

Somebody has to do this work

By [Martha-Lynn Corner](#)

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Fridays have become my scrubbing days.

I have had a love/hate relationship with housework my entire life.

I would just say "my entire adult life," but one of my main responsibilities as a child was helping to keep the common areas livable. At times, this was a pleasure—working alongside my grandmother to beat carpets hanging from the clothesline was a pretty fun way to spend an afternoon. More often, it was boring and unpleasant and repetitive.

Seems like I learned a real life lesson at some point along the way back then, because guess what? It's still boring and unpleasant and repetitive.

In adulthood's brighter days—when I got enough sleep and had fewer wrinkles and could while away time off work indulging in DVD marathons—I would do almost anything to avoid these types of chores. I was guilty of buying more underwear to avoid doing laundry. I was guilty of tearing off paper towels to use as plates just because I knew I wouldn't have to wash them later. I was guilty of deciding that the tub probably never needed a good scrubbing, because we took showers in there, right? Done.

That's all well and good until there are suddenly four people sharing about 900 square feet of living space, including a six year old with an art fetish and an extreme aversion to recycling her creations, and a four year old who sees the interior of the toilet more as a vague suggestion than an imperative. And my husband and I do eat and sleep and wear clothes, so the dishes and laundry are at least partially our faults. (No comment on the stacks of comics in the dining room.)

The other thing I've lived into are the hundreds of ways things can grow rusty and dim, and I'm not talking about housework right now so much as lifework. And so much of this lifework can be heavy and difficult. There have been disappointments and devastations, which have taken up time and space and made their mark. I'm in

a season of difficulty right now. And I'm finding it a little weird that, in one of those sudden lessons that sometimes float by on the swill, the routine stuff that's meant to mortar together the rest of it can turn into the very places restoration begins.

Last Friday I scrubbed the shit out of my shower. I changed my clothes ahead of time into the rattiest gym rags available, blasted some Weezer and other pseudo-ironic hits from the '90s, and used an entire bottle of bleach-tinged scrubbing stuff. I demolished two sponges. The rest of the bathroom got more or less soaked during the assault, so I scrubbed that, too. Then I turned an oscillating fan on in there and collapsed on the side porch and tried not to smell myself, and I realized something. I had not had a thought more complex than "CLEAN ALL THE THINGS" for over an hour. And my brain felt kind of great. It felt loose and warm, like it had been in the dryer. It felt lighter and spongier and less like crap. My fingernails were destroyed and I bit them all off later, but that was a minor casualty.

This is just some of the work that takes the place of having fun these days. The rest of that work is actually work, like at my job, or parenting, which can be fun but often isn't (especially when my brain is full), or therapeutic work, which is the best and hardest work I do some days and leaves me the most exhausted. There are bright spots too, of course. One of them, shocking and repeatedly, has been how often God has shown up in a visceral and real and present way, and how often the routine scrubbing stuff seems to bring him to the forefront.

In more cynical and—yes—younger and less-complicated days, I read the chapter in *An Altar in the World* in which Barbara Brown Taylor talks about body prayer and I got so far up on my "brushing your teeth IS NOT PRAYER" high horse that I gave myself cavities. I mean, please, right? This woman dared to take the contemplative work of saints and compare it to the mindlessness of mopping a floor?

I get it now, Barbara. From the tips of my top-knotted hair to the bottoms of my rolled-up sweatpants, I get how you find God just attending to the stuff of life. If God is life and love and we're beloved children even in those weeks and months and decades when we're sunfaded and cracking and frayed, in attending to the mess around us, we're somehow attending to the mess within ourselves.

And that is always a place where God can be found. Sometimes, we find ourselves there, too.

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