



31 DAYS
TO A CLEAN HOUSE
AND A
SATISFIED SOUL

Sarah Mae

- COAUTHOR OF *DESPERATE* -



.....
Having a Martha Home the Mary Way
.....



Having a
Martha Home
the
Mary Way

31 DAYS TO A CLEAN HOUSE
AND A SATISFIED SOUL

— Sarah Mae —



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foreword



THIS BOOK IS HOW I met my best friend. She's the one who wrote it, but five years ago when she released pieces of it as a bit of a pamphlet e-book, I read it for no real reason other than I needed to do something. Cleaning my house was one of the somethings.

You've been there, right? My guess is you're there **RIGHT NOW** since you're holding these pages this very minute. Among the things bidding for my attention at that time in my own life was a request from our church to lead a women's Bible study group. I was in a bit of a dry season, which led me to a really deep conversation with myself that went something like this:

"I'm feeling uninspired right now, and my house is a wreck—a wreck, I tell you! But if I lead a study on cleaning, then I'll actually be forced to follow through with it. Those who lead are forced to do."

If there were a prize for superspiritual reasons for doing things, I would absolutely not have even made it through a preliminary round. But since they asked, and since a friend of mine told me about Sarah's project *31 Days to Clean*, I submitted the class proposal and ordered the book afterward. Uninspired people often don't do their homework.

When I actually downloaded the e-book, I realized that my best-laid plan needed to be adjusted something fierce. I didn't know that e-books are typically not nearly as long as standard printed books, and here I'd just signed up to lead a fourteen-week study. The title alone—*31 Days to Clean*—should have tipped me off that I would come up short on material if I'd actually bothered to do the math. But then again, pertinent things like timing and preplanning weren't exactly on my unmotivated radar.

I freaked out for a day and then figured that since I wasn't inspired, maybe if I asked the Lord, He'd give me a nugget to fill up the rest of the time.

And He did.

I used parts of Sarah Mae's e-book in conjunction with some of my own Bible study on the why behind the Mary and Martha challenges, and something incredible happened in that group.

Women were changed.

What began as a kick in the pants to do the laundry and wipe down the baseboards turned into a refocusing of a roomful of women who had all lost their way somewhere in

the midst of the mundane. The instructions they were reading weren't just a call to action to ruthless purging in hopes of seeing the floor of their closets again—they were an invitation to explore the why and the how together.

I remember thinking to myself in the midst of that study, *If I ever wrote a book and it changed people, I'd sure want to know.*

So even though I didn't know her personally, I e-mailed Sarah Mae just to tell her . . . to encourage her . . . and to let her know that somewhere in the midst of cleaning closets and writing mission statements, a whole group of women unlocked passions for their homes and families and friends—parts of their lives that had collected some cobwebs over the years.

I never expected to hear back from her, but the Lord had plans for this woman and me, and He used this book to start them.

What began as a project to get her own heart in order has now turned into this full book. Over the past several years, Sarah has fine-tuned the projects, missions, and motivations within these pages. She has dug deeper in her soul, and the Lord has unlocked new content that I believe will move you into the experience I had with those women years ago. It's time to get going, girls—grab a friend, grab a hand, and grab a mop—we've got some tidying up to do. We may start clearing off counters and floors, but in the end, I think what we will find is rearranged hearts.

So as you turn these pages and explore the Mary inside of you (the one who lounges at the feet of guests and loves well)

and the Martha (who is on the move and gets stuff done), I think you will find that the cobwebs you most enjoy removing are the ones in your soul.

Logan Wolfram

Author, Speaker, and Host of Allume Ministries

Gentle Homemaking



AN INTRODUCTION

I USED TO THINK that if my home was clean, I was a good homemaker.

Over the years, as I've reflected on my life and have recalled memories of growing up, I've come to the conclusion that it is not a clean house that defines good homemaking, but rather a warm, inviting place that is filled with love.

As a matter of fact, I would prefer to get rid of the word *good* altogether and replace it with *gentle*. I want to cultivate the art of "gentle homemaking," which is the ability to be gentle and kind with ourselves in the process of making and keeping a home while being gentle and kind to those around us.

It's so easy to beat ourselves up as well as cast blame on those closest to us, isn't it? We are quick to condemn ourselves and our efforts when things don't work out the way we envisioned. And once we feel frustrated with ourselves, it's a natural progression to accuse those around us. Our husbands and children can so easily get the brunt of our own feelings of inadequacy. I have often accused myself of being

a homemaking failure. But you know, the only thing those condemning voices do is paralyze us from getting on with our lives, trusting God in our weaknesses, and moving forward in faith.

