

BUILDING HOMES IN LIKELY AND UNLIKELY PLACES

Anne Baker

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Women's Meeting

Small pleasures are helpful in life--morning coffee, mid-afternoon chocolate, an occasional pedicure. Not necessary, but helpful, right?

One of my small pleasures in life is a subscription to *Real Simple* magazine. It comes about ten times a year with a stream-lined but eye-catching cover and this wonderful, hope-giving sub-title: *Life made easier*.

I see it and feel as if help is on the way. This month's topic is, "Getting Organized for Fall: Systems in Place, Stress in Check." I glance at the table of contents and wait expectantly for a chance to sit down and read life-changing articles such as:

How cold is it? The season's best cool-weather coats

A month of mini organizing moves: Actionable tasks to help get your place in tip-top shape

The vet will see you now: Your vexing pet questions answered

Will these articles change my life as promised? There's a good chance they will give me some truly helpful tips that I'll be grateful for and there's a reasonable chance that they will at some level make my life easier. At the very least I'll get some up-to-date fashion advice and new recipes to keep me going for the next couple of months.

But the truth is that the real issues in my life aren't ones that *Real Simple* can fix. Although day-to-day logistics play a role, my real work is centered around the lives and well-being of **people**, and there's no "life made easier" plan that can touch my work with them.

What do people need? At the most basic level, we need food, water and shelter. A person could survive for a while with just these foundational needs being met. But what kind of person would that be? One who was deprived of the stuff that makes a person's mind and soul grow and expand, of all that makes a person's life different from an animal's. One whose potential as a human being would be stymied and stilted. It would be a sad life. We all know this.

To thrive in life, we need much more. We need intellectual stimulation. God has made us with brains that do more than control our physical impulses. We can learn to

talk, read, write, reason, invent, plan, analyze in remarkable ways. We benefit immensely from opportunities to learn to think with sophistication.

We need opportunities to be creative and to appreciate the creativity of others. We are made to respond emotionally to the beauty of music and visual art. We are made to create beauty of our own.

And we need healthy relationships with other people. Small people, babies and young children, clearly need other people in their lives to meet their most basic needs. But studies have shown that to thrive babies need not only their physical needs met, but also another person's warmth and affection and love. And really all people of all ages are the same. We all need the love and care of others.

Of course this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to describing human needs. Books have been written and fields of study have devoted themselves to delineating the ideal situation for the education and emotional development of children or to intervening in the lives of adults who have missed out on these advantages.

People do need physical shelters and day-to-day logistics in place. But that is not enough. We need a place where the scope of our needs is addressed. Where there is love, beauty, and intellectual stimulation. Where relationships are solid and growing and where people are committed to us. This what we think of when we think of a home.

I. HOMES IN LIKELY AND UNLIKELY PLACES DEFINED

And this is what I will be referring to today when I speak of building homes. **I will be talking about building and creating environments where people are cared for comprehensively.**

I will be talking about building these homes in both likely and unlikely places. By likely places, I mean in the places where you would expect homes to be built, that is within families.

And by unlikely places, I mean in less obvious places. The variety in this kind of scenario is immense.

One set of scenarios that I have in mind are those that surprise us in life and present us with challenges that make it seem impossible to build the home that we dreamed of. They may include the loss of someone we wanted with us, an exceptionally difficult parenting situation, aloneness in a season that we did not expect to have it, or the presence of long-term or serious illness. For those of you that are for these kind of reasons feeling discouraged, I hope that you can find something tonight to

grab onto that will help to give you faith that God is with you as you build a home in your “unlikely” situation.

