

BEAT THE BOREDOM IN A WEEK

7 days of games, meals, crafts
& devotions for families



*Beat the Boredom
In a Week*

*...a week of games,
meals, crafts and
devotions for families!*

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In this Ebook, you will find a full week of amazing activities, recipes, ideas and more... just for you and your family! We have come together as a group of bloggers to share all of our ideas for you... in one place. Our hope is that you walk away feeling inspired.

Enjoy!

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Chapter one:
Free Activities for you & your kids by
Becky at
Your Modern Family

I'm Becky- a wife, mother of four, teacher, therapist and blogger. I blog to help other families by sharing the tips that I have learned along the way. I hope that my blog provides the tips that you need for running an organized home, raising kids, cooking kid-friendly meals & learning new ways to save money!



A little more about me... I married my high school (& college) sweetheart and we have been blessed with our four young children. I was an elementary teacher, until our oldest son was born in 2006. Two years later we welcomed another beautiful baby boy and I became a part-time (one morning a week) play therapist. In 2010 we had our third little boy and he has filled our lives with even more joy. In 2012, we were excited to welcome our sweet baby girl.

I love to share what I learn in my life with my friends and now I am excited to share with you. We can all learn so much from each other! I am blessed to have met these amazing women that I am co-writing this ebook with and we are excited to be able to pass on our ideas to you!

Have fun reading this book. I love that it is a collaborative ebook with a few of my favorite bloggers. I know that it will fill you with ideas that will help to make your life easier and more fun!

Be Inspired!

~Becky~

My husband and I have four kids and we have the kid's friends over at least twice a week (play-dates), so I am always in search of some fun, low-cost activities to keep our little ones busy, engage, learning and having fun! [Spending one-on-one time with your kids](#) is important, but family time is equally important. Lets think of some ways that we can enjoy spending time together. Having free ideas for your kids can be a great way to spend your days. Don't turn on the TV today- you have 12 fun activities to pick from! Enjoy!

Pick an activity for every day of the week and have fun with your kids!



1 . Make a leaf collage that resembles stain glass. This is a great activity! When I was a teacher, I used to do this with my students several times a year. I now do this at home several times a season! First- go on a leaf hunt! Gather some leaves (about 10-15) and bring them inside. Set them aside.
Next- Plug in your iron.
Third- Get two sheets of wax paper (the size of printer paper works well) and set them on your table.

Fourth- Take old crayons and removed the wrappers (broken crayons work great for this).

Fifth- Take a cheese grater and grate some old crayons onto your wax paper.

Set the leaves on top of the crayons and then grate more crayons on top. **The crayons will hold the two sheets of wax paper together, like glue.** Put the other wax paper on top.

Last- Iron them together (you may want to use a towel on top of the wax paper to prevent it from sticking to the iron) It makes a leaf stain-glass collage.

When it is dry, you can get a hole-puncher out and punch a hole in the top for yarn or ribbon. Hang it on a window for everyone to see!

2. **Go camping (in your own backyard)**

This is fun and easy to organize. My husband plans on doing this in the next few weeks with our kids, my brother and his son. They will cook hot-dogs, make s'mores and have fun! If you don't have a fire pit, my friend uses her grill for the hot-dogs and s'mores! Borrow a tent or buy one used, if you don't have one. Or just "camp out" until bedtime and then move the 'camp' inside to sleep (no need for a tent).

3. **Go on a walk & learn a little...** If you asked our six-year-old what he wanted to do right now, he would say "Take a bike ride." We bike around the neighborhood, or we take our bikes to a nearby park. If you aren't up for a bike ride, just take a walk or go for a hike at a local park. Look for treasures (stones, leaves...). **Make it a math lesson- take rulers & measure things.** Record them in a journal. Our boys LOVE to do this!



4. Time for YOU to PLAY at the playground (not just your kids!)

Can you remember the last time that YOU went down the slide or tried to swing "as high as you can" on the swings? Join in on the fun with your kids!! **Don't just supervise- get involved and your kids will remember!**

5. I scream, you scream, we all scream for FREE Ice Cream!

You can enjoy your ice cream while getting your kids a free cone. So many places do this. Brusters is our favorite one. The cones are small, so it won't spoil any meals and they are eaten before they melt! :) (a win-win!)



Image source: sodahead.com

6. GET CRAFTY! Give your kids some materials and let them create! My husband lets the kids use scrap wood to make things- like beds for their stuffed animals. The kids love helping him and then painting them and fixing them up with cotton balls (mattresses), tissues (blankets), etc...!

7. Movie Night (outside): Rent a movie from the library (free) or a Redbox rental (**DVDonme** is the code to get you a free movie for your first time using it with that credit/debit card). If its a nice day, take a portable DVD player outside, lay on a blanket with some snacks and you have a full 'movies on the lawn'. The kids think this is really fun and it is a special family time that you can enjoy any night of the week!

8. Volunteer together. It is so important to teach your children to volunteer and give back. I was taught this as a child, as was my husband. We continue to volunteer when we can and we want our children to do the same. It could be as easy as taking up your neighbor's garbage cans when they are out of town or dropping off food at the soup kitchen. Just explain the reason that you are doing it and encourage your children to join in!

9. Take a field trip! Visit a local pretzel shop- they will let you make your own pretzels and see where they are made. You could visit a fire station, a school, a restaurant... Most places will let you do this without hesitation.

10. Put on your own show! Use those socks that have lost their match to make a puppet for yourself and your child. Use paint, wiggly eyes, yarn and even cut up old clothes to make new clothes for your puppet! Put on a puppet show. Use your camera to tape it and watch it together. Our kids do this several times a week. They watch it over and over and laugh hysterically! Show your child how you use funny voices for different characters. Make up your own or follow someone else's lead ("Three Little Pigs")



Image source- Pinterest

11. Have a card match. By four years of age, each of our kids had learned to love the card game WAR. (How to play: Deal all of the cards- face down. Each player gets a pile. Each player will flip over one card. The person that lays down the card of highest value is the winner and keeps both of the cards. If there is a "tie" you have a war, where you get to do it again.) This is a wonderful way to include math in your fun activities!

12. Make Cereal "candy" necklaces. This is fun, easy, and the kids love it! Just take a piece of yarn and tape a little bit of scotch tape onto the end to make it easier for the kids to get the cereal onto it. Tie a big knot or bow at one side, to stop the cereal from falling off. Give your kids a bowl of cheerios or fruity cheerios or fruit loops. Teach them how to put the cereal on and when they are finished, tie the ends together for them. What could be better than a wear-able snack! (By the way...This would make a great snack for that walk that you are going to take! No need to stop to eat- you have that part covered!)

Keep in mind that it doesn't really matter WHAT you are doing, as long as you are spending that time with your child- focusing on them! Turn off your phone, the TV, the computer and just tune in to your precious, God-given child and enjoy the wonderful people that they have become!

Visit *YOUR MODERN FAMILY* on [Pinterest](#) to see more ideas that your family will love!

For more money saving ideas, visit my post on [Becoming a stay at home Mom on one income!](#)

Also- check out ebook on how to [Potty Train in a Weekend \(3 days!\)](#)



Lastly- how we set up our "special nights" of spending one-on-one time with our kids



Visit Becky from Your Modern Family on Facebook and on Pinterest

Chapter 2

Organizing a Busy Bag Swap by Gabby at MamaGab.net



My name Gabrielle, though everyone calls me Gabby. I have a master's degree in English and education, and while I used to teach high school English, I'm now putting that degree to work as a mommy to 3 kids ages 4 and under. I'm passionate about motherhood, walking with God, good books, and intentional homemaking.

