



Finding Your Purpose at Work

How to move from discontentment in your career, to meaning and joy.



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Introduction

Would you like a soda with your salvation?

By Marian Liautaud



I'll never forget the moment. My husband, Dan, and I were attending my girlfriend's wedding. We had been seated at a table of strangers for dinner. Dan and I quickly realized that we didn't have much in common with these eight other people. They had lots of post-graduate degrees and impressive jobs. We, on the other hand, had just made a major career change into the, um, food industry. Fast food, to be more exact. We listened while everyone took turns bragging





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about their recent accomplishments. Suddenly, the focus turned to us. "So, what do you do?" one Ph.D. probed at Dan. "I make sandwiches," he responded. *Did he have to be so loud*, I wondered, as all eight pairs of eyes fell on us. No one spoke for what seemed like a very long time. "Oh, interesting," was all we heard in response.

I knew then with absolute clarity that the business we were about to embark on would not put us on any professional "who's who" lists. I'll admit it took me a while to see how owning a sandwich shop could prove to be significant work. But truly, no job taught me the real meaning of finding purpose at work more than this one.

For starters, most of our employees were between ages 16 and 25. Nearly every one of these young men and women had come from extraordinarily dysfunctional homes. Dan and I quickly realized that we were their first picture of a working (both figuratively and literally) marriage. To the best of our ability, we treated these marginalized individuals with respect and dignity. We looked beyond the piercings and tattoos and did our best to care about their souls.

Our little sandwich shop was a church of sorts, a place where these ragamuffins we called employees could come and be loved exactly as they were. With God's help, we tried to live the gospel and present a compelling picture of what it meant to be a Christ follower.





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Baking bread and slicing meats to create the world's best deli sandwiches took a certain amount of skill and intentionality. But relying on the lunch counter as a means to serve up salvation gave me a whole different reason to show up for work.

To your career success!

Marian V. Liautaud

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads,
Christianity Today International



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Leader's Guide

How to use “Finding Your Purpose at Work” for a group study.



“**F**inding Your Purpose at Work” can be used for individual or group study, but if you intend to lead a group study on this, some simple suggestions follow:

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternatively, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the “Thought Provokers” be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It’s important for women to know that others share their experience. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

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Becoming a Purpose- Filled Woman

Saddleback minister Katie Brazelton helps you understand your place in this world.

By Jane Johnson Struck

Almost two decades ago, Katie Brazelton found herself divorced and suddenly devoid of the roles she'd used to define her life. This agonizing transition—and the purposelessness that ensued—left her in an emotional free fall, wondering if “the only logical life purpose [she] had left was shopping” for clothes to compensate for a depression-triggered weight loss.





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*Slowly and painfully, Katie began to recover a sense of purposeful living after a life-changing encounter with Mother Teresa during a 1988 trip to Calcutta. As a result of her long journey of spiritual growth and discovery, outlined in **Pathway to Purpose** (Zondervan), Katie realized her call to mentor other searching women. A licensed minister at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California and author of the *Pathway to Purpose* series, Katie has helped thousands discover their church ministry and life purpose, and she's now training others to do the same. So if you're wondering about your place in this world, here's what Katie has to say to you.*

—The Editors

Why are you so passionate about women living lives of purpose?

Because for years after my divorce, I didn't. The angst of purposelessness almost tore me apart. But one of the most important components of my healing was learning that "finding purpose" is a universal heart cry. I wasn't alone in yearning for a life that had significance!

If God has a purpose for us, why do we often feel as though we're simply going through the motions of living?

That's because when we're in "robot mode," we let busyness, noise, fear, or impure motives drive out that purpose. We guilt ourselves into doing the hard work of becoming holy in the day-to-day grind instead of experiencing the reward of fulfilling the reason God put us on earth!

I know I used to be more concerned with religious to-do lists and endless faith-driven obligations than with unearthing the buried passion God instilled in me. There was a time when I'd routinely ask myself,





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Am I happy? I was so unhappy, I couldn't even get the question out before I started sobbing.

We women need to discover our purpose in life for two reasons. First, fulfilling our purpose gives glory to God. Second, it releases us from the captivity of hopelessness and despair.

How do you define "purpose"?

For Christians, purpose is being and doing what God intends us to be and do: doing today what God asks us to do in our family, church, and community; being more like Christ; and then doing the distinct, bold work God designed us to do before we die!

Scripture reveals the "pathway" to follow. It's spelled out in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36–39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20). In *The Purpose-Driven Life*, my friend Rick Warren says these verses tell us we're ultimately made for fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship.

But to discover our more unique life mission, we should pray specifically for God to reveal it; we should meditate on pertinent Scriptures, such as Psalm 37:4, Amos 4:13, Matthew 14:27, and John 17:1; and we should clear away some of the mental and emotional clouds that block us from his revelation.

What do you mean?

The Bible says, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13–14).

After my divorce, I lived in manic mode; I'm amazed now I actually thought I could find God's purpose in





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the midst of my frantic life. I numbed my pain with overspending, travel, and work. It didn't occur to me numbing my pain became my purpose.

