



COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library
12330 Conway Road
Saint Louis, MO 63141

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

This document is distributed by Covenant Theological Seminary under agreement with the author, who retains the copyright. Permission to further reproduce or distribute this document is not provided, except as permitted under fair use or other statutory exception.

The views presented in this document are solely the author's.

Flourishing in Working Motherhood:
Living Fully in a Culture of Exhaustion and Intensive Mothering

By
C. JoAnna Schlecht

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Saint Louis, Missouri

2026

Flourishing in Working Motherhood:
Living Fully in a Culture of Exhaustion and Intensive Mothering

By
C. JoAnna Schlecht

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry.

Graduation Date May 15, 2026

Dr. Suzanne Bates
Faculty Advisor

Dr. Meryl Herr
Second Reader

Dr. Joel Hathaway
Director of DMin Program

Abstract

Everyone is meant to feel fully alive, and although much works against American mothers in this regard, burnout is not inevitable; with the right support and practices, flourishing is possible. The purpose of this study is to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish despite the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles. The majority of American mothers today work full-time, engage in intensive mothering, and perform a “second shift” at home to manage domestic responsibilities and family needs. Within this tension, many women experience exhaustion and burnout that hinders their ability to live as whole persons made in the image of God. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the descriptive research of deeply spiritual working mothers and find out exactly how they can be a part of the community of the well-rested who are living full and flourishing lives.

This study employed a qualitative design using semi-structured interviews with eight professional, Christian mothers, all of whom are married and represent various denominations. The interviews sought to address three research questions: (1) How do professional working mothers describe the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles? (2) How do they navigate these challenges? and (3) In what ways, not currently experienced, do they desire to flourish while managing maternal stress in their dual roles?

The literature review examined three key areas to frame this exploration: the history of motherhood in America, biblical rhythms of work and rest, and approaches to burnout prevention.

This study concluded that participants demonstrated resiliency by establishing boundaries, pursuing rest, and cultivating support. It recommends that working mothers

implement the creative practice of mothering sabbaticals following seasons of high stress - in order to combat exhaustion and be restored. Other recommendations include creating “unicorn space” for the development of hobbies and passion projects, nurturing deeply supportive female friendships, caring for the physical body as a recognition of human limitations, insisting their partner participate equally in the care of the household and childcare, and pursuing time of solitude and silence with God.

To my bright-eyed children. May your hearts know joy and wonder, and your lives flourish in God's love forever. And to my dear husband, thank you for working towards both our flourishing as we build this beautiful life together.

Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Abbreviations	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Maternal Overwhelm	4
Made to Flourish.....	11
Conclusion	12
Purpose Statement.....	14
Research Questions.....	14
Significance of the Study	15
Definition of Terms.....	16
Chapter 2 Literature Review	22
Motherhood in the United States	22
Biblical Theology and Orthopraxy of Work and Rest.....	53
Psychology and Counseling on Preventing Burnout	90
Summary of Literature Review.....	118
Chapter 3 Methodology.....	120
Design of the Study.....	120
Participant Sample Selection	122
Data Collection	126
Data Analysis	129
Researcher Position.....	131
Chapter 4 Findings	133

Introductions to Participants and Context.....	133
Challenges of Maternal Stress Withing Two Distinct Roles	135
Navigating Maternal Stress.....	148
Future Flourishing.....	191
Summary of Findings.....	199
Chapter 5 Discussion and Recommendations	201
Discussion of Findings.....	203
Recommendations for Practice	219
Recommendations for Further Research.....	242
Appendix.....	244
Bibliography	249

Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Abbreviations

AAUW	American Association of University Women
ACNA	Anglican Church of North America
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CNBC	Consumer News and Business Channel
ESV	English Standard Version
FLMA	Family and Medical Leave Act
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ICD	International Classification of Diseases
I/O	Industrial/Organizational (Psychology)
JD	Juris Doctorate
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
MBI	Mindfulness Based Interventions
NFC	Near Field Communication
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
RQ	Research Question
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain
US	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1

Introduction

Women have always worked – seen or unseen – and they always will. Work has been woven into their lives since the beginning of time and passed down from generation to generation. Katelyn Beaty, author and former managing editor of *Christianity Today*, observes that women have long carried the weight of responsibility both within the home and beyond it.¹ They bake bread, tend animals, raise children, make clothing, care for the sick, start businesses, and plant trees. From the first days, God entrusted Eve, along with Adam, with the creation mandate² – to produce children, create culture, and care for the earth and all its creatures.³

Late theologian and pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, Tim Keller, taught that work is not a necessary evil or a burden, as some believe. Rather, it is a divine gift, woven into the fabric of paradise. Work is a God-given privilege for all people in all places.⁴ Only after the Fall was the beauty of work diminished, offers Beaty. And yet, though the beauty of work faded, the goodness and beauty of work was not

¹ Katelyn Beaty, *A Woman's Place: A Christian Vision for Your Calling in the Office, the Home, and the World*. (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2017), 7.