The other set of scenarios that I have in mind are those in which home-like relationships are cultivated among people who are not necessarily biologically related. These are situations in which we extend ourselves to others such as:

- *Using your home to extend hospitality to neighbors*
- *Including in your holiday celebrations a person or another family that is alone in some way*
- *Befriending someone who is new to the area*
- *Calling a spontaneous study break and getting to know some new people on your hall*
- *Opening your yard to neighbor children*
- *Hosting a small-group meeting for your church*
- *Inviting a co-worker over for a cookout*
- *Making a meal for your apartment mates*
- *Regularly inviting old and new church friends to your house just for fun*

Now because of the world that we live in today, I do feel like I need to qualify this a bit. In promoting homelike environments among those that are not families, I’m not promoting the mentality that says that families can look any way that we want them to as long as the people love each other. My definition of family comes from what we see in God’s Word, centering around a husband and wife, and the children that God gives to them and the sons- and daughters-in-law and grandchildren, etc. that follow.

But what I also see in God’s Word is that when such families become Christians, they become part of a bigger family, the family of God. In fact, becoming a Christian is all about entering this family.

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellows citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Eph. 2:19)

So, God brings us into His family, the church. And He uses His church in family ways. We extend ourselves to others; we accept others’ extensions of care to us; God meets our needs through others; and He uses us to meet others’ needs. Often the need-meeting is simultaneous.

And He uses us to bring family-type love to those are in need and who do not know Him. We show God’s love to those around us so that they may catch glimpses of

the Savior. We look for opportunities to articulate the gospel and pray that they will be drawn to Him.

The family as we see it described in God's Word is significant. It is significant because it teaches how to relate to our own families. And is significant beyond in demonstrating to us the kind of relationships that others need. God gives us in the family models for how to care for others; models to in many ways imitate as we build homes in "unlikely" situations.

II. WOMEN ARE GIFTED TO BUILD

Now before we dive into some thoughts about the building of homes, I want to take a minute to let you know why I think that God's Word suggests that it is women who are uniquely gifted to to own this home-building burden and to feel a hefty responsibility in creating healthy home environments.

Proverbs 14:1 says,

"The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down." (Prov. 14:1)

This suggests to us that a woman's wisdom or foolishness in how she builds her house has serious consequences.

Proverbs 21:19 says,

"It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman." (Prov. 21:19)

This confirms the impact that we can have on the atmosphere of a home. (If Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.)

Proverbs 31:10-11,

"An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain." (Prov. 31:10-11)

Here we see that the value placed on finding an excellent wife is extremely high.

Proverbs 31 goes on to list the myriad of tasks this woman oversees each day. To name a few, she rises while it is still night and provides food for her household, considers a field and buys it, plants a vineyard, perceives that her merchandise is profitable, opens her hand to the poor, makes sure her household is well-clothed, makes bed coverings for herself, makes and sells linen garments, clothes herself with strength and dignity, opens her mouth with wisdom and kindness, looks well to the ways of her household, inspires respect and love from her children and most of all fears the Lord.

This list indicates that this exemplary woman carries the well-being of her household in her soul and that her focus in all that she does is for its success.

And finally, Titus 2:4-5 tells the older women to teach the younger women to among other things, love their husbands and children and to be self-controlled and kind. This puts emphasis on the relational part of what she does. Paul also wants her to be trained in working at home, emphasizing the significance of her focus there.

We see from these scriptures two things: (1) There are big suggestions made that a woman has a considerable impact on the atmosphere of her home; and (2) it seems clear that the well-being of a woman's household should be a priority for her.

Now, I realize that while for some the context for walking this out is very clear, for others it is not at all clear. You have circumstances in your life which actually make it feel nearly impossible for you to have a home-building focus.

But let me remind you of the way we defined home a few minutes ago: "Building and creating environments where people are cared for comprehensively." This definition does not restrict home building to a certain life situation. It suggests looking at the life the Lord has given you today and looking for the people whom the Lord may be calling you to minister to in a home-building kind of way.

"When God created woman, He created her with sensitivities that most men possess to a lesser degree. We need these sensitivities because we were created to be the life-bearers, the nurturers. That's part of what it means to be a woman.

