

Today's Christian Woman

Series

LEADER'S GUIDE

Balancing Work and Family Life

Prayer and preplanning can provide the wisdom and flexibility we need to balance our homelife with our career.

Balancing work demands with family life can be a complicated and stressful responsibility. Jane Kise, in her article for TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, recommends preplanning to ensure the outcome we desire for our families. Preplanning will allow for financial flexibility and time for family needs, as well as increase our ability to hold to values that honor God and family.

Using the example of the Proverbs 31 woman, this study will discuss: How do we gain financial flexibility and stability while caring for our family's needs? How do we balance preplanning with trusting God for the future? What Christian values should guide us as we determine a career/family balance?

Lesson #2

Scripture:

Proverbs 16:1-9; 31:10-31; Colossians 3:12-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-11

Based on:

"Balancing Act," by Jane A. G. Kise, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, July/August 2001



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: prior to the class, provide for each person the article "Balancing Act" from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine (included at the end of this study).

Our culture would have us believe that working moms can have it all and do it all. The truth of the matter is that the rigorous demands of work and the emotional pressures of a busy family life often conflict. When we are torn in our struggles to do our work with excellence while caring for the needs of our families, we can feel overwhelmed with responsibility and emotionally frazzled. Jane Kise suggests ways moms can find a healthy balance between work and family life. Choosing family-friendly jobs, not succumbing to the lure of materialism, and holding to Christian values that honor God and family are key elements to achieving this balance.



Work can be fulfilling in many ways. The Proverbs 31 woman worked with delight. Kise reminds us, however, that we must be careful not to determine our self-worth by our job. God values us because we are his children made in his image, not because of what we do. Remembering this will help us to find motherhood equally fulfilling, if not more so, than our careers, in what Kise calls a "society starved for meaning and purpose."

Discussion starters:

- [Q] In what ways does our society lead women to believe that they can have it all—a demanding, high-powered career and a healthy, well-adjusted family? What pressures does this idea create for women?
- [Q] Years ago there was a commercial jingle that said, "I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan, and never let you forget you're a man. I'm a woman." What unrealistic images of a woman's role do commercials like this portray? What issues have led our society to create the idea of the superwoman?
- [Q] What struggles between work and home do full-time working moms often face? Have you ever felt like you weren't doing anything well because you were pulled in so many different directions? Share your story. How might this type of feeling affect a person's self-esteem?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles**Teaching point one: Seek God for wisdom as you plan for the future of your family.**

Read Proverbs 16:1–9 and 31:10–31. If we commit our work to the Lord, our plans will be established. God has made everything for its own purpose. This includes every person and



family. If we humbly seek God's wisdom (James 1:5), he will guide us as we plan for our families, and he will reveal his purposes in our lives.

The capable woman described in Proverbs 31 smiled at the future. Knowing God would never forsake her, she trusted him as her Jehovah-Jireh (The Lord shall provide). She was not afraid of the bitter snow or violent storms that her household might face. She walked with God, and she did all she could to prepare for whatever God allowed in their lives. Her attentive care and genuine concern for her family were evident by her diligent planning. Her family was clothed in scarlet, the best material available. She was purposeful in her dealings: conscientiously searching for the best supplies, carefully considering her options, and faithfully acting on the wisdom God gave her.

- [Q] Kise believes that preplanning is “essential to ensure the outcome you want to achieve” for your family. Based on the passages you studied in Proverbs, do you agree with her? Explain your answer.
- [Q] According to Proverbs 16, why should we seek God as we plan for the future of our families?
- [Q] Why do you think the woman described in Proverbs 31 smiled at the future? List specific things she did to plan for the future of her household.
- [Q] Why do you think the author of this Proverb considered this woman's thorough preparedness and diligence in planning for the future to be noble character qualities? Based on Proverbs 16, when might a person's plans for the future not be noble?
- [Q] How do we balance preplanning with trusting God for the future?

Teaching point two: Find a balance between work and family life that benefits all involved while bringing glory to God.

Look again at Proverbs 31:10–31. Kise recommends that parents should find the right blend of parenting and work for their family. She suggests that mothers find careers and companies that will allow them to put their families' needs before work by either putting their careers on hold or by giving them the flexibility necessary to care for their families.

