

MORNINGS WITHOUT MEASURE

BY ELSIE IUDICELLO





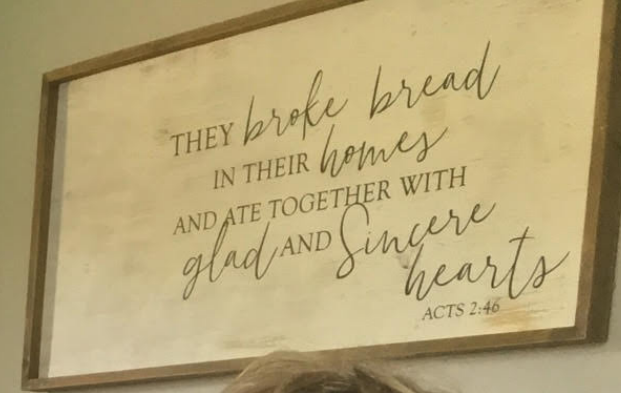
We've been gathering around this wood table for six years. It was lovingly made by the man who stole my heart. He gave me the table a few months before we said "I do." A few months after the wedding we were pregnant with our first boy and within five years all four of our boys were seated around that table where we now gather every morning to embrace a liturgy of habit that nourishes us down to the bone.

I am not a morning person and this ritual of starting each day building relationship with my children over truth, goodness and beauty, is a balm to my heart. The children set the table and put the kettle on. Dvorak plays and we look at Cassatt's work and we'll swing on birches in our minds for a bit while Mr. Frost's words fall like snowflakes around us. No lectures or long speeches or terms to memorize, just the pleasure of beautiful things, good food and each other.

Beautiful music, poetry, art, Shakespeare and the like have become our habits. In the same way that we always share a large Sunday dinner or celebrate Noche Buena with my family, we always read and recite poetry. We remember to brush our teeth every day and we never let a day go by without listening to a beautiful piece of music or looking at fine art. These habits have become family culture. It's small and simple when you think about it; a track of music, a picture, a poem, a cup of tea, a few pages from a book, and we leave the table with hearts and minds and tummies full.

Yet the repetition of small and simple eventually builds the beautiful and complex. The beguiling wisp of steam curling up from the teacup, the familiar scent and glow of the beeswax candle, wrapping itself around the room, holding us close, anchoring us home. The early morning warble of little voices lifted in song to the heavens, the earnest prayers and petitions that follow. The stack of books upon the table, each one read in small increments over a long period of time, following us through a season or two or three. Worthy books to treasure and savor, books that are well worn and familiar, books that mold beautiful childhoods and shape virtue-hungry men.

Humble learners gather around this table to converse, contemplate, sing, fumble with the eternal and seek wisdom. The smallest of these come to gobble meals, chirp and squeak, grab for attention, sit upon laps and be held. These are the elements of habit that bind us as a family and shape us as individuals.



*Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean,
And the beauteous land.*

*Thus the little minutes,
Humble though they be,
Make the mighty ages
Of eternity.*