Busy Bags are fun all-in-one activities that keep little hands busy and learning without tons of attention from mom. Many moms love to use them for keeping the kids busy while prepping dinner while others bring them to the doctor's office. But when we organized our recent Busy Bag exchange this summer, moms were really thrilled to use them to keep the kids quiet on **road trips and flights across the country.**

While it's easy to make your own busy bags, it's a real time and money saver to host a busy bag swap. Instead of making 10 different busy bags, you can make 10 of the same busy bags, get together with friends and swap. When you're finished, you'll all leave with great activities to keep your children busy and learning.

Some of the moms preferred to meet in the evening without the kids, so **we scheduled an evening swap at my church.** I set a date and a time that would work for most of us.

We then **created a Facebook event** and invited everyone from MOPS and other moms in the community. I asked the moms to RSVP and list the item they wanted to bring so that there would be no duplicates.

I contacted moms from my local MOPS group, so we knew all of our activities would be geared towards pre-schoolers from about **ages 2-4.** If you want, you can actually **focus on an even smaller age range,** like just 2 year olds or only 4 year olds.

I requested that **all busy bags be placed in zip-top bags,** the kind that have an actual plastic zipper, so that little hands could open and close the bags without any help from mommy.

You can also require lamination if you want, but we didn't want to add anymore to our to-do lists. Still, some activities like the lacing cards were laminated, which is nice!

Then **we met up for less than an hour** and swapped bags! All of the bags were organized neatly on a table, so we each just walked by and grabbed one of each bag. My kids missed me during the hour that I was gone, but they were thrilled when I walked in the door with fun games just for them!

Here are the busy bags...



Lacing cards are great for developing fine motor skills. These are more appropriate for my 4 year old than my 2 year old.



Both of my kids, ages 2 & 4, love the velcro craft sticks.



Here are some animal matching games. This is easy to make with foam pieces.



My 4 year old loves these popsicle stick puzzles. My two year old tries really hard with these, but he mainly just lines up the popsicle sticks in random order.



This is the craft that I made. My 4 year old is more proficient at the [Button Snake](#), but my 2 year old really loves this one.



Both of my kids love picking up worms with the clothespin and feeding baby birds in the Bird Nest.



Shape Highways are my toddler's favorite activity because he loves zooming cars anywhere he can.

The Results?

My kids love Busy Bags! I keep all of the bags in a basket, and my toddler loves to pull them out. He grabs one, plays with it for a while, then cleans up everything and picks out another bag. One day last week, my 4 year old went to a friend's house to play. My 2 year old

spent an entire hour playing with busy bags while we cleaned the house for the last minute house guests who were arriving that evening.



I'm hearing great things from other moms too. One mom took all of the busy bags and placed them into zipper pouches. She put the zipper pouches in a binder so that her 3 year old could play with the busy bags on a flight across the country. Smart mama!

We're definitely going to do another swap, though we're thinking of including the kids next time with possibly a play date at McDonalds or somewhere else. I was happy to hear moms talking about "next time" before we even left the first busy bag swap!

Don't forget to check out the other posts in our Summer Series: [Beat the Boredom! The Ultimate Mid-Summer Survival Guide & Giveaway.](#)

Have you made busy bags? What were your kids' favorite activities? Do you have any suggestions for organizing another

swap?

Sabby

In the next chapter, I am going to show you how to plan play dates in your area the easy way...

Chapter 3

How to plan a Facebook Play date Group in you area, by [MamaGab](#):

I'm not a fun mama. I'm not a creative one either. But I am *friends* with fun and creative mamas, and that makes up for my deficit, or at least I hope it does. In fact, one reason my kids have so much fun and go to so many amazing play dates is all because of one gal I'm friends with.

A couple of years ago, she did the simplest and best thing for our kids. She created a Facebook group for play dates in our town. All summer long, she plans one play date a week for any mom in the community to join. We might meet up at Chuck E. Cheese one week, because if we go before lunch, \$5 of tokens can go a *long* way with preschoolers and toddlers. And maybe one week we'll meet up at a local park.

Recently, she planned a play date at a splash pad and asked moms to bring snacks. When I arrived, I found two large canopies to shield us from the sun, picnic blankets, and even snacks that were safe for my toddler's food allergies because we always specify that on the play date site. How phenomenal is that?

There was even one month when we stopped doing the really big & fun play dates and started meeting at my house once a week for a small play date and prayer time with each other. It was a sweet way to get to know new moms and pray for what was going on in our lives

Since many of us are MOPS moms, we also team up with a very large local church where our MOPS group meets so that this mom doesn't have to do all the planning. The church plans other great play dates throughout the summer for the MOPS and Mother's Day Out families. Some are simple and others are complex.

One week, we brought bikes, tricycles, and even Cozy Coupes for our kids and they just rode around the gym in a big circle. We were floored at how well the kids shared their toys with each other.

Another week, the church planned a beach party at their volleyball court. Huge blow-up toys and small wading pools were set up everywhere and the Mother's Day Out staff served up snow cones for moms and kiddos.

Sometimes, planning fun things for my kids simply means keeping an ear to the ground and an eye on my local paper for all of the great things going on in my area. Other times, it's as simple as finding friends who can plan well.

[Visit Gabby from MamaGab on facebook](#)

Chapter 4

Seven Days of Devotionals by Jessica at Smarterter Each Day



Jessica Smartt used to be a librarian and an English teacher, but now she works much harder just being a mom. You can find Jessica blogging at [“Smarterter” Each Day](#) where she pokes fun at the everyday challenges of motherhood, shares all her delicious allergy-free recipes, and rejoices that God loves her no matter what phobia she’s recently developed. She is blessed to the moon and back with two energetic little boys and a husband who can fix anything.

**Seven Days of Devotionals:
Day 1 - How to Kick Out Worries By Remembering**



image courtesy [Alfred Borchard](#)

This essay first appeared at "[Smarter](#)" Each Day on February 7, 2010.

Sometimes I read the Old Testament, and I have the hardest time not getting so annoyed at God's people, the Israelites. Today, for instance, I read that famous story when God parts the water of the Red Sea, and then crushes them back down on the bad guys, the Egyptians. What a crazy, amazing miracle they watched!

And then these Israelites are so stupid... **Three verses after a miracle, they're *complaining* to Moses about bad-tasting water.** After all they've seen, *complaining*. They can be so bratty, forgetful, and selfish.

Of course, I think about this story for two seconds, and then the conviction hits. I quickly remember my own complaining. and worrying. and doubting. *and the miracles I stubbornly forget.*

Everyday there's some common annoyance, something lacking, something worrisome, something just as selfish and petty as yucky water, that has me grumbling to God.

I heard some guy on the radio recently say that **faith is a function of memory.** I had always thought that faith meant you just trust God with everything awful, blindly. But what he said made it sound more reasonable.

And I think he's right – faith is more like **forcing yourself to remember the acts of God in your past.**

Do you have miracles to remember? What are your amazing stories?

