

Should Women Work Outside the Home?

God embedded gifts within each of us before the beginning of time to perform specialized tasks here on Earth (Ephesians 2:10). Actually, the calling God places on our hearts can never be withdrawn; according to Romans 11:29 it's irrevocable. Kind of like a divine Mission Impossible assignment ordained by the Father.

This revelation is freeing. As a homeschooling mother of four, I often hear strangers say, "I could never homeschool. I'm not sure how you do it."

I typically respond by saying it's not for everyone—because it isn't. There are many people on the opposite side of this camp who are just as passionate about keeping Christian kids in schools to be a light to this world, but my calling will not be your calling.

There is an elusive identity circulating in our Christian communities. Some believe that, in order to achieve holiness, we must act a certain way. But the real truth lies in the mission we embrace according to who we were created to be. Looking at how our neighbor lives is not the answer. Just like one family may have seven kids, while another only has one, neither family is more righteous than the other. The same can be said for the hardworking single mom or unmarried woman who is an entrepreneur.

The sticky question we must ask is what does the Bible say regarding the issue of working?

The biblical mandate for women

There are two main references that we can examine on this topic:

In Titus 2:3-5, Paul exhorts older women to “train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home...”

Additionally, 1 Timothy 5:14 instructs women to be managers of their homes.

Managing a family requires endless work in order for it to operate efficiently. No wonder Paul encouraged older women to teach younger women how to watch over the affairs of their homes. It’s an ongoing, often overwhelming job, but one God has called us to do.

In addition to these prominent references, scripture displays a handful of examples of women who worked outside of the home.

In Romans 16 we learn that Phoebe was a deaconess, Priscilla was a tent maker (Acts 18:3), Lydia sold fabric (Acts 16:14), Deborah pulled double duty as a prophetess and a judge (Judges 4), Samuel’s daughters were bakers, perfumers, and chefs (1 Samuel 8:13), and Exodus 1 talks of women as midwives.

Then there is Jael, “the most blessed among women.” In Judges 5:24 we read that she lured the commander of the Canaanite army to her tent and assassinated him with a tent peg (Judges 4:18-22). Although not technically a paying profession, this last example is a reminder that the Lord fulfills his purposes through women. I love God’s unpredictability in using the meek and mild wife to take part in biblical history.

And we certainly can’t ignore one of the most unthinkable female occupations: prostitution. Rahab, a prostitute, lied to city officials and hid spies for the sake of saving the Israelites. The fascinating fact some may not catch is that Rahab is in the direct lineage of Christ and landed a coveted position in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11).

The ideal woman

The closest representation of the ideal woman is painted in Proverbs 31. Her husband trusts her, she works with her hands,

risers early, stays up late, considers a field and buys it, plants a vineyard, gives to the poor, and her children call her blessed. The woman does it all, fears the Lord, and is greatly praised. Interestingly enough, some commentaries suggest Solomon was referring to his mother—Bathsheba, the adulteress. If this is true, what a gracious reminder that we all have a place in God's economy regardless of our past.

So how can we begin to follow in her footsteps? I love what Beth Moore says about the subject: "God surpasses our dreams when we reach past our personal plans and agenda to grab the hand of Christ and walk the path he chose for us," (Breaking Free; Discover the Victory in Total Surrender).

No two stories alike

The Lord loves diversity—that's why there are no two stories alike in the Bible. I believe he purposefully designed it this way so we would not point to one example and decide, "This is the only way to do life. You must look like (insert biblical character) to be perfect."

There was only one perfect man. The rest of us are simply on a mission or, as Pastor Jon Courson puts it: "We think we're schoolteachers, insurance salesmen, or stockbrokers. But we're not. We're undercover agents for the kingdom. God has planted us in those positions to be His witnesses."

Should women work?

The point is simple. God knows the plans he has for us (Jeremiah 29:11) whether we work outside of the home or not. So maybe the better question women should ask is, "Lord, what have you specifically created me to do?"

It is not about our job. It is not solely about our homemaking abilities. It is about the assignment he designed before the beginning of time. You can make disciples at home or lead a mission in the office. Deborah's assignment was not Jael's, just like Michelle Dugger's is not Beth Moore's.

Personally, I homeschool because after facing multiple near-death experiences, I started to wonder how many years I had left on this earth to spend with my children. It's amazing how a new perspective changes what you value most. My paycheck is an awful lot smaller, but I've turned in my fancy heels for sweet kisses and a part time writing position that God dropped into my lap. I don't think that last part was an accident.

That's the beauty of life. It's about bringing him glory; it's about being usable for the kingdom. The bottom line is that all eternity depends on us living a life worthy of the calling we have received (Ephesians 4:1 NIV).

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