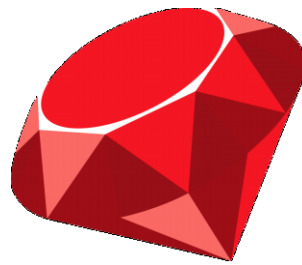


# **More Precious Than Rubies: The Worth of a Godly Woman**



**G. Wright Doyle**

Copyright 2007

## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Ministries for women today: Another look at the Scriptures.....	6
Appendices.....	19
A. Advantages of staying at home	
B. Disadvantages of working outside the home	
C. Children <u>need</u> their parents	
D. Ministries for single women	
E. A woman and her education	
F. Outdated Tradition? Unrealistic Ideal? Absolute Command?	
G. Wives with no children or whose children have grown up	
H. Wives whose husband's income cannot support the family	
I. What if grandparents can take care of the children?	
J. Evidence from psychology	
K. Preparing for Disability, Death, Divorce	
L. A few words to men	
For Further Reading.....	36

## **Introduction:**

### *Wanted – Loving Leadership*

We all long for at least two things: Significance and security. That is, we want to feel that we are worth something (significance) and that we are going to be taken care of (security).

Women are no exception. Like men, they want to be respected for what they are and what they do. They also seek some confidence that their needs, both physical and emotional, will be taken care of in the future.

I believe that men have failed to do their part in conferring respect upon women and in caring for them. As a result, women have often felt unappreciated and neglected, even used.

Before we begin looking at the priceless value of women, therefore, we need to remember why many women feel so worthless.

Over the centuries, countless men have shown little respect for women. Fathers have neglected their daughters, husbands have dominated their wives, and men in general have looked down upon females.

The record is not a pretty one.

Especially in societies where the Bible has had little influence, women have suffered indignities, exploitation, and even abuse at the hands of uncaring men. In traditional Chinese society, girl babies were often left out in the cold to die of exposure; daughters were given less food and harder work than sons; wives were assigned menial tasks and had to submit to harsh treatment from their mothers-in-law. A man could take another woman as his mistress or concubine, but a wife had to remain faithful, even after her husband's death.

During the Qing Dynasty, women were crippled by the cruel practice of foot-binding. Until Western missionaries came, they were usually not given the privileges of education. They were excluded from male-dominated discussions of literature or politics.

Few men thought much about their duty to nurture their wives and daughters. They often put their work and their pleasure ahead of family life. Aside from providing for the physical needs of their household, they saw no need to enter into the mental and emotional lives of the women around them.

In reaction, women in the twentieth century have cried out for recognition. They have demanded education, jobs, equal treatment, and independence. They now sit in corporate offices and even in high government positions. They have excelled in school and in the marketplace. From one standpoint, women have truly been liberated.

On the other hand, marriages are breaking down. Children are suffering from depression, anxiety, and suicidal impulses. Men feel frustrated with the “new women” around them. Women are not cherished any more than before. If anything, they are seen now more as competitors than as beloved companions. “Liberation” has not brought love.

What we need now is a return to the Biblical pattern of men-women relationships.

First of all, men need to look to God for wisdom in relating to women. We cannot rely on our mental powers; we simply don't understand women! Furthermore, we need to humble ourselves, admit our mistakes, confess our wrongs, and ask forgiveness.

China Institute has published a book on the ideal man according to Confucius and Christ. In that work you will find chapters about being a son, a father, a husband. I recommend that all men read as much as they can about Jesus and seek to imitate His pattern of servant leadership. Leadership we must provide, but it must be loving leadership. No more pride, arrogance, ignorance, and self-indulgence! We need to learn how to nourish and cherish our wives as Christ does the church. To honor them as equal heirs of the grace of life. To enjoy them as companions and friends.

A man with a heart to serve will find many books on Christian marriage and manhood. I find it helpful to read at least one of these a year. We can also ask our wives, daughters, and sisters how we might love them better. They are surely full of good ideas!

The second thing we need is for women also to return to the Bible for wisdom. The world's ways are not God's ways. What society now considers normal and right may actually be wrong in the sight of God. Certainly, the past two decades of experimentation with feminism have not produced peaceful, happy marriages. Women are not content, and neither are men. Perhaps it's time for a fresh look at the meaning of womanhood. I offer the follow pages in the hope that they will stimulate reflection and contribute to what is perhaps the most urgent discussion of our time.

### *The Purpose and Plan of This Book*

The purpose of this book is simple: To set forward a view of the worth of a woman as depicted in the Bible. Although I shall refer to other books and have appended an extensive list of excellent references at the end, the Scriptures are my main authority. I hope that I have interpreted them faithfully and welcome comments from those who think I have erred.

The plan of the book flows from my belief about our motives. As I said above, we seek security (especially physical survival and comfort, but also love), satisfaction, and significance. A longing for significance drives much of the women's movement today, for reasons which I have already outlined. Women also crave security, especially financial security. Somewhere along the line, we also want to find satisfaction in our work and our relationships.

A sense of significance can come either from within or outside ourselves. If we look to others to affirm our worth, we shall always try to perform in a way that pleases them. We shall base our sense of worth on our works (broadly defined).

A firmer base for significance comes from within – or rather, from above. Women who trust and love God will look first to Him for their sense of worth. He created them. He sent His Son Jesus to die for them. He loves them. They work as a response to His love, not to gain His approval. They are thus independent of the opinions of others. They are free.

They work, then, not to gain significance, but to serve. In serving others, they find satisfaction.

Likewise, women who trust in God seek first His kingdom and righteousness. They do what they think is right. They trust Jesus when he said that if we put God first, everything else we need will be added to us. Their security is not in their husbands, their children, or their careers, but in God, who promises to provide.

The pages which follow begin with our search for significance through service (what I call “ministry”) and argue that true satisfaction will come to those who serve. We do have to eat, of course, so the question of adequate income receives attention later on.

Several practical questions are addressed in the Appendices.

A variety of helpful books are listed in the section For Further Reading.

You may start reading at any point. Non-Christians may not be interested in what the Bible says about ministry, but I recommend you begin at the beginning. You may gain a new perspective on life!

## **Ministries for Women Today: Another Look at the Scriptures**

The thoughts in the following pages have been developing in my mind for about twenty-five years. That is not to say that I understand as much as I would like to about the Biblical teaching on women, but that these ideas have not just recently been formulated.

The idea for this paper arose when my wife and I began to wrestle with God's will for her life. We realized that the traditional role of a woman as wife, mother, and homemaker was being replaced by another image: That of the woman as highly-competent professional, who may or may not choose to marry, to have children, or to devote her life to her husband and children.

We saw that the new picture of the capable woman emphasized such qualities as energy, hard work, intelligence, competence in the working world, fashionable dress, and success outside the home. The new woman was rejecting the stereotype of a frumpy, home-bound wife who was chained to the kitchen, dominated by children with runny noses and whining voices, deprived of adult companionship, addicted to soap operas, and devoid of knowledge about the larger world. She wanted to be alive, alert, aware, fully engaged in the fast-paced currents of modern life, making her own unique contribution to society and not despised as a second-class citizen. She thought she could compete in a man's world and win, if only given a chance.

Christian women also sought wider scope for their abilities. They knew that God had given them gifts, and they wanted to use these to edify the Church and spread the Gospel. They longed to fulfill their potential as image-bearers of God. In short, they wanted to serve.

That brings us to our question:

*What is Ministry?*

What is ministry, especially for a married woman?

In the Bible, ministry falls into two broad categories: what we would call worship and work (or service – sometimes the original word could be translated either way). Let's look more closely.

### 1. Ministry to the Lord

The Old Testament priests were ordained to minister to God. For example, in Exodus 28:4, God says, "And they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as a priest to Me." Their ministry consisted of receiving from the people, and offering to God, various sacrifices and offerings. We would say that their ministry was primarily 'spiritual,' although it involved many 'physical' tasks such as slaughtering and preparing the animal sacrifices.

Another example of such ministry through worship can be found in 2 Chronicles 31:2, where offerings are joined with thanks and praise as the ministry of the priests. We read also of David appointing priests to ‘minister with song’ before the tabernacle (1 Chronicles 6:32).

In the New Testament, a revolution takes place: All true believers in Christ become a nation of priests, “a royal priesthood... that (they) may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called (them) out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Obviously, this includes all Christian women.

