

EPISODE 035 -

BOOK | THE LIFE GIVING HOME

WITH NANCY RAY

Intro

We can never underestimate the power of a life-giving home. My strongest childhood memories are rooted in my childhood home, as I'm sure yours are too. I also have vivid memories of going to the homes of friends and feeling so welcomed, so loved, and so grounded when it felt like my own home and family were falling apart. Last year when we moved into our current house, my dear friend, Callie, gave me a book called *The Life Giving Home* as a house-warming gift. And this year, we've been reading one chapter a month in the Nancy Ray Book Club since there are 12 chapters, one for each month of the year.

Today, we'll dive into my biggest takeaways, the things that I want to be sure to embrace in my own home.

You're listening to *Work and Play with Nancy Ray*, Episode 35.

Much of our daily lives can be divided into two categories: work and play. Simply put, that's where our life and our legacy take place. This is a podcast all about learning to work and play well, which leads to a healthy soul and a fulfilling life.

Listen in.

Content

Okay, here's what this book did for me. If I can put it into one sentence, it made me view taking care of my home as a joy and a privilege instead of a burden. Now, I fully realize that might not present me in the best way because I'm admitting that sometimes it does feel like a burden to take care of all the ins and outs of my home, but I'm okay with that. I know managing a home can feel like a lot and we lose sight of the purpose of all the laundry, and the kids that constantly outgrow all the clothes, and the meal planning, and the closets that need to be decluttered, and the refreshing of the art and furniture, and finally printing those photos. It can all feel like a lot, and it can weigh on you week after week.

But, I'm here to remind you today having a life-giving home is a crucial part of being able to

work well, and being able to play and rest well, and having a healthy soul, and a fulfilling life. Now, do not translate that in your head to mean that your house needs to look perfect, to be completely organized, or to look like your latest pin on Pinterest, because that's not true. I'm pretty sure the meaning of life-giving has way more to do with the people and the atmosphere you create with your attitude and your hospitality than it does with the way your house looks. But, that's what I love about this book we're talking about today. It speaks to the memories you make and the rhythms you create more than it does to living in a perfectly put together home. Now, as I prepare myself to work a lot less next year and to be home a lot more, this book helped me in a lot of spiritual and practical ways.

So, I'm going to share it my top three takeaways from *The Life Giving Home*.

First, hosting people well takes some forethought and preparation. I know, it sounds really dumb. Like, of course it does. You always have to prepare. But, I loved the chapters that really focused on hosting a guest or preparing a guest room and having a fully stocked pantry. So I kind of want to break down those a little bit just to let you know the things that got me thinking a little bit more. So before hosting a guest, here are some things that I love Sally Clarkson talks about.

Sally co-wrote this book with her daughter Sarah, and they kind of alternated writing chapters. It wasn't a perfect back and forth between Sarah and Sally, but it was cool how they took different chapters and wrote from their own perspectives.

But Sally, the mom, is the one who wrote about hosting a guest, and she said these things. "Always have fresh towels and linens ready to go. Obviously, you want to make sure that the room is ready to receive them, but it's just a good reminder to kind of have that forethought and prepare in advance. And if you set out the towels and things ready for them to receive, it will make them feel more at home."

She said, "Have snacks out. Before they arrive, have a few bowls of nuts or some snacks and make sure that you direct your guests to those places. Have some fresh bottled waters for them." Then, I love this. "Tell them what to expect when they arrive. So take some time to explain the family cadence and schedule so they kind of know the parameters of your house." Every family is different. Every family has a different kind of rhythm or routine and it's just helpful when you welcome a guest in your home to kind of tell them what to expect. For example, she would say, "Hey, welcome. Here's some snacks and water. Here's your room. Feel free to rest for a few hours and then we'll meet back in the kitchen at 6:00 for dinner." Just giving them those parameters. I've really never thought to kind of tell a guest about the schedule or the cadence of our family and rhythm, but I feel like that gives them kind of the freedom to rest and relax or to come and know when they are going to eat dinner. Anyway, kind of basic, I know, but still helpful.