² Gen. 1:28.

³ Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 60.

⁴ Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 22–23.

destroyed. The intrinsic value remains.⁵ Today millions of American mothers feel this tension deeply — work’s divine design and its broken reality.

Cultural theorist and author Andy Crouch explains every human is meant to feel fully alive and, by doing so, participate in the glory of God: “We are meant to flourish – not just to survive, but to thrive; not just to exist, but to explore and expand.”⁶ Amy Sherman, director of Sagamore Institute’s Center on Faith in Communities, describes flourishing as having peace in four relationship areas: “God, ourselves, others, and creation.”⁷ On the podcast *Subtext*, hosted by Lee Camp and Savannah Locke, Camp draws on Irenaeus’s often cited phrase, “the glory of God is a human being fully alive,” to articulate a theological vision for human flourishing.⁸ Reframing this concept in his own words, Camp suggests that all humans share a unified, fundamental purpose: “the human calling is to be a human being fully alive.” Taken together, these thinkers frame flourishing not as optional or exceptional, but as the shared telos of human life. This includes parents as they pursue both their own flourishing and that of their children.

Scholars offer a range of explanations for why mothers today participate in paid employment. Judith Warner, an American journalist known for her commentary on motherhood, discusses the reasons why mothers choose to work for pay or stay home full-time caring for children. The mothers with careers do so for the following reasons:

⁵ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 11.

⁶ Andy Crouch, *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 10–14.

⁷ Amy L. Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing: Pursuing Shalom in Every Corner of Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 14.

⁸ Lee Camp, host, *Subtext*, Is Social Media A Calling, April 1, 2026, <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/269-the-subtext-290318829/episode/is-social-media-a-calling-328722901>.

adult companionship, financial stability, satisfaction, intellectual stimulation, independence, and security.⁹ She further lists the reasons other mothers choose to care for children at home full-time: childcare costs, a husband’s overdemanding job, their own joyless job with low pay, lack of flexibility on the job, not wanting to be separated from their children, and the social status of having a parent at home.¹⁰ Paula Faris, former anchor for “Good Morning America,” questions whether the reasons are as numerous as others claim. Using research from her company, Carry Media, she cites that 70 percent of working American moms declare they work because of financial necessity. And why do they need money? Faris blames inflation and consumption habits.¹¹ Caitlyn Collins, professor of sociology at Washington University in St. Louis who works to advance policies for working mothers, disagrees and believes that true financial need is the most common reason mothers have a career, not greed. She emphasizes that mothers have in mind a specific level of financial security that will result in a “good childhood,” and they work to achieve that standard.¹² Lara Bazelon is a law professor at the University of San Francisco and a journalist. Bazelon argues that society should withhold judgment and embrace women regardless of whether they pursue paid work or not. They should be viewed as human beings with complex lives full of financial and emotional needs that they attempt to meet in a variety of ways. Bazelon speculates that while mothering may

⁹ Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (New York, NY: Riverhead Hardcover, 2005), 146.

¹⁰ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 146–48.

¹¹ Paula Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All: Ditch the Mom Guilt and Find a Better Way Forward* (New York, NY: Worthy Books, 2023), 82–83.

¹² Caitlyn Collins, *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 236.

be one way women choose to meet those needs, a career might be another way. She believes that both can be pursued simultaneously and those who select a professional trajectory find the financial stability assists them to weather economic turndowns, the death of a spouse, disease, leaving unhappy relationships, and surviving a global crisis.¹³

This dissertation will examine married, Christian mothers in the United States (US) as they negotiate home and career and uncover strategies that encourage flourishing in the dual roles of mother and professional.

Maternal Overwhelm

Too many of today's American mothers are stressed and exhausted.¹⁴ Magazines and newspapers feature articles like the one in *Fortune Magazine*, "Nearly Half of Working Mothers Surveyed Have Been Diagnosed with Anxiety or Depression. Here is What Can Help."¹⁵ Another one was in the *New York Times*: "America's Mothers Are in Crisis. Is Anyone Listening to Them?"¹⁶ In 2020, CNBC wrote an article in which they proclaimed, "Roughly 9.8 Million Working Mothers in the U.S. Are Suffering from

¹³ Lara Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother: Why Prioritizing Your Career Is Good for Your Kids* (New York, NY: Little Brown Spark, 2022), xiv-xvii.

