



LEADER'S GUIDE

Mom, the Minister

Women in leadership delight God by using their gifts at work and at home.

She sits in her church office, staring at her business card: Associate Pastor of Women's Ministries. The M.Div. she worked so hard for somehow feels tarnished. She's having trouble balancing her Mommy title with the idea of ministry. Although her degree involved study and perseverance over nine years, and motherhood blossomed in only nine months, she finds herself more connected to her child than to the ministry.

How can she find a workable balance between full-time motherhood and part-time ministry? Can she use her gifts of leadership to lead her children? Will she have to struggle with guilt until her daughter is 18? Who really comes first, God or family?

Lesson #5

Scripture:

Exodus 18:13-27; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Titus 2:1-8; 2 Peter 1:3-8

Based on:

"Leading Our Children," by Sally Morgenthaler, GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM, March 2, 2007



INTERNATIONAL

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Provide each person with the article "Leading Our Children" from GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM, included at the end of this study.

Although we have counseled other women about the importance of making choices, we may find those choices difficult to apply to our own lives. As women in ministry, we feel torn between the job and the children. We teach God's family in the church, but struggle to find time for our own kids. Then when we spend more time with our offspring, we feel as if we've let the church down. Guilt follows us through the house like a dependent toddler.



God called us to ministry, so we are obligated to obey that call. Our "calling" Bible verse hangs in calligraphy next to the framed degrees we've earned. We truly love our jobs and the people we serve. We also adore that little boy with the blond hair who brings us chickweed and calls us "Mom." We long to serve at home just as effectively as we serve at church, but we have trouble feeling fulfilled in front of the kitchen sink.

We wonder if our children will resent God as we utilize our gifts. What if we succeed in ministry, but lose our kids?

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Is it hard for you to serve your own kids while working to reach others? Why or why not?
- [Q] Can we be effective ministers and confident moms at the same time? Explain.
- [Q] How do we let go of the Supermom image we carry in our heads?
- [Q] Is it possible to minister effectively at home? How did that work for Jesus?
- [Q] Why don't men in ministry struggle with the same problem? Or do they?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Determine your "who" versus your "do."

Most of us ask the question "Who am I?" at least once during puberty and several times as we mature. If we're lucky, we discover the answer before others begin to define us. Many of us confuse the "do" with the "who," letting our actions determine who we become. As mothers and ministers, we may struggle with the urgency of daily activities while trying to define what ministry really means. Serving at home might seem like an oxymoron as our leadership skills dampen under piles of laundry.



In their classic book *Boundaries*, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend write, “Make sure that your boundaries are strong enough that you do not let others define you. Instead, work with God to find out who you really are and what kind of work you are made for.”

A vital piece of knowing who we are is wrapped up in knowing our gifts. Most of us have been through personality tests and studied the gifts recorded in the Bible, but we may have failed to utilize those same gifts within the walls of our home. Creativity can be expressed through decorating skills. Hospitality offers warmth and love to all who sit around our table. One glance at the family calendar shows the importance of management gifts and organizational administration. But finding our passion within these gifts is another problem. Sharing a bowl of cereal with a two-year old isn't exactly what we had in mind when we graduated from seminary.

Another aspect of the “who” versus the “do” is the way circumstances define us. Single moms don't have the choice of staying at home for their total ministry. They have to bring in the income while balancing their parental role. Full-time caregivers minister to elderly parents while juggling the soccer mom image. These women may know who they are and what their gifts truly represent, yet the circumstances of the present time determine what they must do.

Whether we are making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, preparing a three-point sermon, or sitting at a traffic light—who we are is the vital question. We *are* ministers.

Read 2 Peter 1:3–8.

- [Q] How has God given you the divine power you need for life's circumstances?
- [Q] How are you currently utilizing your gifts at home?
- [Q] How can we teach our children these qualities Peter lists?
- [Q] Is it possible to be truly productive and effective with our children? If so, why do we sometimes feel empty and unfulfilled?

Optional Activity: *Form pairs. Share with your partner what you think her gifts are and how she is using them productively. Listen carefully as your partner shares her opinion about your gifts and your effectiveness. Discuss the struggles you have using these gifts at home. Determine to pray for each other during the week.*

Teaching point two: Involve the kids.

