

1 MAKING THE CHOICE TO STAY HOME

Our society is changing. More and more women are leaving the workplace to be stay-at-home moms so they can be more active in their children's lives. They want to be there for first smiles and first steps, and they want to kiss away the boo-boos and wipe away the tears.

Today's moms are passionate women who want both careers and families without having to give up precious time with their children. They're searching for ways to have it all, and they're finding that it's possible to work from home and at the same time balance a family.

It may sound like a dream, but it's not. It does start with a dream, though.

A few fortunate women fall into a job or business that allows them to work at home, but it isn't that easy for most women. To find a way to stay at home while still contributing to their family financially is something that many women long for but few know how to achieve. We hope to make it easier for you.

Being Content at Home

You might have expected us to immediately launch into a chapter about how wonderful life can be if you work at home. However, with the authors having worked from home many years, we realized that you first need to be content in your home life to make it work. The focus of your mind is where true happiness lies. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).

Before beginning your search for a career that will allow you to work from home, it's important to remember that God has put you where you are for a reason. It may be for a season of your life, or it could possibly be long-term. Either way, trust that God will provide what's best for you, and that may look a little different than what you think is best.

Being a mom and working outside the home can be incredibly challenging. Coordinating schedules, running kids to and fro, and being so tired by evening that you don't have the energy to enjoy your kids take their toll. However, being a work-at-home mom every day, all day, presents its own unique challenges. It can become monotonous, even tedious. The kids, the house, the responsibilities—the list goes on and on. In either case, it can feel downright impossible to have an attitude of gratitude. The road can be hard, but in the end, your life will be less stressful and more satisfying if you can overcome discontentment. Following are some ideas for building contentment.

Be Grateful

One of the hardest attitudes to achieve is that of gratefulness. It's easy to get caught up in the negatives that happen each day. However, it's important to be grateful for each and every blessing that God gives.

Make a list of things in your life that you're grateful for. You can start your list with your family and the opportunity to work from home, and continue from there. Take the time to thank God for each of the things on your list. As you begin to develop a grateful attitude, you'll begin to notice more and more things each day you can add to your list.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that (*1 Timothy 6:6-8*).

Give Back

Changing your attitude is the first step to finding contentment. Reaching out and helping others is a proven way to change your attitude. When you extend help and graciousness to others, it can't help but benefit you as well.

Find someone who needs a friend, and make a conscious effort to reach out to him or her every week or every month. Or find a ministry that you admire, and get involved. You'll be surprised what investing something of yourself in others will do for your attitude. If you're running a business from home, you may be able to bless others with a product they can't afford or a special discount that will brighten their day. Maybe you can mentor someone. Be careful, though, that you don't get so involved in helping others that you neglect your own business.

Choose to Accept Your Situation

A key component of contentment is *acceptance*. Acceptance doesn't mean you don't strive to better your life. It simply means that you make peace with where you are in life at this time.

There will always be more to attain—more money, more prestige. If you spend your life focused on what you don't have or what you haven't attained in life, you'll be sad indeed. Celebrate each and every success, no matter how big or how small.

Examine your life and see all that is good in it. Each good thing is a gift from God. Accept that He is with you at this point in time. He'll be with you in every success and every setback. Nothing you do will make Him love you more, and there's nothing you can do that will make Him love you less.

We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (*Ephesians 2:10*).

Focus on Christ

This may sound like a cliché, but it's easy to allow focus to move from the Lord to self. When moms work at home, the needs of family, business, and self can sometimes be all-consuming, leaving little time to meet spiritual needs. But focusing on your relationship with the Lord is what should come first. If your relationship with Christ is weak, all other relationships will be affected.

Here are practices that will help keep you focused on Him:

1. Read your Bible every day. Make the commitment to read at least one verse every day. The Book of Proverbs is a good place to start, or start with verses from the Gospel of John for a close look at the life of Christ. As you progress to reading more each day, consider purchasing a Bible that will guide you through reading the whole Bible in a year. There are also versions available that will lead you through the Bible in ninety days.

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful (*Joshua 1:8*).

2. Cultivate an active prayer life. You can pray anytime and anywhere—when you're driving, putting on your

makeup, cooking, even as you drift off to sleep at night. Take advantage of these precious moments to spend them with your Heavenly Father.

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (*1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*).

3. Meditate on the Word of God. When you find a verse or verses that have deep meaning for you, allow your mind to dwell on them, and let them soak into your spirit. A good starting point might be Romans 8:38-39—"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Make note of the verses you've chosen, and jot down thoughts or ideas that they bring to mind. Keep your mind focused on Him, and be in prayer that He will open your eyes to what He would have you learn from the verses.