¹⁴ Astrid Lebert-Charron et al., "Maternal Burnout Syndrome: Contextual and Psychological Associated Factors," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00885>.

¹⁵ L'Oreal Thompson Payton, "Nearly Half of Working Mothers Have Been Diagnosed with Anxiety or Depression. Here's What Can Help," Well, *Fortune*, March 17, 2023, <https://fortune.com/well/2023/03/17/working-moms-mental-health/>.

¹⁶ Jessica Grose, "America's Mothers Are in Crisis: Is Anyone Listening to Them?," Parenting, *The New York Times*, February 4, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/parenting/working-moms-mental-health-coronavirus.html>.

Workplace Burnout.”¹⁷ These data came from a report by healthcare company Maven, which surveyed 440,000 working parents, including 226,000 mothers.¹⁸ C. Collins admits, “Work-family Conflict Is a National Crisis” for working mothers.¹⁹ Professional working mothers experience physical and psychological burnout, low levels of happiness, and a financial penalty simply for being mothers in the workplace.

¹⁷ Megan Leonhardt, “9.8 Million Working Mothers in the U.S. Are Suffering from Burnout,” *CNBC*, December 3, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/03/millions-of-working-mothers-in-the-us-are-suffering-from-burnout.html>.

¹⁸ “Parents at the Best Workplaces: The Largest-Ever Study of Working Parents,” *Great Place to Work*, Maven, 2020, <https://info.mavenclinic.com/pdf/parents-at-the-best-workplaces>.

¹⁹ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 1.

Burnout

While describing her “bone-weary exhaustion,” as a new mother, Faris remarks, “I’ve never in the history of my time as a mama ever felt like I was nailing it.” Faris felt like a failure carrying the mental load of childcare and household responsibilities. She describes her motherhood burnout this way: “I’m at the end of the end of the end of myself.”²⁰ Pamela Stone is a professor of sociology at Hunter College and The Graduate Center at City University of New York. Her research on working mothers found that struggles at work were not the leading cause for career abandonment; the leading cause was overwhelming family obligations. Women did not want to quit their careers but felt obligated. They were pressured to prioritize their family's wellbeing.²¹

Maternal exhaustion is a multifaceted emotional state that affects a mother’s health.²² It is caused by an interplay of stress, anxiety, depression, and guilt. In its extreme form, psychologists label it as “maternal burnout.” Faris believes the number of mothers struggling with maternal burnout could be as high as 80 to 90 percent. She writes that at least 30 percent of working mothers consider leaving the workforce.²³

Sheryl Ziegler is a licensed professional counselor in Colorado, and her specialty is treating maternal burnout. Over the years she observed patterns of guilt, shame, regret,

²⁰ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, xii, 2, 8.

²¹ Pamela Stone, *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 93, 114.

²² Raquel Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., “Depression, Anxiety, and Guilt in Mothers with Burnout of Preschool and School-Aged Children: Insight from a Cluster Analysis,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 259 (December 2019): 244–50, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.08.031>.

²³ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 216.

and doubt in mothers who also held down careers. Mothers would say they felt “stressed, isolated, depressed and like failures.”²⁴ Ziegler herself has battled maternal burnout and describes it as a severe problem where, “we are all pushing ourselves to the brink, creating a level of mental and physical exhaustion that often overwhelms us.”²⁵ Warner avoids using the word burnout and instead calls it “too-muchness,” “existential discomfort,” “a mess,” and describes American motherhood as “oppressive.”²⁶ Ziegler warns that most mothers mistakenly view multitasking as a badge of honor and a normal part of being a mother but do not realize that multitasking is dangerous. Completing multiple tasks simultaneously produces anxiety in the body teaches Ziegler. This can cause prolonged stress, panic attacks, and burnout.²⁷

Happiness Gap

Guilt is the primary emotion working mothers in America identify in early motherhood, acknowledges Grose.²⁸ Mothers feel guilty leaving their babies to pursue employment. They also feel guilty for not finding motherhood as fulfilling as they had expected. Faris echoes this, noting that for all mothers in America, guilt will eventually find them.²⁹ Faris believes mom guilt explains the happiness disparity between parents

²⁴ Sheryl G. Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout: How to Reclaim Your Life and Raise Healthier Children in the Process* (New York, NY: Dey Street Books, 2018), xii–xiii.