Another thing they talked a lot about in the book... And I don't think this was in the same section. I think this was actually in a different section talking about fall and kind of stocking up

for autumn. But, they talked about having a fully stocked pantry. Now, this is something I'm not really that great at because I think through all the years that Will and I have been living on a budget and paying off our house, we have gotten in this rhythm, which is great, and I'm very proud of it, and I still love this idea. But, we've gotten in this rhythm where with our monthly budget, at the end of the month, we're really trying to eat up everything in our house. So, we're trying to eat up everything in the pantry, and in the freezer, and really stretching it. Then, when the first of the next month hits, then we go grocery and getting kind of stock up. So we are fully stocked kind of in the beginning of the month, but not so much at the end. More so at the end, we're trying to figure out creative meals to make.

One of the points they made in this book is if you just have a fully stocked pantry of the basics, of things that you know you can kind of throw together, things you can bake or make in a pinch, it just allows you kind of to feel like you can host someone at any point. Making sure you have plenty of stuff to bake with, plenty of things to maybe throw together, a quick spaghetti dinner, always having those things on hand is really important. That, for me personally, just kind of stuck out. I was like, "Hey, I really want to have more of a fully stocked pantry and maybe budget for that, maybe plan for that a little bit more, so we can welcome people." That includes those nuts, and snacks, and things that are just ready to go all the time.

On another personal note, Will and I have been talking about how we want to start making dinner that's not just perfectly for our family's size, if that makes sense. I'm really always trying to save money and try to plan a perfect dinner so that the five of us can eat everything and maybe not have that many leftovers or maybe we just finish up the leftovers the next day, but instead kind of switching my mindset to, "Hey, let's make more than enough so that if at the last minute Will's mom wants to come over and have dinner with us or a neighbor, we could invite some neighbors over, we have the means and the extra food to do that." So, there's nothing wrong with leftovers. We're big fans of leftovers. But being more intentional about making larger portions is actually a way to just be gracious and host people kind of on a whim. There've been several times where I've thought, "Hey, I want to invite this person over," but I'm like, "Oh, I don't think we have enough food for them tonight because I didn't plan for that many people to eat." So, that's another thing that we're kind of thinking through and trying to rework a little bit in our hosting and in our budget.

Okay, so moving on from hosting people well and taking the time to really prepare for that. Well, that was my first takeaway. My second takeaway is never underestimate the power of guided alone time for your kids. Let me explain. This is something that Sally and Sarah both talked about in the book. basically, from childhood on, Sally would have quiet time for her kids. And you know, my kids are super little right now. They're four, and two, and almost one years old, which I can't believe. But, two of the three are still napping. Sometimes even my oldest naps as well.

As we kind of grow out of nap time, Sally talked about just keeping this quiet rest time where every day for an hour each of her four children would go to a certain corner of the house and they all had their specific corner. They all had their special place for quiet time. And at this

place, they would have a basket of age-appropriate books, maybe some blank sheets of paper or something to draw with or journal with, and they would take the time to just be quiet, to read, to journal their thoughts and ... Gosh, I feel like that is something our kids don't know how to do these days. Our kids really know how to watch a TV show and play a video game. But just to be quiet for an hour and read a book, man, that's something I really want to instill in my kids.

So, just thinking about making those quiet corners of the house special and designated for each child. I love that they really cultivated a deep love of reading in their children. That's another thing that I really took away from this book is, as parents, we have such power over just developing rhythms and cadences in our families to where they can develop this love for reading. All four of her children love to read. And that really has to do with the fact that she planned this quiet hour of their day every single day for them to just read.

She also said in this basket of books that were age-appropriate for every kid, she would have a lot of different choices for them. She would have some novels, or some inspirational books, or some journals, or devotionals. I just love that there's such a variety, some history books. Such a variety for the kids to choose from so that they are introduced to a lot of different kinds of books and they can choose the one that interests them the most.

My second biggest takeaway is just to plan for one hour of quiet time a day to process, to think, to spend time with the Lord, and to journal. And what a gift that is to give to your kids. And Sally, the mom, did this during that time as well. So, hello. I'm always struggling with time to spend with the Lord. But if you make this a priority for the whole family and you model it, too ... Because for me, it's so tempting to just be busy and start on dinner or start doing all these other things while the kids are quiet. But what if you as the mom also took that quiet time? I just can't imagine how great that would be for your whole family.

