

Traps We Can Fall Into

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Day One

The concept of achieving balance between work and personal life has captivated our culture because it seems like everyone is struggling to achieve it. Do you find yourself struggling to balance all life holds? I think it's fair to say that most women in the Western world feel like there's just not enough time in the day. Why is that? Part of the problem is that untrue beliefs have crept in and added unfair burdens. Let's consider the mindsets that can trap us as women into feeling like we cannot manage the life God has called us to.

The most common trap is the belief that **you can have it all**. You know the lie—it expects you as a woman can have a successful full-time career, be a devoted wife and mom, keep an immaculate home, cook only the healthiest family meals, serve regularly in church, keep workout routines, always look fresh and put together, and have that calm and sweet demeanor like it's all no big deal. I'm tired just thinking about that list, but many of us feel the weight of these expectations, and I'm here to tell you the truth.

Here it is: **You cannot have it all, sister! You were never meant to. God created you and me as finite human beings with a limited time each day, with physical needs for rest and sleep and food, with a limited emotional, mental, and relational capacity.** And you know what? Those limitations are not bad! They are God-ordained.

Hear this truth and let it be a balm to your heart—God does not call or expect you to do it all! Isn't that good news? Instead, Scripture counsels you and me to continually be discerning, to continually come to the Lord and seek out his plan and his priorities.

Where is God calling you to invest your time and energy? As you wrestle with this question, Psalm 25 provides a wonderful posture in which to come in prayer. Verse 1 says: *To you, oh Lord I lift up my soul.* The Lord is the one we ultimately answer to. Would you lift up your soul to the Lord in order to discern where he is calling you to use your time and energy and where he is not? Verses 4-5 provide a wonderful prayer as a guide. It says: *Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.* In the midst of hectic days and crazy schedules, may you and I center our hearts on God our Savior, seek his plan, and hope in him alone.

Day Two

What is your definition of a good day? We are considering traps we can fall into regarding work and life. One of the traps I've noticed is that I believed a successful day was dependent on how productive I had been. Do you love check lists? I do! There is something so satisfying about crossing an item off a list. It brings a sense of accomplishment. Conversely, seeing a list of uncrossed items at the end of the day can feel defeating, like the day was wasted. I especially felt this when I had my first child. Try as I might, every task I started was interrupted. My to-do list was never finished, and the type of work I was mostly doing (nursing, changing diapers, washing clothes and dishes, and trying to console my crying

baby) did not have a ring of importance or success. I longed for the productivity and success my career offered.

A few years ago, a speaker came to my church and asked, “What is your definition of a good day?” How would you answer that? Answers that came to my mind were things like, “Nothing interferes with my plans. Everyone gets along and there is no conflict. It is easy and enjoyable. And of course, everything on my to-do list gets done.” But then he asked, “How would God define a good day for you?” Now that is a very different question. Most likely it would be a day where there is recognition of my need for him, a day filled with repentance and humility. A day where his plan for me (even though it often interrupts my plan) is accomplished. To be honest, those are often hard days, the ones I would choose to skip.

Micah 6:8 describes succinctly what the Lord desires. It says: *He has showed you oh man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* This is in a sense the Lord’s to-do list for you. It is harder to check off because it is on-going, but in these he delights.

The next time you feel yourself frantically working to accomplish the tasks you have set for the day or feeling defeated when you don’t, consider what the Lord has actually called you to. The world will tell you, “You are only as valuable as what you produce.” But your value is rooted first and foremost in the blood Jesus spilled on your behalf. As you seek the Lord’s kingdom and embrace his call, you will find a much truer success than anything this world offers.

Day Three

Is it possible to lead a full life and consistently rest? I think many women agree they need rest and long for it, but it seems elusive like an unattainable dream. There have been times when I have sacrificed to take time away for self-care only to come back more anxious and stressed by the time lost. Does rest come from a spa day or vacation? What is rest and how do we get it?

Self-help books and podcasts tend to focus on physical and mental rest strategies that give our finite bodies time to slow down. These are good things, but there is a deeper, more satisfying rest we are made for which only comes through Jesus.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus gives a precious invitation. He says: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* Are you weary? Jesus has a special word for you. He says, “Come to me.” **The promise of rest is embedded in coming to him.** I love how Augustine said, “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”¹ But what does coming to Jesus for rest actually look like? It means prioritizing relationship—carving out time to spend with Jesus in his Word and prayer.