It's important that women are allowed to bring these womanly qualities into every area of life. The whole fabric of our society needs to be touched by the qualities women possess....The enemy has convinced many women to go so far to the other side that they have modeled themselves on the very men they have criticized. In the process, they have denied their own womanhood."

Dee Jepsen, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

The gifts and natural responses that God has given us as women are needed in the world around us. We don't want to ignore this at any point in our lives.

Additionally, a home is the place that you go back to each day -- whether it's your parents' home, an apartment, a house you're remodeling, or a home you've lived in for twenty years. In other words we all have homes. That means we all have some physical place we are called to build.

Jodi Ware on the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood website says,

"One gift from God we might not think of as a stewardship is that of our homes. Whether we live in a half a dorm room or a multiple-bedroom Colonial, we all live somewhere. And that place is a gift from God, a gift we are to steward well."

Jodi Ware

Married or single, older or younger, in college or retired, we women are designed by God to be active in building homes. This is part of our ministry as women:

"To be single is not to forego the traditional "womanly" pursuits. Whether you live alone or with a husband and children, a house or apartment is still a home that requires "homemaking." And marital status has nothing to do with the desire for warm, comfortable, aesthetically pleasing surroundings. God gave each of us a desire for beauty; it is part of our desire for him, who is loveliness incarnate. Why should a single woman reject that part of her image as a creature of God?" (Cheryl Forbes, RBMW)

"The point is that, married or single, your manhood or your womanhood matters. You dishonor yourself and your Maker if you disregard this profound dimension of your personhood. Our culture is pressing us on almost every side to discount this reality and think of ourselves and each other merely in terms of a set of impersonal competencies and gender-blind personality traits. It has the appearance of promoting justice. But the failure to take into account the profound and complementary differences of masculine and feminine personhood is like assigning a truck driver the task of writing the choreography for two ballet artists"

John Piper, RBMW

In closing this section I want to mention that my experience is that you all are a group who excels at making homes. I know this because of the huge home-building

endeavor that all of us are working on together here at SGC. As I consider the women of our church and what our church would be without us collectively, I am aware of the staggering impact we all have on who we are as a whole. Just as a mother in a family plays an enormous part in defining the personality of a home, so the women in our church are in large part the definition of what it is to experience life together here. Collectively, you all organize, analyze, administrate, decorate, care for, greet, weep, rejoice, scrub, make music, open your homes, inspire, cook, teach, prophecy, pray, rebuke, encourage and the list goes on and on.

Our church could not be what it is without the huge footprint of the women of our church upon it. God has made us a vital part of what He is doing.

I want to transition now to several points about how we build our homes. My hope is that what I touch on here will 1) help us to broaden our view of home building from a list of chores that need to be completed, to a way of living that ministers to people and 2) help us to see the eternal significance of what so many of you are already doing.

So first of all....

III. BUILD HOMES WITH CREATIVITY

The ability to be creative and to appreciate the creativity of God and of other people is a foundational part of our humanity, a quality that confirms that we are made in the image of God.

We live in an era where we are not required to be particularly creative to get through each day. We can buy pre-made food, furniture, clothing, and houses. At any time and in nearly any place we can listen to the music that other people have created. The television and movie industries have taken over as the story-tellers of our age. And computers can create artistic images for us with a perfection that would be hard to imitate.

These advances are blessings to us. They've made art accessible to all of us. They've made it possible for us to incorporate artistic images and expressions into our lives in a wonderful way. And even the least artistic of us are able to be look creative now with a little help from Pinterest!

However, there is a sense in which these advances can take away our motivation to be creative on our own. And this is a loss to us as humans. Our minds, souls, and relationships are in better shape when we are thinking, imagining, critiquing, evaluating, and improving the aesthetic qualities of our life together. Homes should be places where people are not just individually viewing or listening to the results of other peoples'

creativity. Homes are best as places where the people in them are pursuing and encouraging creativity together.