We sometimes forget that our primary ministry must be to God. Paul writes in Romans chapter twelve: “I urge you therefore, brethren (and ‘brethren’ in the New Testament includes the ‘sisters’ as well!), by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (12:1).

Jesus rebuked Satan with a quotation from the Old Testament along these same lines: “You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only” (Matthew 4:10). Paul commended the Christians at Thessalonica because they had “turned from idols to serve a living and true God” (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

Jesus issued this solemn challenge: “If any one serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if any one serves Me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:26).

This service of God takes many forms, of course, from the worship before the very throne of God (Revelation 7:15) to faithful obedience to non-believing masters (Colossians 3:24). The main point is that our primary ministry finds its focus and meaning in God and not in anyone else.

This is a ministry that anyone can engage in, simply by offering every thought, word, and action to our God, through Jesus Christ. And it can be done at any place or time. No one can take this ministry away from us or hinder us in it.

According to New Testament teaching, the ministry of each believer will be according to his spiritual gift(s). All those in Christ are not only justified by faith and thus ‘sons’ (this term includes women, of course) of God (Galatians 3:26-28), indwelt by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9), but also endowed with at least one spiritual gift for ministry (Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 12:7).

We need to remember this important fact, because in both the church and in the world there is a tendency to exalt certain gifts (such as tongues or teaching) and to denigrate others (such as service or mercy).

Ministry to *God*, then, is now the privilege of all believers, regardless of sex: this is what we have in common.

## 2. Ministry to the family

When it comes to ministry to *other people*, however, men and women receive somewhat differing instructions in the New Testament. Recent emphases on equality of worth in God's sight have tended to neglect distinctions in function and responsibility in our ministry to people.

What does the New Testament say about ministries for women as women? Quite a lot, actually.

### A. Ministry to one's husband

In the epistles, women are especially instructed to serve God by serving their family. First of all, according to the apostles, comes a wife's service to her husband.

Paul reminds us that Eve was created especially for Adam, "the woman for the man's sake" (1 Corinthians 11:9), and not the man "for the woman's sake." Genesis 2:18 describes God's purpose this way: "I will make him a helper suitable for him."

Inferiority or inequality finds no support in this passage; distinction of function and purpose does. As helper, the woman is not less than the man; in fact, she is indispensable to him as he carries out his God-given mandate.

We often forget that a man needs his wife. Most men will admit this if questioned, even if they don't offer that concession voluntarily. What can a woman do for her man?

Paul gives us a clue in Titus 2:4, when he instructs older women to teach the younger women to "love their husbands." Contrary to popular opinion, men do marry for love. The sexual drive which figures so prominently in a man's desire for marriage includes a deep yearning for companionship, intimacy, tenderness – in short, for love. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Most men apparently agree, for they continue to seek the companionship of women, and to take on the responsibilities of marriage in order to find a true friend and helper in their life's work.

How can a woman love and help her man? She can listen to him, encourage him, pray for him, advise and counsel him, set him a good example, and provide sexual satisfaction. (In this discussion, the man's responsibilities are not touched on, although they are perhaps even greater, and deserve study.) In addition, Proverbs 31 lists a number of services – ministries, if you will – which the capable wife performs for her husband and family.

The 'excellent wife' of Proverbs 31 has often been eulogized, and rightly so. What sometimes escapes attention is that she serves her husband as well as others:

"The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (11-12).



“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land” (because he wears clothing she has made for him, verses 22-23).

A wife who serves nutritious and tasty meals not only saves money for the family, but positively lengthens the lives of those who eat her healthful food, especially if she is able to foster an atmosphere of calm and peace. A quick hamburger – even a gourmet dinner in a fine restaurant – is no substitute for a well-balanced meal served with love in one’s own home, or a lunch lovingly packed and filled with healthful and nutritious ingredients.

If a man can return to a place that is clean, neat, and pleasantly decorated, and enjoy the companionship of a woman who has the energy and attention to love him and care for him, then the burdens and struggles of a day lose their sting. (Again, the husband will have much to do when he comes home, but that is not the focus of our discussion right now.)

Homemade clothes cost a fraction of those purchased in a store. Clothes mended and laundered at home last longer and look better, and certainly mean less money spent on new apparel. Or, if a wife does not sew, she can at least wash and iron her husband’s clothes.

A wife who has the time and energy to shop wisely saves almost as much as most jobs pay, if you count the money she saves by serving primary ingredients and by allowing her husband to eat at home rather than in a restaurant. Factor in the dollars saved in medical bills because of better nutrition and less tension, and you see that a good wife benefits her husband in a multitude of ways, including financial help.

A good wife can play a vital role in her husband’s success as a worker. She can pray for him, advise him, and warn him. If she listens to him while he shares the challenges he faces, he will know that at least one person understands and cares. A wife who will invite her husband’s colleagues over for a meal immeasurably enhances his position at work. In this way, she both enters into his world and communicates love to his co-workers and their families.

All this assumes that she is first spending time reading the Bible, praying, and cultivating her mind with wide and judicious reading. Her reading, watching television, listening to the radio and tapes, can include both her husband’s work and the wider world. A woman thus mentally equipped will not only enrich her own thought life but also enable her to serve as a fully equal – perhaps even superior! – conversation partner to her husband and his friends.

Enough has been said to make the point: God made woman because man needed her. He still does. By serving her husband, a wife contributes measurably to his welfare, and thus increases his effectiveness as a servant of God.

Next to her ministry to God, therefore, a wife’s most important ministry is to her husband.

## B. Ministry to her children

After urging that young wives be taught to love their husbands, Paul continues with the command that they be taught also “to love their children” (Titus 2:4). In his first letter to Timothy, Paul defines the duties of wives in similar language: they are to “bear children” and to bring them up (5:14, 10).

A woman’s ministry to her children, then, consists in bearing them, bringing them up, and loving them.

Paul called for younger women to “get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach . . .” (1 Timothy 5:14; cf. Titus 2:4-5). In other words, he commanded that wives be “workers at home.” Their focus was to be their own home and family, not the world outside.

As we have already seen, a wife committed to the home as the primary focus of her ministry will find plenty to do all day. She will need all the intelligence, skill, and knowledge she has to balance the multitude of tasks that demand her attention. Child-rearing itself is a full-time job. The first few years of a child’s life will be among the most demanding for the mother. Here is a young life, totally dependent upon her for love, security, teaching, training, correction, feeding, clothing, and exposure to the world at large. Lack of commitment to this task will not only leave permanent scars in the child’s heart, but will deprive a woman of immense joy and satisfaction.

On more than one occasion, I have heard first-grade school teachers say that they can tell – usually within a few hours – which students were cared for by their mothers and which were sent to a day-care center or to a home other than her own. The children who had received their mother’s full attention were more secure, obedient, attentive, sociable, healthy, and knowledgeable. Those watched over by surrogate mothers were irritable, insecure, inattentive, and less socially adept. Most disturbing are the studies which show that children brought up by someone other than their mother in the early years have greater difficulty achieving intimacy with others, including their marriage partner. They tend to have rather superficial relationships with others.

Even after the children enter school, the mother has plenty to do. A woman who must rush off to work in the morning seldom has time to prepare her children’s lunch, to pray with them, to send them off with gentle and patient love. Nor is she able to be there when they come home from school – thus the growing number of “after school programs” at schools. If she works at home, however, she can greet them at the door, ask how the day has gone, and share with her children precious moments of remembering the pleasures and assuaging the pains of their day at school. An hour or two later, especially if the children have already shared with the day care provider, there will be no opportunity for their mother to enter into her children’s life at school.

Mothers who work at home can spend the day in quiet prayer for their children. They can do their housework, prepare meals, read books, and be calm and prepared when the children return. They will have the time and energy to supervise their children's schoolwork, listen to their problems, and give advice based upon careful observation, patient reflection, and long-repeated prayer.

I am so thankful that my mother was always home when I returned from school. She greeted me with milk and cookies or even a homemade milkshake. She followed my progress in school carefully, and had time to go with me to talk with the teachers when problems arose. When I got sick at school, she could just come pick me up; she didn't have to take time off work. When I was ill at home, she could nurse me and shower me with loving care all day long. She didn't have to worry that she was neglecting her job – that was her job! Likewise, I thank God that my wife, who could have had employment elsewhere, chose to stay home with our daughter. I believe her inherent sense of security derives from the constant care she received from her mother all throughout childhood.

