

Organize

A Christ-Centered Approach
to Organizing Your Life

HIS WAY

EILEEN KOFF CPO®



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Acknowledgments

Writing this workbook has been on my to-do list for many, many years. In 2004, I joined Sandra Felton's "Faith in Organizing" Yahoo group. My purpose as an organizer was to get a first-person perspective on how clutter and chronic disorganization interferes with the Body of Christ. What I found from the numerous emails from this group exceeded my expectations. Those emails touched a deep desire in my heart to bring God's Word into Christians' lives so that true transformation could occur in their homes and in their relationships. You will read many of these women's testimonies in this workbook. It is my sincere prayer that you will no longer feel alone as you relate to their stories and struggles. I am so grateful to Sandra for having the vision to start this group, specifically for believers.

Writing this book would not have been possible without the help of Shelly Esser, editor of *Just Between Us* magazine. As she began editing this workbook, her encouragement grew as each chapter was unveiled; giving me renewed confidence that this workbook was truly unique and greatly needed. My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Wayne, and sons, Ian, Evan, and Keenan, for your patience, love, encouragement, help, and all the extra hugs as you encouraged me on this journey as an author. Thank you for sharing this incredible adventure with me.

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Preface

With the abundance of organizing books out there, I'm always left wondering why anyone would have a hard time figuring out how to get organized. However, after being in the profession for almost two decades, I have come to the conclusion that what we believe dictates what we do. Therefore, some might ask, "Is clutter really a faith issue?" We believe that God desires intimacy in our daily life, but how does that translate to the clutter that sits on our tables, countertops, and in our storage spaces? This workbook is designed to teach you how to deal with clutter and find a peaceful place where you can nurture intimacy with God.

There are a million reasons why people can't seem to deal with the overload in their lives. That overload can be stuff, activities, or the mental perception of time. My clients have expressed that "cluttered brains equal cluttered rooms." Does God have anything to say in this regard? Is there anything in the Bible that tells us how to finally—once and for all—deal with our internal and external clutter? As a Christian Certified Professional Organizer I say *yes*—a million times *yes*! God has shown me through His Word many passages that can be applied to living an orderly life.

It's my desire that this workbook will not only show you what God has to say about living an orderly life, but that you can be "transformed by the renewing of your mind." Saying goodbye to clutter once and for all is my goal for you. The first several chapters of this workbook will explore why

clutter (both physical and mental) creates distance between those closest to you and your relationship with God. If we agree that God desires intimacy with us—every single day—then how does the clutter in our lives separate us from the abundant life God has provided? Your clutter could be an obstacle that keeps you from greater intimacy and from the abundant life God has provided for you.

The remaining chapters will provide you with a practical blueprint of organizing how-tos for your unique situation. Looking at God's Word throughout the chapters will ensure that the Holy Spirit will lead you each step of the way. Because I have written this in a workbook format, it lends itself perfectly to small groups or expanded study. Upon completion of this workbook you may desire to bring this study to your home church. To facilitate community change, I have devised a teacher's guide to equip you in teaching this study. You can learn more at www.EileenKoffMinistries.com

May our Lord richly bless you as He leads you into all Truth!

Introduction

“I feel buried under all this stuff.”

“I’m suffocating in this room.”

“I’m too paralyzed to begin sorting through this mess.”

Maybe you can relate to the voices I hear most everyday when my phone rings or I get e-mails from people desperate to lead a more organized life. There are millions of people just like you who just don’t know how to begin or how to make their organizing attempts last longer than two weeks.

I frequently hear:

- I have a very hard time letting go of things, so I just keep everything.
- My sleep suffers because I feel like I’ve forgotten something important.
- I keep getting organized, but stuff just keeps coming back like a boomerang.
- Every time I open the closet door; something comes crashing on top of me!
- I’d cook for my family if I could just find enough surfaces in the kitchen.
- I’m too embarrassed to have people over to visit.
- Just looking at this mess makes me tired and exhausted.
- I always end up paying extra on my bills because I’m late mailing payments.

- How come my office is so organized, but my home is just a pile of junk?
- No one in my home will help me keep things organized.
- I'm just plain tired of always being late and never finding my keys.
- The only order in my house is take—out!

Do these questions sound familiar? If so, which ones?

Anyone who has ever tried to get organized knows it can be tough, and that's why I have put together this workbook. Unlike other books filled with hints, tips, and methods that worked for everyone else but you, this workbook will reveal God's plan for living an orderly life. Once you understand how to *Organize His Way*, His way will light your path to a new freedom from your present chaos. I will be sharing from my personal and professional years of experience of working with people just like you—people who have become successful at getting their lives in order.

Over the past decade, the media has paid an increasing amount of attention to the world of organization. In fact, since 2001 (post 9/11), you would be hard-pressed to pick up any woman's magazine and not find the word "organization" somewhere on the front cover. Since people can no longer control the chaos of the world, they have decided to at least control their homes. Past and present TV shows highlighting a fascination of the lives of excess continue to be highly rated: "Clean Sweep," "Mission Organization," "Clean House," "Buried Alive," and "Hoarders." It's obvious that our culture is focused on the need for organization.