When we can move forward without the condemnation of our sometimes meager efforts, we can become better, gentler homemakers and lovers of others.

Now as to the actual chaos and practical business of homemaking, I have found that loving others and creating peace happens when there is less mess.

When I can't walk from the bedroom door to my child's bed without stepping on something, there is chaos.

When I walk into the kitchen and it's too messy to make a nutritious meal (who wants to cook in a mess?), my family misses out on a good meal prepared by me.

When I get up in the morning and can't find something to wear because I didn't do laundry *again*, I feel out of sorts and cranky. Or I'm late for an appointment because I have to search high and low for something I can throw on to make me presentable.

The point is, when we have less chaos in the house (via a mess), we have less chaos in our souls, and when we have less chaos in our souls, we have more energy and capacity to love.

How Does a Clean(ish) Home Love Others Well?

Love can be (and usually is) very practical. When I make sure I have clothes for my kids to wear, I have loved them

practically. When I can get into the kitchen and cook good meals, I have loved my family practically. When I can extend a spur-of-the-moment invitation to a friend who needs to talk, and the surroundings are inviting, I have loved her practically.

Can we love our family and others who come into our home if everything is in a jumble? Of course! This book isn't a legalistic, do-exactly-as-I-say-or-else approach because I know firsthand that a messy home doesn't define who we are. I am simply offering possible ways to add more serenity and minimize the disarray in our homes. My goal with this book and with my life is not to worry about being a homemaker who rocks at cleaning, but rather resolve to be a homemaker who is kind and gentle and has a quiet soul and an available home. Maybe you want that as well?

Let's do that; let's journey together in learning how to quiet our souls, love well, and care for our homes practically.

Why Would a Woman Who Doesn't Like Cleaning Write a Book about Cleaning?

Simply because I wanted to encourage women in the life-giving beauty of homemaking without the guilt involved.

There are enough voices out there telling us to "just do it!" I am writing from the perspective of a woman who isn't a natural cleaner, but who wants to persevere in the traditions of homemaking. I do not believe homemaking is a dying art; rather, it is a time-tested skill that when cultivated creates a womb-like environment where life is nourished.

At its heart, *Having a Martha Home the Mary Way* is really about just that—the heart. *It is about releasing any personal guilt and shame you are carrying and embracing the truth that your “good enough” has nothing to do with your cleaning abilities.* Many of us need to hear that we don’t have to get it all together to be good and loving. Our worth begins when we find our identity in the One who says, “By a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14, ESV).

I love the freedom that comes from knowing I am already—from eternity’s perspective—perfect and complete, for all time. I don’t have to do better or be better; I just need to walk faithfully with my God as He molds me.¹ And so do you.

You can keep and care for your home one step at a time, however imperfectly. You wear imperfect flesh, but you have a perfect soul if you know Him. The blood covers the ugly.

If you struggle with maintaining your house, you get overwhelmed, and you wish you had a maid (I’m praying for one for you!), don’t let those feelings define you or get you stuck. Give them to God and walk in His steps as He goes before you.

I’m in this with you, and together, with Him and our hearts set on eternity, we can persevere!

What Does It Mean to Have a Martha House the Mary Way?



SUCH A FUN PLAY on words, isn't it? I wish it were my idea but I can't take the credit.

Before I wrote the first edition of this book, I had taken readers through a 31 Days to Clean blog series in which the biblical sisters Mary and Martha were not included. It was just me, offering encouragement to my readers before getting to the business of cleaning. However, when I decided to turn the blog series into an e-book, I asked my readers to help me come up with a subtitle. Beth Buster¹ brilliantly came up with *Having a Martha House the Mary Way*.

In the original e-book, I had meshed everything together but Christin Slade² encouraged me to make the Mary and Martha challenges separate from the main entry. These generous women helped shape the book into the inspiring resource you are holding in your hands. *Thank you both so much!*

And now, that subtitle (slightly tweaked) has become the title of this updated edition.

The Story of Mary and Martha

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." LUKE 10:38-42, ESV

As I have studied the interactions between Martha and Mary, I have come not only to appreciate differences in personalities, but also to love the differences that make all of us who we are.