I have not yet mentioned home education as an option. More and more American children – more than one million in 1998 – are receiving instruction from their parents at home rather than in public or private schools. Naturally, this vastly increases the demands upon the mother's time – unless, as in our case, the father serves as primary teacher. Fears that home-schooled children will suffer emotionally, socially, or academically, have been resoundingly refuted by careful studies.

#### i. Wives Without Children

What about wives with no children? Should they try to find work outside the home? It seems to me that the Bible still emphasizes the helping role of the wife. In other words, she needs to do all she can to contribute to her husband's success. That would seem to mean staying at home as much as possible in order to manage the household, pray, study the Bible, read, and practice hospitality. We were without children for the first fifteen years of our married life. Although my wife worked in a Christian bookstore – and for a while managed the store – both full-time and part-time, we discovered that she could serve me and the church more effectively if she quit her job and made the home the center of her ministry. Many women came to her for counsel, because she had time, and we had people for meals often. We had to live off of my low salary as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, but God never allowed us to lack anything we needed. Dori had time to shop wisely, prepare meals from basic ingredients, and save money in other ways. I am convinced that my graduate studies and our ministry in the church were greatly enhanced by her working from our home.

While she was managing a Christian bookstore, she discovered that many women have no one to advise them, counsel them, listen to them, or pray with them. After a while, she decided to quit her job in the bookstore and concentrate her ministry upon me and upon women who had sought her out as a friend and advisor. Over the next ten years, before our child was born, both in America and in Taiwan she found herself fully occupied with

“spiritual children,” women who looked to her as an older sister, even a mother, in the faith.

Our experience, plus the example of many other godly women, has convinced me that a wife without children, or one whose children have grown up and moved away, can fill her days with fruitful ministry to other women. She can serve as a friend and prayer partner to women her age, and as a godly mentor to younger women. Isn't that what Paul meant when he told Titus to urge “the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, ...” (Titus 2:5)? Wives with full- or even part-time jobs outside the home will hardly have time for this vital ministry.

Another option – one which we explored just before she became pregnant – is adoption. There are countless children around the world who need a loving home, especially one in which God is honored. Couples without their own children can find rich satisfaction in bringing up someone else's children. Though not without its difficulties, adoption has brought great happiness to thousands of Christian women.

Another aspect of this does not usually receive the attention it deserves: The very pace of modern life, with both spouses busy at work, can create stress and tension that hinder the conception of children. Thus, if a woman wants to stay home and care for her children after they are born, she would be wise to reduce the amount of stress in her life by concentrating upon being a homemaker after she gets married. Not only would she thus gain practice in running her home before children come, but she would also make having children more likely.

## ii. Obstacles to Motherhood As A Career

With all these benefits to bearing and bringing up children (both biological and spiritual), only a few years ago, it would have been considered unnecessary to say that a wife ought to bear children. It was assumed, taken for granted. Abortion and other measures of birth control have changed that picture dramatically. For a variety of reasons, bearing children no longer seems to be the natural thing to do.

Some women believe that to add the enormous task of bringing up children to an already busy life is to bring in a distraction that will gravely compromise a woman's effectiveness as a member of society and of Christ's church. This idea finds concrete expression both in the numbers of wives who bear children, or having borne them, to take care of them, and in the self-denigrating remarks one often hears from the lips of mothers. (“I'm just a housewife” is the classic example.)

Even missionary wives and earnest Christian women at home often feel that the needs of society are so great that they cannot afford the time to spend with their children. They believe, in other words, that children would get in the way of their ministry. (Sometimes this attitude extends to their husbands, who are also seen as a hindrance to “the work which God has called me to do.”)

Other women consider the pain of childbirth too much to endure, and so they avoid pregnancy or abort a child once it has been conceived. Others resent the intrusion into a quiet – or exciting! – (and sometimes self-indulgent) lifestyle which a baby would be. Many more would rather enjoy the freedom, economic gains, and social status of an independent career than to be saddled with a little person to care for.

Most wives, however, continue to bear children. What has radically changed is that fewer wives want to bring up their own children. All the reasons suggested above, plus added disincentives such as inflation and the costs of buying a house, lead women to leave the rearing of their children to someone else.

In most cases, that ‘someone else’ is an overworked staff member of a day care center. Occasionally (or frequently, as in Asia) it is a grandparent or neighbor. Whatever the case, the child spends most of the day with someone other than his mother. The values – or lack of them – of another person becomes the educational milieu of the child’s most impressionistic years. The love and care which only a mother can give can never be replaced by another, ‘surrogate’ parent.

Studies have demonstrated the enduring damage which such inadequate ‘care’ inflicts upon young children. A child needs more than physical attention, such as feeding and bathing; he needs the stimulation, the comfort, the companionship of his own mother. Without this loving nurture, there is a deep, unsatisfied need for love. (See Appendix C. for more on this.)

It seems amazing that women should not want to bring up their own offspring. Even wild animals rarely abandon their young. What has happened?

In some countries, economic factors seem to dictate the wife’s going outside the home to make money. The cost of housing, cars, and education, to name only a few, have risen so high that many husbands cannot earn enough to pay for all these – at least not at the level that younger couples have come to expect. Actually, women have always made an economic contribution to the family in traditional societies; women have always “worked” in ways that either save or produce income. Industrialization has taken fathers out of the home; low wages sometimes make it hard for families to survive on his income alone.

But couples committed to the importance of having the wife maintain the home and care for their children will find ways to achieve this God-ordained goal, as we shall see below. The real question is one of faith: Do we believe that God will supply our needs if we seek to do His will? Ever since 1971, when I began graduate school, we have experimented with Dori’s working part-time and full-time, and we have discovered that it is better for her to do neither. We have trusted God to supply all our needs, and he has.

Men often put pressure on wives to work outside the home. A father with high ambitions for his daughter and thousands of dollars invested in her education may consider it a huge

waste if she does not find and succeed in a professional career. Husbands who don't understand their responsibility to provide for them will force their wives to go find income-generating work.

Women long for a sense of security, as we have seen. Many wives go out to work because they don't think their husbands can provide for them. Rather than trusting God to take care of the family's economic needs if they concentrate upon their God-given tasks as wife, mother, and homemaker – and rather than finding a way to make money from the home as a base – some women seek to ensure financial security through their own efforts.

Other women simply have no choice. If a husband leaves his wife, is disabled and forced to quit work, or simply wastes his life away in idle pursuits, a wife must find work to feed and clothe herself and her children. No one can blame such women. God will honor their efforts. My only suggestion would be that they seek to earn income from a home-based business, so they can have more time with the children.

Other forces can push a woman out the door into the market place. An abusive husband, domineering mother-in-law, or intolerable home environment can tempt a woman to run away by going to work outside. Given the Biblical teachings on this subject, perhaps other ways to cope can be found: Prayer for the husband, finding something for in-laws or parents to do away from the house during several hours of the day, changing the environment in some way. Faith in God will show us how to please him while maintaining one's sanity and health.

Social pressures also contribute to the flood of wives into the work force. Today, many people believe that a woman's worth comes from her contribution to the welfare of others outside her home. For Christian women, that means that direct ministry to others in the church and in the world takes precedence in value over work done in the home for her family. It also means that work done outside the home for others is more valuable than ministry done in her home for others (such as hospitality).

The fundamental mistake in this line of thought is the equating of a person's worth with his or her work. We all know that the Bible teaches that our worth comes from God, who has freely accepted us in Christ apart from our works.

The second mistake arises from a devaluation of the family and the home as God's primary means of blessing mankind. Proverbs thirty-one, verse ten, provides the antidote for this error. "An excellent wife, who can find? Her worth is far above jewels."

To state the matter very simply, a major change in values has taken place in modern society. The family has been displaced by society as the chief claimant for our allegiance. The individual has been shunted aside by the crowd as the primary unit of society. For some, money and status have crowded love and loyalty off the pinnacle of the pyramid of values. Worst of all, personal pleasure has seized the capital of our hearts as the driving motivation, ejecting self-giving love.

Even in the Christian church, ‘ministry’ in the church and in the world has sometimes displaced motherhood as a woman’s chief calling. It is as though Paul’s words have been excised from scripture.