As I write this, my little miracle is one room away, taking his ten o'clock nap. He's not our miracle baby like most mean it, with hopeful praying month after month and finally those cheerful pink lines. No, when I think of our miracle, I remember standing in our nursery, holding him, sobbing, [wondering if he would ever look us in the eye](#) or play normally or laugh and smile with us.

I remember Todd and me on our knees in our living room, begging God to give us wisdom and heal our little Sam. I never want to forget. I want to remember my miracles. Forgive me, God, when the worries of today make me doubt.

“In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.” ~ Exodus 15:13

Day 2: God Picks Your Kids

This post originally appeared at "[Smarter Each Day](#)" February 26, 2011.



image by [Grażyna Suchecka](#)

Do you know who **Joni Erikson Tada** is? My mom made us watch her bio video when we were kids. At age seventeen she dove in a shallow pool and became paralyzed. I can still picture the scene from the movie, 20 years later.

She's an amazing person. Despite being a quadriplegic, she is married, paints (with her teeth), gives speeches on how good God is (!!!!), writes books, goes on talk shows, and has an entire business running.

One time I heard a blurb she did on the radio. It was titled "Tailor-made trials" or something like that. **In it she talked about how God hand-picks every single trouble for us.** Every trouble is individually *selected, allowed, etc.* as something that each one of us needs, or would benefit from.

I had never thought about God carefully *choosing* my problems, out of love, out of kindness, **out of really knowing who I am.**

I have often thought since about how God also hand-picks our children for us.

Of all the mommies in the world, Sam got me. God thought that *I* would make the best mom for him. It's crazy! So I have Sam...Sam, who had colic. Sam, who is allergic to everything. Sam, who loves to learn, who is addicted to golf, who has a soft heart, who has asthma, who soaks up everything like a sponge, who takes forever to climb down the stairs, who likes to rock and be held when he wakes up, who loves books and who only naps for one hour and fifteen minutes before waking up with a poopy diaper, every, single, TIME.

And then I think about my second, right now just a baby inside me. I worry sometimes, as all pregnant and new moms do...*What will he be like? Will I be a good mom to him?*

But one thing I know. Whoever he is, whatever he is allergic to or afraid of, or however he is the most wonderful or challenging kid I can ever imagine having - **he is mine.** God chose him for me. There is a lot of comfort in that!

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Day 3: When You Don't Feel "Holy" Enough



This essay originally appeared at ["Smarter" Each Day](#) February 12, 2012. I have always loved C.S. Lewis. He wrote the famous "Chronicles of Narnia," but also a whole bunch of non-fiction that just...gets me.

Like this quote: "There have been times when I think we do not desire heaven, but more often I find myself wondering whether, in our heart of hearts, we have ever desired anything else."

That first part, about not being quite as holy as we think we should – now that rings true here in mom-land.

See I used to be quite holy, back in college. I had daily, sacred quiet times, in which I prayed for all of the lost, and nearly all of fruits of the spirit (not just patience). I journaled; I sung (with my eyes closed, mind you) at worship night; I discussed. Oh, how I discussed. *Heaven, in its official self, was near.*

[These days...things are a little different.](#) **Actually I have quite a complex about that holy Jessica of long ago.** She has been replaced with someone who gets annoyed easily, who says her prayers mostly in bed, with warm covers on (you can see where this is going), and...I *think* I know where my Bible is, but a journal??? Forget it.

Which makes me wonder, comparatively, if I will be knocking on heaven's door one day and somehow have forgotten my verses, and theologies, and...*feel out of place.*

I hope Mr. Lewis is right, then, that the inklings of heaven are still right here with me even if books and Bible studies have been replaced by dishes and diapers. And if I look at my heart, I think he *is* right.

Behind all of the vitamins and check-ups and seat-belt-buckling and baby-gate-installing and sneaking of vegetables into things, **is the hope that nothing bad will ever, ever happen to my family.** *Heaven.*

Every time I worry about my own health, it's just because I want to live forever with the ones I love. *Heaven.*

Every time my heart breaks for yet another family with sick kids, *heaven.*

Every time I'm hungry, and tired, and need strength for another day, *heaven.*

Every time I'm struck with how perfect my children are, and somehow hugging them tight is not enough – I want the moment to last forever... *heaven.*

Every time I'm lonely. Every time I'm worried. [Every time I hurt.](#) *Heaven.*

“If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.”

- C.S. Lewis

Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Day 4: How I Know God Loves Mommies

This essay was originally published June 17, 2012 at "[Smarter](#)" *Each Day*.



image by [Andreas Krappweis](#)

When we were on a recent vacation to Myrtle Beach, the kids tried to feed a duck family some crackers, and I was shocked at what happened.

Y'all. **The mommy duck would not even eat!** She was so *pathetically* pre-occupied with those ducklings. Her heart looked like it was going to pound out of her chest. But then again...she did live in the middle of a submarine splash park, so I kind of understand the apprehension.

Her behavior was so striking to me...**I guess I know how she feels.**

Sometimes as a parent, I feel like I'm playing that game "Jenga" we played as kids. I keep pulling out logs, waiting for the wobbly tower to crash.

The first time they handed me Sam, I thought, "Seriously? I am in charge of this?? Are you going to give me a class first or something?" **And when your child has [a life-threatening allergy](#), the perilous and fragile nature of parenting always looms a little more ominously in the background.**

We've had two really awful medical events back to back.

And I am positive these are harder for us than him, being as we are the ones in control. (Not really, of course, but sort of.)

I fish out the peanut shells in the sand where he's playing (most of the them?). I call the company to find out if the hot dogs are safe (enough?). I wash off the table (mostly?) before we eat at the pool. I maneuver Sam around the kids with the cheeze-its. I recall what I've eaten before I kiss him goodnight. I always remember the epi-pen. I diagnose cough as cold or asthma. I prepare, I watch, I monitor.

And – I Am Tired. Really tired. *It is too much. I'll miss something. I am not smart enough. I can't hold it all together. I'm not able to do this job.*

On top of that, I feel guilty. When I think of what God thinks of me – even though a million people tell me otherwise – *I feel ashamed.* I know in my heart of hearts, **I don't trust Him.**

I know in my heart of hearts, I'm frustrated and demanding and self-centered **when I should be grateful.**

Exhausted and guilty. Not a real fun place to live.

Well, I have to tell you this. A long time ago when I was only weeks into being a mom, a friend of mine shared a verse with me. For us, she said. *Us moms.*

Isaiah 40:11:

*He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.*

Did you catch the last line? **He leads the mummies gently.** I have loved that verse ever since.

With the tired, he is gentle.

With the worried, he is gentle.

With the guilty, he is gentle.

With the frightened, he is gentle.

With the little ones over which we worry, he is gentle.

And this is the great and wonderful present of Christianity that I love every time: that he does not treat us as our sins deserve, but He leads us gently to rest.

Day 5: Hope for When You Feel Like a Failure

I have a pair of roller blades in my garage. I think the last time I used them, George W. was in his first term. Also, there are some knitting needles in a bag in my closet. I can't bear to part with them, or the beautiful half-completed "scarf" from senior year.

And that reminds me. **I'm writing a book.** At least I was in seventh grade. We'll see what happens.

I've never thought of myself as fickle, but then again. I was thinking the other day that for a fairly predictable person, I make an awful lot of "I'm going to-s" that, well...fizzle.

I'm going to run everyday.

I'm going to scrub the floors on Thursday.