I had no idea how much my past influenced my everyday life. I needed to put my anger, regret, bitterness, and pain behind me before I could focus on the race God set before me. It took me years to hear God's voice over the noise and confusion in which I lived. As an immature Christian and an introvert, I didn't realize I needed more mature Christians who could help shed light on what God was saying to me about his will for my life.

So you're saying we can't be a lone ranger in this discovery process?

That's right. A woman trying to find her life purpose is like a novice trying to run a marathon. Both need a partner who can prepare them for the challenges and risks that lie ahead. Many women fail to fulfill their significant life purposes because they have no Christian mentor or adviser to help them reach the next mile marker. Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"

God designed our purpose in life to happen in community—whether it's in person, online, through a telephone relationship, letter writing, or as an intercessory prayer warrior. Giving and receiving love is part of God's design, and nothing substitutes for interpersonal communication.





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But community takes time—and we're all so busy!

Yes, but God's creative in bringing spiritual friendships into our lives. Christian community can happen anywhere: at a church Bible-study group, babysitting co-op, corporate lunch-time prayer group, gym, ministry setting, sports event, or hobby show.

One fun way I've developed community is to belong to a "Dreamer's Lunch Bunch"; we meet once a month at a salad bar for the sole purpose of holding each other accountable to God's call on our lives.

Being in community means I'm authentic in a group I trust. Because of the dangers of a "lone ranger" lifestyle, I rely on others to walk alongside me.

Is there a difference between having a purpose and having a passion?

Our purpose is being a woman of God and doing what he asks. Our passions are meant to be godly purpose-indicators. They are the things that make our heart sing; they help us identify and complete our purpose. For example, my passions include jigsaw puzzles, travel, and Sherlock Holmes mysteries. God's purpose for me is to help women figure out his call on their lives.

How can we become content with God's purpose for us, especially if it seems less visible or exciting than we'd envisioned or hoped?

The Bible warns us not to despise the day of the small things (from Zechariah 4:10). It says we need to look forward to when our Master says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).





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The best shortcut I've found to guard against jealousy over someone else's ministry is to invite God to reveal his vision for your life and to believe with all your heart he'll do so. If you find yourself envying others, confess it to them or at least to God; pray for them; and support them in their endeavors.

What's the bottom line on living purposefully?

In Acts 20:24, the apostle Paul says, "I don't care about my own life. The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the Good News about God's grace" (NCV). And 1 John 2:17 says, "The world and its desires pass away, but the [wo]man who does the will of God lives forever." God wants us to heed the apostle Paul's counsel: "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). God wants us to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

I love the way God takes any willing Christian—no matter how broken or scarred her past—and weaves every thread of her life into his kingdom-building plan! He doesn't shy away from our hurts and failures but specializes in hope, second chances, and resurrections.

I never imagined my tough experiences would give me the substance I now need to minister to others. I had no idea God was preparing me to offer the same hope to other women he provided me every day. Our ordinary routines and daily roles—no matter what they are—can provide incredible opportunities to help others become more like Christ.





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In the end, purposeful living is about hope. If you can hang onto the hope that God does have a plan for your life, as the Bible promises in Jeremiah 29:11, you'll make it through the tough days of the unknown and later, the tough days of fulfilling the bold purposes God assigns you.

Katie Brazelton, Ph.D., is a licensed minister at Saddleback Church in California, the best-selling author of the Pathway to Purpose™ series for women, and founder of Pathway to Purpose Ministry, which trains Christian women as Life Purpose Coaches™.

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Reflect

- *Katie Brazelton talks about the need to meet with other Christians who can hold you accountable for pursuing your life's purpose. Who would you invite to be part of your own accountability group like Katie's "Dreamer's Lunch Bunch"?*
- *What tough experiences have you endured that God might be calling you to use for the benefit of others?*
- *What passions has God given you, and what ways do you see him using these to fulfill his purpose for your life?*



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Go Ahead— Dream



You'll be surprised at what
God will do!

By Stacey Padrick

When I was a child, I owned a plaque that pictured a kitten on a rock gazing up at a golden butterfly. Its caption read, "Set aside some dreaming time." While I loved the photo, I always thought of a dreamer as someone with her head in the clouds—forgetting the real world around her. So when I entered college, I left dreaming to the philosophy students. It seemed impractical in the real world of limited resources, changing job markets, and fierce competition. I stuck to what could be measured and graphed—often putting myself and God in a box.





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But several years ago, I was diagnosed with systemic lupus, which turned my "real world" upside down. Physically weakened and highly susceptible to viruses, I had to withdraw from activities, and some of my deepest desires no longer seemed possible. As my hopes for the future evaporated, I had to start trusting God with my aspirations. And as I began to trust, to my surprise, I sensed God beckoning me to start dreaming about doing things seemingly unrelated to my education and training, dreams that may seem insignificant in others' eyes. But these dreams—learning to swing dance, writing a book, leading a missions trip to Asia, and more—make my heart sing. I've allowed God to take me from my comfort zone and do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

Do you limit yourself to what's possible? Practical? Acceptable? Do you find it difficult to allow yourself to dream? The following ideas will help you begin to listen to your heart's desires.