One of the easiest ways to teach our children about gifts is to let them join us in ministry. One pregnancy-crisis counselor brought her son with her to work. He watched videos in the conference room while she counseled next door. He learned to identify the stages of pregnancy and the issue of abstinence. Today, he is in his 20s and still remembers those years and the time spent in ministry with Mom. “I learned a lot about nonprofits,” he reports. “I saw how Mom used her gifts and how a ministry works. I never felt neglected, but rather privileged.”

Leading our children includes teaching them, and the best way to teach is through practical examples. As we involve our children in ministry, we teach them the value of service. They spend time with us, but they also spend time with others. The best education we can offer them is to carefully introduce them to the real world and the impact that ministry can have.



Another example is a woman who worked at a nonprofit for the uninsured. Her teenage son helped stamp and sort newsletters, swept floors, and installed software on computers. He also met several homeless people and learned to appreciate the blessings of his own home.

One pastor of a Chinese church has always involved her children in the ministry. Now her children are grown, and it is the grandchildren who sometimes accompany Grandma to the Chinese Bible study. This pastor writes, "Teach your children the importance of considering others. Show them that the reason you do ministry is to share the love of the Lord. Set the example for them to follow later."

Careerbuilder.com cites the following survey: "43% of working moms are willing to take a pay cut if it allows them to spend more time with their children." Those of us in ministry sometimes have the advantage of a flexible schedule. Even if we take those pay cuts because we work for nonprofits or churches, we receive the benefit of spending time with our children. We also have the privilege of leading our children toward the same path we have found so much pleasure in.

Read Titus 2:1–8.

- [Q] How does this Titus passage apply to us today? How do we mentor our children?
- [Q] How can you love your children by showing them practical aspects of ministry?
- [Q] What are some of the ways you are an example to your children?

Teaching point three: Balance the expectations.

Cloud and Townsend remind us to practice boundary skills, beginning by "Saying no to people in your supportive group." In our support groups, we are honored and respected. We are loved unconditionally, even if we respond to a task by saying no.

Although we love our work and feel called to a lifetime of service, we must set boundaries to protect our families and our health. No one can keep exhaling without inhaling. We need time with our children and spouse, time with the Lord, and time in a relaxing bubble bath. Finding the balance is the key.

Read Exodus 18:13–27.

Jethro saw the importance of setting boundaries in the life of Moses. It was the wisdom of Jethro that set the stage for deacons and elders in the church. Likewise, Stephen Ministry (<http://www.stephenministries.org>) is set up for lay people in the church to listen and care for those in need. This service helps pastors have more time to use their own gifts.

In her article, Sally Morgenthaler reminds us that there is no magic formula or manual for what we do. The various mommy tracks we take have to be formed by our own courage and skills. But as we learn to balance the expectations of others with our own gifts, we can devise a workable plan. This does not mean that we will suddenly become Super-Ministry Mom. It means we will begin to thrive rather than just survive.

- [Q] What commonsense tips do you find in the Exodus passage?
- [Q] How have you retained your passion while juggling motherhood and ministry?



- [Q] Are you afraid to say no? If so, why?
- [Q] What do you think God's expectations are for you?

Teaching point four: Live in the season.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8.

In 1965, The Byrds released their song “Turn, Turn, Turn.” It is a ballad based on Ecclesiastes 3, and reminds us that life has seasons. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to plant and a time to reap. But we sometimes forget there is also a time to be more involved in mothering than in ministry.

During some seasons, our children *are* full-time ministry. We may have the privilege of spending all our time with them: teaching them, baking cookies together, or playing ball in the backyard. Teenagers particularly need our time and attention during these critical years. In fact, some parenting experts believe that teenagers need more attention than toddlers.

In his book *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen wrote, “There is a time to give and a time to receive. We need equal time for both if we want to live healthy lives.”

One mother who has graduated two sons explains, “You have to be flexible. What might be right for you at one season of mothering might suddenly change and be all wrong. You need to accept these changes without grieving the loss of the ministry you loved. Praise God for the season you were able to do it. There will also be times when any kind of outside ministry will be impossible, and you need to accept that too.”

James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, reassured his wife when their children were babies, “I promise you there will come a day when you will have the freedom to use all your gifts.” Today, Shirley Dobson is internationally recognized as the leader of the National Day of Prayer. She has met with presidents and used her skills to organize and influence an entire movement. She is an author and an artist. She has also raised two children and left her influence on their lives.

Living within the season requires patience and perseverance. It also requires a discerning heart and reliance on the Holy Spirit. An accountability group helps support us through every season. Intercessors place a hedge of protection around our fragile hearts while God keeps our gifts safe until it is the perfect time to use them. To everything, there is a season.