There are valid reasons for an emphasis on service in the world and in the church, of course. Faced with the desperate needs of lonely, lost people, what wife does not want to give all the time she can to serving others, counseling, discipleship, and evangelism? What is more important, the eternal salvation of the millions who have not yet heard of Christ, or the education of one or two children?

And yet –

Paul’s instructions to Timothy and to Titus were given at a time when even fewer people had heard of Christ. The churches were riddled with false teaching and inconsistent living. Needs were as pressing then as they are now for wise and godly women who could give proper instruction in the things of God, publicly and privately.

Why? Did he realize that a child’s first five years set the tone for his entire life? Did he see the effect of education in the home in the life of Timothy himself (2 Timothy 3:15) and conclude that a mother could influence the world and the church through bringing up children to know and love God and His Word? He had never heard of Susanna Wesley, but he would not have marveled at the potential one woman’s faithfulness could have for the destiny of millions of souls around the world.

Before we leave the family to turn to a woman’s ministry to those outside her home, let us not forget what Paul said about our responsibility to elderly relatives, especially widows:

If any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.

But if any one does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.

If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened ... (1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16).

What could be more relevant to our own day than these words (to men and women) of reminder to us that we must not neglect our parents in their old age? What ministry could have a greater testimony or more tangible social impact – unless it be caring for one’s own children?

### 3. Ministry to those outside the family

When Paul says that wives ought to be “workers at home,” does he mean that they are chained within the walls of their house or apartment, never to leave? Hardly. What he

means is that the home is to be the focus and primary sphere or arena of a wife's ministry.

The widow eligible for enrollment on the church's charity rolls was the one who had a "reputation for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work" (1 Timothy 5:10).

Like the good wife of Proverbs 31, this wife spreads the blessings of her homemaking abroad, to include the poor and needy.

Again, in this day of loneliness, alienation, and brokenness, when no one has any time to listen or to care, what could have a more powerful impact upon the church or the world than a host of Christian women whose homes and hearts were open? There are countless hurting people out there, and what they need most is love; even Mother Teresa says that. A good wife can provide much of that love right in her home.

Our own experience and observation have taught us that Paul's words carry power and point in this fast-moving age. In fact, a wife with the desire to serve others in her home might easily find herself so busy that she seldom has the time to leave home!

But there will be occasions for a wider ministry. According to her energy level and spiritual gifts, a woman may be able to teach other women, through writing or public speaking, "to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:4-5).

This teaching ministry seemed important enough for Paul to commend and even command it. The reputation of Christianity as an honorable religion could stand or fall with the success of such a ministry.

It goes without saying that, although the primary responsibility for teaching a child the word of God and of his nurture lies with fathers (Ephesians 6:4), while the child is young his mother will spend more time with him. As she does this, she will have opportunities at home and elsewhere to teach and care for other children also. In this way, she can broaden her ministry, provide her child(-ren) with needed peer group stimulation, and come into contact with other mothers.

## **HOW?<sup>1</sup>**

How can a woman in today's society swim against the current of public opinion, risking loss of esteem from her peers, the income from an outside job, and the freedom she feels when she leaves her house each morning?

---

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the issues, opportunities, and challenges of having a wife stay at home, I strongly recommend Larry Burkett's *Women Leaving the Workplace*.



First, she (and her husband) need to face squarely the obstacles and difficulties of choosing to work at home. We have already noted a few of these. Others include the high challenge of caring for growing children, with all their changing needs and incessant demands. The loneliness some mothers endure when they have no outside stimulation, the mental stagnation of not being able to talk with adults, the possibility of “letting oneself go” and losing both physical and mental attractiveness add to the cost of staying home. Depending upon the situation, income may also drop if a wife leaves the workplace. That translates into a greater financial burden for the husband and fewer options in housing, transportation, and entertainment.

Second, both husband and wife need to identify their core values in life. Where do they get their sense of worth and achievement? Do they have to have the praise of “important” people? Do they need a certain level of income? Do they have to be able to answer the question, “And what do you do?” with an impressive job title? Or do they seek to follow God’s word? Do they look to Christ alone for their justification in life? Do they put sacrificial love at the top of their list of admirable qualities?

Then, they need to re-define their definition of “wife,” “mother,” homemaker,” and “housewife.” Is she an inactive, sloppy, poorly-dressed, overweight know-nothing who hides her failure behind the walls of her house? Or is she a dynamic, growing, ever-learning, always-serving, fully engaged, lively, but peaceful and joyful member of society?

Perhaps because my mother demonstrated to me the latter portrait of a “stay-at-home-mom,” I have always been amazed by those who equate “housewife” with “failure.” My father always treated her with respect and praised her for her invaluable contribution to his career, as well as for her selfless care for her five children. Because of his work, my mother had to entertain ambassadors, Congressmen, generals, admirals, movie stars, CEO’s of Fortune 500 companies, and other prominent people. Had she been ignorant, unattractive, or incompetent, my father would never have advanced as far as he did. At the same time, she made her children her highest priority. She supervised our education, being well-read herself. She taught us manners and disciplined us severely for childish folly and selfishness. She was always there when we came home from school, ready to listen to us and show love for us. I shall be ever grateful for her.

A woman whose primary focus is her home must seek ways to maintain her physical and mental fitness. Regular exercise is essential. Dressing well – even at home – keeps up her attractiveness. Meeting often with other women supplies emotional and intellectual stimulation. Reading keeps her up-to-date. Service in the church and volunteer work in society remind her of the needs of others and help her to share what God has given her. Most of all, long hours in Bible study and prayer will provide her with a constant supply of wisdom, joy, and love. Her prayers will powerfully impact her husband, her children, the rest of her family, the church, and the world.

Wives and mothers who need to generate income need to find the best way of making money from the home. Larry Burkett and others have identified dozens of income-producing activities for women who remain at home. These include caring for the children of others (and thus providing playmates for your own children); sewing; writing; computer work; sales; tutoring; piano teaching. Those with initiative, discipline, and creativity will be able to earn money to supplement the family income.

Truly, a godly woman who makes her family and home the center of her ministry will confirm the ancient saying:

*Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life... Her children rise up and call her blessed: her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. (Proverbs 31:10-12, 28-30)*

## APPENDICES

### A. Some advantages to staying at home

Nowadays, when most married women leave home to work, hardly anyone considers the advantages of remaining at home. Certainly, there are some disadvantages: an uncomfortable dwelling, demanding children, domineering in-laws – all these can cause a wife to want to leave home and work in more pleasant surroundings.

Nevertheless, there are definite benefits for those who stay at home. A wife at home has more time to

- Clean and fix up her house
- Shop wisely and economically
- Cook nutritious meals
- Sew clothing for herself and her family
- Care for her children
- Pray for her husband, children, and friends
- Counsel the lonely and the discouraged
- Write letters
- Help the needy

Furthermore, she saves money on

- Food
- Clothing
- Entertainment (she isn't so much in need for it)
- Transportation
- Child care

### B. Some disadvantages of working outside the home

Most people think that if both husband and wife have jobs outside their home, they are better off than if only the husband was formally employed. After all, the extra income, plus added prestige for the wife, brings real benefits.

Few stop to consider the costs involved when the wife leaves home for work. Here are some of them:

A wife who leaves home to work

- Tires more easily
- Consumes time in commuting
- Spends money on clothing
- Leaves the home unguarded against intruders
- Needs more (expensive) recreation

- Can't really help and support her husband in his work
- Loses the joy of caring for her children and seeing them grow up
- Faces inner conflict between work and home
- Exposes herself to unscrupulous men
- Exposes herself to sexual temptations
- Suffers from tensions created by pressures at work
- Has less time to develop friendships

### C. **Children need their parents**

Today, many people, including some Christians, seem to think that children do not really need their parents. This leads fathers to become engrossed in their work, including church work. It leads mothers to leave home and take an outside job.

But the Bible says that fathers should rear their children (Ephesians 6:1) and that wives should "Love their husbands, love their children, be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind..." (Titus 2:4-5).

I once asked a pastor what he thought of that passage from Titus. He responded that it was irrelevant to today's society. That is, he considered it unnecessary for a wife to remain at home to love her husband and children. (Of course, he would admit that women still need to be sensible, pure, and kind...).

Rather than trying to prove that children need their parents myself, I attach a few excerpts from a powerful book, *The Unwanted Generation*. The authors are Paul Meier, a psychiatrist, and Linda Burnett, a mother.