An illusive picture-perfect home is NOT the definition of a well-organized space. Organizing is not about perfection; it's about giving you access to the things you love and time to enjoy them. Others are misled when they believe that once their spaces are organized, they have achieved their goals. A well organized space is but one piece of the puzzle that will allow you to *achieve* your goals. Here is one client's story to illustrate this point:

***Organizing is not
about perfection;
it's about giving you
access to the things
you love and time to
enjoy them.***

My client had the dream to become a baker, but all his countertops were so sprawled with clutter that he could barely bake. Getting his kitchen streamlined didn't allow him to open his bakery, but after several months in his organized kitchen he was able to move forward with his dream because he could now successfully develop recipes designed for the bakery.

Have you ever noticed that “getting organized” is always listed in the top 10 reasons for New Years Resolutions? However, in the kingdom of God, there are other reasons for leading an orderly life. After several sessions, my Christian clients come to understand that this process is truly a faith walk.

The following are a few reasons for living an organized lifestyle. I know the Holy Spirit will show you many more as you begin your journey, but most importantly, this journey will lead you into a deeper and more intimate relationship with Christ.

1. Your relationships flourish
2. Your ability to hear God awakens
3. Each person has certain gifts or abilities
4. An organized life builds character
5. An organized life maximizes time and efficiency
6. To be ready

REASON #1: YOUR RELATIONSHIPS FLOURISH

Our relationships take front and center in all that we are and all that we do.

Luke 10:27 tells us to:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself”.

Simply stated, a disorganized lifestyle suffocates relationships. Clutter has a way of isolating us from building and maintaining meaningful relationships. Instead of constructing a safe space, our clutter actually builds walls of isolation. We can miss the blessings of fellowship because of the shame and embarrassment a cluttered house evokes. The following testimony from Miranda (not her real name) sheds a dose of reality:

Dear Pastor, (name withheld)

I have to tell you how I was moved to take action after hearing your sermon “Precious Praise” from the book of Acts (preached on Sunday, October 13, 2013).

One of the things you spoke on was how Paul and Silas STILL praised God after being stripped, beaten, and thrown in jail (precious praise to God, indeed), and another was how the first response of new believer, Lydia was to show hospitality. You asked wondering, at the

9 am and 12 noon services, how many of us show hospitality by opening up our homes and apartments? There was DEAD SILENCE IN BOTH SERVICES!!! Pastor, the Holy Spirit worked some serious conviction with that question! It seemed like the Holy Spirit had you “hover” over the subject of this kind of hospitality for at least 10 minutes (and I wanted to slowly slide down into my chair and hide)!!! Your question that Sunday convicted me, and the absolute silence in the sanctuary only reminded me that I am not alone!

I believe you were absolutely right when you said there are many complicated reasons for not inviting people into our homes and showing hospitality. But there is also one reason that prevents MANY of us from showing hospitality. This very shameful, embarrassing and overwhelming sin problem is that seven-letter word spelled C-L-U-T-T-E-R!!! I've been dealing with it, and (ironically), I am not only a member of the Keepers of God's House, I am the Tuesday Team Leader (our team is responsible for working on your floor after each prayer meeting)! I know this is a problem for more people than we can imagine. Why else would there be so many TV shows devoted to focusing on people's excess (Clean House, Clean Sweep, Hoarders/Buried Alive, etc.)? I've discussed, with discernment, the problem with others who are dealing with clutter or who know someone overpowered by it — including personal friends, church friends, members of my Keeper's team, one of my friends from the choir, and others. It's not an easy subject to talk about. People can easily disguise it as, “My place isn't done yet,” “as soon as I get that new sofa,” “I don't want people in my business (or my home),” “I don't have time for company” or some other “veil.” However, as you like to say: “It is what it is!”

I delight in giving, and I've shown hospitality by treating people in a warm, friendly, generous way, but lately, not by opening my home. Those times when I want to be selfish, the Holy Spirit will remind me: If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? (1John 3:17).

My apartment has clutter, not like that TV show, “Hoarders/Buried Alive” (which fascinates and can inspire me), but it wasn't in a condition where I felt comfortable inviting people over. How can you show hospitality if you don't feel comfortable because you know you don't have it together? For me, the solution was to get help (again)! I had a professional organizer work with me last year for two hours. It was expensive, and the clutter eventually returned. After hearing your sermon, I prayed, and asked the Lord to lead me to a professional organizer who

understands organizing from His point of view. I was excited when I found a website called faithfulorganizers.com, an organization that connects Christian organizers with clients. Then, I noticed most of the Christian organizers listed in my area just did not seem “set apart” when it came to the presentation promoting their business. They seemed like the previous organizer who came to my home. And then (thank you, Jesus!), I found one called “To the Next Level” “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). “Putting God above all I do is how I conduct my life and business. I treat each client as a gift from God, bringing God’s order into their home or business.” (Woo hoo!) This caption jumped into my face! I knew I had found the organizer God wanted for me.