- [Q] How would you describe the season you are currently living in?
- [Q] Are you content within this season or frustrated? Explain why.
- [Q] What woman is your heroine? How did she handle the seasons of life?
- [Q] What has been your favorite season, so far?
- [Q] Which season are you looking forward to?



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Morgenthaler reminds us to set up our own models of parenting and ministry: "... we all tried to find a way to live life from our deepest places," she writes. "Our most passionate places."

The apostle John would seem to agree. He recorded the words of Jesus, who said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10b). Jesus promised to give us life to the full—abundant life, passionate, inspired life. We can live a passionate life within the walls of our home, watched by the "congregation" of our children.

Making that passion a reality will require our best discernment, and perhaps a resculpting of our call. The following tips may help us consider ways to build on models of parenting while remaining true to our particular ministries.

Action Points:

- Lead at home by delegating chores; no one can do it all and still do it well.
- Set expectations at a realistic level.
- Take mini-vacations with one child at a time.
- Be flexible.
- Stay tuned to the Holy Spirit.
- Learn from older women who have raised children and served in ministry.
- Keep your self-image from being defined solely by ministry.
- Remember that God's timing may not be the same as yours.
- Find some friends who are not part of your ministry; share a play date with your kids.
- Take time to consider how decisions will affect your family.
- Be patient with yourself.
- Pray for opportunities to lead your children closer to the Lord.

As we put our models into effect, we will learn how to tweak them with each season. While we lead our children and lead others, we can always be confident that the God who loves us will give us everything we need.

—Rebecca Jay writes from the heartland of Kansas. She is finally learning who she is, and it's only taken her half a century to discover how to use her gifts.



Additional Resources



ChristianBibleStudies.com

-[Balancing Work and Family Life](#)

-[Soul Care for Women Leaders](#)

-[Six Principles for Women Leaders](#)



Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry, Aida Besancon Spencer (Hendrickson Publishers, 1985; ISBN 9780943575292)



God's Bold Call to Women: Embrace Your God-Given Destiny with Kingdom Authority, Barbara J. Yoder (Gospel Light, 2005; ISBN 9780830737192)



Women Gifted for Ministry: How to Discover and Practice Your Spiritual Gifts, Ruth Towns, Elmer L. Towns (Thomas Nelson, 2001; ISBN 9780785245995)



Why Not Women? A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership, Loren Cunningham, David Joel Hamilton (YWAM Publishing, 2000; ISBN 9781576581834)



Boundaries, Dr. Henry Cloud, Dr. John Townsend (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992; ISBN 0310585902)



Two Views on Women in Ministry, Revised, James R. Beck (Zondervan, 2005; ISBN 9780310254379)



Thresholds and Passages, Cathee A. Poulsen, Fran Lankford (Pleasant Word, 2007; ISBN 9781414110431)



ARTICLE

Leading Our Children

By Sally Morgenthaler, for the study, “Mom, the Minister”

As women, we’re bombarded with so many models of parenting:

- The uber-mommy track: no employment until the last one turns 18.
- The uber-career track: give ‘em six weeks’ attention, and then get back out there.
- The modified mommy: no employment until they’re all kindergarten graduates.
- The modified career: work part-time, school hours only, part-time at home, work nights, etc.



Then there are the tracks known to cause certain kinds of insanity in both children and their mothers:

- Work at home full-time and parent full-time (16 hours per day), otherwise known as “What was I thinking?”
- Work 10 hours a day, commute for 2, and compress parenting into 20 minutes of interaction, if you’re lucky.
- Never have any other focus in life but your children (“Ur-Kids-R-U”), even if they’re 38.

And finally, there are the various “single parent” tracks that some of us are on. These are the tracks with significantly fewer options:

- Single and working two jobs. You’ve never seen a custody payment in the mail.
- Single and working a minimum-wage job because you put your ex-husband through college and grad school and never once thought he’d leave you for another woman.
- Single and never married. You kept your baby, but it’s tough to find the support you need.



I know we typically don't talk about some of these tracks in Christian circles. But they're reality. And it's good to bust through the clean formulas we're presented at some churches. Honestly, is there a "mommy" formula for any women, including Christian women? I don't think so. The circumstances of our lives are unique. So are our personalities, gift mixes, and family-of-origin stories. The list goes on. It gets even more complex. Most of us try several different mommy tracks during our 20-plus-year parenting span. What may have been the answer in one part of our parenting era no longer works in another, so we change.

