



Seasons of Parenting



BIBLE STUDY

Called to Work

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we can still be great moms.



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How can you be a good mother if you also have a job away from home? Working moms get this question all the time. We're probably more vulnerable to that criticism than anything else in our lives. But statistics show that few two-parent families can get by on one average income, even if they fall way below "keeping up with the Joneses."

So what's a mom to do? Are we neglecting our kids when we work outside the home? Does loving a career mean we're not as committed to our families? Is God as horrified over working moms as some people infer? How can we get beyond the intrinsic guilt we feel? In this study, based on an article by Lisa Jackson, we learn from Mary Whelchel of *The Christian Working Woman* how we can go to and from work without guilt riding along.

Scripture:

Proverbs 3:5-6; 31:10-31; Isaiah 26:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 1 Timothy 1:11-12

Based on:

"Kissing Guilt Goodbye," by Lisa Jackson,
CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY, September/October 1999



LEADER'S GUIDE

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note: Prior to the class, provide for each person a copy of the article "Kissing Guilt Goodbye" from CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY magazine (included at the end of this study).

Life is not easy, especially when you're a working mom. Not only do you need to juggle the responsibilities and activities of your family and personal life, but you also have to live up to the expectations and requirements of the workplace. Sometimes we feel like we have to be some sort of superwomen—and most of us feel we fall short of that goal.

Add to that the needs of our kids. We worry that their caretakers aren't taking care of them as well as we would. We feel distress each time we can't get off work for one of their school parties or special events. We even feel that maybe we're not godly mothers because we work instead of staying home with our kids all day.

When we realize that work can be a God-ordained ministry and calling and that we can trust God with the hearts of our children, we can plow through the guilt. We still may not be superwomen, but we can be what God calls us to be at home and in the workplace.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Have you ever felt guilty about leaving your children with a daycare provider while you went to work? Why did this make you feel guilty?
- [Q] Do you think all children suffer when their moms work? In what ways?
- [Q] What do you think is society's attitude in general about moms who work? How about the church's attitude?
- [Q] Have you ever been around Christians who made you feel uncomfortable about working or seemed to disapprove of your job? Why do you think some Christians make you feel this way? What could be their motivation?
- [Q] How do you respond when guilt hits you? How would your life be different if you never again felt guilty about having a job?
- [Q] How do you think God views working women? Do you think he inspires guilt feelings in them? Explain.



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Where God leads us, we are to follow.

Read Proverbs 3:5–6. Most of us are capable people. We do an amazing job of arranging our schedules, multitasking, and juggling the needs and deadlines of our jobs, families, churches, and personal lives. At a frantic pace, we move ahead and plan our own lives.

As Mary Whelchel says, many women tell God their agendas and ask him to bless them. But when we do this, according to Whelchel and this Scripture passage, we put the cart before the horse. We should first go to God with our lives and ask him to write our marching orders. Then, Whelchel points out, when we know we're where God wants us to be, we can get rid of the guilt by taking the marching orders and confidently following them.

- [Q] Do you remember a time when you specifically went to God and asked him to direct you? Afterwards, did you sense his guidance and direction? How did he make clear to you what he wanted you to do?
- [Q] Considering the passage in Proverbs, what happens when we move ahead with planning our lives without acknowledging God and waiting for his guidance?
- [Q] Read Proverbs 31:10–31. What indicates that the Proverbs 31 woman, the virtuous woman, was also a working woman? How does this passage honor that choice?

Teaching point two: God provides us with gifts, not guilt.

“OK, I committed my way to God and sensed that being at work was his direction. So why do I still feel guilty?” Nearly every working mom can relate to that question, especially when we have to miss our child's program at school because we can't get off work. Or when a son or daughter says, “Mommy, why do you have to go to work? Can't you stay home with me?”

At those times, we must cling to our calling. We must hold on to fact, not feelings. We also need to distinguish the difference between false guilt and true guilt. Whelchel points out that we feel true guilt when we're not obeying God. True guilt is specific. God is not the author of confusion. When we are disobedient or going in the wrong direction, the Holy Spirit convicts us of specific things. When the guilty feeling is a result of true sin, the Holy Spirit shows us exactly what is wrong.

On the other hand, false guilt is an elusive, vague feeling. Whelchel points out that if we have our marching orders from God, have our priorities right, and are following God's lead, “then we can be assured those feelings are the work of Satan, trying to find our weak spot.”



Instead of guilt, God gives us gifts to serve him. Very often we serve the Lord with these gifts in a workplace environment, where we can, directly or indirectly, reveal him to those with whom we work.

Read Isaiah 26:3–4 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–6.