Some of us relate to Martha, the industrious, hardworking woman who is taking care of business, sometimes to the detriment of relationships. Some of us relate to Mary, the woman who would rather sit and be with the company than help with the work. There are admirable things about both of these women, but as we examine the story more closely, we can see how wise Mary's choices were. Let's look together.

Just for fun I decided to profile Mary and Martha, based on the accounts where they are mentioned—in Luke 10

above as well as John 11:1-44 and John 12:1-8. The profiles I've drawn up, though based on what we're told in the Bible, are expansions of my own perceptions of their personalities, so please keep that in mind.

Martha

It is a widely held belief that Martha is the older sister. It seems as though she has taken on the role of mother to her siblings, Mary and Lazarus, since no living parents are mentioned. She takes care of business, but it's evident that the weight of her family responsibilities is taking a toll on her. But that doesn't stop her. She is strong, keeps busy, and doesn't have time to mince words. She is bold, but sometimes forgets herself and doesn't always filter her responses. Martha doesn't seem to conform to the expectations of the culture, where women are submissive and quiet and know their place. She says what she thinks and can be demanding. She also knows when it's safe to be herself. She knows who Jesus is and has great faith in Him. But she is also troubled and anxious because she is the caretaker of the family; it hasn't quite sunk into her heart that God has promised and can be trusted to provide for them.

MARTHA'S KEY VERSES:

[Jesus said,] "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." LUKE 10:41-42, ESV

Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

JOHN 11:25-27, ESV

Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” JOHN 11:39, ESV

Mary

Mary, the apparent younger sister, is quiet and patient and exhibits great self-control. She wants to learn, and ponders what she hears. She understands what it means to be in the presence of Jesus, and she doesn't take it for granted. Mary allows herself to be vulnerable, and she is filled up inside with emotion, which she releases at the proper time. She is wise and faithful, and she knows what really matters. Her heart is laid bare, and she doesn't care who sees because she just wants Jesus.

MARY'S KEY VERSES:

Mary . . . sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. LUKE 10:39, ESV

[Jesus said,] “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” LUKE 10:41-42, ESV

[Martha] went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when [Mary] heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. . . . Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit. JOHN 11:28-29, 32-33, ESV

Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. JOHN 12:3, ESV

I can't wait to meet these women in heaven one day! What a joy it will be to truly get to know them.

Here's the lovely thing we learn from John's Gospel: "Now Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John 11:5, emphasis added). That fact is evident through all of these Scripture snapshots, both in Jesus' words and His actions toward them. Jesus loved these women. He loved their whole family.

And so it is with us. We don't have to have a certain "right" personality to be loved. Jesus loves us as we are. But one way He shows His love to us is to uncover us, because He sees into the deep places where our wounds and worries are hidden. He knows each one of them, and He wants us to be free from their grip and be whole.

As we go through these next thirty-one days, I want you to love who you are and yet be able to let Jesus into the hard places. I want you to sit with Him and let Him heal you, so you can be whole.

This is why there are Mary and Martha challenges. First, we get our hearts right before the Lord, and then we can tackle the practical business.

So yes, let's work toward having a Martha-like home, but let's do it the Mary way, with our hearts focused first on Jesus. May we begin each day with this prayer: "My choice is you, GOD, first and only" (Psalm 16:5, MSG).

My Story



IT WAS DARK AND we were in the car outside of an ice cream shop. Tears were fresh on my cheeks. My sister-in-law, Renee, and I had set out to pick up some milk, but more was to come out of that trip than picking up a few gallons of dairy products.

I was crying because my heart hurt deeply; the feelings of not being a good enough wife were eating me up, and I didn't know what to do. I told my sister-in-law that I thought my husband, Jesse, would rather be married to someone else, someone better, who was good at cleaning. "I have this friend," I said through my tears, "who gets up early, is efficient, and is so good at cleaning and getting things done. I'm sure Jesse wishes I was like her. I'm such a failure."

As Renee began to speak life-giving truth to me, my mind raced, trying to rewind the events that had brought me to this point of brokenness and disappointment in myself.

An Inclination toward Messy . . .

Plus Babies and Aprons

Nearly all of my childhood, after my parents divorced, I lived with my dad and stepmom. My stepmom cleaned everything except my room; I never even washed a dish. In fact, I didn't do my own laundry until I was fourteen and living with my mom.