“We are supposed to be representing the Creator who is there, and whom we acknowledge to be there. It is true that all men are created in the image of God, but Christians are supposed to be conscious of that fact, and being conscious of it should recognize the importance of living artistically, aesthetically, and creatively, as creative creatures of the Creator. If we have been created in the image of an Artist, then we should look for expressions of artistry, and be sensitive to beauty, responsive to what has been created for our appreciation.”
Hidden Art (32)

Now, when I look around this room, I am aware that this mindset is not foreign to you! The creativity that bursts forth from this crowd is really staggering. I am aware of women in this room who use photography to produce stunning artwork and memories, who sew beautiful clothing, who draw or paint lovely images, who make furniture, who choose striking colors and paint their own walls, who decorate living spaces artistically to create inviting places for people to live and fellowship in, who bake delicious and comforting food, who sing and play instruments...the list goes on and on.

So I do not think that this idea is one that you all are ignoring. What I really want to do is draw your attention to the fact that these are worthy endeavors, likely good and godly uses of your time, and good stewardship of gifts that God has given you!

And for those of us who at first glance do not feel as though we have one creative bone in our body, let me encourage you that I am not suggesting that professional-quality skills are what is needed to imitate God the Artist in our homes. I am speaking of looking for small and doable opportunities to bring an appreciation for creativity into our home lives. Here are a few ideas. Listen for just one that reminds you of something that might fit into your life:

- Let the children in your life fingerprint
- Plant some flowers
- Bake some bread
- Refinish some furniture
- Take piano lessons
- Sing together
- Go to a free concert together
- Let your teenager re-paint their bedroom
- Sew new curtains
- Re-arrange the furniture

- Take a cooking class
- Have a vegetable garden
- Pick strawberries and make a pie or jam
- Read a book out-loud together
- Build a treehouse
- Sit around the dinner table together discussing world events
- Go to a play together
- Be in a play together
- Commission a budding artist that you know to paint a picture for you
- Commission a bored teenager to build you a bookcase
- Give your son some instruction in photo-editing and graphic arts
- Keep a journal
- Start a bookclub
- Write letters
- Display your photographs
- Make a photobook
- Buy cut flowers at Trader Joe's and put them on your table

Most of these ideas come from living many years now with the women in this room. Be encouraged that this type of activity has eternal significance in developing the minds, souls, and relationships of people. When you live in this way, you set people up well to appreciate and imitate our creative God; to steward well the unique gifting He gives to each of us; to learn that messes, imperfections, practice and hard work, critiques and improvements are part of life together; that quality results don't come without blood, sweat and tears; that people who persevere through a creative endeavor should be commended and encouraged; that the product of such work should be thoughtfully considered and appreciated; that God uniquely gives some people great genius and exceptional ability to create in a way that affects a whole society; and that we are right to admire God's work, evaluating appropriately, but also being aware that there is a wealth of art and ideas to explore and pursue in life. Enough to keep us creating, thinking and learning together for a lifetime.

Next.....we

IV. BUILD HOMES BY HANDING DOWN TRUTH

Now hold that thought. Before we begin this section, I want to tell you about a friend of mine...

My friend works full time to support herself and has an apartment, a dog, and usually a roommate. That in itself is a lot for one person to keep up with. But what I find fascinating about my friend is the way she spends her weekends. One weekend morning I talked to her and she had been with a friend at the ER until 2 AM or so. This was one of her non-Christian friends that she keeps up a current relationship with. This person needed someone with them, and my friend knew that she was the right one to be there that night. Other weekends she'll tell me that she's visiting her own family, maybe for a younger sibling's birthday, or maybe just because she hasn't been there for a while. She works in Children's Ministry at church. And most every weekend she gets together with friends, Christian and non-Christian, to keep those relationships going. Additionally, she has some unique skills that allow her some specific evangelistic opportunities. She is using her own time and money to minister in this capacity.

Okay, now, keep this friend in mind as we head into our next section....

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children." (Deut. 6:4-7).