²⁵ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 10.

²⁶ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 16.

²⁷ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 199, 218.

²⁸ Jessica Grose, *Screaming on the Inside: The Unsustainability of American Motherhood*. (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2022), 74–75.

²⁹ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 81.

and childless individuals in the US. This level of parental guilt does not exist anywhere else in the world.³⁰ Warner acknowledges this and believes guilt, anxiety, and resentment are poisoning motherhood for American women.³¹ C. Collins also supports this view, suggesting that the unhappiness of working mothers in the US stems from the absence of safe and affordable childcare support.³² The Population Research Center at the University of Austin, Texas, concludes that the US ranks last in a list of twenty-two developed countries for the happiness gap between parents and non-parents. They blame the absence of “social policies that allow parents to better combine paid work with family.”³³

Motherhood (Financial) Penalty

When Ann Crittenden, a Pulitzer-Prize-nominated journalist, calculated her loss of income after becoming a mother, the amount approached \$1 million, which, writes Crittenden, is not far off the calculations economists make for these situations. She comments, “The mommy tax I paid is fairly typical for an educated middle-class woman.”³⁴ Crittenden and Faris define a “mommy tax” as the opportunity cost of pausing a career to care for children.³⁵ According to Stone, the financial penalty often causes a

³⁰ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 10.

³¹ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 4, 15.

³² Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 202.

³³ Jennifer Glass, Robin W. Simon, and Matthew A. Andersson, “Parenthood and Happiness: Effects of Work-Family Reconciliation Policies in 22 OECD Countries,” *American Journal of Sociology* 122, no. 3 (November 2016): 886–929, <https://doi.org/10.1086/688892>.

³⁴ Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued* (New York, NY: Picador, 2010), 89.

³⁵ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 87–88; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 135.

career plateau.³⁶ Crittenden shows that the younger a woman is when she becomes a mother and the more children she has, the larger the financial penalty grows over the course of her life. This phenomenon, insists Crittenden, is why many women extend their preparental phase of life, as well as why some purposefully choose childlessness.³⁷

In addition to a mommy tax, explains Crittenden, working mothers have an additional pay gap.³⁸ Women earn less than men in all calculations. Faris uses data from the Pew Research Center³⁹ to figure that “women earned 84 percent of what men earned in the year 2020.”⁴⁰ That percentage has not changed significantly in two decades.⁴¹ Former CEO of Meta and a Google executive, Sheryl Sandberg, criticizes the sluggish improvements in salary equality, calling it unacceptable.⁴²

Using data from the American Association of University Women (AAUW), a non-profit organization that advocates for gender equity and education for women and girls,⁴³ Faris reports that the difference between mothers and fathers is even more

³⁶ Stone, *Opting Out?*, 91.

³⁷ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 91, 103, 107.

³⁸ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 93–94.

³⁹ Amanda Barroso and Anna Brown, *Gender Pay Gap in the U.S. Held Steady in 2020*, Pew Research Center, May 25, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts>.

⁴⁰ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 38.

⁴¹ Richard Fry and Carolina Aragão, “Gender Pay Gap in U.S. Hasn’t Changed Much in Two Decades,” *Pew Research Center*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/01/gender-pay-gap-facts/>.

⁴² Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (London: WH Allen, 2013), 6–7.

⁴³ “At Work, Dads Get a Bonus, but Moms Get a Penalty. What Gives?,” *Workplace & Economic Equity*, American Association of University Women (AAUW), May 6, 2016, <https://www.aauw.org/2016/05/06/dads-get-a-bonus-but-moms-get-a-penalty>.

prominent, with mothers earning 71 percent of what fathers earned.⁴⁴ The AAUW writes it this way: “Men, by contrast, do not suffer a penalty when they become dads. In fact, there is some evidence of a ‘fatherhood bonus’ in which their earnings actually increase.”⁴⁵ Faris shares a story from her own life of leaving a job in television to discover that the man who was hired to replace her was less qualified and received double her salary. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 made this behavior illegal, yet it happens.⁴⁶ Grose argues that each child can potentially decrease a working mother's wages by 5 to 7 percent. A mother is also 100 percent less likely to receive an interview call back, and when offered a job, the salary is on average \$11,000 lower compared to similarly qualified women without children.⁴⁷

Susan Maushart, a sociologist with a Ph.D. from New York University, believes the most significant factor contributing to an earnings gap between fathers and mothers is the prioritization of men’s careers.⁴⁸ Harvard-trained lawyer, author, and founder of Philanthropy Advisory Group, Eve Rodsky reveals that in her own life, after three months of maternity leave, she requested to work from home one day a week so she could have more time with her baby. The company declined her request as well as the possibility of reduced hours. Rodsky and her husband decided that his job held greater

⁴⁴ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 38.