Pastor, I’ve been learning about this issue from God’s perspective, for example: a disorganized lifestyle suffocates relationships (with Him and other people); it builds walls of isolation between God and us and between others and ourselves. It can put God at a distance with all the distractions the clutter creates and the temptation to love and treasure those things rather than God. Sleep can suffer as a result of clutter (Could this be a reason for falling asleep in church? I think so!). We can miss the blessings of fellowship because of the shame and embarrassment. Did you know clutter can shout over every attempt to hear God’s still, small voice? Can you imagine all of us who are not hearing His voice because of clutter?

Pastor, my apartment is not yet exactly where I want it to be, but I’ve set goals, and I’m excited because I’m seeing results. There’s progress! I’m being held accountable to commitments, and after three (virtual) sessions of working with Eileen Koff CPO® on Skype, I can say that I am now comfortable enough where I have invited people over. This is as a result of following her Christ-centered principles.”

Miranda eventually understood how her clutter was isolating her from others, but more importantly, a clutter-filled home builds walls between God and us. A disorganized life can put God at a distance because of all the distractions that clutter creates and the temptation to love and treasure those things rather than God. Our clutter piles suffocate our spaces, and this prevents God from releasing blessings into our lives. For emphasis, let me state this again, our

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suffocated spaces prevents God from releasing blessing into our lives. This will be detailed in Chapter 1. If the sum of all the laws are rolled into this one scripture, in Luke 10:27, then we must always remember the importance of maintaining and creating healthy relationships, with others and with God.

REASON #2: YOUR ABILITY TO HEAR GOD AWAKENS

He who is of God hears God's words.

(John 8:47 NKJV)

Hearing from God is paramount to your progress as a Christian, but clutter can shout over every attempt to hear God's still small voice. It's difficult to still the mind and hear from God under ordinary circumstances, but it's next to impossible to hear Him when stuff is competing for your attention.

Many of my clients have sometimes expressed that when there is too much clutter in a given space, they find it "hard to hear" or concentrate. The room takes on a certain "noise" level, so noisy that the only thing they do is flee from the space. Physical clutter creates visual "noise." Therefore, the easiest way to bring down the visual noise from your life is to remove the clutter. My client Josh expressed it this way. *"I do my best thinking in the shower. There are no distraction and I am fully present in the moment, if only during that small window of time during the day. Somehow the water running down my back helps me clear the clutter from my head, and upon turning off the water, it seems as if I re-enter the world's demands of the day. I have become so accustomed to the clutter around me and the noise it creates, that when I clear the clutter, I feel I'm back in my shower. I can think clearer, breathe better and I smile for no reason at all."*

Creating a clutter-free environment can bring about a greater sense of peace and clarity and when you pray in a clutter-free environment, your ability to hear God's still small voice will astound you.

In Dotty Schmitt's book [Stand on My Shoulders; Treasures from the Secret Places of His Heart](#), she writes *"It is as we cultivate a daily time of solitude and soaking in His loving Presence that the Holy Spirit opens to us the rich treasures of His heart. Outward silence is certainly easier to attain to than is a deep inner place of quiet and stillness. This place of inner quiet is a prerequisite to hearing the voice of God."* Dotty understands that hearing His voice comes with great inner awareness. She also points out that getting "outward" silence is also a key element; they both go hand-in-hand.

As we begin to hear His still, small voice, we will anticipate his presence daily. Our purpose for the day becomes clearer, and the many abundant blessings from Father will manifest. I could never write this statement if I had not witnessed the many testimonies from my students as I have taught *Organize His Way*. I have come to understand this simple truth . . . a clutter-free environment allows for greater intimacy and clarity from the Father. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear. ” (Mark 4:9 KJV)

REASON #3: EACH PERSON HAS CERTAIN GIFTS OR ABILITIES

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

(1 Cor. 12: 4-6)

Paul speaks about the gifts of the Spirit and says that God gives to each one individually as He wills. Therefore, we are all unique and have been given special gifts and abilities. But sadly, for many of us, they go unnoticed or underdeveloped. Why? Because the world and its ways entrap us into other pursuits—like a frantic lifestyle that keeps those dreams and abilities from being at the center of our daily lives. I know this is true because my clients begin to excel in their “gifts” *after* their time and spaces become balanced. All of a sudden, their priorities become clear.

The Bible states in Revelation 3:11(KJV), “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.” Translated: “Thy crown” or the blessings that come with the gifts are then given to someone else. Your gift and talents can open many doors of opportunity, but you must use these talents or God will seek out someone else to do his will. Do not look at your gifts as insignificant. Remember, if you are faithful in small responsibilities, God will bless you with greater responsibilities. We will examine this in greater detail in chapter 1, “For Where Your Treasure Is, There Your Heart Will Be Also.” I imagine God’s great smile every time we use our gift and talents that he has given us. When a cluttered environment (mental, physical, or spiritual) restricts our full potential, then the “Body of Christ” suffers. We are all members of the same Body, and when one part is suffering, we all do. I pray that before these twelve chapters are completed, you will begin to see your gift and contributions to the kingdom of God. Just *getting organized* is not the goal. When you, as a believer, enter into the discipline of an organized life, you

will experience the Holy Spirit in a renewed way. An orderly life makes room for the eternal.