I'm going to use my special moisturizer every night.

I'm going to take B-12.

I'm going to stop gossiping.

I'm going to carry a planner, and turn off the lights when I leave a room.

I'm going to keep my toenails painted and my car cleaned.

I'm going to save receipts, workout my abs and take more pictures.

I'm going to study Greek. to start a book club. to start a prayer plan and a cleaning plan and a learning plan.

Honestly, sometimes I get exhausted and a little discouraged with me and my lack of follow through.

If I could just stick with something.

It's then that I marvel. As I look back on my life, there is ONE thing I've managed to do, that hasn't fizzled or been given to Goodwill or left underneath the bed forgotten. There is ONE constant. It's Him. **It's God.**

How thankful I am that I am not holding on to him, but He is holding on to me. If things were reversed, who knows how long ago my faith would have been forgotten and maybe remembered again, or stopped and perhaps restarted.

I found this theology from the Westminster Confession of Faith. It's old wordy language, but what a wonderful thought!

Perseverance of the saints: "They whom God hath accepted . . . can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

Day 6: How Being a Mom Makes You Holy



This essay first appeared at ["Smarter" Each Day](#) on September 24, 2009.

I had a moment last night, in the wee hours of the morning. Sam, my little baby, had gas, hunger, stuffy nose, and then playtime – *two hours total*.

The moment was when, rocking him and letting him hold one of my hands for comfort, I thought, “*Where else would I really rather be?*” **And I meant it.**

This is a big deal, because honestly, this mothering thing has not been easy for me. It’s a very, very hard job.

But not “hard” like you think. Actually anyone could do the work, which is why you can pay \$10 an hour to most any teenager to do the job for a few hours. In fact, it’s largely mundane, repetitive, menial tasks, if we’re being honest. Mostly, I wash dishes, read kiddie books and change diapers. Not Einstein.

No, the “hardness” of mothering, I realized, comes not in the quality but the quantity. It never, never stops. From the moment they set your precious little bundle on your chest, every, single minute will be different.

Sure, you still enjoy a nap, cup of coffee, conversation with your husband, REM cycle of sleep every once in a while, but each is enjoyed tentatively, with the knowledge that at any moment you could and probably will be called out of yourself for another job. I find myself holding my breath a lot.

But I don’t just mean in a bad way, of course. For the whole time your heart is also bigger, filled with more love, worry, and depth than it ever has been. *But it is constant.*

And I'm not good at that kind of love. I'm more used to the love that shows up during a pre-planned week of mission in Peru, from the hours of 8-3 in a classroom, or momentarily after a convicting quiet time. **This every-minute-kind-of-love I can't do.**

C.S. Lewis has a quote about rats in the cellar that keeps coming to mind... When you turn on a light, that's when you see how many rats are there, *just like sudden disruptions reveal our character.*

Hopeful thinking, maybe, but I'm wondering after last night if some of my rats are disappearing...**Is it possible the cute little guy in farm animal pajamas is chasing them away? :)**

"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Romans 5:3

Day 7: How to Love Someone When It's Uncomfortable

This essay appeared at ["Smarter" Each Day](#) on February 4, 2011.

God speaks to us in different ways. In the old days God spoke through donkeys and whispers and thunder...**But this week, God talked to me through the stomach flu.**

I learned a lot of things.

I learned it's silly to worry about all the horrible things that can happen, because most don't, and then others you never even imagined (like puking so much while you're eight months pregnant you start having contractions and have to go to the hospital for fluids and meds...twice) - *some things like these will happen whether you dreadfully anticipate them or not.*

But mostly during the Great Stomach Bug of '11, **I learned about love.** And germs. Love and germs.

See I had gotten it wrong. All this time I have been thinking that love HATES germs. **Love protects right?** Love cares for your family by washing the sheets frequently, by staying away from sick people, by sanitizing and chlorox-ing and pumping up with vitamin C. I think sometimes, I'm right...Love *does* do those things.

But to a point.

This week, I was really pathetic. I was so sick., I needed ice chips, and plain rice, and my face wiped, and also I needed help with Sam, my very big and very energetic almost two-year-old.

And boy let me tell you. **I am thankful for people who helped.**

I am thankful for my parents, who loved me and cared for me, without worrying about whether they'd get sick. (Which they did.) Not once did someone ask me if I washed my hands before grabbing those crackers, or switch out the nice living room blanket for an old one easier to wash, or go around after me with wipes and disinfecting spray. We were loved. **Period.**

I know if it's your family it's easier, but I have to think at some point I would be tempted to invent an errand to get some fresh air, or get rid of the nice pillows off the couch, or subtly start wiping all hard surfaces with vinegar.

But I never felt anything but loved and welcome. Simply put, I was treated like Jesus would have treated me. Which brings me to the lesson.

I don't want to be sick. Worse, I don't want my kids to be sick. I don't want them to be around flu germs, or gross people, or dirty people or people who aren't clean and normal and safe.

I'm embarrassed of my selfishness.

I know there are people out there who need me. Someone will need me, and I don't want fear or selfishness to make me say "no." I want to love like Jesus does.

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in...And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' " (Matthew 25)

~Jessica Smartt of Smartter Each Day

Visit Jessica on [Facebook](#)

Chapter 5

Outdoor Activities: Free & Cheap *by Whitney at [Beauty in the Mess](#)*



Whitney from Beauty in the Mess: Finding Peace in the Midst of Chaos is a wife to her husband of almost 12 years, and mama to three precious littles all under 4.5, and their fur baby, a black lab golden retriever mix pup who is 5.

Beauty in the Mess is written to encourage mamas who find themselves in the trenches as they clean up yet another spill, put another load of laundry in the washer, and those who are simply trying to find beauty in the midst of the chaos of life. To see the mundane day to day as beautiful and worship to our Lord as we serve our families.

As a mama to three young children, patience is tested, messes are made, and someday bedtime can't come fast enough. Can you relate? The purpose of Beauty in the Mess is to create a place where you can come, stay for awhile, and leave refreshed. Some days are just hard. But thankfully our God is bigger those moments and His mercies are new every morning.

Free & Cheap Outdoor Activities

I will admit, I wanted to write about outdoor activities because that's where I struggle the most. My favorite seasons are Spring and Fall. While I love the sunshine during the Summer, the heat and humidity are not my friends. Maybe it's a curly hair. Humidity and curly hair do not mix. It could be my fair skin that ALWAYS burns.

Don't get me wrong. I wouldn't mind living at the beach. Maybe CA with the warm days and cool evening breezes. ::sigh:: Even though I would rather stay in the cool during the Summer, my children love being outside. So we go out. This is for them.

Here are some free and cheap activities to help you beat the boredom this Summer.



Tour de Parks. There are several parks in our area and even two in our neighborhood. The kids and I decided that once a week we would go to a different park in the area. Sometimes meeting friends and sometimes just us. Occasionally, Daddy even gets to tag along! The kids have loved this! They can run out their energy, meet new friends, and I get to enjoy making memories with them. When we stay at home, I get so caught up in my never-ending to-do list. I have a hard time breaking away to enjoy those little moments. But when we're at the park, it's just us. No phone, no to-do list. We can simply enjoy being together.

