

“Just a Wife and Mother?”

by Steve Canfield

How many times have you heard a husband introduce his wife who, when she is asked “What do you do?,” drops her head and in a depressed, insignificant, apologetic tone of voice says, “I’m just a wife and a mother.” I always want to jump in and say, “What do you mean *just* a wife and a mother?” That’s like being depressed about being “just” a millionaire or “just” a king! For the Christian woman, there is no position that offers greater fulfillment than the call to be “just a wife and mother,” or, as the Bible terms it, “a keeper at home.”

All of us have a built-in need for significance, that is, the desire to feel that we are contributing something of value to those around us. Sadly, the world’s influence and philosophy has convinced many women that this need for significance cannot be accomplished by following God’s “old-fashioned” ideas.

Satan is a master at getting us to question God’s direction and plan for our lives. Satan intimidates women today with questions like: “Don’t you think you should be using all your talents?” or, “What are you going to do if your husband dies or deserts you? Don’t you think you need something to fall back on?” or, “What about the fact that God has given you the desire to work?” When we begin to entertain Satan’s questions, we become open to his lies. Many women have listened to Satan’s lies, things like, “You’ll be happier if you go to work,” or, “You’ll have more freedom because of all the money you will make,” or, “Your children will be better off educationally if they start preschool earlier.”

Every Christian wife must ask herself, “What is God’s purpose for my life on this earth, and how can I accomplish it?” We know that God’s purpose for us is not just to have a bigger house, nicer clothes, or a few more conveniences. The Christian’s ultimate goal in life is not to be happy, but to glorify God.

How can a wife glorify God? Genesis tells us that God created the woman for the purpose of being her husband's "helpmeet." That word carries with it the meaning of being an "encourager." As a wife and/or mother, the woman glorifies God by being an encourager to her husband and children. The problem is that most ladies who go to work outside their homes are seeking to encourage themselves, rather than their family.

Reasons Women Work Outside the Home

Let's look at some reason of the most common reasons women give for working outside of their home.

1. **Finances.** We often hear women say, "I had to go to work just to make ends meet." I tell them the solution is to get shorter ends! The solution is not to leave your children with a paid babysitter, and to pay additional expenses for transportation, clothes, food, taxes, cosmetics, dry cleaning, etc. One study calculated that a woman who earned \$10,000 gross income would actually end up with a net income of only \$1,592, after deducting additional expenses and taxes. A thrifty woman can save far more than this amount by wise stewardship and planning in her home. (Marilee Horton's book *Free to Stay at Home* has many practical suggestions for how a woman can save her family money through being a "keeper at home.")

Even if the wife can get a high-paying job, is it worth the added pressure and the loss of precious time and opportunities to minister to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of her husband and children?

The solution is to learn contentment with what God provides through the husband's income. If we focus on what we desire, we will be discontent. If we focus on what we deserve, we will be grateful.

A woman is needed to meet the *physical* needs of her family, through keeping an attractive, clean, orderly house; preparing nutritious, balanced meals; and purchasing or making suitable clothing.

She is needed to meet the *emotional* needs of her family, primarily by just *being* there when they leave and when they come home, and then by being fresh and available to listen, share, love, and care.

She is needed to meet the *spiritual* needs of her family through the time she invests in prayer on their behalf and in teaching her children the ways of God, in the midst of countless everyday, real-life situations. There is a particular need for women to teach their daughters the heart and how-to's of becoming a woman of God.

Beyond the needs of her own family, there is a great need for godly women who can minister to the needs of others, particularly in disciplining other women to follow Christ.

All of these areas of ministry require *time*—time that is seldom available when a woman has a career outside of her home.

I often tell women, "If you can meet the needs of your husband, with all that involves; if you can meet the needs of your children, with all that involves; if you can spend adequate time developing an intimate, personal walk with God; if you can keep up all the responsibilities of your home (cooking, cleaning, sewing, ironing, etc.), open your home to guests, and be available to minister to others; if you can get a job that does not put you in an environment which makes you susceptible to temporal values or moral impurity or cause you to develop an independent spirit or to come home tired, pressured, or tense, then I would say it's time for you to go to work!"

Becoming a "keeper at home" may require some radical changes in lifestyle for the entire family. It may no longer be possible to "keep up with the Joneses." Sacrifices will have to be made. But the long-term blessings and benefits will make it all worthwhile.

8. Financial independence opens up for a woman **the option of leaving her husband any time there is pressure in the marriage**. One wife who had experienced great difficulty in her marriage shared, "I had just lost my job. I *couldn't* leave my husband, so we *had* to work out our problems." One particularly sobering study revealed that for every \$1,000 a woman earns outside the home, her chances of divorce are increased by 2%!
9. **Increased rebellion and promiscuity** are commonly found **among children** who are left unattended after school. God's Word told thousands of years ago that this would be the case: "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15).
10. The wife who works outside the home **often develops expectations for her husband to be her helper in fulfilling daily household responsibilities**, thus reversing her God-created role to be a helper to her husband.