By Ebenezer Brewer

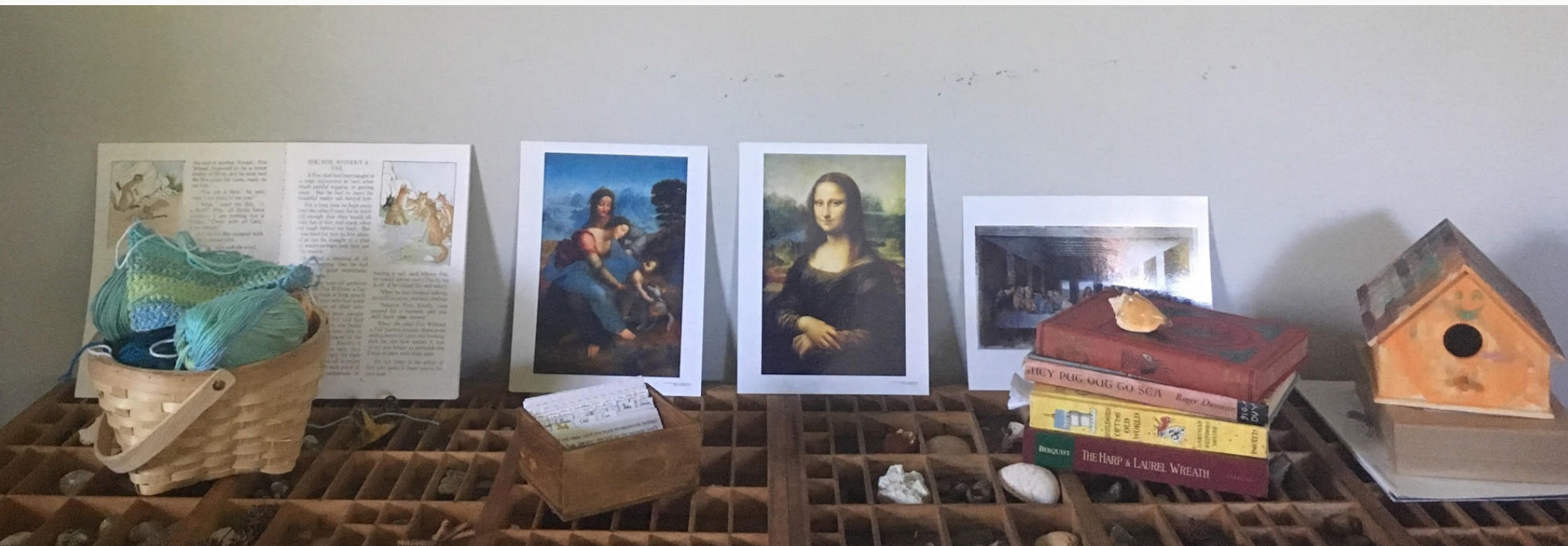


I met the first stanza of this sweet nursery rhyme through Cindy Rollins, author of *Mere Motherhood*, who began writing about her family's use of morning time as a way to simplify life. In her writings she urges us, "If you have something that you want your children to assimilate like poetry or scripture or music or Shakespeare, forget the grand schemes... start giving that thing one or two minutes of your time daily and watch the years roll by."

When we first began morning time I didn't have a name for it. What I had was three kids in diapers, sleep deprivation, and a raging case of PTSD. Our very first morning time lasted five minutes. It consisted of myself, two small boys strapped into high chairs and one baby in a sling. I set out a small

vase of flowers from the garden and lit a candle, placed chopped fruit on table trays and started nursing the baby. I cracked open a random book, selected three minutes prior, and began to read aloud. It was over in five minutes.

Six, seven years later, it is an entirely different experience, but it is very much rooted in the days of diaper-clad toddlers and squalling infants. Those days were of monumental importance because they were both difficult and mundane. They taught me early on to pace myself. Building up our morning time has been the work of thousands of days, stretched in the most minuscule daily increments, slowly pooling together into something truly life-giving and refreshing.





I am treasuring these mornings without measure. No grades, no tests, no rubrics. It's not about performance or learning tricks or amassing knowledge to impress others. Thankfully there is no possible way to teach or present every bit of information out there, this blatant truth reminds me that my role as mother and teacher is not about data input. My children are not products, they are souls. I don't strive to present information, I seek to nurture souls.

Morning time is really a quiet, steady shaping of character and affections. We gather around the table and break bread. We soak up goodness, truth, and beauty. We dwell in the lovely through the simple acts of mundane life. We read a Shakespeare play and gaze upon a tender da Vinci painting. We listen to Bach and imagine ourselves somewhere else entirely. We read Aesop's fables and recite the poems whose words are woven into the chambers of our hearts. We meditate on a passage of scripture together. We talk about current issues. We talk about honor and respect and the importance of absolute truth. This isn't a list of accomplishments or a list of boxes to be checked.

We enjoy these things together as a family. It is not something we are doing, it is who we are and who we are becoming. I love watching their hearts incline towards worthy things. Day by day, year after year, they are taking the shape of what we have slowly poured in.

Morning time is so simple on its own, but when the days are gathered, those 6,500 or so fleeting days of childhood have the strength of swift waters carving through solid rock. On any given day, I am adding a few more grains of sand, a few more drops of water, seeing no instant alterations but knowing in my heart that the landscape is indeed changing.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elsie Iudicello lives in South Florida with her husband, four young boys, twenty-six chickens, two turkeys, a pig and a pup. She is a writer, blogger, herder of small children, seeker of adventure and avoider of laundry. She is passionate about encouraging homeschool moms, reading beautiful books, kissing her hubby and raising her boys to be men of God. She loathes cat memes with poor spelling and the sound of squeaking styrofoam.

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