The accomplished woman of Proverbs 31 balanced work with her family's needs. She worked with wool and flax, bought fields, planted vineyards, made linen garments to sell, and supplied belts for tradesmen. The excellent products she made brought her praise. Her purpose in all of her tasks was to glorify God and to provide for the needs of her household. Her work brought her delight, and she sensed that her gain was good.

- [Q] What balance between work and family life did this woman demonstrate? What priority did she give to her family? Support your answer from the text.
- [Q] How did this woman's work provide for her household?
- [Q] The husband of the Proverbs 31 woman trusted her with his heart. He knew she would bring him gain because she was good to him all the days of her life. What inference can you find from this passage about the priority this woman's husband had in her life? What



specifically can a woman do for her husband that will bring him the good described in this passage?

- [Q] How did the wife described in this passage bring her husband gain? Do you think his gain was merely material?
- [Q] The children of this woman of noble character rose up and blessed her. What does this imply about the relationship she had with her children? How did her work benefit her children? How did her character benefit her children?
- [Q] The capable woman described in Proverbs 31 delighted in her work. Why do you think her work brought her delight? Why do you think work is satisfying? Does your work bring you delight? Explain your answer.
- [Q] Do you feel you have a good work/family balance? If so, explain what you have done to maintain this. If you feel weak in this area, what specifically might you do to improve the balance?
- [Q] What happens to families when work takes a higher priority than everything else?
- [Q] Why is it often difficult to keep a healthy work/family balance? How do we keep from being overwhelmed when trying to emulate the Proverbs 31 woman?
- [Q] How do balanced priorities bring glory to God?
- [Q] How can we glorify God through our work? (Hint: See Colossians 3:23–24)

Optional Activity

In your small group, discuss what you believe would be an ideal work/family balance. Brainstorm with your group to find ways you might be able to achieve this balance.

Teaching point three: When we balance our needs and wants, we allow for the financial flexibility that is important for the good of our family and God's kingdom.

Look again at Proverbs 31:16–22 and read 1 Timothy 6:6–11. Kise recommends that couples be purposeful about their financial planning. She encourages couples to rely on one income to meet their family's needs. This prevents couples from being trapped in a two-income lifestyle, and it allows them the financial flexibility needed for a mother to stay home with her children or work part-time if she chooses. This, of course, assumes that one adult in the family makes enough for the family to live on, or that there are two adults in the family, which may not always be the case.

Paul exhorted Timothy to live a life of contentment by remembering that the things of earth are temporal and cannot be taken into eternity. The antithesis of the voracious greed Paul warned against is generosity. The woman described in Proverbs 31 used her earnings to provide for her family and to willingly and generously help the poor and needy. When our hearts are content, generosity will replace greed. A life of contentment will allow us to make godly decisions with



our finances, instead of focusing on materialistic gain that attracts our wandering eye away from our faith toward the ruinous, destructive emptiness of worldly wealth.

- [Q] According to 1 Timothy 6:7, why should we lead a life of contentment?
- [Q] How can we use our finances in ways that will have eternal results?
- [Q] Paul warned Timothy to flee from greed and the temptations of riches. According to 1 Timothy 6:11, how did Paul suggest Timothy do this?
- [Q] How does a heart of contentment protect us from the temptations of greed?
- [Q] How does contentment foster the generosity of spirit displayed by the woman described in Proverbs 31?
- [Q] How might greed affect the decisions we make about our work/family balance? How might we guard against greed?
- [Q] What role might contentment have in making decisions about living on one income as Kise suggests? What benefits are there to living on one income even if you have two incomes? What happens when couples get trapped into a two-income lifestyle?
- [Q] What if you have no choice but to have two incomes, or must live on one income because you are the only parent? In what ways can you find contentment?
- [Q] What are the benefits of financial planning? What generally happens when couples do not have a financial plan? How does a financial plan help couples balance financial needs with the needs of their children? Do you agree with Kise that we need to be purposeful about our financial planning? Why or why not?

Optional Activity

Kise recommends calculating the costs of working. In small groups, work through the following financial scenario:

Megan works full-time as a receptionist in a doctor's office. She makes \$35,000 a year. Fifteen percent of her income goes to taxes. She tithes 10 percent of her income. She has three children under the age of five. Day care costs are \$300 a week. She works 50 weeks a year. Career clothing costs her approximately \$1,000 a year. Often she picks up dinner on the way home from work, because she hasn't had time to cook. Eating out costs approximately \$80 a week. She spends \$25 a week on gas transporting her children to daycare and getting to work. Approximately how much money does Megan actually clear every year? How might knowing this information affect her decisions about working full-time? What other options might she consider that would allow her more time with her children? What if Megan is much happier working than staying home with her children? How might that affect her parenting? How much should that weigh into her decision?