4. Wait. Contentment will not be attained overnight. Feelings of discontentment will push their way in. When they do, look through your life to bring to mind the ways God has changed you, the things He's done to bring you closer to an attitude of contentment. Contentment comes in His timing, so allow Him the time to work in your life.

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him (*Psalms 37:7*).

If the temptation to wallow in discontentment continues to present itself, find someone who will hold you accountable—someone you can trust to be kind but firm who will speak the truth to you lovingly.

When you're feeling dissatisfied or frustrated, give your accountability partner a call, and be honest about your feelings. Every mom gets frustrated; you're certainly not alone. When you find someone you can talk with honestly, it will be an excellent help in overcoming negative thoughts and feelings. Accountability partners know each other on a very real and honest level and still accept and love each other. This allows both of you the opportunity to be supported as well as supportive.

Contentment may seem elusive, but with prayerful deliberation it can be achieved and will bring you more joy and peace than you can imagine. Start working toward an attitude of contentment today.

When your mind and heart are in a good place, it's time to begin thinking about the choices that are available to you. *Can* you work from home? *Should* you work at home? And *how* in the world do you begin your search for success?

Setting Priorities in Business and at Home

Working from home, particularly if you're running your own business, is a time-consuming endeavor—especially for moms. You're responsible not only for the success of the business but for your family as well. You must be self-reliant, self-motivated, and self-disciplined in order to attain success in both areas.

When you work at home, it's easy to let phone calls, e-mail, and paperwork keep you tied down and cause you to feel you don't have time to take a break or choose to spend top-quality time with your family. Maybe you've noticed that you spend more time in front of your computer or on the phone than you expected to when you made the decision to work at home. Maybe you see your kids acting up and trying to get your attention. Maybe the work-at-home dream you envisioned isn't happening.

You started out with noble intentions, but now the excitement of success in your business has caused you to lose sight of the primary reason you chose this path. It happens to many of us who work at home, so don't worry. Help is on the way.

She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard (*Proverbs 31:16*).

Here are five tips for setting priorities in your life and business:

First, be honest. You probably didn't start your work-at-home career to climb the corporate ladder. Spend some time in prayer, and ask the Lord to show you the things you need to change.

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions about how you've been handling the time commitment of owning a business.

- Are you spending too much time on the phone with clients?
- Do you think about business to the point that you're distracted when you're doing family activities?

- Is television getting more top-quality time with your children than you are?
- Do you snap at your children because of the stresses of your business?

Second, make a list. Sit down and write out a list of things you see that you would like to change. This can be a list of tasks you can do differently, such as limiting the time you spend on your business or ways you can reduce stress so you can deal kindly with your family.

Third, log your time. Buy a notebook or create a spreadsheet to log the time you spend on business. Make a column for each day across the top and a row of half-hour increments down the side. Time yourself every time you sit down at your desk by writing “in” in the box that corresponds to the time and day. Every time you leave your desk or complete a task, write “out” in the appropriate box.

At the end of the week, total up the hours you’ve spent each day on business tasks. Take special note of how much time you spend on e-mail and things that aren’t billable. Are you surprised, or is it about where you thought it would be? This can be a real eye-opener and show you in black and white if your priorities have gotten off track.

Fourth, take a break. If you’re in shock after examining your time log, it’s time to take a break. If you normally work during the weekend, make it a point to take this weekend off. Shut down your e-mail, turn off the ringer on your business phone, and shut the door to your office.

Plan ahead and schedule your time. Prioritize your workload, and have the work that will require the most effort and

concentration scheduled for your peak time. Try not to get sidetracked; stay on task and focus on what you need to do. For example, you'll be amazed by how much more you can accomplish by changing the way you handle e-mail. If you answer it only at scheduled times, you'll find you have more time to do the tasks at hand.

Reevaluate the ways you're spending your time. Try to plan when you can work on your business without losing time with your children. If your children are in school, make it a point to stop working when they get home. If your children are still small, try to plan your time accordingly. Perhaps a babysitter for several hours or days a week is necessary. Another possibility would be to have a grandparent or neighbor watch them once or twice a week to allow you time to work without interruptions.

Fifth, plan an activity. Now that you're ready to make a change in your routine, why not plan an activity once a week? This can be an outing with your children or something simple, like setting aside time to make cookies together. You'll notice that when you plan for these times, they actually happen.

If possible, find another work-at-home mom, and hold one another accountable to keep to your new schedules. Make a weekly play date for your children to spend time together. You and your friend can talk business if necessary, or you may decide to make it a "no business talk allowed" time.

Remember that the years you can work at home and have time with your children are a gift; your business is a gift also. How that will work for you and your family will take a little time to determine and will be different for each family. Take

the time to find what works for you, and set your schedule accordingly. Reevaluate your priorities every few months to make sure that you're making the best use of your time. The rewards will be well worth it.

Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him (*Psalms 127:3*).