Preface your planning with prayer. Ask God to grant you wisdom and inspiration, to open your eyes to a greater vision of your life and him. I used to hesitate to dream, wondering, *What if I dream something that isn't God's plan for me? Who am I to say what I want?*

Yet, as I'm growing in my relationship with God, I'm learning he wants me to be honest with him. God encourages us to pursue our dreams while we rejoice in him. "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Pray God would reveal the dreams he's written on your heart.





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A few years after college, a friend recommended me for an overseas graduate scholarship. Though I'd dreamed of an opportunity such as this for years, I hesitated, wondering if I should stay at the missions organization where I was working. The trip would be a lot of work, and I wasn't sure I was prepared for the challenges I'd face. Despite my reservations, I paid attention to this dream I felt God had given me. I applied, won the scholarship, and studied overseas. There God gave me abundant ministry opportunities to share his love with students from around the world.

Set aside some time. Find time to be alone in a quiet place—maybe a scenic spot you enjoy. Often nature can help us "think big" as we see the grandeur of God's creation. Even a quiet corner in a local library or café can provide an atmosphere for reflection. Bring a journal, pencil, and perhaps a book to stimulate your thinking. One book that helped me was *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*, by Laurie Beth Jones (Hyperion). Another that may help you is *Follow Your Heart* by Judy Peterson (Cook Communications).

Let your pencil go! During a job search, I took out my pencil and began to list my dreams—even the wild and crazy ones: learning Chinese, hang gliding, becoming a missionary journalist. Exhilaration and excitement surged through me when I allowed myself to dream with abandon.

Let your mind and pencil go! Color outside the lines. Ask yourself: If money, time, or background had no bearing, what would I dream? What activities give me a sense of being fully alive? What gifts do I enjoy





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using? What things do I do to bless my friends? What makes me feel as though I were made for this? All these can be clues to help you detect and shape your dreams.

My friend Tamara, whose parents ran a restaurant for years, has a flair for gourmet cuisine and entertaining. Friends often refer to her as "Martha Stewart" and rave about her food presentations. Encouragement from friends and family, coupled with much prayer on her part, led Tamara to open her own restaurant at the age of 27. Within two years, it was the most popular gourmet restaurant in town.

Silence the skeptic. As you pursue your dreams, be aware of skeptical, discouraging thoughts. For example, when I began writing, my inner critic immediately accused, *Me? Write? I can't write! Besides, I don't have anything of value to say.* By identifying your reservations, you'll be better able to discern whether dreams are from God, yourself, or Satan, who will try to deter you from God's plan.

Don't define your limits! Let God decide what you can and can't do. I've argued with God many times about my capabilities. I can attest that arguing only wastes time and obstructs blessings. God loves to work through weaknesses and apparent impossibilities. Truly, "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

I wanted to do something adventurous after college, but when God opened a door for me to teach in China, I thought, *No way! I can't teach. I'm too young to teach at a university! I don't know a thing about China nor do I speak a word of Chinese!* Yet, trusting God, I finally





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stepped forward and went. That year was the most fulfilling year of my life.

Dream big about things that won't happen by your own strength and ingenuity, but only by the power and grace of God. We can never out-dream him!

Stand guard against dream-killers. Dream-killers lurk around every corner, ready to pounce just when you find the courage to begin pursuing your dreams. They take many forms, such as concern about others' opinions. Perhaps words spoken to you when you were young, such as "You're so shy," have kept you from dreaming about public speaking.

Although my father had always encouraged me in whatever I wanted to do, when I was offered a job as a writer and editor, he remarked, "I don't see you liking that type of work." In truth, he didn't see himself liking that type of work. I took the job and enjoyed it. God used it as an unexpected launching pad for my writing career.

Other dream-killers can be imagined or real limitations (lack of time, ability, or training). For me, the daily challenge of living with an unpredictable illness threatens to disrupt my goals and extinguish my dreams. When my health unexpectedly weakens, I often must cancel plans at the last minute. Thus, I become fearful of making commitments and pursuing dreams. Yet, through this challenge, God teaches me greater daily dependence on him. Rather than relying on my strength and determination, I rely on him, knowing that without him I can do nothing. We all deal with some form of limitations, but they can't limit what God can do as we step out in faith.





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Try bite-sized beginnings. If you find "dreaming big" difficult, start cultivating smaller dreams. My friend wanted to run a marathon before she turned 30, and she did it—but she started by running two miles a day.

If you're afraid to pursue a dream, start with the first step, no matter how small. When Moses crossed the Red Sea, he first had to step into the water before it would part.

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the hero teeters on the edge of a chasm separating him from the cave that harbors the sought-after holy grail. The ancient map says he must step forward, though there doesn't appear to be anything to support him from falling to his death. Yet, as he steps into the abyss, he feels something solid under his feet—a camouflaged bridge that had been there all along. Similarly, as we step out in faith, paths we never knew existed will open before us.