Let me tell you more about the "mommy tracks" I've been on, and what I've learned about leading my children.

The complexity of my own situation as a parent astounds me. I've been a stay-at-home mom, an outdoor-photographer mom, a work-from-home-worship-leader-mom, a self-employed-traveling-and-speaking mom, a married mom, a single mom. I've started three businesses while my children were still at home, and transitioned in and out of several careers. Funny how there wasn't a manual for what I ended up doing. If there had been, the chapter titles alone would have terrified me.

My son, Peder, is now a graphic artist and filmmaker. Since he was in high school, we have worked together on various projects. (My company is the first one listed on his resume.) When he was in college about an hour and a half away, we would spend a day or two together every few months, working on worship videos. Yesterday, we were in a meeting together, proofing the final copy for a line of photographic cards I just started. Peder has done all the design work, and forgive my bias, but he's really good.

As we reviewed the proofs with the printer, I remarked that many of the photos were actually taken when the children and I trekked up to the Colorado hills together on weekends. With his sharp 20-something memory, Peder began to recount how he'd experienced the various scenes: lugging my tripod up a craggy gorge so I could capture the waterfall at just the right place; wide-eyed as our rusty old four-wheeler hugged the mountainside to avoid careening into the canyon below (Mom just had to get to those wildflowers at the top); chasing marmots in the alpine rock as I captured a mountain lake in the last light of summer.

Later, when we were driving back from the meeting, I thanked Peder for taking the time out of his busy work schedule to design the cards and see them through to production. He said, "Mom, it's what family does. And it's worth it, just to see how much you're into this. Anna and I always worry about you when you've lost your passion. You've always supported us and pushed us to do the things we love. We want the same for you."

My parenting formula isn't anyone else's. But I do know this: Yesterday, my son shared something eye-opening. Something pivotal. Regardless of the situations we were in (and some of them were traumatic—they lost their dad early on), we all tried



to find a way to live life from our deepest places. Our most passionate places. Those places that called on our best selves. Mothering was that for me, definitely. But so were photography, worship leading, writing, speaking, running an advertising business, and now a card business.

I think the key to my parenting was this: The particular “mommy” or “career” track I was on at any point didn’t seem to matter nearly as much as living the one life I had to the best of my ability. For me, that meant involving my children as much as I could in my pursuits. Most of the time, however, it was not direct involvement, but a day-to-day sharing of dreams, complete with successes and failures.

For those of you who are both leader and parent, your matrix of mothering may look entirely different from mine. Yet if you view passion (that is, living significantly) as a requirement for life and not an option, you will infect your children with a view of life that will help them create rich, God-honoring lives. Rather than just making do with life or worse, settling in as victims of circumstance, you will lead them into the realm of possibility. Regardless of the track you’ve chosen, if you have a dream, live a dream, and share that dream with your children. They will become dreamers and liverers of dreams.

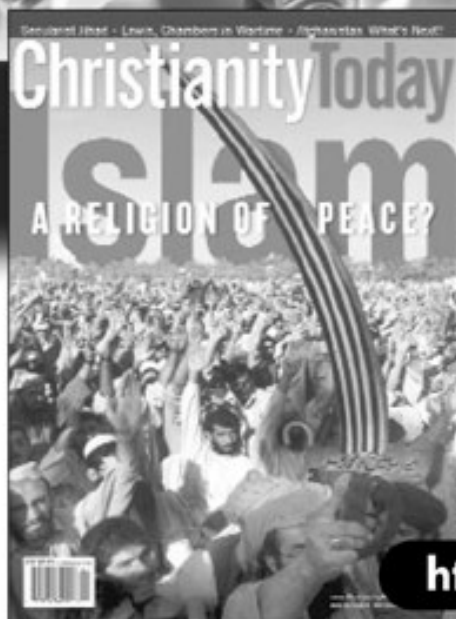
Oh, there’s one parenting track I left out. It’s called the “realized life” track. We have not because we ask not. Ask for the strength and grace to develop your gifts to their fullest potential. Don’t settle for living someone else’s life or the one you think you’ve been handed. Even if you have only an hour or two a week to do it, start co-creating your best life with God, and your children will do the same.

*—Sally Morgenthaler is a frequent speaker and writer, Christian educator, author of *Worship Evangelism and other books*, and innovator in Christian practices worldwide.*

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