

THE FAMILY-FIRST CREATIVE

42 Tips for Following
Your Dreams While
Putting Family First

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THANK YOU

Before we begin this ebook, **I want to take a moment to thank you for pre-ordering a copy of my memoir, *[Something Other than God](#)***. I will be deeply grateful for every copy ever purchased, of course, but I have a special place in my heart for all pre-orders.

It is a big help to me as an author to have advance orders on my book, yet I know that it can be unsatisfying to make a purchase for a product that you won't receive immediately. Since you have given me a gift with your willingness to take a shot on a book that's not even out yet, I wanted to give you something in return.

I worked on this ebook for months to make it a worthy thank-you gift to you. I put my best effort into making it an easy read, full of unique ideas and tips that actually work.

I am so blessed by your generosity, and I hope that you find this ebook to be an inspiring and helpful read.

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, I had three children ages three and under. Over the next five years, we had three more babies; I wrote a 250-page book that required two full rewrites and many extensive revisions; I kept up two blogs; my husband became a CPA, which required taking classes as well as months of study for the notoriously difficult exams; and we began homeschooling our kids.

One of the most common questions I get is: “How did you find the time?!”

I’m not naturally good at time management and I don’t have strong self discipline, but I have learned some good strategies for making the most of your limited free time when you’re in a crazy season of life. And I will share everything I know with you here.

This book isn’t just about getting more work done in fewer hours; it’s a guide to setting your sights on what is most important in life, and pursuing your passions while keeping your priorities in the right order.

You’ll notice also that I do not assume that your hobby is something you’ll turn into a career. Instead, I encourage you to pursue a craft you love as a side project, something you do as a

gift to yourself and to your family, because it fills you with joy and energy. You may or may not ever make a dime from it, but the world (and your house) will be a better place for you having done it.

Though I wrote this book with parents in mind, I think these tips will be helpful to anyone who is passionate about pursuing a craft during a crazy season of life.

1. Define your family vision

What would it look like if your family had a perfect life? What would happen during the ideal week? I'm not talking about servants feeding you peeled grapes on a yacht in Tahiti, but a realistic goal that's based on what you're *meant* to do with your lives, not just what you might feel like doing.

For example, here is how Joe and I imagine the perfect week for our family:

We begin most weekdays by going to a morning Mass. After we get back, I homeschool the kids while Joe works from home. In the afternoon, the kids make birthday cards for relatives or go to foreign language lessons or practice an instrument. Between Joe's flexible work schedule and a little babysitting help, we can arrange it so that I usually have free time in the afternoon to write. Most days, Joe also has time to work on side projects that interest him.

Each evening, we close the day with family Vespers and sit down to a dinner with lots of talking and sharing. If I need

more writing time, I do it after the kids go to bed or in the morning before they get up.

On the weekends, we go to a few kids' events like robotics competitions, art shows, or sports games. Some weekends are busy and full of activities, but we try to make sure they're balanced with weekends that have a more leisurely pace. We might get together for dinner with another family on Saturday night. On Sunday we go to Mass and have the afternoon to putter around the house and prepare for the coming week.

Our lives don't look much like that perfect week right now – not even close, actually. But creating the vision was a powerful exercise because it forced us to get specific about what our mission is as a family. Now that we have that clarified, every now and then we can ask ourselves if our current choices are leading us close to or further away from this vision.

ACTION:

Grab a pen and a piece of paper, and sit down with your spouse to talk about what the perfect week would look like for your family. What does this say about your priorities? What does this say about what kind of family God intends for you to be?

2. Discover your passions

I am assuming that you have some idea of what you'd like to do. Maybe you're a writer who dreams of penning a novel, a seamstress who's dying to make gorgeous clothes, or a photographer who yearns for more time to get serious about the craft.

However, if you're one of those people who passionately wants to have a passion but hasn't figured out what it is yet, that's great too! It's beyond the scope of this book to show you how to discover what you're meant to do, but here are a few tips:

- **Ask God.** Pray for God to reveal what he means for you to do with your talents...but spend most of your time *listening* for the answer.
- **Ask your family.** Ask your spouse, parents, kids, siblings, or trusted friends what talents you have that they think you should be using.
- **Ask yourself** what activities you always gravitate toward.
When I look back at my life, I see that I was always writing

something, even before it occurred to me to label myself a “writer.”

- **Take the Called and Gifted course.** The St. Catherine of Siena Institute has a wonderful [Called and Gifted CD series](#) that will help you determine what gifts and talents God has given you, and many people have found it to be life-changing.

ACTION:

Give yourself permission to think and pray about this topic without worrying about being self-indulgent. A wise spiritual director once pointed out that it’s false humility to overlook what you’re good at, since God gave you those gifts to help build up the Kingdom. In a spirit of service and humility, take time to explore talents you have that might be worth developing.

3. Make sure this activity *gives* you energy

When people ask me how I did all this writing while having six babies in eight years, I explain that writing *is* what gave me the energy I needed to do it all. As a lazy introvert who's extremely sensitive to noise, I can't imagine how I could have kept my sanity without having that creative outlet.

What's most important to understand is that, for me, writing is not "work"; in fact, it *gives* me energy. When I would use the kids' nap times to publish a blog post, I would walk away feeling more refreshed than before I began.

This was a key discovery not only in terms of energy management, but in terms of time management. Since writing is what I do to relax, when I would have rare blocks of free time, I was more than happy to use every minute of it on the book or a blog post. I did not need rest time in addition to writing time.

ACTION:

Continue your discernment from #2, with a focus on which activities *give* you energy when you undertake them.

4. Pitch the vision to your spouse

If your house is even half as crazy as ours usually is, your spouse probably feels like he or she is running on empty most of the time.

If I were to have walked up to Joe in 2008 and simply said, “I want to write a book! Can you watch the kids a whole lot so I can do that?” I think he would have gone into convulsions – not because he doesn’t support me, but because he was already so tired at the end of each day that he had nothing left to give.

It changed the dynamic of this endeavor when I pitched the high-level vision of what I wanted to do. Here is a rough summary of what I said:

I have discovered that writing is my passion, and I am so excited about the idea of writing a book. I understand that nothing may come of it – it’s hard to get things published these days, and authors don’t make much money even when they are published. But it would bring me so much joy to be able to attempt it – and I think that joy would spread to everyone in the house! To do this, I would need time to

THIS IS THE END OF THE PREVIEW

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THE WEEK OF MARCH 31! SEE

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