Under my dad's roof, I was expected to keep my room fairly clean. If I let it get too messy, I would find a note from him on my bed saying something like, "YOU MAY NOT GO TO YOUNG LIFE OR DO ANYTHING UNTIL THIS ROOM IS CLEAN. Love, Dad." He rarely came down hard on me, but he did want me to take care of my room. When I moved in with my mom, it was a whole new ball game. I could keep my room in whatever state I liked; my mom didn't care about it at all. I had freedom! I don't think I was terribly messy, but I didn't put much stock in tidy surroundings.

Once I got to college, my true colors really came out. I roomed with a gal who was extremely neat, and it became clear immediately that I wasn't. I remember her actually taking tape and creating a line midway across the top of the vanity between her side and mine so my mess wouldn't creep over to her organized side. She was mostly gracious, but I'm pretty sure I drove her crazy.

The next place I lived, I had another roommate who kept things spotless, and again, I had to work hard to do my part. Finally, my junior year, I moved in with a gal who was just

like me, if not worse. Our one-bedroom apartment always looked like a bomb had gone off in it.

One morning while we were still in our beds, we heard the front door to our apartment open. We looked at each other, and then my roomie threw the covers over her head thinking that it would be a cue for the unexpected visitor to go away. I started to get my defensive hackles up when all of a sudden we heard, “Ahhh . . . ohhh . . . uhhh . . . groan.”

What in the world?

I opened our bedroom door to find our landlady bleeding on the bathroom floor, in a pile of our mess. She had tripped over our clutter in the hallway, veered off, and hit her head on the bathroom sink. Talk about embarrassing! She was there for some sort of routine maintenance check, which apparently we had been advised of in a mailed notice that was most certainly in the papers strewn all over the floor. If I had known of the upcoming visit by actually reading the paper, I would have cleaned up a bit. Really.

Of course, the upside for my roomie and me was the assurance that if someone did decide to break into the apartment, the intruder would probably end up in a bloody heap before doing any harm.

Fast-forward to my first year of marriage. Jesse and I lived in the small apartment that my messy roomie and I had shared—she had moved out and I stayed. I tried to keep it nice for my husband. My biggest issue was papers and junk that all ended up on the dining room table. And I always had a messy kitchen. But still, in my opinion, it wasn't too

terrible. My husband and I were stretching into our new lives together, learning about each other, and just enjoying the freedom that marriage brings. It wasn't until I got pregnant that things got ugly really fast.

Along with the surprising and exciting news that I was pregnant, I also got incredibly sick. I threw up from morning to night, had terrible headaches from not getting enough food, and one evening ended up becoming so dehydrated that I was taken to the hospital and hooked up to an IV. I couldn't go to work, and I was in bed most of the day hitting myself in the head with the palms of my hands (like that helped), wishing for a narcotic to knock me out for three months. No such narcotic arrived. When I would feel hungry or get a craving, I had just enough strength to half-crawl to the kitchen, eat a few bites, throw up, and go back to bed.

Jesse was a senior in college at the time, and when he would come home from class, the apartment was littered with bowls and cups that I had brought out but not put back in the kitchen. The place was a wreck, and I'm sure the smell wasn't too pleasant. My husband was carrying a full course load plus an internship with a police department so he not only had to study for his classes, but many times he was pulling overnight third-shift hours required for the internship. He was exhausted and overloaded, and I was exhausted and sick.

He resented me for not taking the dishes to the kitchen, and I resented him for not understanding how terrible I felt with my pregnancy. Just the thought of moving made me

queasy. He thought I was exaggerating, and I thought he was not supportive. Our marriage went through a really rough time during the initial months of my first pregnancy.

Unfortunately, my next two pregnancies weren't any better. I was nauseous all the time, the house was a wreck, and the bitterness between us was becoming worse. It was awful.

I would try to establish a routine, but of course as soon as I did, I would have another baby, or one of my children would go through a change (teething, crawling, etc.) that wrecked my routine. Or I was just exhausted from getting up at night, nursing, and caring for three little ones. I struggled with motivation, fatigue, laziness, lack of self-discipline, and constant feelings of failure and guilt. I sincerely wanted to be a good wife and homemaker, but I felt that I was failing miserably.

So I tried harder.

I read everything on cleaning and being a good wife and mother. I perused the Internet for tips and tricks, and read all about biblical womanhood. Oh yes, I would be that woman, that biblical, godly woman who cared for her home, her husband, and her children no matter what; all my energies would go toward the goal of making my home a haven. I even invested in pretty aprons.

But then I ended up in the car outside the ice cream shop.