⁴⁵ “The Motherhood Penalty,” Workplace & Economic Equity, American Association of University Women (AAUW), August 31, 2023, <https://www.aauw.org/issues/economic-security/motherhood/>.

⁴⁶ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 37–38.

⁴⁷ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 96–97.

⁴⁸ Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Our Lives and Why We Never Talk About It* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1999), 192.

importance, and he therefore continued on with his career, just the same as he did before he had a child, while Rodsky quit her job.⁴⁹ Rodsky is not alone in feeling forced to make a choice between work and family. C. Collins works with mothers who “felt resigned to the fact that they would never feel guilt-free about both their jobs and their family life at the same time.”⁵⁰ She explains that women who leave the workforce to raise children full-time not only lose a salary but also gain zero Social Security credits and forfeit retirement income by working for free as mothers.⁵¹

Made to Flourish

Humans are meant to do more than just to survive. Humans are to thrive in relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world. In doing so, they participate in the glory of God.⁵² It is hard to flourish when all one’s time is spent merely existing, declares researcher Tina Schermer Sellers, a professor of marriage and family therapy at Seattle Pacific University.⁵³ It is difficult for mothers to do well in all areas of life and find time to rest. Yet without rest, mothers are barely surviving and often experience overwhelming stress, exhaustion, lack of time for hobbies, and unequal pay.

⁴⁹ Eve Rodsky, *Fair Play: A Game-Changing Solution for When You Have Too Much to Do (And More Life to Live)* (New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2021), 7–8.

⁵⁰ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 243.

⁵¹ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 77–78.

⁵² Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 14; Crouch, *Strong and Weak*, 10–14.

⁵³ Tina Schermer Sellers et al., “Women Called: A Qualitative Study of Christian Women Dually Called to Motherhood and Career,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33, no. 3 (September 2005): 198–209, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710503300305>.

According to Warner, the happiest mothers she studied, working or not working for pay, were the ones who were able to “act in line with their natural inclinations and ambitions.”⁵⁴ Nancy Pearcey, a Christian author known for her scholarship on worldviews and culture, writes, “The cultural and religious messages received by women regarding motherhood and vocation often produce complicated dilemmas for women who seek to participate in both domains simultaneously.”⁵⁵ These messages can cause mothers to feel like there is no time during which she can flourish because the responsibilities she bears are too great.

Conclusion

All over the world in 2022 mothers sang along to the lyrics of “Surface Pressure” from Disney’s movie *Encanto*:⁵⁶ “Pressure, like a drip, drip, drip that’ll never stop, whoa. Pressure that’ll tip, tip, tip ‘til you just go pop, whoa, oh, oh.”⁵⁷ The song tells the story of the second oldest sister, Luisa, who protects her extended family with superhuman strength, but modern mothers adopted them as their own. The extremes of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the shared experience of maternal burnout. Mothers were exhausted and vocal. One Cincinnati, Ohio, blogger said, “Each and every lyric resonated

⁵⁴ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 149.

⁵⁵ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 346.

⁵⁶ Jeremy Hanna, “20 Best Disney Songs According to the Billboard Hot 100,” *Inside the Magic*, March 17, 2023, <https://insidethemagic.net/2023/03/greatest-disney-songs-all-time-billboard-hot-100-encanto-lion-king-jh1mmb/>; *encanto* reached number 9 on US Billboards Hot 100 in 2022.

⁵⁷ Teal Conroy, “‘Surface Pressure’ from ‘Encanto’ Is the Mom Anthem of 2022,” *Medium*, January 26, 2022, <https://medium.com/@tealconroy/surface-pressure-from-encanto-is-the-mom-anthem-of-2022-1af938b64602>.

with me — perfectly voicing my inner monologue.”⁵⁸ Other bloggers wrote about the pressure to “be resilient, taking on load after emotional load,”⁵⁹ keep everyone safe from COVID-19, educate the children virtually at home, and find time for self-care.⁶⁰

Even without a global pandemic, American women are balancing careers, intensively mothering their children, and responsible for the bulk of household responsibilities, without the benefit of community support to care for their children. They face inequalities in their careers; they are not receiving the same pay for the same work as men. Unsurprisingly, many are exhausted and burnt out, feeling pressure to do it all excellently. There is too much to do and standards are high. They have no time to rest. They cannot flourish.