- [Q]** What does it mean to have a steadfast mind? How can remembering Isaiah 26:3–4 help us when feelings of guilt strike?
- [Q]** First Corinthians 12:4–6 tells us there are different kinds of gifts and service but the same Lord over all. What does that mean? How can remembering that God has given us a specific gift, area of service, or expertise help us when we feel false guilt about being a working mom?
- [Q]** In what ways can God use a woman to be a reflection of him in the workplace?
- [Q]** What specific action steps can we take when we're feeling false guilt?

Note: Whelchel suggests that Scripture is a woman's best weapon against false guilt. So find a Scripture to memorize and use it as a screensaver, or find another way to keep that text before you.

Optional activity: Break up into groups of three or four. Give each person a pencil and paper, and ask them to make a list of gifts God gives. Ask the small groups to report their findings, and make a master list on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or overhead projector. Now ask the small groups to walk through the list of gifts and discuss how each can be lived out at home and at work.

Teaching point three: God loves our families even more than we do.

Our children are not just ours; they're God's children too. The responsibility for these kids doesn't just rest upon our shoulders. The Holy Spirit guides, corrects, and protects even these little ones. God loves them every bit as much as we do—even more!

Even stay-at-home moms aren't with their children every hour of the day and can't protect their children from everything they face. But when we can't be there, God can. When God guides us into the workplace, we can commit our kids to him and know that even when we're away from them, he isn't.

Read 1 Timothy 1:11–12.

- [Q]** Timothy was appointed to serve God in certain ways at certain times. Yet that did not mean that everything was always easy in his life. He suffered. How can this encourage us as working moms to ease our guilt feelings?



- [Q] What does this verse tell us about committing our children to the Lord's care? How does this work out in a practical sense in our lives?
- [Q] How does God guard our children when we're not there?
- [Q] When we realize that God is more committed to our kids than we are, how does that change our lives?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

God guides and equips each woman. His plans are as individual as our fingerprints. He calls some women to be full-time, stay-at-home moms. Others he calls to perform his tasks at a workplace while others support us by helping with our children. Still others he calls to work outside the home for a season. God gives each of us a job description. We can operate confidently within that job description, throwing any false guilt back on God's shoulders until he changes that job description.

- [Q] What do you feel is God's job description for your life right now? How has he revealed this?
- [Q] If you are living according to God's job description for you, how can you ignore or banish false guilt when it starts to attack?
- [Q] How can you respond in love to people who directly or indirectly accuse you of not being a good mom because you work?
- [Q] What can you do to help you remember that your kids are in God's care?

Study prepared by Jeanette Gardner Littleton, who works from her home while managing three kids, two dogs, two cats, two hamsters, three fish, and one husband.



Additional Resources

-  *Fran & Jesus on the Job*, by Mary Whelchel (Tyndale, 1993; ISBN 0842312269)
-  *The Frazzled Factor Workbook: Relief for Working Moms*, by Jane Jarell and Karol Ladd (Thomas Nelson/W, 2005; ISBN 1418501921)
-  *Martha to the Max: Balanced Living for Perfectionists*, by Debi Stack (Moody Publishers, 2000; ISBN 0802453899)
-  *Soaring on High: Spiritual Insights from the Life of an Eagle*, by Mary Whelchel (Moody Publishers, 2001; ISBN 080241784)
-  *The Single Mom's Workplace Survival Guide*, by Brenda Armstrong (Gospel Light, 2002; ISBN 0830734934)
-  The Christian Working Woman website: www.ChristianWorkingWomen.com
-  ChristianBibleStudies.com
- Fear Factors in Parenting
 - Parenting Together
 - Mentoring Youngsters Toward Adolescence
 - Responsibility Super Models
 - Replace Whining with Respect



Kissing Guilt Goodbye

Mary Whelchel, an expert on working moms, helps you be the parent God wants you to be.

Interview by Lisa Jackson



You haven't even made it to work, and already you know it's going to be one of those days. Sarah is pouting because you forgot to wash her neon purple shirt, and today is Glow-in-the-Dark Day at school. Matthew's sitter is sick, and you had to scramble to find a replacement. You finally get the kids where they need to be, breathe deeply, and prepare to face your day. Turning the corner, you find yourself smack in the middle of a traffic jam. *Why did I ever go back to work?* you wonder. *Life sure was a lot simpler when I was at home.*

Sixty percent of all mothers today work at least part-time outside the home. And statistics show that the No. 1 emotion that working mothers struggle with is guilt—guilt because they aren't home when the kids get home from school, guilt because their kids don't like their sitter, guilt because they can't be room mothers.

"Working mothers are under tremendous strain," says author and speaker Mary Whelchel. "We have a lot of people depending on us. If we mess up, everybody feels it."

Whelchel knows about work-related guilt. A career mom since her daughter was eight, Mary is the founder of The Christian Working Woman, a ministry dedicated to helping Christian women apply God's Word to their lives in the workplace. We talked to Mary about getting rid of working-mom guilt.

Let's start with the basics. Why is guilt such a problem for working moms?