REASON #4: AN ORGANIZED LIFE BUILDS CHARACTER

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

(Ephesians 2:10 ESV)

Chambers dictionary defines character as or'derliness *noun*, or'derly *adjective* in good order; regular; well regulated; of good behavior; quiet; being on duty, *adverb* regularly; methodically.

Character is the person you really are. Building Christian character is a process, much like living an orderly life. If you are always stressed because you can't find what you need, your character suffers. If you are continually late and others are always waiting for you, your character suffers. If you are financially burdened because your money habits do not conform to your income, your character suffers. Living an orderly life, like a surgeon's knife, exposes root character issues and begins to let God take control. Character provides oneself a sense of direction in life, and people want to be around others who are productive and authentic in their witnessing. I am reminded of St Francis of Assisi's quote, "At all times preach Jesus Christ, and only when necessary, use words." Our character speaks for us in the mundane of life because character voices an authentic walk with Christ. Our character fragrance enters before any word is uttered. Our character will draw people to Christ or repel them. I just love the translation for 1 Corinthians 14:40 from the Institute in Basic Life Principles, "*Preparing myself and my surroundings so that I will achieve the greatest efficiency.*"

REASON #5: AN ORGANIZED LIFE MAXIMIZES TIME AND EFFICIENCY

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Matthew 9:37 (NIV)

People's lives are getting busier and busier, so the importance of being organized from the world's point of view is more critical now than ever before. In these end times it is imperative that we begin to see the world as our harvest field. But how can we tend our crops if distractions and life's urgencies take precedent over God's call on our lives? The secular world understands

that the more organized and efficient we are with what we've been given, the more work we can accomplish. It's no surprise that time management seminars rank number one in popularity in most corporations. Living an orderly life allows you to prioritize and streamline activities that produce the greatest results. These results put people at the forefront of our attention. God is seeking individuals to reap His harvest. When our lives reflect this readiness, then we will be in our season to reap His great harvest.

REASON #6: TO BE READY

You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

(Luke 12:40 NIV)

We will all stand before God one day and be judged on how we managed the matters He entrusted to us. It's my heart's desire that you will hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:23). Many of my client's attitudes reflect this famous quote by Bill Watterson (creator of Calvin and Hobbs): "I believe God put me on this earth to accomplish a certain number of things. Right now I'm so far behind that I will never die." Becoming ready will reveal our day-to-day priorities and those priorities are directly reflected in what God calls our treasures. On judgment day, your treasures will be illuminated. What you stored up in heaven, lasts for eternity. What you stored on earth will pass away. Understanding your heart's treasures, both earthly and heavenly, is one of the goals of this workbook. Learning how to increase your heavenly treasures will transform the way you think and prioritize your day.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

It's my prayer that this workbook will help you eliminate clutter and transform your lifestyle. Based on my extensive professional expertise and Christian beliefs, I will not only help you focus on the "hows" of organization but also on the "whys". For example, it might be difficult for some of you to make the transition from a home filled with clutter to a clean, well-organized living space. For others, physical clutter may not be of paramount importance, but finding time and to put God first in your busy life may need some work and contemplation.

I'll outline methods for solving organizational issues within your home, but most importantly, I'll teach you the biblical principles for doing so. We will look at how your belief systems influence your thoughts and how those thoughts affect your actions. By infusing God's Word into each chapter, like lighting a darkened room, you'll be able to see the root causes for your clutter and what to do about it, starting with your heart and attitudes. Each chapter will feature biblical principles and study, a different organizing area that needs addressing in your life, questions for reflection, a personal story from people struggling like you, a practical application, a prayer, and organizing tips and resources.

I also hope to dispel any of the myths, lies, and false beliefs that keep you tied to your possessions and clutter. We're going to dig a little deeper to discover how our beliefs dictate our thoughts and how our thoughts reflect our actions:

If I change my beliefs, I will change my thoughts.
If I change my thoughts, I will change my words.
If I change my words, I will change my actions.
If I change my actions, I will change my habits.
If I change my habits, I will change my character.
If I change my character, I can change my destiny.

It's my prayer that as you work your way through this material, God will begin to declutter your heart so that you can discover the freedom of simplicity that is in Christ . . . Organized His Way!

—Eileen

What's Working and What's Not?

Note what you highlighted in the preface and introduction. This is a good indicator of your values.

What's working well? Your space is functional when you can live, work and relax as you want. Identify what's working to your level of expectation.

What's not working?

Take a look at your space(s). What seems to be causing you the most distress? Is it the paper piles in the kitchen? Is it the blocked doorway?

List everything that just plain bugs you. Write down the consequences too. How does this affect your finances, relationships, health and spirituality?

Focus on one area from your list above. Accept the fact that you cannot tackle everything on your list. Prioritize based on your values, as they relate to the negative and positive consequences of getting organized. Know your WHY!

