





# WHEN YOUR HOUSE BECOMES A HOTEL

Fighting burnout at home

By Christina Quick

## Beep! Beep! Beep!

The timer tells me Daniel, my 8-year-old son, has finished his required reading for school. I start the bath water running just before rushing to turn off the noise. On the way, I pick up a backpack, two marbles, the TV remote control and a pair of socks.

“Let’s remember to clean up after ourselves,” I say to no one in particular.

I turn off the timer with my elbow and notice my daughter’s pink plastic bracelet in the corner. My hands are full, so I grab it with my toes and make my way back through the house to redeposit my finds in their proper places.

Stopping at the calendar, I see that there is a school field trip tomorrow. And a dentist appointment. And ballet. That reminds me that I need to wash my daughter’s leotard and tights. My head is deep in the hamper when my son announces that he needs \$2 for the field trip. I rummage through my purse and finally locate a dollar bill, three quarters, two dimes and five pennies.

Back to the hamper for pink tights. There they are. Let’s see, the tag says to wash them in cold water. Oh no, water! I hurry back to the bathroom just in time to avert a major disaster.

“Cool, a deep bath,” Daniel marvels from the doorway.





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There's the timer again. Now it's telling me to check the chicken in the oven. I turn the pieces, reset the noisemaker, take two ibuprofen tablets for my headache and start thumbing through the unopened mail.

"Hey, Mom," I hear my daughter say. "This is for you."

Six-year-old Hannah extends a dandelion and a homemade card that reads, "MoM, Yor grAtE." I pause for a moment before dropping the mail on the counter and bending down to give her a hug.

"Thanks," I say, "you're pretty great yourself."

"I learned a new song today," she says, beaming. "Wanna hear it?"

I muster a smile, find a chair and plop down to listen to Hannah's song. The chicken, the bath and the laundry will have to wait. For the first time since I walked through the door, I focus on one activity, one child, one moment. As I drink in the melody of that sweet little voice, I can almost hear God's voice speaking to me.

"This is what they need most," He seems to say. "This is important."

I realize I need that gentle reminder at times. Like many parents, I've become an expert at multitasking. My husband, Wade, who single-handedly sees the kids off every morning, is also quite skilled at juggling multiple duties. Unfortunately, this tendency to manage so many activities at once has the potential to sabotage the very thing we're trying to create — a happy, Christ-centered home.

At best, such a pace leaves families feeling pulled in too many directions. At worst, it can lead to a form of burnout and complete exhaustion at home that is similar to what many workers experience on the job.

Keri Wyatt Kent, author of *God's Whisper in a Mother's Chaos* and *Breathe: Creating Space for God in a Hectic Life*, co-published by Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) International, says home burnout is a reality for a growing number of parents.

"So many parents that I talk to say, 'I thought I was the only one who wrestled with these things,'" Kent says. "They're feeling frustrated, isolated and overwhelmed."

Kent suggests five ways to avoid burnout at home and get the most out of family life.

### Focus on the moment.

Multitasking has its place, but Kent says families need to rediscover the art of focusing on one thing at a time. "I make lunches and breakfast at the same time for my kids while quizzing them on their spelling," Kent says. "But it's hard to love someone in a hurry. Love requires attention, and we can't give someone our full attention if we're doing three other things."

Whether you're reading a storybook to your toddler, hearing about your teenager's day or enjoying a cup of coffee with your spouse, the idea is to focus attention on individual activities and people in spite of other demands and distractions.

"It's a gift we give our families and ourselves when we say, 'For the next 20 minutes, I'm going to do this one thing,'" Kent says.

### Include God in the equation.

Kent says many people make the mistake of thinking they're too busy for God. They fail to realize that maintaining a relationship with Him is the only way to experience the peace and purpose they're desperately seeking.

"There are ways you can connect with God — even in the midst of the chaos," she says. "Sometimes it's as simple as taping a Bible verse above the sink and meditating on it while the kids are hanging on your leg."

### Connect with others.

Developing a network of friends and relatives who are willing to lend a hand or listen to your concerns is vital for preventing burnout at home, Kent says.

"We're designed for community," she says. "God desires a relationship

with us and desires us to be in relationships with one another. When we try to do everything ourselves and don't allow people to come alongside us to help, of course we're going to burn out."

### Guard your time.

Over-scheduling is one of the biggest burnout predictors for today's families, according to Kent. "Before we say yes to anything, we need to take a look at what we're saying no to," she says. "Without realizing it, we may be saying no to sanity and time together as a family. If kids are in three different sports, for instance, you by default have to say no to family dinners together."

Kent says couples should identify their priorities and then strategize their schedules accordingly. "We have to ask the important questions," she says. "Where do we want to put our energy? Where do we want to go as a family?"

### Make room for little things.

Kent says many people believe they can't alter their home lives without making major changes, like quitting a job or moving to the country. Yet she notes that it's the little things — such as getting alone with God for a few minutes or taking time to play in the lawn sprinkler with a child — that often make the biggest impact.

"All of us can learn to slow down and focus on the important things," she says. "It will make you a person who is happier and more purposeful."

Gary Allen, a father of two and national Ministerial Enrichment coordinator for the Assemblies of God, agrees that little things can make a huge difference.

"Ten minutes on the right subject at the right time in the right place can mean more to your children than an entire day that has been planned," Allen says. ■

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