Teaching point four: Whatever we do, we should work at it with all our hearts, working for the Lord rather than for men.

Look once more at Proverbs 31:10–31 and read Colossians 3:12–21. Whatever balance God leads us to, we need to hold true to values that honor God and family. Paul encouraged the Colossians to do their work as if they were doing it for the Lord, for it was Christ whom they served. He reminded them to focus on character qualities of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, and unity in all that they did. He instructed family members to honor each other and bring glory to God. Whatever choices we make in our struggle for work/family-life balance, we should do it all in the name of Jesus.

- [Q]** Why are the character attributes listed in Colossians 3 important to all we do? How will these values impact our work performance? How will they impact our family life?
- [Q]** How might focusing on values and character qualities that honor Christ influence our decisions regarding the work/family-life balance?
- [Q]** How should focusing on the character qualities outlined in Colossians 3:12–15 help family members follow Paul's instructions for family life given in Colossians 3:18–21?
- [Q]** What character qualities did the woman described in Proverbs 31 exhibit? How did they impact her quality of work? How did they affect her work/family-life balance? How did they glorify God?

PART 3**Apply Your Findings**

If we seek God for wisdom and direction for our career and family choices, he will lead us to a balance that is good for all involved and which brings glory to his name. Parents need to consider careers and companies that are family-friendly. In evaluating our careers and the hours we work, we need to beware of the lure of materialism so prevalent in our culture. Focusing on generosity and caring for the poor and needy will help us to be content with the many blessings God gives each of us. Whatever we do, we need to do our work for the Lord, for it is Christ whom we serve. When we do this, our work and our home life will bring glory to his name.

- [Q]** Why is it important to find a balance between career and home life? How does an unbalanced work life negatively impact family life? How does an unbalanced work life negatively affect our ministry availability? If our work routinely keeps us from our family and ministry, what message is that sending to our children?
- [Q]** What part of this study was most helpful to you? Why?
- [Q]** Which of Kise's recommendations were most help for you? Why?

—Study prepared by Julie Kloster, speaker, freelance writer, and regular contributor to *CHRISTIANBIBLESTUDIES.COM*.



Additional Resources



ChristianBibleStudies.com
-Fear Factors in Parenting
-Parenting Together
-Mentoring Youngsters Toward Adolescence
-Responsibility Super Models
-Replace Whining with Respect



Daily Wisdom For Working Women, Michelle Medlock Adams, Gena Maselli
(Barbour Publishing, 2004; ISBN: 1593103697)



Getting A Grip: Finding Balance in Your Daily Life, InterActions Series, Bill Hybels, Kevin Harney (Zondervan Corp., 2005; ISBN: 031026605X)



It All Comes Out in the Wash: Sorting Through Priorities When Your Load is Out of Balance, Judi Braddy (Beacon Hill Press, 2006; ISBN: 0834122596)



Notes to a Working Woman, Luci Swindoll (Thomas Nelson/W, 2004; ISBN: 0849945399)



Prayers for the Working Mom: 7 Secrets to Phenomenal Success, Sabrin O'Malone (Faithworks/Stl, 2004; ISBN: 1932124209)



The Frazzled Factor Workbook: Relief for Working Moms, Jane Jarrell, Karol Ladd (Thomas Nelson/W, 2005; ISBN: 1418501921)



Today's Christian Woman

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ARTICLE

Balancing Act

10 ways to determine the right blend of parenting and work for your family.

By Jane A. G. Kise, for the study “Balancing Work and Family Life”



<http://www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2001/004/images/6.38.jpg> When people hear I work part-time out of my home as a corporate management consultant and writer, and still am available to my two children, they usually say, “You’re so lucky. You have the best of both worlds.” But luck had little to do with it; it took careful planning years in advance.

Your situation may differ from mine, but no matter what approach you choose, preplanning’s essential to ensure the outcome you want to achieve. For example, if you desire to be a stay-at-home mom, consider the following tips *before* you’re faced with the challenge of balancing financial needs with the needs of your children:

1 Define what it means to stay at home. My children attended day care/preschool 12–15 hours a week from three months of age, but I considered myself a stay-at-home mother. Other “full-time” moms I know run their home business after their children go to bed, juggle schedules with their husband, or split their part-time hours between their home and an office. And some fit the traditional picture of a homemaker. What would be ideal for you?