Sidewalk Chalk. My kids love to pull out the sidewalk chalk. Sometimes they get carried away and it turns into wall chalk and door chalk, but it usually washes off. Unless they use the pink chalk. Then we just enjoy their art for awhile. I usually draw a hopscotch board on the ground and they hop from square to square. They don't quite understand the concept of throwing the stone into the square and jumping over that one, but that's okay. They are having fun.

Bubbles. My absolute favorite bubbles are the ones from Gymboree. But they aren't cheap. I usually blow the Gymboree bubbles and let the kids pop them. When fill up the bubble blower that the kids use, I put in the bubble solution from the Dollar Store. They love playing with the bubbles and they are working their face muscles and lip placement. This is an excellent activity for my son with [Apraxia](#).

Baby Pool or a good ol' fashioned sprinkler. Our neighborhood has a pool, but we have yet to use it. I just can't bring myself to take three little ones to the pool by myself. That just sounds like a recipe for disaster. But we do have a deflatable pool that is the perfect size for the kids and a little splash pool for the baby. We have tried the sprinkler in the past but for some reason they were scared of it. The sprinkler is way better for our yard though. We may or may not have left the pool out full of water and now have a big brown spot in our backyard. Oops! I also bring out plastic pitchers, cups, bowls, scoops, and anything else they can [pour and mix](#) water in.

Splashpad. I had never heard of splashpad before having children. It's great! We just dress the kids in their swimsuits and swim shoes and they run, I mean walk of course, around the splash area. We have two free splash areas around us and two about 45 minutes that you do have to pay for but it's not expensive.



Music in the Park. We absolutely love that our local Symphony has free performances during the Summer. We recently attended a performance overing looking a lake. It was a beautiful night for a performance. We sat off to the side and the kids were able to run around and dance to the music while not disrupting the other patrons. My daughter is still talking about it, asking about the next performance.

Picnic at a Park or in your own backyard. We usually have backyard picnics for lunch. It's a nice change of pace for all of us, and I don't have to clean up the crumbs. Sometimes we call it a tea party and make everything little. Little sandwiches, small snacks, we drink out of the tea cups from their play tea set. They love it!

Let your children **create an obstacle course with items found around your house.** We haven't done this one yet, but it's on our Summer Bucket List. The only rules are the items have to come from the house and the kids make up the rules (within reason of course and safety). This could be done indoors on a rainy day, or outdoors and include a cool splash in the water. The possibilities are endless!

Local Pool. Even if your neighborhood doesn't have a pool, most cities and towns have public pools. There is a cost, but it's usually not a lot. Depending on the age of your children or grandchildren, they could even join the swim team.

Farmers Market. We love the farmers market. It's a great place to meet the farmers, get to know them, hear their story, and know where your food comes from. While you're there, ask the farmers about farm tours, or if they ever open their farm to visitors.



Visit a local Farm. We recently bought chicken from a local farmer. We went to the farm after processing day to pick them up. My children loved the farm. The chickens running around, the bees buzzing around the bee boxes, the garden growing, and the fresh air. They loved it! Some farmers offer classes for preschoolers and children that are geared to their level. Usually all you have to do is ask at the Farmers Market!

Visit the Zoo. There are a couple of petting zoo type places around us and two Zoos within hours. These aren't free or cheap, but sometimes you can find coupons in the Entertainment Books that are sold as fundraisers.

Go on a Nature Walk. Earlier this week we went on a nature walk in our backyard and found a caterpillar! Right now she's (yes, "she" is a girl, lol) in a mason jar with dirt, leaves, and a stick. My daughter talks about her "pet" like she's a member of the family. She is very concerned about her and what she is doing. We are also learning about what caterpillars eat and how to identify what kind of caterpillar she we now have. Now every day it is requested that we go on a nature walk to see what else we can find. I dread the day we find a snake and they ask to bring it home. That answer will definitely be no.

Play in the rain. Obviously use common sense and do not go out in the rain if it is storming, or lightning. But a nice Summer rain is perfect. If your children have rain boots and rain coats, great! If not, expect some really wet kids.

Dig in the dirt. My kids have always liked to dig. I'm not sure what the fascination is, but they love it. We won't talk about how they sometimes eat the dirt too, because that's just gross. We have a raised bed in the backyard where I wanted to plant our garden but instead our herbs just took over. There are two places in our small backyard I know I can find my kids if I ever look out and don't see them right away. They are either playing hopsquatch (not to be confused with hopscotch) on the stepping stones or digging in the dirt in the raised bed. They may also be eating mint leaves or fennel at the raised bed. They love it.

Visit Whitney on [Facebook](#)

See Whitney's posts on [5 easy steps to streamline your day](#) and her post about [how to Date Your Husband](#).

Chapter 6

Sanity Saver: creating big fun while living in small spaces

By Kristi at [Klover House](#)



Kristi, a former elementary educator and now stay-at-home-mom-blogger over at [Klover house](#), is a lover of Jesus and the word, her hubby (she's known since the 6th grade), her three precious princesses, all things crafty, and chocolate. visit her at klover house to find the latest happenings of those three adorable girls, their quirky mom, and hunky dad. klover house is also a place to find God-talk, family-friendly recipes, and an array of projects too!

We are currently townhouse owners with *three small kids*, and we are also in the process of home staging/selling, so i've got some ideas here on how to keep your littles happy and having fun this summer without a lot of space! plus, here at klover house, we're into blowing bubbles...not budgets!



NEED TO GET OUT?

find the freebies.

summer in a small space may mean you'll be looking to get out a little more than usual. summer draws us out anyway, but we get especially stir-crazy around here. but when you are living on a budget, you have to do a little homework in order to get out and not break the bank. be on the lookout for frugal finds and freebies.

restaurants:

chick-fil-a, for example, has a [cow appreciation day](#) at their store. dress up like a cow and receive a free meal. partial cow costume = free entree. this event is going on all day. monday, the 15th is lucky tray day 11am to 8pm. a sticker on your tray earns you a free dessert. then, tuesday, the 16th, is family night with gymboeree. stay in-the-know by checking out your local chick-fil-a's website.

max and erma's is a favorite of our's. they also have a great website that details the events happening in your neck of the woods. kids eat free on tuesday nights; wednesday is a free cookie day and karaoke night. hubby and i get sandwiches, the kids eat free, and we spend the money on dessert since we saved on dinner.

story times:

check your local libraries for story times, craft days, guest readers, etc. one of our local malls holds a story time on two different days. tuesday's is at pottery barn kids (you receive a stamp and once your child earns five, they get a reward), and every other wednesday, another story time is held by the mall itself.

bite the bullet and buy some passes.

my sister- and brother-in-law bought our kids the most awesome christmas gift last year. passes for the zoo, the aviary, and the children's museum. although, they felt badly on the day not having a tangible gift to offer the kids, we have assured them a gazillion times that this was the best idea ever! we make sure to remind the kids each time we use the passes that we have this fun opportunity thanks to aunt and uncle. it's the gift that keeps on giving. the passes are good for the entire year, and that is from when you *activate* them/make your first trip *not* when they are purchased. we didn't go to the zoo until the weather warmed up, and so our zoo pass, for example, is good until *next spring*. not to mention, we also get a discount on other zoos for having this pass. we have gone to each of these places so many times over the last few months. it has more than paid for itself. plus, you can take a bagged lunch along with you and have a really special day that is ultimately free! these passes aren't cheap, i know, but if you can plan ahead and budget them as a special gift for christmas or a birthday, do it. you will get plenty of use out of them, and your kids will thank you in smiles all day long!