What Went Wrong?

My heart was in the right place, and I had good ideals. I wanted to care for my home and my family, but those ideals

weren't translating into my everyday life. I knew I needed God to intervene.

But there was pain before there was peace.

That night in the car, I just felt weighed down. I had convinced myself I couldn't change, so why bother? I bared my soul to my sister-in-law: "Jesse would be happier with someone other than me. My kids deserve a better mother, one who can at least keep the house clean." I began to feel that my worth as a person was reflected in windows that sparkled and floors that glistened.

"Has Jesse ever said that he wants a different wife?" my sister-in-law asked.

"Well, no," I admitted.

She looked me right in the eyes and said, "No one has the authority to tell you who you are. Not your husband, not anyone. Only God has the authority to tell you who you are."

And just like a hammer crashing into a glass window, she shattered the lie that my worth was determined by my cleaning abilities.

It slowly sank in. *I don't define who I am, cleaning doesn't define who I am, my husband doesn't define who I am, certain ideas of biblical womanhood don't define who I am* [although I didn't realize that last one until later]; *only God can tell me who I am*. I wasn't exactly sure who that was yet (that's been a process), but I knew that I would no longer equate my identity with cleaning.

I would be free from that burden.

It took a while to break clean of the habit of defining

myself that way. From time to time, I still reverted to feelings of worthlessness, but God put a stop to that in October 2010.

I don't know how or why or what the circumstance was, but somehow this revelation went straight to my heart from the Holy Spirit.

I am clay, and clay cannot mold itself.

No matter how much I try or strive or work hard at becoming better or good enough, I can't do it. Only He can work with this clay woman. So I throw my hands up and submit, trusting His work in my life.

No More Striving

*O LORD, You are our Father,
We are the clay, and You our potter;
And all of us are the work of Your hand.*

ISAIAH 64:8

As the verse says, we all are clay.

It's humbling to realize that there are some issues in our lives we can't change on our own, the ones that we can't seem to overcome no matter how hard we try; we must consciously be willing to let the Holy Spirit step in. But it's important to recognize that how we live every day—the choices we make—should be done with discernment, listening to the Father through His Word and the Holy Spirit. It's how we grow up and mature. And who does the maturing? Who sanctifies us, matures us to be more like Jesus?

I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me. ROMANS 15:18

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

EPHESIANS 5:25-27

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely. I THESSALONIANS 5:23

We should always give thanks to God for you . . . because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13

To those who . . . are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. I PETER 1:1-2

Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection began our sanctification, and it is the Holy Spirit in us who continues the work that works out our salvation! It is the treasure that was given to us when we believed. He does the work; He matures us. What a freeing revelation that we can't do it, but that the Holy Spirit can, in His power and strength.

Christ did the work on the cross. The Holy Spirit continues the work in our lives. Our job? To surrender to Him and walk faithfully one day at a time.

Surrendering in Real Life

How does this surrender and belief that the Holy Spirit is doing the work in me play out in everyday life? What does it look like practically?

For me, it's like this:

I live.

I get up, I work, I enjoy, I trust. I still live on this earth and I am able to walk through this life with great freedom. I am in God's will right now, in this moment, and so I'm no longer worried about every step I take. I am doing what the Bible calls "walking by faith."

We walk by faith, not by sight.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:7

I watch for evidence of God around me, and I listen to Him through His Word. I go forward with my days, knowing that He will direct my steps. I can't really go wrong if I'm walking by faith, and if I do, I know He will use it for His good plan.

The biggest part of living out of faith and belief in the work of the Spirit is that I do not focus on my ability or inability to do this or that. I do what I can as I can.

I wash my sheets. I do the dishes. When I don't do the

laundry or the dishes, I don't allow the lie *I'm no good* to interfere. Instead, I remember that I am human. Which means I'm going to mess up and fail, but I'm not a failure. I'm literally a work in progress. And I accept that.

I accept that some days I will get lazy and make big mistakes and fall. But I will go to the throne of grace and receive the truth that I am still a new creation in Christ. I am new because of Christ, not by anything I can do or did do. I am because He is.

So I walk, I fall; I walk, I fall; and all along I am available for Him to mold.

I believe in His work on my good days and my worst days.

So whether the dishes or laundry get done or not, I am secure in the fact that I am who God says I am.

I want to work hard and take care of my family and my home, and I'm doing so every day, knowing I am free and I am loved.