These two point out that working mothers do more damage to their children, by leaving them in the care of others, than is justified by the extra pay and prestige of a job. This damage leaves children unable to face life with confidence, trust, and character. It produces misfits and criminals.

If you love your child, please read the following pages.

#### Children Need their Parents: Excerpts from *The Unwanted Generation*

"A child's problems ... usually reflect the parents' personal hangups and inferior child-rearing techniques" (12).

"From the first, Mary was an unwanted child. From infancy, Mary was placed in a day-care center nine hours a day, five days a week. They used 'meeting little Mary's material needs' as a self-righteous justification for leaving her in the day-care center" (12).

"They had no idea how much psychological damage a child can experience from excessive time spent in a day-care center" (13).

“Too frequently being a housewife is labeled a form of slavery. Too many women are hearing the message that wives are inferior and that only fulltime career women are real successes. A child is viewed as an obstacle, a handicap, a bore, a curse, or an accident. Child(-ren) are becoming society’s responsibility rather than the parent’s concern. Too many children are being farmed out, like Mary was, to day-care centers, although research studies have shown how psychologically damaging forty or fifty hours a week in a day-care center can be to children during those crucial first six years of their lives. Children today are living in an unwanted generation, and we will suffer the consequences both as individual parents and as a nation” (13-14).

“We challenge parents with children at home to the God-given responsibility of providing personal and loving care for them” (14). -Paul Meier, M.D

#### A Housewife’s Perspective –

“As mothers we will have our children at home under our primary care for only four or five years. Eighty-five percent of their personalities will be formed by the time they are six! It’s nearly impossible for a day-care worker to treat my children with the same love and patience that I would. She doesn’t love my children like I do... Consequently, I am certain that my children would not develop the confidence and security, on which they will depend throughout their lives, to the same extent at a day-care center that they would at home. There seldom is an adequate substitute for the real parent.

“Raising a child in our day is both the most difficult and rewarding task God calls a woman to do. Recently I read a newspaper editorial that said, ‘Women who stay at home show a callous, self-interest.’ I would have laughed if I hadn’t been so physically and emotionally drained after caring for my two boys all day, along with cooking and cleaning... But, it’s worth it! Every minute of it. I have the satisfaction of knowing that I’m doing what the Lord wants me to do, and I’m reaping the fruits of obedience already: the unexpected flower brought in from outdoors, the spontaneous kisses, and the joy of hearing Brian answer, ‘Jesus,’ when I ask him who made the flowers” (17).

“Dr. Howard Hendricks, a prominent Christian author, cites a questionnaire in which a group of young couples were asked to list their priorities. Most of the lists started with ‘a nice house’ and other material possessions, with relationships listed toward the bottom. Twenty years later, the same people were asked to rewrite their priorities, and almost all of them put relationships first – especially with their children.” (Linda Burnett)

“The primary place where children can learn character is in the home. Just as children cannot grow spiritually just by attending Sunday school one hour a week, neither will they learn duty, reliability, kindness, and sacrifice by spending only a short amount of time with mommy and daddy at the breakfast and dinner table” (23).

“Apparently, some people decide to have a baby for the same reasons that others buy a dog. They think that a baby is merely someone to play with. They do not anticipate the awesome and totally consuming responsibility a child creates. Perhaps these couples

should buy a dog instead – it would require less care, and if neglected, the magnitude of the consequences would be far less.” (24) -Paul Meier

(Quoting Carolyn Lewis, a feminist): “In our eagerness to exact equal treatment, we women seem to be forgetting who we are. We are not men. Men cannot bear children... Here is a tiny... ball of potential, the whole luminous future of the universe, waiting to be loved and shaped. There is nothing either inconsequential or demanding about choosing to make this child one’s life work. Nor is there anything shameful in wanting to make life comfortable and happy for another human, like a husband” (26).

“Staying home twenty-four hours a day, day after day, doing household chores and taking care of several young children would be, in my opinion, too demanding for most people ...” (30).

“But does that justify leaving your children in a daycare center and getting a fulltime job? Absolutely not. That would be illogical, especially after considering the permanent, emotional damage that full-time daycare can cause to children.” (Dr. Meier recommends that mothers give their children into others’ care several half-days per week instead.) (31)

Theodore Lidz, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine, states emphatically that “during no other period of life is the person so transformed both physically and developmentally as during infancy” (33).

“Lack of social nurturing will result in distortions of emotional development and stunting of intellectual growth.” (33)

“...Although adequate mother substitutes are satisfactory the first six months of life or so, on the social level the mother is very specifically needed by the infant starting about seven months of age” (37)

“By the time a child is old enough to go to school, most of his character structure has been established.” (38)

“Mothers who give love and warmth are essential.” (39)

“Even more so than during infancy, mother substitutes through the toddler years present a serious problem. Any prolonged separation from the mother during this stage can result in a loss of initiative or even the determination for survival.” (39)

“Experts agree on these two factors: (1) the most crucial time in the development of a person’s emotional and intellectual potential is in his first five years of life, and (2) the most vital ingredient during that most important time is the mother-child relationship.” (47)

#### **D. Ministries for single women**

Not all women get married. Rather than downgrading the single estate, as some cultures do, the New Testament exalts the role of single women. Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, Dorcas, Lydia; and a host of others demonstrated their love for God by serving Christ, his Apostles, and the church. Paul goes so far as to declare that the single estate is in some ways superior, for it frees a person to focus entirely upon pleasing God (1 Corinthians 7:32-34). Just as a woman's worth has nothing to do with her work, so it has no relation to her marital status.

Single women sometimes feel that they really have no opportunities for ministry, since the Bible tends to stress the role of the wife and excludes women from some public speaking and leadership positions in the church.

But Paul makes it clear that single people have more freedom for ministry than married people do. "The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:34).

What are some of the things a single woman may do? Here is a suggestive, not exhaustive, list:

- Prayer
- Worship
- Singing in the choir
- Accompaniment of a choir
- Visitation of women
- Evangelization of women
- Counseling women
- Teaching children
- Teaching women
- Secretarial work
- Cooking: for the church, for the ill and aged
- Sewing for others (Acts 9:39)
- Hospitality for Christians (Acts 15:15)
- Writing letters of encouragement and advice
- Nursing
- Midwifery
- Obstetrics and gynecology
- Medical research
- Childcare for children whose parents cannot or choose not to care for them
- Literature work, especially writing for the instruction and evangelization of women and children
- Ministering to other needs of Christians (Romans 16:2)
- And so on ...

### **E. A Woman and her Education**

One common objection to a having a wife stay home to work is that she will waste her hard-earned – and expensive – education. Furthermore, educational loans need to be repaid somehow.

We should remember that God wastes nothing. If, in obedience to his teaching, a wife works from her home, her education will surely be an asset in her ministries for the rest of her life.

Consider this very incomplete list of ways in which advanced education – even professional degrees – may be used:

- To help a wife understand her husband’s work and world.
- To help her advise him.
- To help her communicate with his colleagues.
- To help her assist him in his work. Dr. Carl Henry’s wife, Helga, read volumes of German theology and philosophy, saving him countless hours and equipping him to write his massive *God, Revelation, & Authority*. AP Religion Correspondent Dick Ostling’s wife, Joan, helped him write a ground-breaking book on Mormonism.
- To oversee the education of her children.
- To teach her children at home and to serve in a home-schooling cooperative.
- To help her understand other women and counsel them.
- To equip her to start a home-based business, such as consulting, legal work, medical research, writing, sales, advanced tutoring, etc.

### **F. Outdated Tradition? Unrealistic Ideal? Absolute Command?**

By this time, many are asking, “Are you saying that God commands all married women to stay home to work and not ever work outside the home?”

The simple answer to that question is, “No.” Each situation is unique, and each couple (or married woman whose husband is absent or incapacitated) must make the decision based on their understanding of God’s word.

Having said that, however, I should add that I believe the Bible teaches that (1) married women should make their home and family the focus of their lives (assuming, of course, that they worship and serve God first), and that (2) mothers with young children should do all they can to work at home, so as to be able to be with their children as much as possible.

Now for two specific applications of this principle:

### **G. Wives with no children or whose children have grown up**



Younger wives who have no children, and mothers whose children have grown up, may want to work outside the home, full-or part-time. Before they make such a decision, however, I believe they should consider the following:

- A wife is told to submit to her husband, not to other men (or women). When a woman works outside the home, she automatically falls under the authority of others. She will have two masters. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.”<sup>2</sup> He spoke these words with reference to the temptation to worship money, but the principle holds true. A wife torn between the demands of her job and the needs (or requests) of her husband will have tension in her life.