also, the museum here gives you one guest pass that is good for up to four people, so you can plan a family play date as well. it's perfect for a rainy afternoon! one of the floors in our museum has several awesome activities for little ones (toddlers/pre-schoolers), and there's a section of couches in the middle where i've seen groups of moms sitting and chatting while their children safely play around them. and the zoo will have special member events, like a visit with the elephants or a family night, etc. these passes are worth every penny for sure.

seek out local play groups or events.

this is a big one for us. b/c i'm online often, i receive several emails a month from local groups (macaroni kid, patch, galleria). they keep me up-to-date on local events, play group opportunities, and freebies galore. i jot all of these things down in my planner. it doesn't mean we're going to do them for sure, but at least i have the info handy if we have the opportunity. also, talk to people. other parents are in your same shoes. i heard about a really great play group held at a local church from my cousin, and then i bumped into a parent of one of my old students, and she was telling me about the same group! parents will gladly share their treasures with you if you ask! b/c this group meets at a church, it takes place rain or shine. it's a safe environment for my kids to get out and socialize and a chance for me to have a conversation with someone who doesn't want "milkies" or "binkies." win-win. ;)

don't be afraid to plan a free event for your friends and their kiddos too! i did this earlier in the year. we had a little valentine's tea party at my community's clubhouse. i got some help from friends with a few crafts. all of the moms brought something food- or drink-wise. it was a lot of fun. one friend mentioned that she appreciated it, b/c her older child was having a valentine's party at school, and our party gave her little one the same opportunity!

check out this plan for a [busy bag swap](#) from [mamagab](#)! i thought this was such a great idea that i will be planning one of these in the very near future myself!

plan frequent play-dates.

i am fortunate in that i have several stay-at-home (full-time and part-time) mommy friends that i can connect with a few times a month. facebook and social networks have really helped us to find out who else out there holds the job description of "personal assistant to...little one and little two" or "taxi driver at the smith household." connect with these other parents, and make it a point to get together. grab some coffee, meet up *before* nap time, and have fun! play dates have been *so* helpful in keeping this mama sane, and the kids need and love them just as much as i do, if not more!

- * go to each other's houses (take turns bringing coffee or a baked treat, etc.)
- * meet at local parks
- * visit the children's museum or other fun place together
- * plan a lunch date at chick-fil-a or have a picnic
- * stroll around the malls or outlets and hit up build-a-bear or let the kids explore the disney store for like an hour :)
- * go to free local story times or events together

play a sport or take a class.

our little ones are three and under, but i found a program that allows even our two-year-old to play soccer. it's an added expense, but after being cooped up all day, it's an expense that's worth it to our family. they look forward to it every week. i can't say they actually *participate* faithfully, but they do look forward to it! (or maybe it was the new tennis shoes and ice cream cones afterwards that sealed the deal...)

HAVE TO STAY HOME?

keep the indoors a fun place to be!

here are some fun things to do while indoors:

- indoor picnics / tea parties
- baking / cooking together
- creating something other than food in the kitchen (make your own play dough, salt dough ornaments, etc.)
- dance parties (we love the songs, "[dance](#)" by jesus culture and "[deep cries out](#)" by bethel church. "[deep cries out](#)" is an awesome song for following directions in movement. we are working on learning our right and left using this fun song! plus, they're worship songs. it melts my heart when i hear my kids singing to the Lord randomly throughout the day.
- spa day! give your kids mani/pedi's
- write letters / call some relatives (they would *love* to hear from the sweeties, and your kiddos are learning about correspondence!)
- use the outdoor stuff *indoors!* friends of our's have a very small slide in their living room against a wall of windows! my kids love it when

they go over they just slide their little hearts out. it's such a great idea and works so well in a small space! if you need the extra room, keep it somewhere else and just pull it out when it's yucky out, or use it as a reward for great behavior, using the potty, etc.

- have a youtube mini marathon. we did this yesterday for about 30 minutes. i pull up elmo and silly symphonies and the kids are in awe! there's just something about the "brush your teeth" song that draws my kids in like nothing else! i got some things done in the kitchen while they sat at the table watching short videos. rather than putting in a 30 min show, i think this works better for their short attention spans. plus, they're singing along. it's fun!
- we also love an [indoor butterfly catching game](#) that i made up using tissue paper "butterflies" and pink butterfly nets from the dollar store.
- for MORE great indoor ideas, visit [this post](#) from [beauty through imperfection](#).

get outside anyway!

don't have a swing set, sliding board, swimming pool, big yard? no biggie!
our yard is only a small square behind our townhouse. try these things:

- hook up the sprinkler or hose
- get a water or sand table
- sidewalk chalk
- bubbles / bubble machines
- have a picnic / outdoor tea party
- go to the park / playground
- take a bike ride / go on a nature walk
- have a special "pool day." our community has a pool, but if your's doesn't, don't be afraid to ask a friend or family member if you can schedule a pool day, or check out your local pools.
- fly a kite at home or an empty ball / soccer field (our neighbors are super sweet, so they don't seem to mind when we occasionally go running through the backyards with our kite!)

create a bath stash, and use it!

my kids LOVE bath time. like 99% of the time anyway. but, as you know, b/c you might be in the same boat, bath time happens at one of two times:

1) after dinner / before bed. this is the norm, and there's little time for play. mom wants to get them to bed. dad wants to get them to bed. no one really wants to sit on the potty and watch their kiddos play in the bubbles for an hour when it's already 7pm. not over here, anyway.

2) after they have *earned* a bath (i.e. getting into something dirty, pooping/peeing in their pants, dripping a popsicle all over themselves, "playing" with their food when you turned away for two nanoseconds to take/make a phone call).

that said, use a rainy day or a day in which you just need an indoor break (maybe you need to read your bible, or finish a blog post, or just sit down for a minute), grab something from your bath stash (a little collection of bath/water appropriate items) - bathtub crayons/markers/paints, a new toy or bubble bath, pool noodle blocks, bath tub letters/numbers, bubble wands, a fishing toy/game, whatever!

I've even seen parents giving their kids popsicles in the bath tub - genius! use this as a learning opportunity or just a time for the kids to splash and play. no one's screaming while you wash behind ears. there's no rushing them out and into pjs. it's just a time for enjoyment. sit on a stool or the potty and just enjoy watching your kids play in the water while you take a breather. i have to say this though - **PLEASE DON'T LEAVE THEM UNATTENDED. EVER.** ok, i know you knew that, but i just had to throw it in there just in case! and don't fall asleep sitting there either! ;)

maybe this would be a good wind-down activity just before naps. and if you don't do anything else that would get them dirty later, you just may be able to skip the dreaded 7pm bath!

BOTTOM LINES:

1 - do your homework

familiarize yourself with your community. get the info you need in order to plan a fun summer for your kids. if you know what's out there, you can better plan your week, while keeping your budget and priorities in check.

thanks to facebook and pinterest, info and ideas are just a keystroke away. take an hour or two a week - maybe on a quiet night, after the kids are in bed or during a nap time - and do your weekly schedule and meal planning. i say meals too, b/c your errands and daily plans are directly linked to what you'll end up eating for the week, so get it all organized at once.

our week looks something like this lately:

sunday - church, lunch, naps (so anything goes after nap time)

monday - usually our stay-in-and-recuperate-from-the-weekend-day. we veg out, and i try to straighten up the house and catch up on chores, etc.

tuesday - am story time event and pm soccer practice

wednesday, thursday, and friday - errands, play dates, trips to the park, pool days (our townhouse community has a pool), etc.

having this basic framework allows me to fill in the gaps fairly easily and plan ahead meal-wise too.