Look around at the space. What is your vision for the space? Always begin with the end in mind.

How will you plan time for Chapter 1?

Chapter 1

Where are Your Treasures? Assessing Material Possessions

*“For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also”*

—Matthew 6:21 NIV

When my son Evan was a small child, he had an intense desire to own a particular Lego kit. After many months of dreaming and talking about it, his birthday finally arrived and he received his heart’s desire—the new Lego Space Station! Evan spent hours constructing and playing, but after a few weeks, the allure of the new Legos disappeared and he was on to something else. That’s often what happens with earthly treasures. The pleasure is temporary, leaving you always wanting something more.

It’s so easy to get caught up in this materialistic world of ours, isn’t it? Before we know it, the desire for that fancy new car, new home, or some other material possession dominates our hearts and minds. “Things” can begin to consume our thoughts, leading us on a pursuit of acquiring more while we push away and replace God as number one in our lives.

Before we can get into the practical how-tos of organizing our lives, we have to first examine what it is we love, what we really treasure. That will tell us a lot about our possessions and ourselves and how tightly we are holding on to the very things that often end up cluttering our lives. A treasure is not so much a physical want, but a heart’s desire.

Let's take a look at "The Parable of the Hidden Treasure" and "The Pearl of Great Price" to help us out. The Bible says:

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

(Matt. 13:44 – 46)

My paraphrase to the Matthew scripture would sound like . . . A treasure in heaven simply means living a life with open hearts and open hands. We must know the value of what we are searching for, and we must know where to find it.

How willing are we to trade in all our possessions in order to receive the Kingdom of Heaven as the man in this passage does? Upon finding the treasure in the field, he goes and sells all he has in order to buy the field so that he can own the treasure that is hidden in the field—a treasure so immeasurably amazing that it's worth sacrificing all in order to receive it.

- Where are you investing?
- Where are you spending?
- What are you sacrificing?

Answering these questions will be a good indicator of where your heart is. Matthew 6:19-21 says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on

*Our hearts are like a
needle of a compass;
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direction in which our
treasures are kept.*

earth . . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Let's consider what Jesus means by our heart. Jesus is speaking about the very core of our being — our emotions, wishes, and our will. What we long for and desire is our treasure, and seeking after that treasure will move our entire being to seek after it. Our hearts are like a needle of a compass; always pointing in the direction in which

our treasures are kept. Our earthly treasures are kept here on earth, our heavenly treasures are kept for us when we return home.

Treasure in this context refers to a “treasure store.” It’s a concentration of riches, often one that is considered lost or forgotten until it’s rediscovered. Just as your use of time says a lot about your priorities, so your material things (treasures) say a lot about your heart and thoughts.

TO THINK ABOUT

What is your treasure? Is it your house, your clothes, your possessions, your job? Is it fame? Is it comfort? Is it belonging?

Whatever you love—that is your god. You carry your love for it in your heart. It’s something you think about day and night. He who lays up treasure for himself is not rich toward God.

We store up treasure in heaven by seeking the Kingdom of God through helping others.

According to Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible:

Christ counsels us to make our best things the joys and glories of the other world, those things not seen, which are eternal, and to place our happiness in them. There are treasures in heaven. It is our wisdom to give all diligence to make our title to eternal life sure through Jesus Christ, and to look on things here below, as not worthy to be compared with it, and to be content with nothing short of it . . . A man may do some service to two masters, but he can devote himself to the service of no more than one. God requires the whole heart, and will not share it with the world. When two masters oppose each other, no man can serve both. He who holds to the world and loves it, must despise God; he who loves God, must give up the friendship of the world.¹

MARY’S STORY

I have to look at my life and what my treasures on earth really are. I choose to do so because I feel I have no choice but to get rid of the shame and disappointments my home is bringing me. I find that God reveals things to me as I declutter. My current treasures, I’ve discovered, are rolls and rolls of wrapping paper. Hidden in my closet was wrapping paper, intended for the holidays, but now the rolls are so badly damaged they are junk. I can no longer use them for the holidays for which they were intended.

Many holidays have gone uncelebrated. I cannot even bring friends and family into my home because of my home’s condition. As a result, I am

not bringing joy to other people at all. My heart remains closed in shame because I can't get my home orderly enough to celebrate, so the intended wrapping paper for past gifts haunts my memories.

What we store on earth is where our heart is, and my heart is not in the right place. I have chosen to put my heart in a pile of junk! This didn't happen overnight. It was a series of small choices I made. Satan would love for me to continue making excuses to keep this going. However, I need to be completely honest with myself and with God. I need to confess this series of "harmless" sins I have committed in choosing not to deal with "this" and "that" today. Saving unused items doesn't add to my life or my ability to serve God. Stocking up for "just-in-case" days keeps me chained to my past.

I need to trust that God will provide what I need so I don't have to store it up. In order to be free—to follow God and to trust Him—I need to lighten my mental, physical, and spiritual load. I can say over and over again that I want to serve God; but if I choose to enclose myself in a prison of pain and clutter, I am useless. There is no point to it and no need for it. I'm frightened to really follow God. But deep in my heart I know that with God running the show, I know there is nothing to fear.