Be on the lookout. Look for ways God might be offering direction and guidance as you pursue dreams. A local church or community college may offer a class or workshop that provides insight or resources related to your dream. Also, talk with others involved in your area of interest. You'll be amazed how God makes connections and honors the risks you take.

While visiting a friend, I mentioned my interest in retreat ministry. She told me of a couple she knew in Virginia who'd just purchased a bed and breakfast/retreat center. They needed helpers to develop the ministry. Six months later, I was living at the B&B, where I could learn hands-on about the ministry.





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Go Ahead — Dream

As we step out in faith to pursue the dreams God's placed on our heart, inevitably we'll experience setbacks and disappointments. As I write this, I'm still saddened by the loss of a long-held dream to lead a missions trip. After planning and preparing for a year, I had to forego the project at the last moment because of a downturn in my health. Yet in my disappointment, I continually claim the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair" (2 Corinthians 4:8).

God can work powerfully in our weakness or crisis because we're forced to trust him. We shouldn't wait until we "have it all together" to dream. Begin now, even in the midst of brokenness. My friend Tamara, who opened the gourmet restaurant, pursued that dream after her husband left her. As we entrust broken dreams to God, he'll release new dreams—and do more than we could hope or imagine.

So go ahead—dream! Whether your personality's practical or imaginative, your limitations real or self-imposed, your dreams grandiose or simple, set aside some dreaming time. Whether you learn to swing dance as I did, or aspire to do something life-changing, such as launching a new ministry, allow God to expand your horizon and use you to fulfill his purpose in your life.

Stacey Padrick, a freelance writer from the San Francisco bay area, is the author of Living with Mystery: Finding God in the Midst of Unanswered Questions (Bethany House).





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Go Ahead — Dream

This article first appeared in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine, September/October 2001.

Reflect

- *When you were a child, what did you dream about doing in your life? Which of those childhood dreams still sticks with you? If you haven't pursued it yet, why not?*
- *The author advises us to "silence the skeptics." What "skeptics" speak up when you dream? Are they practical considerations, or self-imposed limitations?*
- *If you were to make a list of all the areas where you think you are weak, how do you think God would show his strength?*





How Do I Uncover My Spiritual Gifts?

3 ways to discern how
God wired you.

By Nancy Ortberg

I love this question! Discovering and utilizing your spiritual gifts is one of the most exciting adventures a person can have with God. The Bible says spiritual gifts are abilities God bestows on every believer for the common good of the body of Christ. They're a large part of the answer to the question, "What should I do with the life God gave me?"



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How Do I Uncover My Spiritual Gifts?

Passages like 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4 go into specific detail about what these gifts are and how they should be used. It's clear every spiritual gift is a reflection of God's nature that you carry within you. And because your spiritual gift reflects God's design and direction for your life, you'll find great passion, joy, and satisfaction in expressing it. Your spiritual gift also will be a place of deep spiritual formation in your life, as God uses it both to powerfully connect you to him and to expose areas of your soul that need his forgiveness and redemption.

So here's a process to start:

Pay attention. Notice the things that energize you and seem to come naturally. Remember the quote from the movie *Chariots of Fire* when Eric Liddell explained to his sister why he was postponing his return to the mission field in order to race in the Olympics? "Because when I run, I feel the pleasure of God."

Every spiritual gift gives off clues. Your spiritual gift will cause you to react a certain way in a given situation. If there's a problem, people with the spiritual gift of shepherding will be immediately concerned that people are cared for and growing in Christlikeness as a result of the issue. Those with the gift of intercession (prayer) will immediately say, "We need to pray about this," while those with a leadership gift will begin looking at solutions for the problem.





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How Do I Uncover My Spiritual Gifts?

Try. Once you've gathered enough information to create a list of some possible gifts (perhaps gifts of mercy, evangelism, encouragement, or hospitality), exercise your options. A great place to start would be a volunteer position at your church. While you're trying it out, you'll start to discern whether you're good at it or not. Also, others will tell you!

When my kids were young, our church needed help in the nursery during the worship services. I volunteered for a three-month opening. I didn't feel the pleasure of God; the children didn't feel the pleasure of God. It was so not my spiritual gift. Part of learning what you're good at is having to go through the pain of learning what you're not good at.

As you try different things, you'll eventually find yourself engaged in something during which time flies and you find a deep sense of connection to God. Pick that road to continue your adventure.

Develop. In 2 Timothy 1:6, the apostle Paul encourages Timothy to "fan into flame the gift of God." We're responsible to develop our gifts. Perhaps one of the best ways to do that is to mentor someone who's just starting on this discovery process. People with the spiritual gift of wisdom are probably the best people to develop someone else with the spiritual gift of wisdom, and so on for each of the gifts.





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How Do I Uncover My Spiritual Gifts?

It's remarkable how you can deepen your relationship with God as you uncover and live out the spiritual gifts he's bestowed on you. What could the church and our world look like if each of us used the gift God's given us?