As you read this book, I want you to take whatever fears, failures, insecurities, and any other issues that are balled up like a fist inside you, and place them in your hand. Now open your hand and release them to God, letting Him take them and show you a new way.

You are so loved. I can't wait for you to see how He shows you that over and over during the next few weeks.

How to Use This Book



I KNOW THAT NONE of us live in identical houses with the same number of family members and cleaning challenges. You might be a single woman in a one-bedroom apartment, and another reader might be in a six-bedroom home with ten children. I based the cleaning schedule on the average house: three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, kitchen, and dining room. There are days to clean a family room, an office, and a homeschool space, as well as a project day to clean another area that I didn't list. I would like you to implement the cleaning ideas Monday through Friday, use Saturday for projects you need to catch up on or for extra rooms, and reserve Sunday for rest.

Feel free to adjust and make the plan work for you. Let's say you have a basement instead of a family room. Just use the family room day to work on the basement. See how flexible it is?

Each day there is a reading designed to encourage you, inspire you, get you thinking, and get you energized. There is no judgment; this isn't boot camp. Come as you are and

have some fun as you make your surroundings sparkle and infuse your heart and your home with peace.

After the day’s reading, you will be given two challenges: a Mary Challenge and a Martha Challenge. The Mary Challenge speaks to your heart and the Martha Challenge spurs you to action.

My goal is to inspire you and give practical help to get you moving and cleaning, so that ultimately your house will be nice and tidy by the end of the thirty-one days.

But of course it isn’t just about the cleaning.

My hope is that through the readings and the Mary Challenges, you will be motivated and also be able to experience peace throughout the process. I want to engage your heart, and I want you to have rest in your soul.

The world needs both Marys and Marthas, and if we can embrace a little of both of them, I think we’ll grasp this homemaking thing with gumption and grace.



Mary Challenges

Through the Mary Challenges, I want to encourage you to get rest and fill your heart with God’s peace by sitting with the Lord, reading the Scriptures, and learning from Him. In fact, when we choose to sit with Jesus first, we are choosing the “good portion” that Mary did while Martha was bustling around trying to get everything accomplished.

Before the cleaning and the day with all of its (possible) troubles gets ahold of you (Matthew 6:34), I’m encouraging you to get ahold of Him.

These challenges will get you pondering different aspects of your life and offer you practical ideas to inspire you over the next few weeks.



Martha Challenges

The Martha Challenges are designed for those of us who are not born cleaners. Oh, we want a clean home, and we start out with good intentions, but we tend to get overwhelmed with ALL THERE IS TO DO because we aren't consistent with keeping on top of the cleaning. *Ahem.* The Martha Challenges in this book break down cleaning tasks into manageable steps for you, spreading them out over a month. These are not deep-cleaning tasks; these are let's-get-this-house-in-order tasks. Hence, there are no challenges to dust the ceilings or rotate mattresses. While those tasks are worthwhile for keeping a home in clean shape, this book does not go into that depth. However, we *will* organize junk drawers and scrub toilets.

Getting Your Kids Involved and Bonus Tips

Some days include a section called Get Your Kids Involved! This is for those of you who have children and want to utilize their capabilities. Directing their exuberance and energy into hands-on responsibility is a boon for all of you. Never underestimate how much your kids are able to do. The Bonus Tips are extra tips to help you for that particular day to hopefully make your cleaning life easier!

Are you ready? Let's get to it!



Prep Day!

The secret of getting ahead is getting started.

MARK TWAIN

THIS IS YOUR GET-AHEAD-BEFORE-YOU-BEGIN day. You will need to pick a day that you can spend a few hours cleaning. For many of you, this will be a Saturday.

Your job: Get the kitchen and main spaces clean so you can begin the full challenge with a clean slate. This isn't the time for deep cleaning; it's just a general pickup and getting your kitchen clean (dishes washed, floor swept). Think simple! For me, if I take a few hours and just get to work, I can get so much accomplished, and that sets me up for success during the busy weekdays.

I have found that if I'm going to be digging into cleaning

and purging throughout my whole house, I need to have a fresh start in my main living spaces or I feel too overwhelmed. Plus, you will have more momentum if you start ahead of the game.