Lord, I need to trust you today and more every day. Speak to my heart and place trust there so that I am not afraid to truly follow you and to live the life you have purposed for me according to your will. Lord, I believe. Forgive me and help my unbelief.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What does what your treasure say about you?
- Where is God in relation to what you love?
- What is an earthly treasure?
- Name three earthly treasures you own.
- What is a heavenly treasure?
- What does this treasure look like stored up for you in heaven?
- How you spend your money greatly determines your priorities. Where have your priorities been this week? (Examine your checkbook!)
- Has this been a typical or atypical week?
- Name three purchases you recently made and your reasons for buying them.
- What treasures do you have at home?

- What condition are they in?
- Do you have generational/family treasures?
- How do you honor and respect them?
- How congruent are your treasures and your beliefs?

To maintain right relationships to our “earthly treasures” while laying up “treasures in heaven,” we need a different perspective. The rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. In spite of his longing to gain eternal life, the request to let go of his earthly possessions was just too much for him. Jesus looks at our heart, and the lad’s heart was with his treasures on earth. Do your earthly treasures hinder your ability to walk with God?

THE SOCK DRAWER STORY

During one of my classes in “Organize His Way”, I gave what I call the “sock drawer” example. One of my students in the class stated that she had a drawer bulging with all of her socks. No matter how many times she tried to organize her array of socks (white crew and sport, black, brown, tan, red, green, blue, purple and yellow, dress, polka-dotted, toe-in, multicolored, striped and fuzzy) they all ended up in a mess just a few days later. As the organizing expert, I began my classic, “Have you tired this scenario”? A dear sister in the back of the room stood up. “Why don’t you just keep the essentials? The black, brown, and tan and a few favorites from the others. Let everything else go.” As she was speaking you could see the sock student’s face contort with an expression of “I’d rather die than to let go of my socks.” When I saw her face, I was reminded of the rich young ruler and Jesus’s encounter. Even though the lad had kept the “law”, upon hearing Jesus instruction to sell and give, he was greatly saddened. He knew what he must do, this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but he couldn’t let go of his treasures. His stuff had become his idol. God clearly states that we shall have no other idols above Him. God never demands we change. In this story, he doesn’t stop the ruler, he lets him go away, knowing how very sad he was. God will never force, or change His way to accommodate us. The sock drawer can stay as full as you want it to be. You can stay frustrated with the socks of life, or you can begin to let go and experience the freedom that is in Christ.

KEY SCRIPTURE STUDY

Jesus has a way of reaching down to our very core and challenging our thoughts. What are you living for?

Look up the following verses and reflect on how they might help you keep your heart focused on the *right* treasure.

Proverbs 2:4-5

Luke 12:3

Shedding What You Don't Treasure and Honoring What You Do

Eliminating Homelessness from Your Home

We've all heard the adage, "A place for everything, and everything in its place." Barbara Hemphill, CEO and founder of Productive Environment Institute states "Clutter is postponed decisions®" Your piled-up stuff represents nothing more than a delayed decision to put it where it belongs. Not giving each item a home simply means that you haven't taken the time to figure out if it's important enough to keep or think about where it should go.

*"Clutter is postponed
decisions®".*

Every item in your home was brought in one at a time, so each item should have a place where it can be properly put away. For example, every piece of paper that finds its way into your home should have a home. I know this can sound daunting, but in Chapter 8—"Like Paper, Like Manna"—I'll explain this in detail. I'll show you just how easy it is to make this a reality.

Once these decisions are made, maintenance is easy. Remember when you first learned to drive? So many new actions were required just to start the car. Now you are so accustomed to starting your car that you never have to think about it. The same will happen with eliminating clutter in your home. You *can* build a new lifestyle. In a matter of only a few months, maintaining a clutter-free home will become effortless.

The bottom line is that many of us do not have the proper space in our homes to keep all of our possessions. Quite frequently, I get calls from inquiring clients who want me to come in and organize their space, but *not get rid of anything*. Our society simply has too much stuff. Keeping everything and not giving honor to our possessions undermines our ability to feel gratitude for them. The more you have, the less often you will feel gratitude for your possessions and the incredible things they allow you to do.² All of our stuff has a cost. Yes, the purchase of the item came with a price tag, but the cost of maintaining it is even greater. There are a host of psychological costs to everything we keep, especially if those things exist in a state of disorder. Clutter just feels bad to be around. I have seen dramatic changes in the lives of my clients as a result of their ability to honor what they keep by tossing, selling, or donating what is no longer serving their present lives. Many have

told me that their sleep, for example, is markedly better. They tell me that they can actually sleep longer and dream more deeply. House cleaning no longer takes all weekend to complete and that allows them to pursue outside interests. De-cluttering will not only transform your home, it will transform your life!