Guilt and parenting seem to go hand in hand. Every mother experiences it. We somehow believe if something's wrong with our children, it must be our fault. And because a



working mother isn't physically present with her kids twenty-four hours a day, she naturally blames herself even more when there's even the slightest problem. There is also a guilt that's unique to Christians. I think it's because of the attitude in some Christian circles that working mothers can't possibly be as good at parenting as their stay-at-home counterparts, and their children can't possibly become well-adjusted adults. There are some pretty strong opinions and a lot of blame being thrown around.

How can a mom know if God wants her in the work force?

She needs to start on her knees. A lot of women tell God, "This is what I'm going to do. I want you to bless my agenda." That never works. You must go humbly to God and say, "Lord, I want your will, whatever that is. I'm giving you a blank sheet of paper, and you can write my orders on it." Working moms need to make sure their marching orders come from the Lord. Once you know you're where God wants you, you really can get rid of guilt. Take hold of those orders and start marching. Be confident in them. But, if you have any uncertainty at all about working outside the home, if you've never gone to God in the first place, then back up and seek his will.

Some would say those guilty feelings are a sign that a mom should be at home rather than working.

Maybe, but just because you *feel* guilty doesn't mean you *are* guilty. Working mothers assume that every problem their children have is the result of their working. It's just not true. If you stayed home and devoted every minute to your children, they'd still have problems. You need to look closely at your emotions and determine if you're feeling true guilt or false guilt. If it's false guilt, get rid of it.

What is the difference between true guilt and false guilt?

We feel true guilt when we're not listening to God. True guilt is specific: you know why you're feeling guilty and what you're supposed to do about it. It's a matter of being obedient to God. If a mom is working and she knows God hasn't called her to that job, she better get out or she's going to be buried in guilt. If you've been putting your job ahead of your family, that's true guilt. Is your job short-changing your family? That's true guilt. False guilt is a vague, cloudy feeling, one that's tough to nail down. It says, "I'm not right. I'm not what I should be." It feels the same and acts on you the same as true guilt, so it's tough to know the difference. It all goes back to those marching orders. If you know you have your priorities right and are following God's lead in your life, then you can be assured those feelings are the work of Satan, trying to find your weak spot.



Obviously, God wants us to get rid of any false guilt. How can we do that?

The best weapon against false guilt is Scripture. Find a verse that relates to your guilt, memorize it, put it on your screensaver—whatever you need to do to get it in your head. Then, when those feelings threaten to overwhelm you, remember that Scripture. Let's say you're battling the fear that your kids won't turn out right because you're working. Use a verse like 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power," or Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

The Bible is often used to tell moms they shouldn't be working. How do you respond to that?

The Bible doesn't offer black-and-white directives about whether a mother should work. I do, however, find many principles about priorities. It's clear that women should be responsible for their households and put their families ahead of their careers. Scripture does offer a great example of a woman who does both things well: the Proverbs 31 woman. She puts the Lord first and then takes care of her family before heading to the marketplace. She knows her calling and obeys.

That sounds good on paper, but working moms can still feel like they're missing out on big chunks of their kids' lives.

You will miss out on things an at-home mom might not, but it doesn't have to mean disaster. If you're where God wants you, you must trust God to fill in the gaps. It's costly to give of yourself, your time, and energy. Time you spend playing a game with your children when you'd rather be taking a quiet bubble bath or time when you really don't feel like going to a school function after working all day. These are very real sacrifices parents must make. But God has given each of us gifts and talents (1 Cor. 12:4–6). He expects us to exercise these abilities, both in the home and in the workplace. Career women can make a very real impact on this world. The Bible says "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). As a working mom, you can extend the light that shines in your own home into the world around you. Working moms often worry they're shortchanging their families.

What are some practical tips to keep the household running smoothly?

First, divvy up the chores. A lot of working moms try to alleviate their guilt by becoming "super mom." They try to compensate by not asking of their children and husbands what would normally be expected of them. Listen, you're not doing your kids any favors if you do it all for them. They need to have their own tasks: making their beds, washing the dishes, walking the dog. They need to be taught that the family is a team that works together, with everyone doing his fair share. So sit down as a family and put in writing exactly what you expect from your children. Second,



let Dad take over some responsibilities. This way, kids get twice the nurturing and at the same time see that parenting is a team effort.

Looking back, what have you learned in your life as a working mother?

A working mother can be the mom God wants her to be, and her children can have all the attention and nurturing they need. God doesn't expect perfect parents, but he does expect to be No. 1 in our lives. The most important thing any parent can do is pray. Prayer is essential whether you work outside your home or not. When your kids see you praying, reading the Bible, and seeking God's guidance for your life, they'll take these values for themselves. If you demonstrate your commitment to Christ, your children will learn to live for Jesus, too. And that's what really matters when it's all said and done.

"Kissing Guilt Goodbye," by Lisa Jackson, CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY, September/October 1999