Nancy Ortberg is a church leadership consultant and popular speaker who lives in California with her husband, John, and their three children.

This article first appeared in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, January/February 2007.

Reflect

- *Read 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and 1 Peter 4 to explore what spiritual gifts there are and how they should be used. As you read these passages, what clues can you find in your own life that point to your spiritual gifts?*
- *In what areas have you already exercised your spiritual gifts? What was the outcome? If you had to make a guess, what would you say are your spiritual gifts?*
- *If you could choose someone to help mentor you in your spiritual gifts, who would you choose? Who can you identify in your life to mentor and help "fan into flame" their spiritual gifts?*





Some Days I Hate This Job!

Ways to cope with work-related frustrations

By Holly Green

You've had it with your job. You're overworked, underpaid, and burned out. Take heart! You're not alone. Whatever our occupations, we all have occasions when we're fed up. Before you hand in your resignation letter and rewrite your resume, consider these ideas for coping with work-related frustrations.

Battle Boredom. Is your job tedious? Take on additional duties. Assist someone proficient in a skill you'd like to learn. Work at upgrading your skills to be eligible for more interesting responsibilities.



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Some Days I Hate This Job!

Set Priorities. If you panic under a heavy workload, organize your time so you do the essential work first and save the less urgent for last. Keep a checklist and mark off tasks completed.

Repair Relationships. Most unhappiness at work stems not from the job itself but from relationship conflicts. Is there a person with whom you don't get along? Then confront the problem head on. It's difficult, but try something like, "I feel things aren't right between us. I'm sorry for anything I did. Can we start over?"

Find a Confidant. Share job frustrations with a mature person outside the work environment. Look for someone who keeps confidences well and offers sympathy but also holds you accountable to work on solutions to your problems.

Expand Your Interests. Remember, work is only one aspect of your life. Don't expect it to meet your every need. Put your energies into a variety of relationships and activities—family, friends, church, classes, clubs, community service.

Watch for Lessons. Keep your eyes open for what the Lord wants to teach you. He can turn bad times into opportunities for growth. If you are being treated badly, for example, use it to learn to treat others well.

Let God Use You. Have you considered that he has put you in your job for a reason? Be his instrument to make a difference where you are. Don't ask for relief; ask to be the one who brings relief to others.





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Take Inventory. Just how bad is your situation? Write down the pros and cons of your position. Does one list balance the other? This may help you determine whether you are well-suited to your work, or whether the job really isn't a good fit and it's time to change.

This article first appeared in the January/February 1991 TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Reflect

- *The author states, "Most unhappiness at work stems not from the job itself but from relationship conflicts." In your experience, has this been true? If you are currently disenchanted with your job, which work relationships might be contributing to your unhappiness? What could you do to fix this?*
- *In what other areas of your life do you wish you had more balance? What activities would you like to make time for outside of work?*
- *Why do you think God has allowed you to be in the work position you're in? In what ways do you see him using you to help others? How do you see God using your position to grow you?*



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Gutsy Single Girls

Meet eight women who tackled
their dreams all by themselves.

By TCW readers



It's never easy to go after a big goal in life, but doing so alone can be an even greater challenge. So we were impressed by the courage and determination of these eight accomplished single women. May their stories of solo feats inspire you to greatness as well.





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Gutsy Single Girls

A Shop of Her Own

While I was growing up, I watched my parents start and grow their own businesses—and I occasionally dreamed of having my own little store one day. After college and seven years of working at a public relations agency, I started working full-time for my mom's store, an upscale lingerie and gift boutique called Knickers of Glen Ellyn. When it came time for my parents to retire, they sold Knickers to a new owner, I found a job elsewhere, and a few years later the store closed.

It was totally God's timing when I walked by the empty storefront one day and began dreaming of bringing back to life the store my mom had created and I'd helped run for five years. I spent the next week prayerfully putting together a business plan, meeting with small business advisers, working out the financial details, and making the tough decision to quit my job. It was a huge risk to take as a single woman, as this would be my only source of income in tough economic times. Despite my fears, two months later I had my grand opening.

Today, Knickers has been up and running for a year and a half. I've given the store my own flourishes, and I love being my own boss. It's been a gift from God to finally have a shop of my own.

Kathryn Hudson, Illinois

Rallying the Troops

This past year, after having similar conversations with several single Christian female friends, we realized there's a serious lack of books, conferences, and other resources geared directly toward our





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Gutsy Single Girls

demographic. So we decided to do something about this need ourselves. We assembled a board of dynamic single Christian women, and Here Now! Ministries was born. Last year, we developed a website (www.here nowonline.org) full of great resources—including articles, an e-mail newsletter, website links, and books about the many topics related to being a single Christian woman. We also hosted our first conference. Nearly 50 women from 10 different states joined us for a great day of growth, encouragement, and laughter.