- Wives are to love their husbands first of all. A wife who must work several hours a day outside the home has less time and energy to give to her husband. She will have fewer hours to pray, read the Bible, clean the house, prepare meals, keep herself fit and healthy, broaden her mind through reading, or make friends with the wives of her husband’s colleagues. She may be so tired after work that she is not able to meet his sexual needs. She may not be able to invite his colleagues over for dinner. Her love for her husband may suffer from her work outside the home.

- Mothers with older children still have an important role to play in the lives of their offspring. Some people imagine that a mother’s duty has been done once a child goes off to elementary school. Nothing could be further from the truth! Throughout their school career, children need their mothers in a multitude of ways: To cook good meals for them, help them with schoolwork, talk to the teacher, listen to their problems, take them out to play, and provide a peaceful home to which to return after the challenges of a day at school.

This need increases when children enter the teenage years, and can even intensify when a young person goes off to college. One mother told me the other day that as soon as her sons left for college, she thought she would have extra time. Then her sons began to call her with all sorts of questions, and she spent hours on the phone with them each week. After marriage, children still need their mothers to give advice, help with the grandchildren, and support them in prayer. Truly, being a mother is a life-long, full-time occupation!

- Our parents continue to need us. The older we get, the more our parents require our assistance. Women with jobs outside the home may find it almost impossible to care for their older parents.

- Christian women are obligated to serve the church. They are to “wash the feet of the saints,” as Paul puts it. That means taking care of the physical needs of other believers. Women with outside jobs have less time and energy for this kind of ministry. One of the major problems of the modern church is the absence of women to do the work

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:24

they used to – visiting other women, counseling, assisting in church administration, etc. The busyness of working women today contributes greatly to the rising incidence of depression among women, who used to be able to share their troubles with a neighbor. Society is crying out for women with leisure to listen and to care.

- Mature Christian women have a duty to teach younger women how to live. This is a great opportunity for the older generation to transmit its wisdom to the next generation. Women with jobs – even part-time jobs – will have less time to instruct younger women in God’s word and its application to family life.

#### **H. Wives whose husband’s income cannot support the family**

Nowadays, with costs rising, countless women seek employment outside the home in order to generate enough income to meet the basic economic needs of the family. Is this wrong?

Every couple must make their own decision, but before a wife takes a job outside the home, I recommend that she and her husband consider the following:

- All that has been said above about a woman’s ministry to her family and to the church should give a woman pause before she immediately decides to earn income with a steady job outside the home.

- Jesus’ words about serving two masters deal specifically with this question. Do we seek to follow his clearly-revealed will first of all in life, or will monetary concerns dominate our decision-making?

- If we decide to do God’s will first and foremost, he will provide for us. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”<sup>3</sup>

- The primary burden of caring for the material needs of the family falls upon the husband and father. He is to “nourish and cherish” his wife, as Christ does the church.<sup>4</sup> As a father, he is to imitate God, who provides all that we need. “For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, “Give us this day our daily bread.”<sup>6</sup> Can we not believe that He will supply all our needs if we are seeking to serve Him?

- As we have said, a wife who stays at home can both save and earn more money than most people imagine. It takes some thought and disciplined work, but millions of women throughout the ages have made a significant economic contribution to the family finances without working outside the home at a “regular” job.

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:29

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:32

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 6:11

## I. What if grandparents can take care of the children?

Increasingly, grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren. Either because the wife and mother chooses to leave the home to work or because divorce or disability has removed the husband from the scene, the older generation are being called upon to take care of the youngest members of the family.

Although grandparents will certainly have more love for their grandchildren than anyone the parents could hire, either at home or in a day-care center, this arrangement still has many serious flaws. Among them:

- The Bible commands parents to educate and care for their children. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”<sup>7</sup> Paul’s words often quoted above apply this duty to mothers as well. For example: “If she has brought up children...”<sup>8</sup> In fact, the care of parents for their own children forms a foundation of ethical assumptions throughout the entire Bible; isolated texts such as the ones mentioned only highlight what is everywhere taken for granted. To give to grandparents a responsibility God has delegated to parents is to violate a fundamental facet of Biblical teaching on the family.

- Children are told to honor their parents and obey them. Although we can legitimately apply this principle of honoring one’s elders to include grandparents and others in the authority, the primary reference is clearly to parents. How shall a child honor his parents if they neglect him and fail to spend time with him?

Consider these other factors as well:

- Grandparents are notorious for spoiling their grandchildren. Many a parent has discovered that weeks of careful discipline can be undone by a weekend spent with grandparents. One woman I know, whose mother-in-law has taken care of her children for several years, now complains bitterly that they have not been properly disciplined. Whose fault is that?

- Even with the best of intentions, older people have less energy, and thus will be less likely to provide the strict discipline younger parents can give. Teaching and training a child is hard work! It demands time, attention, and sheer physical endurance.

- Grandparents will also have a different perspective from the child’s parents. This can be critical in today’s society, where rapid change makes older views obsolete (I don’t mean older ethical views, but some traditional ways of doing things that are not in keeping with the Bible.) A more serious problem arises when the parents are believers and the grandparents are not. How can Christian parents hand over the spiritual nurture of their offspring to people who don’t share their faith in God?

---

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 6:4; see also Colossians 3:21

<sup>8</sup> 1 Timothy 5:10; see also 5:14; Titus 2:5-6

For these and other reasons, having grandparents care for one's children is not usually a good idea.

## J. Evidence from Psychology

In the major compendium edited by Piper and Grudem, David Ayers presents evidence for the universality of sex-role differentiation, including care of children by mothers.<sup>9</sup> He cites various studies to show that the traditional view of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers results from scientifically-observed “neurological, hormonal, and other physical sex differences uncovered by biologists and physiologists. Stephen Goldberg... has used empirical studies on humans, mostly anthropological, to sustain and defend this position... He states, ‘...the sexual stereotypes now so derided turn out to be basically correct.’”<sup>10</sup> He cites the experience of the communes (*kibbutzim*) in modern Israel where, despite intense pressure from men, women soon began to turn from traditionally “masculine” occupations and ambitions to a greater emphasis upon home and family. In assessing the impact of feminism in law, the media, and education, he concludes, “the feminist revolution has made an incredible contribution to the soaring divorce rate.” The feminists’ call for independence and equality for women loosens the ties of interdependence found in the traditional model of the family; the woman with a career does not “need” a man. Thus, both man and wife tend to drift apart, at first only mentally, then often physically as well. On the other hand, wives who stay home to care for their children depend upon their husbands to provide for them; this dependence increases mutual love and brings out the natural protectiveness and urge to provide found in males.

In another chapter of the same book, Gregg Johnson refers to a “landmark review of psychological literature on the subject of gender differences... They found that the majority of studies revealed that males scored higher in levels of aggressiveness, dominance, self-confidence, and activity level. Females scored higher on verbal ability, compliance, nurturance, and empathy scales. Women tend to socialize more intimately with a few friends. Men are apt to form larger groups.”<sup>11</sup> These differences support the traditional roles of men working outside the home and women staying at home to care for children.

Johnson’s major focus, however, is on the evidence from biology. Referring to the psychology study cited above, he says, “My purpose ... is to demonstrate that these differences are not only real but likely to have their roots in our unique biology as males and females.... We are differently gifted as male and female not only in anatomy and physiology but also in behavior.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> David Ayer, “The Inevitability of Failure: The Assumptions and Implementations of Modern Feminism” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism.” Cross Way books. 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Piper and Grudem, 316.

<sup>11</sup> Gregg Johnson, “The Biological Basis for Gender-Specific Behavior,” in Piper and Grudem, 281. His footnote refers to E.E. Maccoby and C.N. Jacklin, The Psychology of Sex Differences (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp.349-355.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, 281.