When speaking with a new client, I explain that clutter is not the problem. It's not about their stuff. Rather, he or she must learn to deal with the power of the object. I agree with Peter Walsh, organizing expert, when he says, "When objects hold a tremendous amount of power over someone, then I have discovered that people lose the ability to choose which items are important. EVERYTHING becomes important, and if this is the case, then nothing is important. If all has equal value, if all of the baby clothes are important, and all of the art drawings are important or if all of the craft supplies are important, what usually happens is a feeling of a lack of honor or respect for any of it! If stuff is packed away in a box to deteriorate either by age, mold, or animals, then giving honor to those items is meaningless".³

I start by getting my clients to tell the story of the object. For example, if among your prize possessions is an old hat once worn by your father, his watch, pictures, and letters, I will suggest to my client that we get a shadow box and arrange those items in it and display it in a room that will allow the family to see and remember Dad. Honoring the few and discarding the rest releases the client's guilt of having to save it all.

WHOSE STUFF IS IT ANYWAY?

"The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord; the earth and all who live on it are his."

(Ps. 24:1 GNT)

In Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*, he states, "We never really own anything during our brief stay on earth. God just loans the earth to us while we're here. It was God's property before you arrived, and God will loan it to someone else after you die. You just get to enjoy it for a while."⁴

I might add that even though you may think he's speaking of property on the earth, I would suggest that *everything* in your home actually belongs to God. That coat you bought last fall is His. Remember, He gave you or your spouse the income so that you could afford the coat. He supplied all the raw materials that go into the coat, and he made the people who manufactured the coat. How it got into your hands was all *His* doing. The coat, actually

does belong to Him and He loves you so much that even a coat to keep you warm in winter is important to Him. Warren continues: “*Our culture says, “If you don’t own it, you won’t take care of it.”* But Christians live by a higher standard: because God owns it, I must take the best care of it that I can. *Those who are trusted with something valuable must show they are worthy of that trust.* (1 Cor. 4: 2 NCV). At the end of your life on earth you will be evaluated and rewarded according to how well you handled what God entrusted to you. That means everything you do, even simple daily chores, has eternal implications.”⁵

“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else’s property, who will give you property of your own?”

(Luke 16:10-12)

In sessions with my clients, as well as presenting at speaking engagements, I am always asked these questions: Is clutter really a *faith* issue? Does it really matter if I let the endless to-do lists go undone? It’s hard to believe that God really cares if I hang up my coat! I can assure you, God is concerned! Even when it comes to the smallest of details, He needs to see you can handle the small things before He entrusts you with greater responsibility. (My *paraphrase for Luke 16:10-12*).

It’s the same story time and again — clients tell me they want to have it all, but they hesitate in taking the responsibility. So many times I’ve seen my clients’ homes piled high with stuff — but the family is oblivious to the negative effects the clutter has on communication and cooperation. In every meeting I have with a client, I strive to act as God’s hands and feet, shedding His love and influence into each situation. I teach my clients that when we are responsible for the way we take care of our items, then those around us begin to follow in kind. Case in point, I was recently working with a woman whose son repeatedly neglected to straighten his own room; but when he saw how his mother and I were working together to organize the home at large, his personal habits changed as well. He had simply been waiting to see the “right thing” done, so that he could incorporate the same changes. Never underestimate the smallest of actions.

“Every action in our lives touches on some chord that will vibrate in eternity”

—Edwin Hubbell Chapin

We must always strive to do what is honorable and just – not only with our actions, but also with the items that God has provided in each of our lives. Where we spend our time, with whom we associate and even the purchases

We must always strive to do what is honorable and just – not only with our actions, but also with the items that God has provided in each of our lives.

we make will profoundly affect our eternal rewards. In our struggle to loosen ourselves from the entangling net of clutter, we may lose sight of an important factor: It’s not about us. Above all, Jesus demands we love Him more than anyone or anything. This requires us following Him, trusting Him, and being satisfied only in Him. Only then will we be able to receive and manage the true riches He desires to give us. Become faithful with the small things and the greater WILL be added unto you.

ORGANIZING TIPS —ELIMINATING HOMELESSNESS FROM YOUR HOME

- **Pray.** Let your prayer be focused on what God’s desire is for your space. I’ve heard it said many times that our intentions are not necessarily God’s intentions. We may think we need to start in room A, but during prayer, God makes it clear that we are to start in room B. Our prayers direct our paths. As you open your heart to God, He will speak to you about your clutter and each possession.
- **Let God shine His light on a small area of your home.** Once you have decided what is a treasure, give your treasure the honor and respect it is due. Honor each item with a “home,” where it is properly put away.
- **Display Your Treasures.** If you choose to display your honored memorabilia, you might want to consider using museum wax to anchor your items and avoid damage. Follow the preservation rules suggested by museums or historical societies. The Internet is a wonderful source for instructions on how to care for almost anything. The American Institute for Conservation is a great place to find a conservator and suggestions on how to save your treasures.

You can also learn much from the way experts at the Smithsonian Institution (www.smithsonian.org) take care of their great treasures. Another easy-to-use website is the Minnesota Historical Society (www.mnhs.org). Your local historical society or museum might also be a great resource, as are appraisers in your local area.