God showed us just how willing he is to use our little to make much and to encourage others, and he reminded us just how much he loves us single gals. Forming a new non-profit organization from the ground up has been both scary and exciting, but we continue to learn and grow. Planning for our next fall conference is underway, and we look forward to seeing where God will take us next.

Teishetta B. Daniel, Illinois, and Phyllis Nsiah-Kumi, Ohio

Starting Over

I never dreamed I'd end up a divorced mom with three teenagers. After almost 20 years of marriage and being a stay-at-home mom, I was launched into the work world. I'd already completed my undergraduate degree in business administration years earlier, so at least I had that under my belt. I started out as an accountant for a small printing company. Then I worked as an office manager for my divorce attorney (doesn't God work in mysterious ways indeed!). I'm now a business administrator for a large church, and I love my work.





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I've come to understand that God had a plan for my life all along. I don't believe divorce was his idea, but he walked with me through that painful period of my life and has brought me to a place of peace and joy.

Kathleen E. Cook, Georgia

This article first appeared in TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine, March/April 2004.

Reflect

- *Whether you're single or married, if you were to start your own business, what would it be? Why does this particular business appeal to you?*
- *Which of these ventures is most inspiring to you? What traits do you think each of these women possesses to enable them to launch the ventures they did?*



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Working 9 to 5



5 surprising ways you can survive—and thrive—in your job.

By Verla Gillmor

During my early years as a journalist, I was given the opportunity to work as a general assignment reporter for NBC's powerful 50,000-watt radio station in Chicago. The job catapulted me into broadcasting's big leagues, and I was determined to work hard, think smart, and wow everybody with my excellent reporting skills.

One of my first assignments was a "breaking" news story of a pleasure boat sinking in a storm on Lake Michigan. Several passengers drowned. The Coast Guard dramatically rescued the rest. I raced to the scene, where a Coast Guard cutter was bringing survivors ashore, interviewed anyone who would talk to me, then hurried back to the station to get the story on the air as quickly as possible.





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My editor, a crusty fellow with more than 20 years at NBC, had a reputation for making the lives of on-air staffers as miserable as possible—especially the women. Humiliation and intimidation were his weapons of choice.

As I scrambled to finish my report for the fast-approaching newscast, he seized on the fact I'd failed—in my rush to file the story—to get the Coast Guard spokesman's first name. It was a careless error on my part, but not one that merited what happened next.

The editor stood in the middle of the newsroom in front of about a dozen people and began to shout insults at me in the ugliest display of meanness I'd ever experienced. I stood facing him like a deer caught in the headlights and silently prayed, *Dear God, don't let me cry*. Finally, he turned and stalked out of the newsroom.

I was so stunned, I started to shake. As I walked into a side office to privately regain my composure, I thought, with deep resignation, *This is just part of the job. Guess I'll have to pray and "hang in there" until this passes*.

Now, with the hindsight of 35 years in the marketplace, I've learned no one has a "perfect" job. But I've also discovered—the hard way—that there are alternate ways to handle the inevitable workplace conflicts or stresses we all encounter. The surprising news is that the five problem-solving tips below don't depend on anyone's cooperation but your own!

I. Identify the Real Problem: Is It You?

Much as I hate to admit it, some job stress is self-inflicted. My first memory of this was a situation that began quite innocently.





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I clipped out a business-related magazine article to give to my boss. I'd run across the article the night before while thumbing through a magazine for relaxation. He was delighted and urged me to continue to pass along anything I thought might be useful. His praise felt so good, I started scanning magazines I never would have read, searching for more articles. They were such a hit, he decided the practice should be formalized into a daily briefing book distributed to senior staff.

What started as a casual gesture became a major project on top of my regular duties. No one offered to help, and I didn't ask for any. I relished the affirmation and couldn't bear the thought of handing it off to someone else. That didn't stop me, however, from harboring anger and resentment over the added work.

It wasn't until much later that I realized the problem wasn't the workload. The problem was me—my need for affirmation, my penchant for people-pleasing, my reluctance to ask for help.

When you clarify exactly what the issue is behind your workplace stress, it can lessen your sense of victimization, even if the revelation isn't particularly welcome.

SELF CHECK: What is the main source of my work-related stress? How am I contributing to the problem?

2. Take Charge of Your Attitude

How many times have you sat in the employee lunchroom with coworkers when a person starts to complain about a change in the office hours, the vacation schedule, or the telephone rotation? Within five minutes, everyone sitting around the table feels obliged to chime in





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with their own litany of job gripes. Complaining is contagious. It's hard not to become a carrier.

Complaining gives the appearance of offering relief—a chance to vent. But rehashing a stressful situation in a setting that offers no opportunity for correcting the problem takes emotional energy and doesn't change the problem. In fact, it can make a problem seem worse than it is.

The Bible says, in essence, to save your breath. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 12:36 that someday we'll have to answer for every careless word we've ever spoken. So vow instead to be a carrier of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). If you have a suggested solution, go to the person with the power to execute the solution, and make your case. Relish being part of the solution, not part of the problem.

SELF CHECK: Who is the appropriate person with whom to discuss this? Is there another way I can look at this situation? What can I do to help eliminate this stress rather than rehash it?

