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Freedom from Clutter

A simple 8-step plan to organize paper and things

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I wrote this plan for a woman who reached out to me in distress. She was overwhelmed by the paper she had left unattended in every room in her house. You may modify the plan to address *things* rather than paper.

Step 1 Place these 3 items in a room.

An inbox

A box (something pleasing to the eye)

A paper bag near the box

Step 2 Understand the 3 paper groups.

A Papers **Urgent.** Papers that need immediate attention, are time-sensitive, or should be available.

B Papers **Non-Urgent.** Papers you need in the future **or** you are undecided about

C Papers **Trash.**

Step 3 Place all paper into one of the 3 items you have placed in the room.

Place **A Papers** (urgent) in **The Inbox**

Place **B Papers** (non-urgent) in **The Pretty Box**

If you are undecided, it is a **B Paper**. This is not the time to make hard decisions. This is the quick “sweep” stage. *This cannot be stressed enough.*

Place **C Papers** (trash) in **The Paper Bag**

Step 4 Address the **C Papers** in **The Paper Bag** first.

Get the trash out of your working space! Place the bags in your car to take to the recycling center. If this is a burden, throw the bags away. Your sanity is more important than anything. A clear area will strengthen your emotional health and give clarity to the next steps. Give *things* to charity. Avoid having a garage sale. The goal is to be simple and quick.

Step 5 Vacuum up the excess dust where you are working.

Step 6 Address the **A Papers** in **The Inbox**.

Schedule a weekly quiet time to attend to this stack. Be faithful to the schedule. Make it fun with a special drink!

Step 7 Address the **B Papers** in **The Pretty Box**. You have 3 choices:

1. **Ignore** the box for a while and savor the new ordered environment. Since you have chosen a pretty box, it will look nice in your space.

2. **Wait** 2 or 3 years to go through the box. Recycle what has become trash. Address the rest with Step 7, #3.
3. **Address** the box. Block your time. Take ½ to 1 hour a day, or 1 hour a week, or ½ day per week for this task. Just be consistent. If it is difficult or emotional, ask a friend to be there for encouragement. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you make decisions. Follow these 4 instructions:
 - **Make Similar Piles**
Begin by making similar piles according to subject matter. Possible categories include: magazines to read, photos to put in books, info to give to a friends, miscellaneous, papers to file. You may even begin a pile of trash as you begin to revise your decisions.
 - **Label the Piles**
Put a post-it note on each pile and label it; use 1 to 3 words that would make it easy to retrieve them in a filing system. If this becomes exhausting or the piles get too high, you may determine the papers are not worth the effort and put more in the trash. Pray to be realistic about whether you will go back to the paper.
 - **File** the papers or place them in a neat **stack** on the desk for further action. For extremely large stacks, place the paper in boxes that pertain to one subject. Label these boxes and put them in your closet for future reference.
 - **Stack** – For paper you want to address soon but is not urgent, place it near your inbox of high-priority items.

Step 8 **Going forward...**

When you are finished with these steps, establish one area in your home to address all future paper. Place incoming paper in one of the three places (the inbox, box, or bag) so the task will not become overwhelming again. As **C Papers** accumulate, remove them quickly.