In this passage parents are instructed first of all to love the Lord themselves, to have the Lord's words written on their own hearts. For the past year and a half our ladies' ministry teachings have been focused on our primary role in life, that of being a Christian, a child of God, a disciple of Christ. This is because we cannot minister to others if we ourselves do not know Christ and are not daily pursuing Him and growing in His ways. When we know Christ ourselves, ministry to others is a natural outflow of our communion with Him. It is not done out of obligation or a sense of earning the approval of God or man. It is done because we love God.

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)

When we are God's children, we love to walk in His ways and do His works.

Secondly, this passage instructs parents to teach the words of the Lord to their children, to talk of them. Most Christians know that providing for the education of one's children is a primary responsibility of Christian parents. Rightfully, parents think hard about their children's educations and work diligently to set each one of them up well to learn and succeed. This is clearly right and good. The challenge, perhaps, is the

comprehensive nature of the education that we need to provide them with. Sometimes in the midst of ensuring that they are educated in way that will allow them to take their places in society as productive adults, we can at some point become lax in articulating to them the words and ways of the Lord.

But the Lord emphatically puts this responsibility upon parents. All during our lives, we are to speak to our children of the Lord, of His Word and of His ways past and present. We are to articulate to them what the Lord has done for us individually and why we trust Him for the future. There are biblical issues that are unclear at first reading, and they need to be discussed. There is application of God's Word that we need to instruct our children in. We need to explain why we worship the way we do, why we attend the church that we do, why we make the lifestyle choices that we do. Don't assume that they understand. Talk to them, explain, articulate, pass on. Over and over and over. At age three, and age eight, at age thirteen, eighteen, and twenty-five. For your first child, your middle children and your last. We cannot lag here. We cannot assume and presume. We must work and work and work.

Edith Schaeffer says this,

"Deut. 4:9-10: 'Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children...' How clear it is. The truth of the existence and the character of God is to be made known to the children and the children's children. We are responsible for our children and for our grandchildren, [and God may give us unique opportunities with] our nieces and nephews and our grandnieces and grandnephews. That they may know what? The wonder of who God is, what God has done, what God has said, and what He has meant to those doing the telling..."

The plea of God is to keep handing down the true truth -- don't miss a generation. He wants people to know; it is to continue to be known. In Psalms 81:13,16 we have the compassionate Words of God which remind us of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem because the people turned away: 'Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways....He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee.'

God's direct Word comes to us -- consider your place in the family as central, not just in this moment of history, but as part of the 'relay.' Don't let a gap come because of you. Don't take the beauty of the family life -- and the reality of

being able to hand down true truth to one more generation -- as a light thing. It is one of the central commands of God"

Edith Schaeffer, What is a Family?

I do hope that positioned securely in the grace of God, we will consider the seriousness of our responsibility in this area...

I also want to talk briefly about the fact that because of the sinful world we live in, we know that this scenario of parents passing on God's truth to their children is a scenario that has not been or is not a reality for many, many people. And I want to draw your attention to the fact that the Bible is all about God intervening in the lives of those of us who were not His people, who were not taught His ways by their parents, and making us into His people. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10). He did this when he called Abraham out of Ur and told him that he would be the father of His people, when He brought Rahab and Ruth into the line of David, when he saved the woman at the well, when he told the story of the Good Samaritan, when he gave Paul the obligation to preach the gospel to the Jews first and also to the barbarians and the Greeks!

So if you hear this exhortation to parents and lament the fact that your own home situation was not or is not what you want it to be, be comforted that you are in good company with those that the Lord saves:

"Then there is a promise which David knew to be true as he sang, 'When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up' (Psalms 27:10). The Lord is family indeed and in the midst of writing about the relay it is important to include the importance of the closeness to the Lord of a single person who is cut off from human family. The Lord puts it this way: 'Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee' (Isaiah 49:15)..."