2 - pretend you're a teacher

this ties in with the above. basically, sit down and do your "lesson plan" for the coming day(s). check out [pinterest](#) too for ideas. luckily, i have some amazing friends that talk about what they're doing with their kids on [facebook](#) frequently, so they're always inspiring me and giving me great ideas for my own kids!

think about what you have around the house. do you have ingredients to make cookies one day? can you have a craft day? if you need something from the dollar store or michael's, think about those things now, and plan ahead. this will make your life a lot easier.

also, stock up on things when you catch them on sale. while i'm at michael's or target, i keep an eye out for clearance items that my kids will love, and i build up a little box of fun things. sticker books, little activity bags, craft bags, etc. aldi's will also have seasonal baking projects for super cheap. i think i saw a monsters inc. cupcake kit there this week.

3 - make a flexible plan

in their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

make a plan, but remember, things happen, the kids need extra rest, a friend will call the night before for a play date, you suddenly run out of milk and have to make a store run, a realtor calls at 9am for a 12pm showing (this was my life for the past three months)...it all happens!

hope you found some helpful tips here! remember to check out the other great posts in this summer series! thanks for stopping by!

[*Visit Kristi of Klover House on Facebook*](#)

Chapter 7

A week of meals planned for you *By Danielle of Snippets of Inspiration*



I'm Danielle, a Florida girl who loves **homemaking, piano playing, reading** and my Lord! I count myself blessed to be able to keep house and cook for my husband! I enjoy discovering beauty tips, finding new recipes, crafting and inspiring others to do the same! Please stay a while and enjoy yourself perusing my pages!

I was an elementary teacher for several years when, after I got married, I decided to be a full-time housewife. I've been blessed to be able to focus my efforts to make our home happy and healthy in every way possible! I found that I needed a way to organize my recipes and beauty and cleaning tips, thus this blog was born! While keeping this part of my life organized online, I figured I would share it with those who cared to look. I hope you enjoy wandering through my pages.

CHICKEN CRESCENT SQUARES

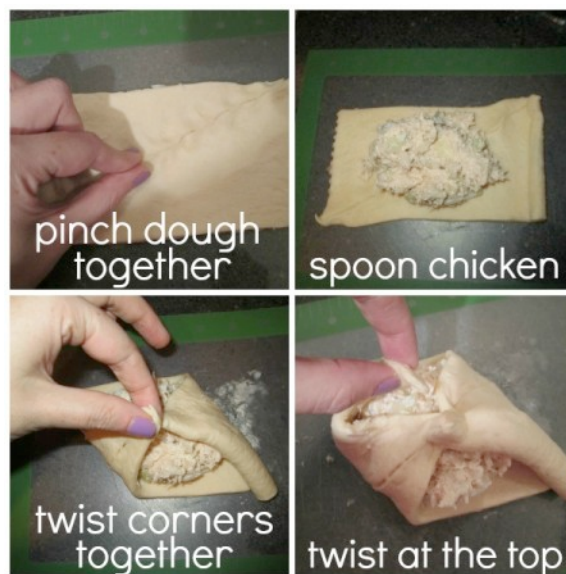
Chicken Crescent Rolls Squares

This chicken crescent rolls squares are fabulous! A friend gave me this simple recipe when I was in a bind for dinner and since then I make it quite often! A tube of crescent rolls and any chicken mixture will do! It's great for leftovers too! I use my small conventional oven to make these as not to heat up the house with the heat from the large oven. Enjoy!

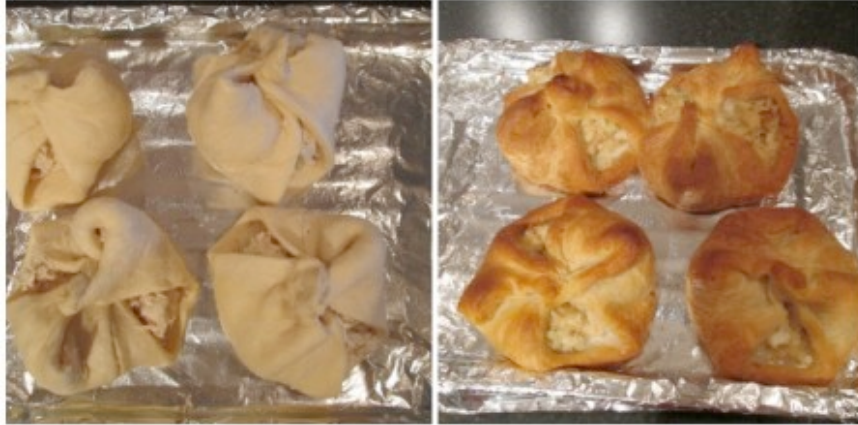
INGREDIENTS:

- 4 oz. cream cheese
- 3 Tbls butter, melted
- 2 cups cubed cooked chicken
- 1/4 tsp salt/pepper
- 2 Tbls milk
- 1 Tbls garlic
- 1 Tbls chives
- 1 (8 oz) tube crescent rolls
- 1/4 cup bread crumbs or [Homemade Breadcrumbs](#)
- 1 tsp rosemary
- 1/2 cup onions
- 1 tsp oregano

INSTRUCTIONS: 1. Blend cream cheese and 2 Tbls butter; add next 6 ingredients and mix well 2. Separate dough into 4 rectangles. Spoon mixture in the center of each rectangle and twist corners at the top together and seal down a bit.



3. Place on greased cookie sheet. Brush the chicken crescent rolls with remaining butter and sprinkle with breadcrumbs. 4. Bake 20-25 minutes.



the chicken mixture usually makes more than 1 tube of crescent rolls so buy two tubes and use whatever is left over. *I've added bacon to this recipe for extra flavor and that is quite yummy!*

MEXICAN PIZZA



I found this recipe on Pinterest and tweaked it to meet my needs. It turned out very well! This is a copycat recipe of Taco Bell's Mexican Pizza they serve. That was always a favorite of mine when I was younger and frequented that fast food chain. These are quite tasty and much healthier than the "real" version. It's fairly simple to put together and definitely a crowd pleaser!

INGREDIENTS:

- 12 small soft tortilla shells
- 1 can { 15 oz} refried beans
- 1 lb ground beef or turkey
- 1 can {10 oz} enchilada sauce
- 2 tomatoes
- 4 green onions
- 3 jalapenos
- 8 oz cheddar cheese or mexican blend

INSTRUCTIONS:

- A. Chop the tomatoes, green onion, jalapenos, and grate your cheese. Brown ground beef and season with taco seasoning if you like. Heat the refried beans in a pot on the stove on medium heat. Open enchilada sauce and heat on



- B. Grease a hot skillet with cooking spray and "fry" the tortillas til they are browned and a bit crunchy. Make sure you flip them frequently so they don't burn.

- C. Assemble each pizza. {1} Spread refried beans. {2} Sprinkle ground beef. {3} Top with matching tortilla shell. {4} Spread enchilada sauce. {5} Sprinkle tomatoes and cheese. {6} Top with green onions and jalapeños.