Okay, moving on. My third takeaway. My third takeaway is that a life-giving home has everything to do with the tone that you set. Now, I said earlier in the podcast this is not about having a perfect home, and it's not. It's not about having something that's Pinterest worthy. But at the same time, it does have to do with the tone that you set, and you can set a tone in your home by having an orderly, by choosing thoughtful décor, and music, and candles, and really by just setting it with your attitude, with your peaceful demeanor, with your joy. Kind of want to break down a couple of those things that really stood out to me in the book.

The first one is decor. Sally talked a lot about choosing artwork that reflects your family and what you appreciate and hanging those kinds of artwork all over the walls of your home. This is something. Artwork is so important to me. I'm a photographer, but I don't know what it is. I have a hard time of printing the photos and hanging them up, and I think it has a lot to do with the fact that my kids are so small and I feel like we're just getting through every day, and artwork is just not the highest priority. But, just the tone that it sets to have scripture verses on your walls or up-to-date photos, I just think that it really makes your family feel kind of loved

and comforted just having beautiful art in your home.

Side note to this. I don't feel like I'm naturally super gifted at this, but I have a couple of friends that really are, and I've asked them for help. So if you feel like, "Oh, I don't know. I'm not really good at this," if you have a couple friends who are really good at interior design and décor, just ask them to maybe give you some ideas or to help you because that's really been helpful for me.

Another example, music. Playing worship music or classical music in the background of dinner or rest time, it really makes a huge difference. This is something that I've started to do, even just ... We have an Alexa, and we say, "Hey, Alexa, play classical music," or, "Alexa, play Shane & Shane. We love to shuffle Shane & Shane. Or, one of our favorite playlists on Spotify right now is called Mezzo Piano, and it's just piano to worship music. You can search for it and find it. We didn't make it. But, it's simply this pianist who takes worship songs and just plays them on piano, and it's so lovely. We play those as we're getting ready for bed or during dinner.

Anyway, bottom line is music can really make a difference in the tone that you set. In the morning, when I'm playing with the girls, I'll put on some toddler music or some kids praise and worship, and it's really upbeat. Or Kidz Bop is really fun. It's like pop music, but it takes out all the bad stuff and puts it to fun kid ... Like kids are singing it. Anyway, just taking the time to think through the music that you're playing in your home and the tone that it sets because it really does make a difference. I found that even when I play classical music for my dog when we leave the house, he's way more chill and doesn't bark as much and is just like ... I don't know. It's just kind of funny, but it helps. Classical music or whatever music you're going to play helps set the tone in your home.

Okay, third, candles. I want to talk about candles. I don't know why, but I am so careful with how long I burn my candles or what favorite candles I'm using up, and I'm kind of stingy with it. I don't know what my problem is. But man, after reading this book, they talk about lighting candles for everything. They're lighting all these tall candles for just regular dinner every single night. They have these candle sticks that they light and they light candles. It's like there's several candles constantly burning in their home, in the bathroom, in the guest room, when they're welcoming guests, in their kitchen. It's just this ritual kind of that they have. But I tell you what, there is something special that happens when you light a candle. You just feel warm and at home. Of course, if it's a really pretty smell, I just love the atmosphere that candles really can contribute to.

So, I have been rejuvenated to spend my money on having candles that I love and having them burning all the time, even when it's just me and the three little kids at home. It does something good to my heart when I can just light a candle and enjoy it while I'm cleaning the kitchen, or changing diapers, or whatever. You know it's burning, and it just makes me feel a little bit more special. So, don't be so stingy with candles is another takeaway for me.

And speaking of setting the tone, I'm talking about décor, and music, and candles, and all these things that are tangible things that you can actually do that will change the tone of the home. My favorite story from the book ... And this is kind of how I'll close this episode is by telling this story. It's my favorite story in the whole book. And this is the heart of it, because it reminds me that it's not about the things that you have, or the things that you do, or how organized or perfect it is. It's all about your heart. And as a mother and as a wife, you have such a special role in your home to set a tone that can be kind of stressed, kind of crazy, kind of anxious, kind of frantic or it can be fun, and joyful, and peaceful, and calm, and you can be the anchor. And listen, I am not that every day, by any means. A lot of times, I'm the more stressful. But, I just think it's worth reminding you and me today that a life-giving home has so much to do with your attitude.