And it is important for all of us to realize that there are often children and adults in our lives without family that we are called to be family to. The Lord sometimes puts into our lives members of the next generation who do not have someone passing onto them the ways of the Lord, and we end up being the privileged ones to do that. Edith Schaeffer finishes her above encouragement to those without families in this way:

"But one who is alone with the Lord as his family needs to be aware that there are children who have no one to hand them the flag, and needs to spend time communicating with his Father in heaven about whom to hand it on to!"

Edith Schaeffer, What is a Family?

I think that this mentality can be helpful for all of us. We want to be aware of ways in which the Lord may lead us in small or big ways to bring those without families into our own families and into the family of God. Unique, out of the ordinary ways in which we may pass on the baton of God's truth to the next generation.

There are many in this room who have done this in remarkable ways. Lives have been changed eternally because of it.

At this point, I also have in mind my friend that I told you about at the beginning of this section. How does my friend pass on God's truth to the next generation? Well, in many ways. First, she's keeping up relationships with the young people already in her life, her siblings. She doesn't forget their birthdays, she shows up regularly, she shows interest in their lives. Also, she's pursued another opportunity to impact kids through her work in SGC's Children's Ministry.

And, she's remaining faithful to her own peers, also members of a young generation, keeping up her relationships in ways that lend credibility to the gospel message.

Finally, she's pursuing an additional opportunity to share the gospel with adults since the salvation of parents can be the best way to affect the salvation of a child. Is this friend passing on God's truth to the next generation? Not necessarily in the "likely" ways that we think of with a parent/child relationship; but she is in the "unlikely" ways by taking advantage of the variety of relationships and opportunities that God presents her with.

What strikes me about this friend is not how many things she does -- we all differ in our capacities for this type of thing. What strikes me is the priority she puts on the relationships that are in her life today. She doesn't see them as incidental, but as her personal sphere of ministry.

This leads us to our next point...

V. BUILD HOMES BY BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Home is where we all receive our earliest training in how to interact with others. It's the initial 20 year course we all get in human psychology and counseling. It's where we learn to agree or disagree with Paul Tripp's assessment of relationships: Are they or are they not a mess really worth making?

Biblically speaking, I'd say that they are. Our pursuit of God is made manifest in how we love and live with others. 1 John 4:8,

"Anyone who does not love does not know God" (1 Jn. 4:8).

We read about the lives of Old Testament saints and watch the relational sowing and reaping that occurs throughout their lives. We read Paul's instructions to the New Testament churches and see him over and over again advise them on how to love each other.

We also see that God's intention for us in passing on His truth is to be done within the context of the daily relationship we have with the next generation. Going back to Deut. 6 we read:

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

We do not convey God's truth in a one-time setting. But we do it side by side, day by day, year by year. We do it as work and live together at home, as we go places together, as we live life together. This implies that we are doing life together, and that we are doing the work we must do to maintain our relationships.

Now, before we go further in this area, I do want to stop for just a minute. I know that when we talk about relationships, we immediately start to think about the current state of those in our lives. And depending on where we are in life, this can be a painful or discouraging topic. Relationships are alive and fluid; always in process, never complete. I do not want this section to be one that produces condemnation for any of us. But one that just causes us to step back for a minute to consider a couple of areas that can affect our relationships.

*****Be aware that our relationships are covered in God's grace extended to us in redemption. We do not have any hope in our own abilities to love well, but depend completely on God's perfect love to redeem us. 1 John 4:10:**

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10).

His perfect love is what gives us hope.

Yet, as we put our hope in God's perfect love and forgiveness of our sins, we also press on toward growth in godliness. We continue to read and study God's Word and call for grace and help in applying it.

There is one key piece of our godliness that I think has a major impact on the relationships that we build within our homes: Kindness. I chose this because it is mentioned specifically for women. This doesn't mean that other areas are not also very important. But I think that it is noteworthy that when God takes a minute to speak

directly to us as women, He mentions this character quality. He created us, so I trust that He knows us. And His choice of areas to focus on make sense to me in light of what I know of my own relational struggles and in what I think I've seen others walk through.