- **Store your items at the “point of use.”** This system refers to organizing things so that they come to hand easily when they’re needed. This “point of use” system allows you to easily access what you need in direct relation to how often you use it. Most people don’t have a place for everything and everything in its place ‘system’ so they put things where they fit. This is why people keep an abundance of plastic shopping bags in the pantry, or in a kitchen drawer or even in a cabinet stored by the pots and pans. There is no logical place to put them and that’s why they seem to accumulate. I’ve even heard that they go in the drawer under the kitchen cloths, because that’s where Mom used to keep them. The core of the “point of use system” is having a well, thought out plan. Consider how you want your home to function, and remember the “point of use” rule. The following four question will help you to move toward your next steps.

Organizing Questions to Help You Get Started

- How can I begin to eliminate homeless items in my home?
- On a scale of 1(not ready at all) to 10 (very ready) how ready am I to do this?
- If every item in your home had a home, what would the positive outcomes be?
- Are those outcomes important to you?

A TESTIMONY FROM TALA

I read the first chapter a couple of times because it didn’t sink in. I don’t have a “collection” of any sort that I could think of — I don’t collect dolls or teacups

or anything that would be considered a “treasure.” I went through the questions and answered them as best as I could but couldn’t really see how it could help me. After praying about it, the word “treasure” stuck in my head. I would look at my piles and think “treasure” — then, I realized that there is no “treasure” in that pile, it’s just junk — at least it looked like junk. Why would I keep junk in my house? Then, I realized that I treasured my house. I love my home. Then, I thought of my kids, whom I treasure, and realized that I wouldn’t want my treasures growing up around junk. My family comes from the Philippines and there is a large garbage dump there where very poor families live. My parents would tell me stories and songs coming from that place and I found it very disturbing. To a lesser extreme, if I am not careful, I will turn our home into that place. I know this is overly dramatic, but the thought of it bothers me. I began to look for treasures in my house because I want my home to be a home of treasures.

Later, I began to plan my day and was watching the Today show. They had a segment about clothes and trending fashions under \$25 and I began to consider buying some things. Then, the word “treasure” popped into my head. I realized that I should not bring in “non-treasures” either. When did I start seeing my home as a place that doesn’t need to be treasured, or my family, or myself, for that matter? You might not hear from me for a couple of days. I feel the urge to go through my piles of junk and it might take a while.

HOW TO BUILD TREASURE IN HEAVEN

- Build generosity into your budget.
- Give time and money to those in need.
- Sell what you don’t need and give the money to a hurting family.
- Use your talents to teach others.

TESTIMONY FROM BARBARA

After reading Chapter 1, I have come to realize what a treasure my home is. My elderly father lived with my husband and I for the last two years of his life. It was a very hard time for us as we cared for him around the clock. Life just seemed to stop, but I wouldn’t change a thing because it brought me to a new phase in the Lord. A few months after my father’s passing we decided to do some redecorating. The house had become a hospital and we wanted to make it our own again.

We hired an interior designer and all purchases made and work done reflect who we are today. Each piece and placement in our home is of value in my heart. But what is truly amazing is that if you came into my home you would never think I needed help in organizing. Everything looks very neat and orderly, but don't open a closet, or drawer, or cabinet. I have spent most of my life cleaning out, reorganizing, getting spaces to look good-only to have the cycle repeat itself over and over because I hadn't changed my ways. I see now, that doing this "His Way" is what makes the difference.

I have asked God to go into every area of my heart, even the places I don't know about, and I have given Him free access to clean it all out so He can be upon the throne in my heart. And look where He has brought me; to all the stuff and clutter behind closed doors and cabinets. Nothing is hidden from Him. I have it hidden, so everything looks neat and clean, and, although I am disgusted with this aspect of my life, I have been complacent and given up. But He sees it and wants to free me from it. So He has brought me to "Organize His Way" and He has already blessed me.

As I focus more on God's Kingdom, which is eternal, I will focus less on the temporary things that I have accumulated and not let go of. I want to seek God for His wisdom and not allow my fleshy heart to be drawn away from His treasures. I want to replace my desires with His and my ways with His. As I seek Him in this and obey and make immediate right choices, my life will change and I will honor Him.

TAKING IT TO GOD

Father,

I know I'm to store up my treasures in heaven, but quite frankly, I have no idea what that means. How do I store up something I can't physically see or understand? I know you will reveal this to me as I seek your Word and listen to your voice. Thank you for showing me that what's in my heart has a direct correlation to what I love. Forgive me for pursuing so many earthly possessions and activities. I realize now that by doing so, I have shut the door on the blessings you had purposed for me.

I humbly confess and ask your forgiveness for keeping these false treasures. I understand that laying up my treasures in heaven is when I give of myself to the service of others in Christ's name. I ask you to shine your light on the treasures I need to store up in your kingdom. Help me realize the difference between "stuff" and "treasures." Most of all, help me to always treasure you above all other treasures in my life. Amen.