So, back to the story. There is a time when--and this is one of the chapters that Sarah was writing, the daughter. She was recounting a time where her dad had to leave for work and her mom was left at home with all four kids, and the kids were young. There was just this daunting sadness like, ugh, they knew dad was leaving. They knew he was going to be gone for a week. Sarah was starting to realize how difficult that was for her mom to be home with all four kids--the time came for him to walk out the door, and they all said goodbye to their dad.

It was around evening time and she was just sad, and everybody was just kind of gloomy. The door shut. They all kiss him goodbye, hug him goodbye, said, "Have a safe trip, Dad. We love you." They close the door and turn to look to their mom, and their mom was like, "Who is ready for a movie? Who wants a special movie night?" And all the kids, their eyes brightened. They got so excited. She was like, "And guess what? We're going to have a movie in our bed. I'm going to make popcorn. You guys are all going to pile on mom and dad's bed, and we're going to have a special time together." The kids were excited. They had popcorn and chocolate, hot chocolate. They just loved it.

That story over just about anything else in the whole book has stuck out to me because Sally, the mom, had this opportunity to kind of be gloomy, right? And she had this ... Not even an opportunity. She had the right to be kind of sad. Her husband just left her with four small kids. That's an overwhelming feeling. But what she chose was she chose to turn that into an opportunity, and to an opportunity of fun and love. She turned just such a difficult situation into a celebration. I just loved that story. I feel like no other story in the book really embodied what a life-giving home is all about, which is just turning whatever you have, whatever God has given you in your home into something to be celebrated, and no one can do that but you.

Ultimately, the home is supposed to be a reflection of our eternal home. It won't satisfy every longing, but it should be a comfort, a safe place, and a healthy environment. This is a theme that Sarah talks about a lot through the book. I'm all about the incarnation and how God came and dwelt among us, just like we're celebrating this advent season. He came into dwelled among us, became flesh, and lived with us, and showed us ... This was his temporary home, but showed us kind of what it's like to look towards our eternal home and how this home that we live in today, the walls that surround you, the roof that's over your head should simply be a glimpse of our eternal home to come.

I just want to acknowledge the fact you might be listening, and maybe the home you grew up in was far from this. Maybe it was the opposite of a safe place. My heart and my hope is that you hear some hope today that some of us have been raised in healthy homes, but others of us really painful homes. But, I want to leave you with some encouragement. We can create something new. We can create something new, not perfect, but something life-giving for our families. And that is what this book showed me. My home is not going to look just like the Clarkson home, but there are things that I gleaned from this book and took from it that I thought, "You know what? I can do that. I can make my home even more of a life-giving home today because of this book." And I'm no longer dreading taking care of my home or doing the laundry, but viewing it as a joy and a privilege because it's my opportunity to be the joyful conductor of a life-giving home.

Okay, now it's time for the Work and Play Cornerstore where I have a little bit of fun and draw from my personal life and experiences to bring you a book I'm loving and a thing I'm loving. It might be completely random, funny, serious. I just want to stick by that it's something I personally use or recommend. And I'll get a tiny commission from anything bought through these links, which helps me continue to bring this podcast to you every week. Today, I'll be adding the book, *The Life Giving Home*, of course, as well as my favorite candle to the Cornerstore.

I just want to add that I do think this book is the perfect house-warming gift, just as my friend Callie gave it to me. My favorite candle is the volcano candle, which is constantly burning in Anthropologie. You can get it on Amazon or at Anthro. And in my opinion, it smells so good in every season of the year, but I personally love burning it right after you put all your Christmas candles away in January. I feel like it's just so fresh. Basically, *The Life Giving Home* book and the volcano candle would be the perfect pair for anyone's home. So if you have a friend that's moved into a new home, I think those two gifts would be perfect.

Thank you for listening to episode 35 of Work and Play with Nancy Ray. Everything I've mentioned today can be found in the show notes at nancyray.com/podcast/35. And you can find me at nancyray.com or follow me @nancyray on Instagram or Facebook almost daily.

I'm going to close with words from Sarah Clarkson, co-author of *The Life Giving Home*. She said,

"When someone once asked me just what it was that my parents did that made me believe in God, without even thinking, I said, 'I think it was the French toast on Saturday mornings, and coffee, and Celtic music, and discussions, and candle light in the evenings. Because in those moments, I tasted and saw the goodness of God in a way I couldn't ignore.'"

I hope this encourages you today that the small things you are doing every day matter. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.