe you just need to set apart a certain time of day to plug in. It could be for 30 minutes, an hour or a span of several hours for work-related stuff or reading. Whatever amount of time, it's a great way to make sure you focus on what really needs to be done so you don't get sucked in to hours of mindless surfing.

30. Create a Legacy

Creating a legacy isn't something that's done overnight. It isn't only achieved by the super-rich. Missionaries don't have the market on living a life of meaning and purpose. It's done by the ordinary radicals, the ones who challenge "the way things have always been" and the naysayers.

The people that create legacies do what they were meant to do because the pain of not doing it would be so much greater than the pain of change and growth that comes with pursuing it.

How do you create a legacy?: It helps to know yourself and your passions. To quiet yourself and listen to that still, small voice who whispers to your heart. What makes you come alive? What movies do you watch that fill you with joy? What do you see that stirs such a holy anger that you know that you must do something? What would you do if money were absolutely no object?

Got it? Do it.: I must confess that this is mostly a letter to myself. A "get your butt up off the couch and do something" call to action. I know the answers to those questions. I know that if I had unlimited funds I'd move somewhere that needed me and start an orphanage. I know that I've experienced immeasurable joy at the births of babies and body-quivering rage at the mistreatment of little ones. I know what makes me come alive. But why am I not doing it?

Throw the stupid box away: Maybe the thing you've been called to do just isn't possible in this season of life. That's ok. It just means it's *time to think outside the box* and look for creative, simple ways to do what makes you come alive. Don't put your calling in a box. Boxes lead to excuses and excuses lead to mediocrity. And I refuse to be a model of mediocrity for my children.

You don't have to be rich or famous or holier-than-thou to create a meaningful legacy. You just have to be you – the you that you were created to be. Are you willing to step out of the box?

Thanks for reading!

I hope you enjoyed the book and that you took away some useful tips for making natural wellness part of everyday life. If you liked the book, would you mind taking a minute to share it with your friends? Here's a little blurb you can copy and share on your favorite social media site:

"I just finished Everyday Crunchy by @shalommama. You can get a free copy here <http://shalommama.com/everyday-crunchy>"

I'd love to connect with you. Here are a few places you can find me:

[Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Pinterest](#), [Etsy](#)

Or if you'd just like to send me an email, you can fill out this [form](#).

~Nina ([Shalom Mama](#))