After examining differences between men and women in non-nervous system physiology, the peripheral nervous system, the limbic system, cerebral organization, and stress management, Johnson concludes: “We have some fundamental physiology and neural differences that are present at birth and predispose us toward certain behaviors dependent on gender... It seems very significant that these different gifts correspond very well to the different roles given to men and women in Scripture (see other chapters in this book). These unique abilities, coupled with the traditional roles, have served mankind well and enables us to fulfill the commission to multiply and fill the earth very efficiently. It may well be that along with the fundamental division of labor in marriage referred to in Genesis 2-3, God gave the necessary gifts to uniquely accomplish those tasks.”<sup>13</sup>

Does this mean that “biology is destiny,” or that their physical make-up always compels women to restrict their activities to certain traditional roles? No. Men and women are not animals, driven by instinct. We can choose how to live. We are not determined by our biological structure.

On the other hand, biological differences do help explain why men and women act the way they do, and why all societies in human history except our own have encouraged women to focus their energies on their homes, husbands, and children. Stephen Clark has presented some of these differences for us in his massive *Man and Woman in Christ*.

Clark notes that these differences “must be stated descriptively rather than evaluatively.” That is, we must not think that either sex is superior or inferior to the other; they are equal in their distinctiveness. Further, “the differences between men and woman are not absolutes.” Each person is unique; no one fits a mold. Some men are more “feminine,” and some women are more “masculine.” Generalizations describe overall patterns, not any one individual. In addition, “both sexes possess every trait” to some degree; “many trait comparisons are not universal but hold only within the same social group or within the context of male-female relationships”; “the most significant differences... are in psychological structure and social behavior rather than in intelligence, skill, and ability”; “the differences between men and women should sometimes be controlled, not maximized.”

With those qualifications, Clark names some of the main differences between men and women, as follows.

#### *Integration/Differentiation*

“The female... is characterized by the unity and wholeness of the entire psycho-somatic personality and by the harmonious development of the faculties; the male... by the perfecting of individual capacities to obtain record achievements.” That is, women are more integrated than men. Mind, body, emotions, all affect each other. Thus, women react to situations more immediately and spontaneously, whereas men tend to distance themselves both from their emotions and their circumstances more. “Women tend to

---

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, 293.

perceive things more as an entire person.” “Men tend to respond with their personalities functioning in a more compartmentalized fashion.” The mental and physical will be more prominent than the emotional in a man’s reactions.

Intellectually, men and women work differently. Women tend to resort to intuition, whereas men tend to analyze, disassemble, classify, and then synthesize. Especially in social situations, a woman will relate all the data to herself, and the man will tend to distance himself from the data.

Women prefer the living, the concrete, the particular, rather than an impersonal object, an abstract principle, a general truth. Women react more personally, men with more abstraction and a sensitivity to structure. To know something, women tend to draw near to it; a man will tend to distance himself from what he wants to know. A woman tends to identify with what she wants to know; a man, to distance himself from it (or him). In other words, women tend to be more subjective, men more objective, especially when responding to social situations.

Bodily experience also differs between men and women. Women tend to be much more conscious of their bodies than men. “Sexuality is more diffused in time and space for the woman... and is thus more fully a part of her personality... A man tends to consider sexual activity as another element in his life...” Men tend to approach a sexual relationship as a pleasurable activity which they pursue regardless of the identity of their partner... Most women find it more difficult to participate in a sexual relationship without simultaneously developing an emotional attachment to their sexual partner.

#### *Goal Orientation / Personal Need Orientation*

The second major difference between men and women shows up in social behavior: “Male social behavior is more goal oriented; and female social behavior is oriented more toward helping or caring for personal needs... Men are more purposeful... more inclined to formulate and pursue long-range goals, more invested in accomplishing a particular set of prescribed ends... Women tend to be more concerned with immediate needs and with the way people relate to one another.”

One writer sums up this difference in the words “work” and “care.” Men work towards goals; women seek to care for people and to nurture relationships. Men aim for achievement, women for nurture of people, especially their own children. In keeping with their differences noted above, men tend to relate to social situations in terms of aims to meet or problems to solve; women, in terms of the totality of the social situation, in terms of personal care rather than particular problems.

Of course, men can be trained to care and women to set long-range goals, but the difference noted above relates to what is most natural for each sex. Neither approach is “better” than the other; both are needed in most social situations, although some situations require more “male” goal orientation and others require “female” caring orientation.

As we might expect, men and women differ also in the two key areas of aggression and nurturance. When their goals are blocked, men become very frustrated; they may express their frustration by becoming aggressive. At the least, being achievement oriented, men will be more competitive than women. When the stakes are high, competition may turn to combat. On the other hand, women, caring more to meet personal needs, will be more nurturing of others than men.

Men and women exhibit emotional differences, too. Women are generally more anxious and fearful than men, especially in the face of physical danger or social rejection. Men, on the other hand, become nervous when they perceive threats to their “manhood,” such as “public humiliation, failure, and appearing cowardly.”

Intellectually, men and women also differ. Women surpass men in verbal skills, but men have greater visual-spatial ability.

Causes for these differences may be found in various places, including the greater physical strength of men and the impact of hormonal changes upon the emotions of women, making them anxious, irritable, or depressed when there is a low level of estrogen and progesterone in their bodies. The division of the brain into left and right sides seems to have consequences: Men are more “right” brained, and thus better at spatial-visual functions; women, more “left” brained, and thus verbally superior.

### **K. Preparing for Disability, Death, Divorce**

Perhaps even more than men, women crave security. The thought of relying solely upon a man for their financial provision fills many women’s hearts with fear. “What happens if he is disabled, or dies, or divorces me?” they ask. Let’s look at these three threats in turn.

But first, we should admit that the wise person foresees evil and takes precautions. If a woman prepares herself by acquiring a suitable education and some marketable skill, she will be able to generate income by working when the time comes. Equipping herself in this way makes good sense. In addition to that basic preparation, there are other steps to take:

*Disability* happens, but rarely. How many men do you know have been disabled as adults? Not many. Nevertheless, one should prepare for such things. One way is to buy disability insurance. You have to be careful to get a policy that provides enough income and covers all sorts of partial as well as total disabilities. Mortgage insurance can also help cover such needs. Such policies are not too expensive.

If you have been frugal and prudent, have avoided debt, have saved for future expenses (such as college), then your financial burden will be much less than those who have spent all their money and have nothing saved up. Most financial advisors strongly urge families to have at least three months’ of salary kept in an emergency fund. Such a cache would make the loss of the husband’s income less traumatic at the beginning.

*Death* comes to us all sooner or later. Men tend to die earlier than women. That is why retirement centers have so few male residents. A woman must prepare to spend several years as a widow. Her husband must also make plans for the welfare of his family after he dies. Life insurance is your first line of defense. At the time of this writing, you can purchase \$500,000 worth of term life insurance for less than \$50 per month. That would provide ten years of \$50,000 income a year, not counting interest if the death benefit was wisely invested. That's a lot of money!

Rather than relying entirely on life insurance, however, think about why men tend to die sooner than women. Heart disease and prostate cancer. Bad habits such as smoking; heavy drinking; too little exercise; and above all, eating too much of the wrong foods, bring on death years sooner than necessary. A man who loves his family will take care of his health. But a wife who loves her husband – and herself and her children! – can play a vital role. If she provides him with nutritious food, freshly cooked each day, he will avoid many illnesses. Restaurant or prepared foods contain ingredients often linked to heart disease and cancer. A woman who manages her household well, spending enough time training the children and listening to them and being careful to manage her budget well, can greatly reduce the stress in her man's life and thus prolong his years. Frequent and satisfying sexual intercourse also promotes health. Women who take care of their appearance and otherwise try to keep their original attractiveness will be more likely to meet their husband's sexual needs. If she is exhausted from work, she will have little energy; hours away from home at work will leave her little time for her home or family.

*Divorce* stalks the land like a hungry predator, slaying millions of marriages each decade. No woman can keep her husband from leaving her (although she can keep herself from leaving him!), but every woman can take reasonable precautions. There is no doubt that divorces have multiplied since women began entering the workforce in large numbers. The reasons are evident: More women in the workplace provide more temptations for adultery. Furthermore, women tend to take more pains to be attractive to those outside the home than to their husbands.

