

“Career Women”

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A full-page ad appeared in the "Career Women" section of the Denton, Texas *Record-Chronicle* on March 29, 2000. The page was headlined, "Once upon a time...Women were housewives & mothers, but now we do it all!" I did not appreciate the implication that women who stay at home and take care of husband, house, and children do not work or are of less value than are "career women."

The headline is misleading. I am firmly convinced that, unless a "career woman" has an exceptionally flexible job and schedule, a very accommodating employer, and someone to care for her children who will bring them up exactly as she herself would (in which unlikely case she still is not actually bringing them up herself), she cannot "do it all." Either her job will suffer, or else her home and children will suffer.

The future of our country depends on our teaching and training of these children right now – this task is crucial. What more important "career" can one think of than that of nurturing, teaching, and training one's children in a secure, stable atmosphere, where discipline is administered with consistency and love? Do I want my child to absorb someone else's values (anyone else's – even a "nice" person's) other than my own Scripturally founded values? Remember, there would have been no Timothy without Lois and Eunice (2 Tim. 1:4-5). We who are mothers should remember that our children actually belong to God (in just as real a sense as Samuel did, 1 Sam. 1:1-26). God gave us the stewardship of their care, teaching, and training for a few years. What kind of "return" do we want to give back to God on His investment, when the days of our stewardship are completed and the child is mature? Should not we be "redeeming the time" against the day when our children are tested (Eph. 5:15-16)? We must be willing to pay whatever price it takes to "buy up" all the opportunities we can for preparing them for lives dedicated to the service of God, unto Whom we will give an account.

The idea that one can spend "quality time" with one's children (and thus somehow compensate for the missing "quantity time") is pure hogwash. The need children have for the attention of parents cannot be put off until a convenient time. I have worked outside my home (after my children were older), and I know how exhausted I was when I reached home after a stressful day. Had there been children to care for in the evening, I would have seriously short-changed them. During some of those years of working outside my home, I also cared for a

young grandchild – taking her to work with me (in fact, taking her everywhere I went), then caring for her in the evening at home. I am sure she did not get the patience and attention she deserved, but I did the best I could. Patience is hard to come by under those circumstances (1 Cor. 13:4-5)

Jesus once asked: “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?” (Luke 11:11-12). These words apply with equal force to a mother’s concerns for her children. When we give our children the “leftovers” after we have given our best to others all day, are we not, in effect, giving them a stone, a serpent, or a scorpion? Unless a "working mother" (is there any other kind?) can afford to hire help, her attention is pulled in many different directions; all those mundane chores at home have to be done or at least supervised. There will often be school activities in the evening requiring parents’ attendance, and/or homework needing assistance.

Cannot we see the connection between the epidemic of violence among children in recent years and the fact that so many children are being brought up, not by conscientious parents, but by day care employees? Those day care centers with which I have had acquaintance are overcrowded and shorthanded, and many of the employees are there (at minimum wage) because they cannot find any other work. To many of them, it is just a job with the purpose of getting a paycheck – they put in their eight hours and get away as soon as possible. While some of them might like to give the children time and love, they are spread too thinly to do so.

Even worse, many children are at home alone with unsupervised television after school, on holidays, and in summer, from which they get an education in such negative traits as disrespect for adults, disregard for the property of others, filthy language, sexually immoral behavior, dishonesty and deceit, self-centeredness, materialism, "might makes right" – in short, survival of the loudest and most aggressive. I have also seen this principle demonstrated in more than one day care center: The loudest, strongest, and most aggressive children are the dominant ones. The atmosphere is often rowdy, uncontrolled, and even physically dangerous.

What can we be thinking of, to turn the care and training of our precious children over to the bullying and bad influence of undisciplined peers, to complete strangers (some of whom have been discovered to be pedophiles) or worse, to the entertainment industry? Some of the “educational” programs are almost as bad as those on the commercial stations because of what they teach both explicitly and implicitly (e. g., evolution). If a parent watches such educational

programs with his or her children, one can point out errors and take advantage of opportunities to teach. A parent may then exercise proper judgment as to what programs should be “off limits.”

I am not condemning all mothers of young children who work outside their homes. I well know that many have no choice. But when a mother can choose, and she **chooses** to devote herself to caring for her family, why would anyone want to make her feel as if she is not worth very much, is lazy, or is shirking her responsibilities? Some have even called such women “freeloaders,” have accused them of not carrying their own weight or have said that caring for children is demeaning and a waste of intelligence and education. Nothing could be further from the truth. Any woman, who has stayed at home and devoted herself to caring for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of one child or of several children, is doing a duty – a very taxing and exhausting duty at that – of inestimable value and far-reaching consequences. She uses both her education and her intelligence constantly. Hers is truly a labor of love. She should be encouraged and uplifted, not denigrated.

She knows her children and their needs in ways that no hired caregiver could possibly know them. She is there when they need her, not “by appointment only.” She is obedient to the command that she be a keeper at home and that she is to love her children (Tit. 2:4–5). Love involves so much more than just words or emotions (1 Cor. 13:1–8). The stay-at-home mother fulfills her responsibility to teach her children at all hours of the day (Deu. 6:6–9). One cannot teach her children merely by saying something such as “All right, now we are going to sit down for fifteen minutes, and I am going to teach you.” While there is certainly a place for “scheduled” teaching, I believe a mother’s (or a father’s, for that matter) most valuable teaching is that which she does moment by moment, while going about her daily routine of activities. She teaches her children by her attitude, by the tone of her voice, by her patience (or lack of it), by the comments she makes, by the songs she sings, by what she listens to on the radio or watches on TV, by her concern for others and the good deeds she does for them, and by her honesty (or the lack thereof – “answer the door and tell whoever it is that Mother is not home”). Children can see through us; they know very well what is most important to us.

The stay-at-home mother and her family must be willing to forego many of the material things they might otherwise have with her extra income, but the trade-off is well worth it (sadly, sometimes even Christian husbands will try to push their wives into taking a job and leaving their children). Solomon said that it is better to have a dinner of vegetables served with

love and peace than to have a stalled ox served with hatred (Pro. 15:17). Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (4:11). He wrote to Timothy, “Godliness with contentment is great gain,” and warned that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil; we should not trust in riches (1 Tim. 6:6, 10–11, 17–19).

Sometimes I think it is easier to be content with less than it is with more. The sad truth is, the more we have, the more we want. (In fact, we would all be better off if we did not have some of our possessions which take our attention away from spiritual things—or worse, plant evil thoughts and desires in our heads.) Could there be a relation between the material things—luxuries (now become “necessities”) purchased with Mother’s extra money and the fact that so many church members have their vision almost entirely focused on earthly, material, physical things—from sensual “worship” practices to questionable, worldly methods of reaching the “unchurched”? We so easily forget that this world is not our home, and that we can take none of our possessions with us (Job 1:21; 1 Tim. 2:4; 6:7; Heb. 11:8–10). Only those treasures which are stored in Heaven will survive (Mat. 6:19–21). My most prized physical treasures are my children and grandchildren, and I want them to go to Heaven more than I want anything else for them. Surely this is true of any sober-minded mother.

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