But there is another important facet. Verse 29 says, “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.*” A yoke is a frame fitted over an animal or person to direct their work. Let me just tell you, there are a lot of yokes in this world. I like to think I’m a free individual who makes my own decisions, but when I honestly consider it, I see a yoke of perfectionism, of seeking to please others and wanting to live up to others’ expectations, of needing to fix all the problems around me. What yoke are you under that guides how you live and work?

Every yoke we wear is a harsh taskmaster—except one. Jesus invites us to unburden ourselves of every other yoke and instead take his, which he promises in verse 30 is easy and the burden is light. What yoke do you need to replace today? Come to Jesus and live under his authority and guidance for your life. May we find our true rest only in him.

¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book I, chap. 1.

Day Four

A proverb that always causes me to pause when I read it is Proverbs 14:1: *The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down.* For any woman who is married, has children, and is working, there is a constant pull for how to use the minutes of the day. A trap in thinking I can fall into is that my family really doesn't need me that much. After all, my husband is a competent adult and my children are getting older and more independent. Surely it is okay to focus more of my attention on other things than my household, right?

While there may be seasons where a working wife and mom is needed less in the home, Proverbs 14:1 cautions us that the wise woman *builds* her house. This is a present continuous verb. It doesn't say "built" in the past and is now done or "will build" again in the future, but it paints a picture of a woman consistently looking to the needs of her family and continuing to build her home. Building is constructive and productive. This woman is attentive to her family's needs and works to meet them.

Now contrast this with the foolish woman. With her own hands, she tears down her house. Isn't that sobering? The Bible cautions you and me that if we are not careful, we can actually tear apart our homes and families. Certainly, active sin can tear down a house, but so can neglect. This could come through laziness, but it can also come through pursuing other meaningful work to the point where the family is neglected. I have been guilty of this. There have been times when needs from extended family or ministry commitments have absorbed so much energy that I have very little left for my family. Here is the truth: **your family needs to be a higher priority than your job. After your relationship with the Lord, your family should be offered your best attention, energy, and devotion.**

If this is convicting to you, take time to consider what a focus on building your home could look like. Maybe you initiate a walk around the block with your husband after dinner to check in on how he is doing. Maybe you schedule 30 minutes during the week with each child to enter their world and do something they like. Maybe you are more intentional during mealtimes to ask good questions or read Scripture together. In this season of life, how can you actively build your home? May the grace of the Lord sustain us as we continue to pour ourselves out for the good of our families.

Day Five

I want to explore the thought that "boundaries are bad." Now, I don't mean the boundaries that we choose for ourselves—I like those boundaries because I am in control of them! But what about boundaries in life that I'm not in control of, that I don't choose? Maybe being a caregiver for an aging parent limits your time and resources. Maybe a physical condition keeps you from certain types of activities. Financial need might require you to work more and limit your ability to serve in an area of interest. These "boundaries" often derail the plan we had set and can be disappointing.

But Psalm 16:5-6 provides encouragement. It says, *Lord, you have assigned to me my portion and my cup, you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

So, this psalmist paints a picture of the Lord giving him a God-ordained lot. Picture a yard with a fence around it. Just like a plot of land is portioned out and the boundaries of it are marked, the Lord in his wisdom has given you and me a lot. Psalm 16 says this lot is secure. It has set boundaries that are good, the psalmist even goes so far to use the word "pleasant," and that this set amount leads to a delightful inheritance.

God in his perfect and loving wisdom has placed certain limits in your life for your good. These boundaries are not meant to harm you but to serve as guardrails to lead you to the specific work God has for you at this time. That doesn't mean I just resign myself to the hard things of life and never seek change. Of course not, but it does mean that I can humbly, and even joyfully, accept

what God allows in my life at this season because I know it has been filtered through the hands of my Father who loves me.

What unique and specific boundaries has the Father allowed in your life? Take a good look at your lot and thank God for it. For now, it is the means to guide your time, energy, and talents toward what the Lord desires you to pursue.