11. The woman who works outside her home, away from the protection of her husband, is **left physically and spiritually vulnerable**. There is greater chance of her being exposed to physical danger or to morally compromising situations.

What's a Woman to Do?

Many women have gone into the marketplace because they genuinely feel unchallenged by their responsibilities in the home.

Let me suggest that the highest fulfillment anyone can ever experience is to be found in meeting the needs of others. No career outside her home could possibly give a woman greater opportunities to develop and maximize skills as an artist, teacher, manager, efficiency expert, counselor, nutritionist, seamstress, economist, as well as a host of others.

There are those who feel it is necessary for the wife to work in order to be able to put their children in a Christian school. While I am a strong supporter of Christian education, let me say that the purpose of the Christian school is to help *build* families, not to tear them down. God never indented for the Christian school to serve as a substitute for committed, available parents. For many families, the financial pressure may indicate God's direction to educate the children at home. If it is God's will for the children to be in a Christian school, He is more than able to supernaturally provide financially to make it possible, without the wife having to violate God's priorities for her life.

2. **Personal Fulfillment.** It seems that most people spend a lifetime trying to achieve a feeling of importance. A challenging job, extra money, or a promotion may satisfy momentarily, but it seems that whenever we get to the top of the ladder, someone has added three more rungs, and we never seem to arrive.

There is also great danger in getting our emotional fulfillment from someone other than our mate. Over 51% of America's women are in the work force. Men and women have been thrown together working side by side, developing common interests, and working toward common goals. This has produced an "infidelity trap" which is unparalleled in our history. In his excellent book *Can Men and Women Be Just Friends?*, André Bustanoby warns that "Emotional intimacy leads to emotional infidelity, which usually leads to physical infidelity."

In the last few years, my wife and I have spent hundreds of hours counseling husbands and wives whose mates have been caught up in an affair. Ninety percent of the time, the individual involved was someone they met at work. Women are finding it easier to gain significance at a job, because what they do at work is not taken for granted, as it often is at home. At work she is applauded, patted on the back, and given a raise for service beyond the call of duty. On the other hand, at home she may feel badgered and belittled: "Where are my socks?" "Why isn't this ironed?" "Does a guy ever get any food around

here?" As a result of poor relationships at home, it is natural to confide in others who are more understanding. When you find yourself sharing your most intimate thoughts and struggles with someone other than your mate, you need to remember that you are setting yourself up for disaster. André Bustanoby reminds us that "The greatest intimacy is not a bare body, it is a bare soul. Once we have bared our souls, it is easy to bare our bodies." The solution is to *build* the intimacy of your marriage, not run from it. Work at building the emotional relationship of your marriage by developing an interest in the topics and activities that are important to your mate. This will take time and deliberate effort, but will reap tremendous rewards.

Our ultimate significance can come only from God. The most satisfying approval comes as we glorify Him in the calling He has given us. Real fulfillment is not the result of doing what I want to do; it comes from knowing and doing the will of God.

3. **Peer Pressure.** Many will say, "Everyone else is doing it." That may be the only cliché Satan didn't use on Eve, but it is extremely popular today. Women are often made to feel like second-class citizens if they are not pursuing a career outside of their home.

However, we cannot allow the world to dictate our decisions and behavior. To determine God's direction for our lives, we need to find out what God thinks is important (1 Samuel 16:7), we need to value what God values (Luke 16:15), and we need to invest our lives in that which will last for eternity (Matthew 6:33).

Potential Dangers of Working Outside the Home

It is not possible for a single article to deal with all the ramifications and questions related to working wives and mothers, but I believe every couple needs to consider

the potential dangers of sending the wife into the marketplace. These consequences of the decision for the wife to work have been illustrated again and again in scores of couples that my wife and I have met and counseled.

1. Working outside the home **severely limits the time a wife can devote to her first priorities as a wife and mother.** The old adage that *quality* time is better than *quantity* of time, simply is not true when it comes to building a home. Being an effective wife and mother requires both *quality and* quantity of time.
2. The woman who works for a man other than her husband finds herself **having to please and obey two authorities.** Jesus said that no man can serve two masters.
3. The working woman is **motivated by money to please a man other than her husband** in areas of dress, attitudes, and service rendered.
4. The working woman **gives her best hours and energy to those outside of her family.** Seldom are the "leftover" hours and energy sufficient to adequately meet the needs of her family.
5. When a woman is working to provide for the basic needs of the family, the **husband does not have the security of being the provider that God intended for him to be** (1 Timothy 5:8).
6. If a woman is successful at her career, a **competitive spirit can develop between her and her husband.** He may become insecure and feel that his wife no longer respects or looks up to him.
7. Having a career of her own encourages a woman to develop an **independent spirit that undermines the oneness of her marriage.** She may begin to think of the income she receives as "mine," and will invariably feel greater freedom to make decisions independently of her husband.