3. Sort Out What Can and Can't Change

If you're a person who loves clear instructions and an even flow of work, then working in an advertising agency or a sales office full of hard-charging free spirits is definitely migraine material. Since it's doubtful that your environment's going to change, any change must take place in you.





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I was totally clueless about this concept of "job fit" until, as a young adult, I temped for three months in an office where the median age of the employees was 55 and the office mantra was, "We've always done it this way."

My boss held a brainstorming session to discuss ways to "fast track" a particular project. I'm a big-picture idea person and joyfully showered him with suggestions. He didn't like any of them. In fact, he thought I was a little too innovative for my own good.

I eventually learned he really didn't want to improve things or use this project as an opportunity to implement permanent change. That might expose the reality that his time-honored procedures had been ineffectual all along. Rather, he chose a temporary maneuver to get us through the project, after which things could return to "normal."

I had two choices—neither of which I liked. I could stay—and stuff down all the gifts and talents God wrote on my DNA so I wouldn't be seen as a troublemaker. Or I could leave and find a more compatible job.

We always have choices. The question is whether we like the choices we're given. I didn't want to leave; I wasn't the problem. The reality, however, was that they weren't going to change.

SELF CHECK: What's within my power to change about my situation? If nothing changes, can I stay and still be true to myself, as God created me? If I should leave, what needs to happen for me to be prepared?





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4. Detach from the Problem

I once worked for a large corporation in a job that required me to prepare month-end reports with input from other people. Every month, despite clearly defined deadlines, the information came to me at the last minute. I always ended up staying late on Friday night to complete the report while everyone else was off enjoying their weekend. I was certain my colleagues' failure to meet the deadline was a form of thoughtlessness toward me and carelessness toward their job. It felt personal.

One day a coworker said to me in frustration, "You know, the reason this information is always late is because the cycle for capturing this data is totally out of sync with the deadline for the report. Is there any reason why the report can't be due the 5th of the month instead of the 1st? Then, meeting your deadline would be no problem."

It turned out my boss didn't care if it was the 5th or even the 10th of the month, as long as it came in on time every 30 days. I sheepishly abandoned my paranoia and feelings of rejection. It wasn't personal after all.

Is your reaction to a stressful situation disproportionate to the circumstances? Maybe it's a sign something else is going on. In this particular situation, I realized my job responsibilities had nearly doubled over the last 18 months. It wasn't just the monthly reports—it felt as though my whole job had run amok! I couldn't see the real problem until I was forced to step back and look at the situation as a detached observer.





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SELF CHECK: If I stepped outside myself and observed this situation, would I see it differently? What mental "prompts" can I give myself to stop taking problems too personally?

5. Live in the Present

Stress is more manageable if it doesn't also carry the weight of all past and future problems that bear any resemblance to it: "My boss always waits until the last minute to do these mailings." "My team leader never asks my opinion."

Such "kitchen sink" thinking—piling onto the present problem "everything but the kitchen sink"—sabotages solutions by sheer pound weight. Jesus reminded us in Matthew 6:34 to live in the present because "each day has enough trouble of its own." The current moment may be tough. But soon it will pass and, chances are, a better moment will take its place.

SELF CHECK: Has "piling on" problems ever solved anything? Whom can I ask to hold me accountable for changing this behavior pattern? Am I willing to deal with my present situation without attaching baggage to it?

The Bottom Line

If you're waiting for your job to behave, expect a long wait. We live in a fallen world. Instead, over and over I remind myself, How much of this will matter in 5, 10, or 100 years? In the midst of the ups and





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downs of work, if our life is anchored to the One who doesn't move—Christ, the solid Rock—then we can survive ... and even thrive. He promised.

Verla Gillmor, a TCW regular contributor and freelance writer, lives in the Chicago area.

This article first appeared in the November/December 1999 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Reflect

- *If you had to diagnose the main source of your work-related stress, what would you say it stems from? How might you be contributing to the problem?*
- *Describe a time when you ended up in the midst of complaining coworkers. How did you handle the situation?*
- *Thinking about stressful situations you face at work, what is within your power to change? If nothing were to change, what would you do to cope with your circumstances?*





Unemployed!

What to do when it happens to you

By Holly Vicente Robaina

Unemployment often is viewed as a man's problem. But what about when it happens to you?

My husband, Ricardo, and I both have gone through periods of unemployment, and we've each dealt with the loss differently. While Ricardo's job plays a huge role in his identity, for me, a job is just one small role. I clung to my roles as wife, daughter, and friend during times when my "employee" role was gone. And the loss I felt wasn't so much for the job itself as for the benefits I'd gotten from it: a regular schedule of stuff to do, people to interact with every day, and a sense of contribution.





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Unemployed!

Here are a few tips for women facing unemployment—from one who's been there.

Keep a schedule. Boredom was my Enemy No. 1. On Monday mornings, I'd make a list of activities including job hunting, chores, errands, exercise, Bible reading, and hobbies—enough stuff to keep me busy all week. I kept a regular bedtime so I wouldn't be tempted to sleep all day. I also kept the television off during the daytime so I wouldn't be distracted from my "work."

