

There is another way

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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*All these things are in the way*, I sigh. Shuffle and shove to make space again. *I am tired of working like this*, I mutter.

I want to sweep everything aside—the papers and the clutter and the laundry and the bills and the books and the toys and the shoes—and stare at a vacant desk. A spotless office. A shining house of sparkling minimalism.

**It will never be.**

Call it the [sacrifice of the mess](#). Call it [the holy beautiful of right now](#). Call it [life with kids](#). Call it our [tired thirties](#).

Whatever you call it, call yourself to look upon it again.

I look again.

All the things cluttering my view? They accompany a full life. Piles of doctors' bills. Art keepsakes from two more years of school. Photos of loved ones to frame. Books to read. Seedlings to plant. Work to finish. Newspapers to recycle. Bank statements to file.

It will never be done. It will never be clean. And this is OK.

**This is another way.**

Somewhere between the trend to accumulate (*more and more, bigger and better*) and the trend to purge (*less and less, sparser and lighter*), there emerges a third way: **finding peace in the chaos.**

The way that says we do not need more; we need to care for what we have.

The way that accepts how a life lived with people will always be full—of clutter and conflict, yes, but also comfort and companionship.

The way that knows if cleanliness stands next to godliness, then messiness shrugs and smiles to take its place on the other side. God in the middle. All the rest, all around.

Because God is not found only in peace, quiet, polished, decluttered, *10 easy steps to simplify*. God is also found in mess, chaos, muddle, question, *oh help me everything is a disaster*.

God is not confined to clean, sparse monastic cells. If God is present everywhere and always, then God is also present in a life lived in places, with things, among people.

This is another Way.

Three months from now looks wide open on my calendar. **It is an illusion.**

The chore chart, the labeled bins, the meal plan, the synchronized schedules – they promise perfection. **It is a lie.**

Life will fill up then just as it fills up today. Love and work expand within whatever space we offer them.

And despite our best efforts, we continue to be mere mortals. We walk through grassy dirt, we cry hot tears, we breathe dusty air. Crumbs fall from our lips while we chew. The dog never stops shedding, no matter the season.

So we need this third way, the stumbling path that trips over sneakers on the floor and mountains of unfolded laundry. The way that invites us to see the miracle, not the drudgery, of sharing our lives with real, messy people.

The same themes surface whenever I write these days. **Letting go. Looking up. Learning to embrace the ordinary and the imperfect.**

For a long time now I have felt a turning, and I can finally name it as the settling into mid-life.

My tired husband and I laugh about this a lot. We collapse into bed, and one of us mumbles, *Back in college, we wouldn't even be going out for another three hours*. But we are happy *here*. A deep and satisfying joy, albeit exhausted and cluttered. I wish I could tell my younger, anxious, ambitious self that life could be this good while being so far from smooth.

**This settling joy is what I wanted all along, and I only found it in the middle of the mess.**

Bump, blemish, brokenness—we know ourselves by the edges of what we brush up against. We learn the limits of our being.

And a full life—bursting with people to love and things to do—it is a marvel even as it overflows. A to-do list that never shrinks. Work that keeps going. Children who arrive and grow and explore. A world that keeps needing our attention and compassion.

It will never be done. It will never be clean or easy. And this is another Way.

The way of peace and patience. The way of realism and release. The way of laughter and letting go.

(The way of remembering that *we cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.*)

And the way of gratitude to God right in the messy middle: of each day, of this life, of what we are becoming on the way.

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