

Dream Job: Caroline Barnett Balances Work, Family and a High-Profile Ministry

I groan as the alarm sounds at 5:00 a.m. Thank goodness, I don't have to get up. The annoying bleep is rousing my husband, Matthew, so he can catch a flight to some city to speak and raise money for the Dream Center.

I try to go back to sleep, but he's making too much noise showering and packing for his trip. On his way out the bedroom door, Matthew kisses me on the forehead, and I groggily tell him, "Go get 'em, tiger."

I toss and turn for a while and suddenly hear my wake-up call at 6:15. "Too soon," I mutter.

I shuffle down the hallway to wake up my daughter, Mia, repeating my attempts three to five times within 15 minutes. I head to the kitchen to get the morning ritual started—make breakfast and pack her a lunch. I notice the time (yikes!) and try to hurry things along.

By 7 a.m., Mia is sitting at the kitchen table gobbling her breakfast, and I'm double-checking that her homework is still in her backpack from last night's study session.

I can finally pour my first cup of coffee—in a thermal travel cup—to drink as I drive her to school. As Mia heads to the car, I run upstairs to wake up my son, Caden. I bundle him in a blanket and run to the car, where Mia waits. Half-asleep, Caden mumbles, "I don't want to drop Mia off. I want to stay in bed."

Once Mia is dropped off at the Christian school, Caden and I head home. I feed him breakfast and get him ready for his

first-grade home-school class. By the time his teacher arrives at the house, it's time for my second cup of coffee and my time with God, studying the Word and praying.

The quiet time is energizing and helps motivate me to start tackling the to-do list I make each night that relates to my roles as wife, mother, homemaker, friend, pastor, leader and now author. From picking up dry cleaning to preparing a message for the upcoming weekend's women's conference to attending a PTA meeting—I'm ready to dive in. It's going to be a great but long day.

People often mistakenly believe that serving others will require an unmanageable sacrifice from them—personally, professionally and emotionally. That hours spent at a homeless shelter will have negative effects on their own children left at home. Or that adopting a child may demand more of them than they can emotionally handle. Or that being a big sister to an inner-city kid may mean a person has to give up the thought of marriage.

Let me assure you that God does not call you to serve others at the expense of other areas of your life. Certainly there are seasons in our lives that make it difficult, even impossible, for us to do anything outside of managing our lives or our families. There are times our attention must be drawn toward taking care of important personal matters, like tending a sick child or dealing with a family crisis.

Our levels of willingness may change throughout our lives, but the key is staying consistent with what we can give and do.

Meshing a personal life with a life of service requires a balancing act that may take some time and effort, but it can be done. I often think of life as standing on top of a board balanced on a rolling barrel. If you want to maintain your balance, you have to constantly shift and adjust your position on the board.

Determine Priorities

The first step to staying balanced is to decide what is and is not a priority. Here's how I do it: I make a list of my responsibilities, goals and tasks, and then I evaluate how much time I spend on them and what matters most. I remind myself of my mission in life—to be able to stand before God knowing that I fulfilled my call to love and be faithful to my husband, children, family and friends—and determine my priorities based on this statement. Putting this step into practice has helped me learn how to live purposefully.

Eliminate Non-Priority Demands

Second, evaluate and eliminate the things in your life that don't contribute to what matters most to you. Cut out projects, demands or requests that others may have persuaded you or pressured you to do. Stop taking tasks merely to please people. Avoid people who drain you or offer only negative energy. Keep your social networking interactions and television viewing to a minimum. Make fewer trips to the store. Make your time with friends worthwhile, not just a gossip fest.

For myself, I learned to cut back on my children's outside activities. I had made the mistake of overcommitting them to sports and other after-school activities because I wanted them to have a variety of experiences. My motives were good, but when I became involved to an unrealistic degree, it caused undue stress on our family as a whole and a lot of time mismanagement on my part. I've since limited my children's activities to what they are passionate about and what is realistic for the entire family.

Take Time for You

Third, find out what makes you a "better you" so you can focus on and accomplish your priorities. Life can be tough. We all need to find an outlet to recharge our internal batteries and

regain our strength. For some people, this means regular exercise, a hobby, reading or attending a weekly get-together with uplifting friends. When you make time to do things you enjoy to unwind and recharge, you are better equipped to serve others in and outside of your family and to meet your priorities.

As an introvert, I recharge by spending time by myself. If I don't have regular alone time, I get cranky and overwhelmed. I have to set aside this "me time" in order to be at my best. Matthew is the exact opposite. A true extrovert, he regains his strength by being around crowds. Being alone drains and depresses him.

Keeping fit also helps clear and sharpen my mind and gives me lasting energy throughout the day. Six days a week, I pop in an exercise video or hop onto the elliptical machine for thirty minutes.

Of course, you can't spend more time doing these things than what you have prioritized. I love watching cooking shows because they relax me. I TiVo them so I can cut out the commercials. But I know there will be days when I have to turn off the television altogether because getting to bed earlier will make me more efficient at tackling the next day's priorities.

You Can Find a Balance

I understand that in today's world, balance is a commodity many of us believe we cannot afford. Women often feel pulled in every direction, stretched to the point of no return, running a hundred miles an hour, only to crash and burn at the end of the day. I don't believe God designed us to run ourselves ragged so that we begrudgingly serve Him. When God calls us to do something, He will equip us to get the job done.

I try to emulate the godly woman described in Proverbs 31. She is a woman of faith, of virtue, of integrity. She takes care of her family and her health. She is a wise steward of her time and finances. She is charitable and hardworking. The writer doesn't say that she served others at the expense of her own health, or that she took care of her family but ignored everything else. She had an appreciable amount of responsibilities and was able to balance them appropriately.

Serving others is more than something the Bible commands us to do. It is, in fact, a blessing that will not only change those around us, but will also make a difference in our own lives. Find your place, whatever season of life you're in, and help those in need. You'll never regret it.

*Taken from Willing to Walk on Water by **Caroline Barnett**. Copyright © 2013 by **Caroline Barnett**. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved. The book will be released April 1. **Caroline Barnett** has a passion for inspiring women of the church to find their God-given cause. In her role at the Dream Center, Caroline has changed people's lives through a wide range of outreach ministries—from starting a food truck ministry that currently feeds over 50,000 people each month, to founding Project Prevention, a foster care intervention program designed to assist families facing the threat of separation due to issues of poverty.*