2 Decide what you value as a couple. Our first child was born while my husband was employed by a company in financial trouble. Since his position was shaky, he felt I needed to work enough to at least stay networked in my career. That meant someone else watched our children 12 hours a week—a small compromise for peace of mind.



Some husbands are uncomfortable with the thought of being the sole breadwinner. Discuss these values and priorities with your spouse *now*.

3 Pick a career that honors parenthood. After becoming a mother, an attorney friend of mine was told by her male partners, “If we as fathers have to put in 60-hour weeks, so do you.”

In contrast, one corporate trainer was allowed to pick her schedule and clients, working just a few hours a week after her child was born. Talk to people in different careers and companies to discover which will allow you either to put your career on hold or put your children first.

4 Be flexible. After my children were born, I was able to work as a consultant because of the advanced degree I’d obtained in night school. While attending classes on top of a 40-hour work week was tough, I sought the degree in hopes of gaining the type of flexibility I now have. If you hope to work part-time, consider if specialized training could increase your chances. Few moms have time for school once children arrive.

5 Live on one income. Children bring increased expenses, making it difficult to cut back on your lifestyle after they’ve arrived. Start now by living on one income and saving the earnings of the other spouse. My husband and I made this rule when we first married, and we can testify it isn’t impossible if you keep this goal in mind as you buy your home, a car, or plan a vacation. Just remember what’s important to you: keeping your family a priority.

6 Visit day-care facilities or check out other options now. First, decide if day care is something with which your family’s comfortable. If you opt for day care, before your children are on the way, visit places that care for infants. Assess whether you’d be comfortable leaving your baby in their care. In my case, I found a wonderful day-care provider who employed four college students to assist her in caring for the children. While she was expensive, hers was the only facility I saw that gave the kind of care a mother would give. It’s helpful to understand your feelings about the various options before you’re under pressure to make a decision. Then, take a realistic look at the expense and how much you want to be away from your children.

7 Find a support network. Some of my friends continued to work despite their desire to be home because they were afraid of being isolated from other adults. Chat with other moms who’ve made the transition, and find out how they did it. This isn’t 1960: In many neighborhoods, you could be the only stay-at-home mom. Who will be available for adult conversation? The security that comes from finding church groups or other networks before children are born can smooth the abrupt changes maternity leave brings.

8 Calculate what it costs to work. Take a moment to calculate the cost of wardrobe, transportation, day care, lunches out, cleaning services, and whatever else



you might spend in the work force. Then calculate the after-tax pay you'll actually bring home. One of my sisters-in-law figured out that after these expenses, she'd be making around 50 cents an hour. For her, the choice to stay home was easy, even though her husband was a social worker who brought home a modest salary.

9 Define the role you want to play in your child's life. I avoided returning to an office environment once my children were in school because I wanted flexibility. Many women plan to return to the work force as soon as their youngest child reaches kindergarten, only to find their desire to be available to their children increases at this point. I hear comments such as, "We never would have bought this house if we'd known I'd want to stay home," or, "We thought I'd go back to work, so we used up our savings." Avoid digging yourself into these holes.

10 Find your self-worth in God. If you currently find great fulfillment in your career, don't wait until you're at home to have a ready answer to the inevitable question, "And what do you do?" Be able to tell yourself exactly why you made the choices you did. Before you leave the workplace, list why you're of value to God—not because of your job, but because you're his child! You can channel God's love to your children, be an example of selfless giving, and aid friends and neighbors in ways full-time working women can't. Enlist your spouse's help in reminding you the work you do at home is vitally important in a society starved for meaning and purpose.

If this all sounds complicated, it is. Is it worth it? You bet! Knowing my husband and I both valued my keeping one hand in the workplace allowed perspective when deadlines or sick children caused major collisions in our schedules. Still, I struggle with knowing how much time to devote to my children's school and how much to work. Women who wish to stay at home with their kids, however they define it, face some tough decisions. But with prayer and some preplanning, you're on the way to healthy, happy stay-at-home motherhood.

—Jane A. G. Kise, a part-time writer/consultant, lives in Minnesota.

"Balancing Act," by Jane A. G. Kise, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, July/August 2001





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