Proverbs 31 describes the woman who fears the Lord as one who has “the teaching of kindness on her tongue.” And Titus 2:5 includes kindness in the list of what the older women are to teach the younger women. As Christian women, most of us have relationships at the center of our lives. And there is not one relationship of any kind that is not affected by the extent of our kindness in it. The way we speak to those that we interact with regularly really does matter. It is one of the major ways that we either build our homes or tear them down with our own hands (Prov. 14:1).

Which can sometimes seem like a cruel joke. There is probably not one of us here who doesn't feel overwhelmed by the weight of who and what we are responsible for. We live our days trying to figure out how to most efficiently and effectively do the work that we are called to do and how to simultaneously care for the hearts the people God has connected us to. The reality of moving quickly and not treating the people we are moving as if they are a hindrance to us; of getting the day's work done and dinner on the table without plowing over the people we are trying to feed and minister to; and of preserving for the evening any energy to converse with the very ones we care most about is can seem an incongruous one. Yet, it is our reality. God has made us creatures with global awareness of a variety of responsibilities AND the ones most suited to giving people the emotional love and care that they need.

So how do we grow in living our lives kindly? Well, there are many ways to answer that question. But tonight I'm going to answer it from just one angle. I think that it is easier to do our work kindly when we are clear that the whole of what we are doing is exactly what we should be doing: that it is of great importance and significance and that it is work worthy of being our top priority. When we face the multitude of responsibilities that we have as though they are unrelated tasks that must be gotten out of the way so that we can get to the real fun of living, we will day after day feel that we are missing it, living a rather meaningless life, one that does not allow us to have the fun that others have. And will communicate this frustration to the people that are part of our lives.

But when we are clear on God's purpose for us, the variety of tasks that make up our days become connected to one overarching and meaningful purpose, one that spans this life and the prepares us and others for eternity. This sense of unified purpose allows us to face whatever task is next on our list with a consistent conviction of its importance. It provides a platform for peace and joy to characterize our days. And the result is a greater ability to interact with the people in our lives with kindness.

Homes are places where people learn to relate to others. As the ones who in many ways set the tone for the homes we are in, let's pursue growth in godly love and kindness, to make the experience of the people in our homes ones that give them hope, that lead them to believe that in Christ relationships really are "a mess worth making."

VI. BUILDING HOMES IS A WORK WE NEVER FINISH

A home is created when God the artist brings the people in the home together. Most often families begin with God bringing two people together in marriage. This is God's creative work and we rejoice when He does it. The family usually expands with the addition of biological or adopted children. The family grows and matures. Other people are brought into the family -- sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren. Many homes have seasons of welcoming extended family members into their homes: aging mothers and fathers or aunts and uncles, etc. Sometimes a younger adult family member needs a home for a while -- they are welcomed as well. In other seasons a friend or acquaintance needs a home or a family situation. As Christians, we look for these opportunities and meet such needs as we are able. Homes expand, contract, shift, adjust throughout a lifetime. At any given moment, we see our creative God bringing people together. It is God's creative work of art, and not a static one. This work of art shifts and changes throughout lifetimes.

Why is this? *Because homes are made of people.* And people are never finished. Appropriately, children move out of their parents homes. But children never leave their parents lives. In fact, once they leave, they usually bring more people to love and care about. Also, no one person is ever complete. It appears to me that there are great moments of parental accomplishment, watershed moments when life as it was ends and a great shift takes place. But parental love and concern never end. Even good, easy children are never finished products. As long as we are alive we all face new trials and temptations and challenges. Christian parents rightfully pray for their children as long as they are on earth. Christian people care about the people in their lives as long as they both shall live. There is no big relational retirement moment for the people of God.

And so, the work of art that God creates when He creates a family and home shifts and changes throughout a lifetime. My mom loves to always have a current photograph of her family. But you know, her current one is never up-to-date for very long. It's hard to capture this piece of art.