If a man comes home after hours spent with cheerful, charming, and well-groomed women, only to be met by a sloppy, slovenly, and grouchy woman; if he leaves a bright, well-kept office for a disordered home – can he be faulted for noticing the contrast? Should we be surprised that men fall for their secretaries, assistants, and colleagues? If he arrives home hungry and tired, only to be served something from a fast-food restaurant or retrieved minutes before from the freezer or even told he must get the food on the table himself, should we wonder at his annoyance and disappointment? All over the world, men rarely offer to do housework. When they do, they rarely enjoy it. Most men think that cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks belong to women. They resent having to perform them, even when they admit that a woman who works all day deserves her husband's help at home. That is why we often hear working wives complaining that their husbands don't help with the housework. Men just don't like that kind of work, especially when it is demanded of them.



There are exceptions, of course. Some men are good cooks and enjoying preparing meals. Almost all men are happy to help their wives in cases of illness or fatigue or pregnancy. But when a wife seems to shirk her duties at home and expects her husband to spend a lot of time in the kitchen, most men resist. If they were allowed to express their true feelings, they might say that being treated like a wife makes them feel less like a man. We may decry that. We may say it reflects male laziness or pride. But we must face this stubborn fact.

What does this have to do with divorce? If a man returns to a a good meal served in pleasant surroundings by a wife who is not tired out by her job; if he can share his triumphs and trials and work and hear his woman tell about her day at home with the kids – then he will be more likely to want to come home. He will treasure his wife, his children, his family life. He will be able to relax at home. He will have more energy for his wife and children. He will feel like a man. He will be more likely to act like one, too.

So, if you want to reduce the probability of divorce, then concentrate upon your home and family. Make *that* your career. Who knows? Maybe your husband remain faithful to you until death parts you!

Finally, we should remember that, though we take precautions against future disasters, our hope is only in God. “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD.”<sup>14</sup> We trust in Him, not ourselves. Jesus told us to pray for our daily bread. He has assured us that if we seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, all our material needs will be amply met.<sup>15</sup> We do what He commands, and He will do what He has promised. We walk by faith, not by sight.<sup>16</sup> We don’t know what the future holds, but we do know Him who holds the future. We don’t need to worry about anything. We can cast all our cares on Him, because He cares for us.<sup>17</sup>

#### **L. A few words to men**

Men – especially fathers and husbands – we need to love and cherish our women! God has placed them in our midst as precious jewels. If we look to their physical and emotional needs, they will repay us with love and devotion far more than we deserve. If we want to enjoy these lovely creatures, created in God’s image as we are for our help and companionship, then we must do our part. Whole books address the challenges of marriage and our duties as husbands. I commend such books to you. For now, let me just share a few guidelines out of many more that could be mentioned:

- Learn to love God. Put Him first in your life. Spend time in His Word and in prayer each day. You have enough time for the television, sports, video games, and professional advancement – you have enough time for God! There’s no excuse for neglecting your privilege of communion with your Maker and Savior each day. He will

---

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 21:31

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7

<sup>17</sup> 1 Peter 5:7

guide you, encourage you, strengthen you, and fill you with the love you need for your wife.

- Look before you leap! Marry wisely. Do you want a wife who will provide you with loving companionship and care for your children while managing the household? Then don't ask a woman to marry you unless she shares your goals for her life. If she desires to pursue her non-domestic career, let her do so – without you. Give her the choice. Don't expect her to excel at two full-time jobs at once. She simply can't do it, and guess who will suffer?

- If you marry a woman who expects to work after marriage, and especially after children come, then don't complain when you have to eat restaurant food or do the dishes! It was your choice. Plan to spend hours on household chores without grumbling. Forget about a relaxed evening at home with your sweetheart. Don't plan on coming home to happy, well-behaved children; their hired caregivers just can't do as well as a mother could. Expect your preschool aged children to get sick often; your primary school aged children to have trouble at school; your teenagers to feel distant from their parents. Put money in your budget for child care; fashionable clothes; transportation, costly meals; medical bills; and possibly counseling fees. And do it with a smile. You made the decision.

- If, on the other hand, you find a woman who is “more precious than rubies,” treat her as a priceless gem! Compliment her. Thank her. Don't – ever! – complain about the food. Notice the little things she has done around the house. Ask her how her day went before you tell her about your work. Give her time to talk about how she feels. Take her out on a date often. Turn off the TV, close your magazine, put away the computer game, and spend time with your bride. Tell her often that you love her. It won't be hard!

- By all means, take the lead in bringing up your children. The Bible teaches that our heavenly Father cares for His children, loves His children, listens to them, loves to spend time with them, teaches them, guides them, protects them, and provides for them. Fathers are primarily responsible for teaching their children the truth of God.<sup>18</sup> Your wife will spend more time with the kids when they are young, but you should be by her side with them whenever possible. Offer to help her with them. You will be glad you did. They will know from the beginning that their father loves them, and your wife will deeply appreciate your participation in the wonderful privilege and responsibility of caring for the young lives God has given us. I have heard many men say that they regret not having spent enough time with their children while they were still young; I have never heard a man say he regretted spending too much time with them!

- Take the lead in family worship. Read the Bible aloud to your family each day and lead them in prayer. Show them what a God-fearing man looks like. Display faith, hope, and love in their presence. That will give them security and peace in a world of turmoil.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 6:1

- The house is your responsibility. Make sure you take good care of it. You will delegate most household duties to your wife – and later to your children – but you should take an active care in the upkeep and management of your home. Don't wait for your wife to beg you or nag you.
  
- Encourage your wife to develop her intellect. Regardless of how much formal education she has had, make it easy for her to learn more. Buy books, magazine subscriptions, a good computer and encourage her to make use of them. Talk about your work with her, assuming that she is interested. Tell her about interpersonal relationships (without gossiping or burdening her) and ask her for her advice. Seek her out as a conversation partner. But be sure to listen to her as well. Learn new things from her, especially what she is discovering about God and his Word.
  
- Make sure your wife has time with other women. When the children are young, help her to arrange a child-care agreement with other mothers, or find babysitters for her, so she can go out by herself to shop or to attend a meeting several times a week. It's not easy for a woman to be home with little children all day. Lighten the load for her as much as possible.
  
- Fathers, train your children to honor their mother. Allow no rebellion or disrespect. Let them know often how much you appreciate her staying at home to care for you and for them. They will get the message that their mother is special – and she is!

**For further reading:**

- Adams, Jay E., *Christian Living in the Home*, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972.
- Burkett, Larry, *Women Leaving the Workplace: How to Make the Transition from Work to Home*, Moody 1995.
- Campbell, Ross, *How to Really Love Your Child*, Victor Books, 1978.
- Christenson, Larry, *The Christian Family*, Bethany Fellowship, 1970.
- Clark, Stephen B., *Man and Woman in Christ*, Servant Books, 1980.\*
- Elliot, Elisabeth, *Let Me Be A Woman*, Tyndale House, 1976.
- , *The Shaping of a Christian Family*, Thomas Nelson, 1992.
- , *Love Has A Price Tag*, Christian Herald Books, 1979.
- Fleming, Jean, *A Mother's Heart*, Navpress, 1982.
- Hurley, J.B., *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, Zondervan, 1981.\*\*
- Lucas, J.R., *The Parenting of Champions*, Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1989.
- Mac Arthurs, John, *Different By Design*
- Meier, Paul D., *Christian Child-Rearing and Personality Development*, Baker, 1977.
- Meier, Paul D., and Burnett, Linda, *The Unwanted Generation*, (Later published as *A Mother's Choice*) Baker, 1980.
- Meier, Paul, and Meier, Richard, *Family Foundations*, Baker, 1981.
- Moore, Raymond, and Moore, Dorothy, *Home Grown Kids*, Word Books, 1981.
- Murray, Andrew, *How to Raise your Children for Christ*, Bethany Fellowship, 1975.
- Narramore, Bruce, *Parenting with Love and Limits*, Zondervan, 1979.
- Patterson, Dorothy, *Where's Mom?: The High Calling of Wife and Mother in Biblical Perspective*, CBMW.
- Piper, John, and Grudem, Wayne, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Crossway Books, 1991.\*

Schaeffer, Edith, *What Is A Family?*, Revell, 1975.

Schock, Bernie, *A Radical Plan for Restoring the Home*, Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1989.

Strauch, Alexander, *Men and Women: Equal Yet Different*, Lewis and Roth, 1999.

Swenson, Richard, *Margin*, Navpress, 1992.

Tripp, Tedd, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Shepherd Press, 1995.

\* Massive and comprehensive examinations of the entire subject. Highly recommended.

\*\* While I do not always agree with the author's conclusions, I still recommend this book as a useful reference work.