SUPPLY LIST _____

Here is a list of supplies you want to make sure you have on hand as you begin:

- Sponges and/or cleaning rags
- Mop
- Broom and hand broom
- All-purpose cleaner
- Floor cleaners (for wood, vinyl)
- Wood cleaner (for dusting)
- Toilet bowl brush
- Toilet bowl cleaner
- All-purpose bathroom cleaner
- Tile and tub cleaner
- Glass cleaner



Lifting Life above Mere Existence

Life-giving is about receiving from God in order to give to others.

BARBARA MOUSER, *Five Aspects of Woman*

TUCKED INTO A MOUNTAINTOP, surrounded by trees and blue skies, her home sat waiting to greet me. As I approached her door, I saw a sign on the side of the house that said, “Welcome, Sarah! We are so glad you are here!” Through the front door, into the entryway, I was greeted with smiles and hugs. After introductions, I was shown to my room where I would be staying for the next few days.

Next to the neatly made bed was a bottle of water, a vase of simple flowers, a beautifully handwritten note, and a little jar of foil-wrapped chocolates.

This lovely setup, personally arranged, was all for *me*.

Back upstairs, the smell of a homemade meal was floating in the air. Candles were lit and classical music was playing in the background.

This was my first time to visit the home of my mentor. I had flown hundreds of miles to visit her, to spend time with her family, and to be mentored by her in person. And immediately upon pulling up to her home, I felt so special, so loved.

I would have been happy just to be there with her without any of the extras, but she chose to make things beautiful for me. Going the extra step to raise life above mere existence is her defining gift.

I want to do that also—to be someone who takes the time to make the ordinary into something beautiful.

Because we are created to be life-givers.

All women are life-givers; God made us that way. Life-giving, in its most basic sense, is raising life above the level of mere existence. We give life physically and spiritually, in many forms. We also give life intellectually, socially, and artistically. We as women have been blessed with the very nature of life-giving! At its core, life-giving is all about love—loving others with what God has given us.

Just think of it: Our bodies hold and nurture life as a baby grows within, and then we are able to hold and nurture life with our hands and our minds and our creativity—to live life and make it lovely and vibrant for the world around us. What a gift!

You can give life to your home by making it warm and inviting, fresh and invigorating! You can give life to your home by making sure there are clean dishes to eat off of and clear spaces to walk in and organized papers that are easy to find when you need them. You can give life to your home by filling it with loving, true, and good words! You can give life to your home by building up the souls in your care and the souls who enter it. Your home can be a place where weary bones rest and burdens are lifted and laughter ripples through every room. All of these things make a home.

You are a creator of beauty and peace and safe spaces.

You are a homemaker.

Let's embrace this empowering definition of who we are: "Who is woman? She is the redeemed life-giver, enlivened by the love of Christ and continuously renewed by Him as she nurtures others."¹



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Mary Challenge



READ DEUTERONOMY 30:15-16

What does God say about choosing life or death?

Why do we choose life? Do you think it's more than just physical life we choose? Why?



Have you looked at yourself as a life-giver, as someone who can choose to raise life above mere existence?

Think of some ways you can bring life into your home. What are some things that would make you smile to see or experience in your home?

What can you do today to raise life above mere existence?





MARTHA CHALLENGE



Put a load of laundry in the wash.

CLEAN YOUR KITCHEN.



DO THE DISHES

1. First, do the dishes. *Give a WOOT if you have a dishwasher and praise the Lord for it!*
2. Also the pans—yes, even the greasy piled-up ones you haven't wanted to touch.
3. Wash out the sink. (If you have bleach, plug your sink and fill it with water, add a dash of bleach, and let it sit for half an hour.)



NEXT, GATHER UP ALL THE PAPERWORK

4. Gather up all the paperwork, junk mail, and stuff on your counters, put it in a bin or a bag, and set it aside. You'll deal with this on another day.
5. Wipe down the counters.
6. Eat a cookie. 🍪



Every morning during this challenge I want you to clean the kitchen. Yes, every morning. YOU CAN DO IT! I'm with you, sister. Oh, and by "clean the kitchen," I just mean the dishes and the surface areas.



Put the laundry in the dryer.



GET YOUR KIDS INVOLVED!

Mobilize your kids to help! My five-year-old loves to wash the pans because to her, it's fun! Crazy, right? Just go with it. Give your kiddo the soap and a scrubby, and let your helper go to town on the pans. Don't hover—let it be. I promise the pans will be cleaner than they were before—they might even get completely clean!



BONUS TIP

Put your dishes on a lower shelf so your child can put the dishes away *and* set the table easily. My kids have been unloading the dishwasher since each of them was four years old. They can do it!