I am glad, though, for her persistence in capturing each year or season of her home and family. Some of our family pictures have friends in them that lived in our home for a while. Some include people who spent holidays with us for a season of their lives. Some show the absence of a child who lived far away for a while. And then the

next shows the happy day when they came back, sometimes bringing someone else with them. Sometimes the picture was taken in faith that the growing relationship with this person would soon become permanent. They next shows the happy settledness of the newly married couple. There is the season when a toddler is being held in place by the desperate grasp of an older sibling or cousin. And then a few years later, that wiggly toddler has grown and is holding onto someone else. Boys become taller than their sisters. People in their 40's become gray. The oldest generation looks a little more fragile. Our losses and hard times are recorded, too... And yet, God is faithful. It is really priceless to be able to in some way capture the movement of this piece of art. It does help us to see the neverending work that God is doing.

The work of art is never complete.

CONCLUSION: THE VIRTUE THAT TIES IT TOGETHER

As we close I want to talk about something that in a way brings it all together. It's self-control, something else that the Lord asks older women to teach to younger women. I think that in order to maintain our focus on the Lord's priorities for us, and to do our work faithfully and with kindness, we must be self-controlled. We just cannot do everything in this life. Now more than ever, the options for us are wide-open. At any and every moment we can engage with the world through technology. And long-term we have life-focus opportunities that woman in previous times would never have dreamed of. To navigate this bombardment of options and opportunities we need to continually come back to the Lord's priorities for us and be sure that all that we're doing, short-term and long-term, fits into the grander scheme for our lives, the call to be God's women and to do the relational and physical work He has designed us to do.

So, I would encourage you to get "*Real Simple*" about your life. As I mentioned before, I there's much about it that I love about this magazine. Its monthly articles take the complexity out of some of life's mysteries such as "What's a good fall potluck dish? How to plan a family vacation peacefully? What products to use on my face from ages 20-80? And how to clean my shower?"

But you know, when it comes to ultimate answers, even this magazine doesn't get simple enough. This year they've been ending every issue with a page called "Life in Full." Each month this article features a particular woman in about six photos that capture the different parts of her day. The captions talk about what her personal desires for her life are and how she manages her life in a way that lets her cram in a little bit of everything to make it all happen. There are some good ideas here, for sure. But the main point of these snapshots of lives, I think, is to let us know that whatever we want, we can have it. The only obstacles involves the schedule.

In actuality, we can't cram in everything. Not if we're ordering our lives according to God's priorities for us. His priorities involve relating to Him and to people significantly and doing the work of establishing homes, for our families, our church, and beyond. That kind of work takes a focus that will eliminate pursuing some of the interests that strike our fancies. Homes that accomplish eternal work take a lifetime of focus, of learning how to love and minister to all those that the Lord brings us. It takes self-control to stay focused, to make sure that our top priorities are protected

But let me assure you, that if you take on this priority, this focus in life, you will not regret it. The people of God do not die lamenting the sacrifices they make for Him. He fills our lives with all that can't be taken away, now and for eternity. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to keep what he cannot lose." When Jim Elliott said this he was putting into his words the idea that Paul conveys in Phil. 3:8: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."

So, consider, what is God's purpose in putting you here on earth? You are His woman, created and redeemed by Him, put here not randomly, but as His servant. You are part of His plan. Search the scriptures, pray that you would know His overarching will for you, and trust Him to reveal the specifics at each twist and turn that life brings. Be in this world, but not of it. Trust Him and be a radical woman, for His glory. Let this sense of purpose undergird you as you go about your daily tasks and love people.

Let me end with another quote by Dee Jepsen: "I frequently remind people to whom I speak that today all of us are one day closer to death than we were yesterday. When faced with our own death, what will be important? The title before our name? Our influence or power? Our great achievements? None of these things will make the slightest difference. What will matter will be the nature of our relationship with the God who made us and of our relationships with others -- with friends, family, even our enemies. That is what will count. And that is what we women are best at--relationships that embody the kind of love the world needs so badly" (Dee Jepsen, RBMW).