While job hunting certainly is a priority, varying your activities is essential. The first time I found myself unemployed, during my single days, I made the mistake of job hunting all day, every day. It made sense at the time: I had lots of bills to pay and zero income. But this strategy quickly caused burn-out and depression, which made my job search much more difficult. It really raised my spirits when I decided to ...

Take up an (inexpensive) hobby. Conscious of money matters, I looked for low-cost and no-cost ways to have fun. So when I was single (and thinking about every penny I spent), I found plenty of free entertainment by visiting the library or sightseeing in my local historic district. Take advantage of this time—some museums and tours offer reduced prices or even free admission during weekdays. Town halls or visitors' centers often have free guidebooks with a list of these.

During my second bout with unemployment, I had my husband's income to lean on. So I decided to try something I'd long been curious about: artistic painting. After an initial investment of \$7 for brushes and paints, I found I could make beautiful paintings





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for about \$3 each. Creating art for our home gave me a sense of accomplishment—something I sorely missed from my working days.

A full schedule with fun elements kept me busy enough. But it certainly couldn't replace my need to ...

Interact with others. When Ricardo lost his job, there were few people with whom he wanted to share his burden. I was just the opposite: I told everybody. I spent more time on the phone with friends, and would seize any opportunity to interact with others.

We women thrive on friendships and communication. It's important to find the sense of community you miss from a job by plugging into more social activities at church, volunteering, or just talking with your friends.

It's also important to share your physical needs. At one point, when I was single and unemployed, I didn't have a scrap of food to eat and was about to be evicted. I was afraid that if I told my family and friends, they'd think I was irresponsible or even refuse to help.

Hunger finally won out over embarrassment. As soon as I shared my needs, one person immediately offered to pay my rent, and others bought groceries for me.

Family and friends offered so much support.

Ultimately, though, my greatest comfort came when I would ...

Pray. It's surprisingly easy to pray when you have tons of time and no one else to talk to. I desperately wanted God's companionship. At first, I cried out to him about my loneliness, begging him to fill it with friendships, activities, a job. But as I felt him comforting me, my





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perspective changed. I became grateful for the solitude because it allowed me to talk to God nonstop. I saw evidence of his provision every day. Pretty soon, I stopped asking God to change my circumstances and started thanking him for this time of spiritual renewal.

*This article first appeared in the July/August 2004
TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.*

Reflect

- *If you've ever faced unemployment, or walked alongside someone who has, which of these suggestions were most helpful for you? What would you add to this list if you were advising someone on how to navigate unemployment?*
- *What benefits do you think there are to experiencing a season of unemployment? If you became unemployed, what hobby would you most want to pursue?*
- *With so many women working outside of the home, would you know who to call if you suddenly found yourself at home during the week? Are there any steps you can take today to connect with the women in your neighborhood who are home each day?*



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Additional Resources



GiftedForLeadership.com. A new blog designed specifically for Christian women who are capable, called, and gifted leaders. Also, includes a free monthly e-mail newsletter and an upcoming collection of downloadable booklets. These tools will equip, encourage, challenge, and unite women who exercise leadership gifts in church and parachurch ministry, in business, and at home. They'll also build a community of women with leadership gifts who can challenge and support one another and grow together. This site is a resource of Christianity Today International, produced in partnership with the editors of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.





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Additional Resources

Network by Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels (Zondervan Corp, 2004, \$10.99, 144 pages, paperback) The revised *Network* participant's guide is a dynamic six-session process to help Christians understand who God has uniquely made them to be and guide them to a place of meaningful service in the local church. Revised and updated, the enormously popular Network approach has been refined for even greater effectiveness and ease of use.

Living Life on Purpose: Discovering God's Best for Your Life by Lysa TerKeurst (Moody Publishers, 2000, \$13.99, 192 pages, paperback) Every woman longs to live up to her full, God-given potential. But the hectic nature of your life may leave you struggling just to keep your head above water. Fortunately you can do more than simply survive. You can develop a Life Plan that will help you. More than just helping you get a better handle on your schedule, your Life Plan will allow you to enjoy a life that is truly well-lived. Lysa TerKeurst provides the framework to develop a life purpose plan that is biblically based and easy to understand and use.

Pathway to Purpose for Women: Connecting Your To-Do List, Your Passions, and God's Purposes for Your Life by Katherine Brazelton (Zondervan Corp, \$18.99, 256 pages, hardcover) "What was I born to do?" We all ask ourselves this question. Here's help in finding the answer! Showing you how to integrate God's purposes—worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism—into your daily to-do list and your passionate interests, Brazelton guides you in discovering who you are and why God made you.





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Additional Resources

Bible studies:

Discovering & Using Our Spiritual Gifts A downloadable resource for group or individual study by Christianity Today International.

Why God Gave You Gifts A downloadable resource for group or individual study by Christianity Today International.



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