

Recently I was in the kitchen preparing a new recipe that contained a few not-so-often-used ingredients. As I searched our cabinets for an item, I was amazed at all the stuff I ran across. There were items that hadn't seen the light of day for a long, long time. I ran across many partial containers of "this and that" and quite a few unopened boxes, bags, and cans of food items I don't even remember buying. Now, lest you get too pious, I bet the contents of your pantry also contain such "artifacts!"

That little adventure into the "catacombs of our kitchen" reminded me that we are to practice good stewardship in all areas of our lives. **Remember, God owns everything, blesses us with much, and expects us to manage all that He gives us. That's stewardship.**

We live in an era of convenience and in many ways this makes our lives much easier. But that same convenience can hamper us in practicing good stewardship. Many of us have no conception of the art of "making do." Our grandmothers did. They were masters of "making do." They knew how to use what was available in the house to feed and care for their families. And pioneers certainly were great examples as they stored up food stuff to be used throughout the year. If Pa couldn't shoot a rabbit in the dead of winter – no problem – they simply broke out vegetables they had canned last summer. And when that ran low, they would eat dried beans. They were very careful to ration out things like flour and sugar because they couldn't run down to the corner supermarket!

Today, according to the Food Marketing Institute, a typical shopper makes at least two trips to the supermarket each week. And that doesn't count what seems to be the almost daily quick stop for an item or two. Do we really need to replenish our pantry so often? Most of us could go weeks, maybe even months without adding a single item to our pantry, refrigerator, and freezer. So, why aren't we better at "making do?"

Three things contribute to our poor shopping habits.....first, grocery stores are conveniently located. When I was a boy, supermarkets didn't exist. We shopped at the neighborhood grocery store. In fact, my mom often ordered groceries over the phone and they delivered them to our house! A great way to avoid impulse buying! Today we think nothing of popping into the megamart.

Second, cravings often dictate when we shop. Our instant gratification mentality says, "I want it, so I need it,

so what am I waiting for?"

Third, "plastic or paper?"....no, I'm not talking about grocery sacks. I am talking about credit cards in lieu of paper money. Often groceries are purchased with credit cards and are consumed before the bill is even received. And, if only the minimum balance is paid, the costs of those groceries can really sky-rocket.

After Jesus fed the five thousand, he said to his disciples, "*Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.*" (John 6:12) No doubt, He might be a little disappointed in our wasteful habits today. Quite likely, many of us have heard the following at dinner tables of our past, "Finish your food, there are children starving in foreign countries." We laugh at that, but it's really true. Here's an updated version of that old saying that isn't a joke, "**The next time you feel like complaining, remember: Your garbage disposal probably eats better than 30% of the people in this world.**" Ouch! The truth hurts.

Here are a few practical ideas to sharpen your "making do" skills from Lynette Bleed, a freelance writer and seminar speaker on topics related to budgeting and grocery shopping.....

Shop one time per week maximum – Learn to use what's on hand. Get creative. Carefully plan each shopping trip and buy according to a list. **Keep staple items on hand** – Items like frozen bread, peanut butter, soups, spaghetti sauce, noodles, eggs and plenty of toilet paper! **Make substitutions for fresh produce until the next shopping trip** – Buy frozen fruits and vegetables to fill in for fresh produce. **Use what you have** – Many kitchen cabinets and medicine chests have opened boxes, bags, and bottles. Use what you've already invested your money in before buying more of the same. **Wait for a sale** – Buying items of sale can save 20 to 50 percent. If there's a great sale and money in the budget, consider stocking up.

"*Give us today our daily bread*" (Matthew 6:11). We often forget our daily bread is a blessing and provision from God. **Sharpening our buying skills, learning the art of "making do".... practicing good stewardship in all areas of our lives creates self-control, an empathy for those who live on much less than we do, and a greater sense of contentment in our lives.**