Ci.

- D. Bake in the oven at 400 degrees for 6-8 minutes to heat.

- E. Cool a bit then serve.



BUTTER CHICKEN



The name of this chicken dish is quite deceiving as it does not taste anything like its name! It is an Indian flavored sauce atop chicken

chunks and white rice. But don't be afraid to try something new because this dish isn't super strong. It gives you a hint of the spicy flavors that India has to offer. It's very good!

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 2 onions, diced
- 2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts cut into 1 inch pieces
- a 2 inch piece of ginger, cut into 1/2 inch slices
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1/2 cup slivered almonds
- 1 cup plain yogurt {not nonfat}
- 2 tsp. garam marsala spice
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 {15 oz.} can diced tomatoes, drained
- 1/4 heavy cream
- 3 Tbsp chopped cilantro, optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions and cook, stirring, until softened and beginning to brown, about 5-7 minutes.
2. Place the onions on the bottom of the crock pot. Place the chicken on top.
3. Combine ginger, garlic, almonds, yogurt, garam marsala spice and salt in a food processor and process until smooth. Add tomatoes and pulse once or twice to combine together. Pour this mixture over the chicken in the crock pot.
4. Cook food on low for 4-5 hours, until chicken is tender. Then stir in the heavy cream, cover and cook for an additional 10 minutes.
5. Serve with white rice. If you like, sprinkle with cilantro just before serving.

This will feed about 6 people

SWEET AND SOUR CHICKEN



I was quite surprised at the outcome of this recipe. It was AMAZING! It tasted just like what you buy at an authentic Chinese restaurant! Make it because I know you'll love it!

INGREDIENTS:

CHICKEN:

- 3-4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts

- salt & pepper
- 1 cup cornstarch
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil

SAUCE:

- 3/4 cups granulated sugar
- 4 Tbsp ketchup
- 1/2 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 Tbsp soy sauce
- 2-3 garlic cloves, minced

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees.
2. Cut the chicken into 1 inch pieces and season with salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat.

3. Place the cornstarch into a gallon sized Ziplock bag and seal with the chicken inside tossing to coat the chicken.

4. Whisk the eggs together in a shallow pie plate and dip the cornstarch-coated chicken pieces in the egg and place them in a single layer in the hot skillet. Cook for 1-2 minutes and then flip each piece over to cook on the other side until nicely golden but not all the way cooked through. When finished cooking, place the chicken in a single layer in a baking dish to finish cooking.

5. Mix the sauce ingredients together in a bowl and pour over the chicken in the baking dish.

6. Bake for 1 hour turning the chicken once or twice while cooking to coat evenly with sauce. Serve hot over steamed rice.

If you like extra sauce, double the sauce ingredients. Pour half of it over the oven chicken and pour the other half in a saucepan and cook on the stove at a simmer for about 10 minutes until it thickens. You can serve on the side.

This dish will serve about 6 people.

CROCK POT ENCHILADAS



This is super easy recipe to compile and leave until it's finished cooking! I often use this for Sunday afternoon lunch. I put it on before I leave for church in the morning and when I come home, it's all ready for me! It's tasty, especially with the cumin spicing! And it's easy to eat instead of assembling tacos! Again, this is another favorite in the family!

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 lb. ground beef/turkey
- 1 cup onion
- 1/2 cup chopped green pepper
- 1 can diced tomatoes with green chilies, undrained
- 1/3 cup water

- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1/2 ts salt
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 1 cup cheddar cheese
- 1 cup monterey jack cheese
- 6 corn tortillas - size depends upon the crock pot size)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In skillet cook beef, onion, and green pepper until beef is browned and vegetables are tender; drain.
2. Add the next 8 ingredients and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Combine cheeses.
4. In crock pot layer about 3/4 cup beef mixture, one tortilla and 1/3 cup cheese. Repeat layers.
5. Cover and cook on low for 5-7 hours.
6. Garnish with salsa and sour cream.

You can double this recipe if you need and your crock pot will accommodate it!

STUFFED SHELLS



This Italian recipe is great tasting but I will warn you: it takes a bit of preparation time as there are many steps involved. All in all, it is well worth it to make!



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 box of jumbo pasta shells {36 count}
- 1 chopped onion
- 3/4 pound of ground beef
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 egg
- 1 container of ricotta cheese {15 oz.}
- 1 box of spinach {9 oz.}
- 3/4 cups grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 oz. mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup of breadcrumbs or try my [homemade breadcrumbs](#)
- 1 can tomato sauce {32 oz.}

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cook pasta shells and cool.
2. Cook ground beef with half of the onion and garlic cloves.
3. Cook the spinach, drain and cool.
4. Heat your tomato sauce on the stove and add any spices you desire. *I always add a couple tablespoons of sugar*
4. Mix ricotta, mozzarella and Parmesan cheese with the egg and cooked spinach.
5. Mix all ingredients together.



6. Spoon the ground beef mix into each cooked jumbo shells and arrange in a baking dish.



7. Spoon the tomato sauce over the top of the stuffed shells. COVER BEFORE YOU PUT INTO THE OVEN!



8. Cook in the oven for 30 minutes at 350 degrees. Take the foil off and cook for another 10 minutes.

ENJOY! This will make enough for about 10 people. I usually freeze half of it and save it for later. And I serve it with my [amazing cheesy broccoli casserole!](#)

MINI MEATLOAF

This has got to be one of my favorite meals! It is totally delicious, very healthy and best of all, easy! I hope you enjoy it as much as I do! It never fails to impress!



INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 lb of ground turkey
- 1/2 cup oatmeal
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 1/2 cup barbeque sauce
- 3 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 egg
- salt
- cubed cheddar cheese (Velveeta works great!)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Saute onions in the olive oil until tender.
3. Mix the ketchup and barbeque sauce together.
3. In a bowl, mix the sauteed onions, turkey, oatmeal, salt and half of the ketchup/barbeque mixture together. You might want to use your hands to get it mixed together well.

4. Take part of the mixture into your hands and form a ball. Make sure that it is small enough to fit into a muffin pan because that is what you will cook it in.
5. Here is where the cubed cheese comes into the play. I usually have block cheese around and I will cut about 8 pieces of 1/2 inch cubes of cheese; I have also used Velveeta and finds that works best as far as melting. Next, insert the cubed cheese into the middle of your meatloaf ball



6. Completely surround the cheese cube with the meatloaf and pat it together forming a flat ball.
7. Place into the muffin pan and top each mini meatloaf with a spoonful of part of the remaining ketchup/barbeque sauce. (leave a little bit of sauce for later) Cooking in these muffin pans help to cook the meatloaf faster and makes for an easy cleanup. Using the ketchup/barbecue sauce on top helps the meatloaf not to taste quite as dry and gives added flavor.



8. Slide the pan into the oven and cook for about 30 minutes. Take your pan out and top with more ketchup/barbecue sauce and cook for 10 more minutes.

This recipe will serve four

people, each having two mini meatloafs.

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and that you are walking away with a*

*lot of great ideas to make your day
more enjoyable and stress-free! We
are so happy that you were able to take
a little piece of each of our blogs and
make them a full week of something
wonderful!*

Blessings!

*Becky, Gabby, Jessica, Whitney,
Kristi & Danielle*