Pearcey maintains, “The intersection between spirituality, motherhood and vocation is largely unexplored in contemporary writing and research.... the stories, themes and voices of deeply spiritual career mothers have been largely silenced in literature.”⁶¹ She observes that descriptive research focused on integrating spirituality and the dual calling of career and motherhood is lacking. This is especially true in Christian literature, where there is often an emphasis on guiding women towards domestic roles while neglecting discussion of their careers. Warren encourages Christians to be known

⁵⁸ Kate Desmond, “How Disney’s Encanto Perfectly Captures My Pandemic Mom Brain,” *Life According to Kate Blog*, January 1, 2022, <https://www.katedesmond.com/single-post/how-disney-s-encanto-perfectly-captures-my-pandemic-mom-brain>.

⁵⁹ Amelia Kibbie, “All Moms Are Luisa from ‘Encanto’ Right Now — and Always,” *Mom.Com*, January 18, 2022, <https://mom.com/momlife/all-moms-are-luisa-from-encanto-right-now-and-always>.

⁶⁰ Marianne, *I’m a Luisa: The “Surface Pressure” of Being a Mom*, Indianapolis Moms, February 6, 2022, <https://indianapolismoms.com/parenting-perspectives/im-a-luisa-the-surface-pressure-of-being-a-mom/>.

⁶¹ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 346–47.

as a “community of the well-rested – people who embrace our limits with zest and even joy.”⁶² And so it is the purpose of this study to contribute to the descriptive research of deeply spiritual working mothers and find out exactly how they can be a part of the community of the well-rested who are living full and flourishing lives.

Purpose Statement

This study explores the historical development of the “ideal” American mother, the biblical rhythms of work and rest, and the problem of and solutions for maternal burnout. It examines resources and strategies that support working mothers in cultivating joy and fulfillment in their roles as humans, parents, and professionals. Moreover, the desired outcome of this study is to encourage the flourishing of working mothers in their many roles. The purpose of this study is to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish despite the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do women describe the challenges of maternal stress?
2. How do women navigate the challenges of maternal stress?

⁶² Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 152.

3. In what ways not currently experienced, do women desire to flourish while navigating maternal stress?

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for working mothers and will provide ways to reduce stress while encouraging working mothers to pursue joy and fruitfulness as integrated, whole people. The findings, when applied, will diminish incidences of maternal burnout and allow women to stay in the workforce and achieve their goals.

This study has significance for partners and families of working mothers. By providing findings from best practices, families may make informed choices for dividing household labor. By granting partners a window into the world of working mothers, it will heighten their empathy of their partner's experience. Ideally children will benefit from life with a mother who is healthier and more resilient. A mother's improved mental health will overflow into her family relationships. Children will see the embodiment of a flourishing partnership, one they can use to guide their future marriages and families.

This study has significance for those employing women, particularly by shedding light on the pressures they face with work-family conflict. The insights derived from this research can inform and shape policies, leading to more inclusive and flexible workplaces. Employers will be able to craft work environments that accommodate the needs of working mothers and champion their wellbeing and productivity based on best practices. This intentional approach may contribute to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and a more engaged, diverse, and motivated workforce.

This study has significance for the Christian church, especially pastors and those who disciple women. The insights can shape the content and delivery of sermons and

pastoral care strategies, ensuring they are relevant to working women's challenges. This will foster spiritual growth in women while supporting their dual roles as professionals and parents and thereby acting as a catalyst for the flourishing of the entire community.

Definition of Terms

Burnout – is a state of constant exhaustion resulting from chronic stress.⁶³

Connection – is “the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment.”⁶⁴

Dual Roles – is working two roles simultaneously, professional and parent.⁶⁵

Dual Career Household – is a family where both spouses work for pay. Other terms include “two-job marriages”⁶⁶ and dual income homes.

Emotional Labor – is the work of maintaining relationships, such as comforting a child who woke up from a scary dream and sending thank-you notes.⁶⁷

Family-Work Conflict – is the conflict that occurs when the needs of the family interfere with one’s career.

Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) – is a federal law that provides some employees with twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to care for themselves or a family member with a serious health condition. To qualify, they must have worked for

⁶³ Lebert-Charron et al., “Maternal Burnout Syndrome.”

⁶⁴ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012), 145.

⁶⁵ Sellers et al., “Women Called.”

⁶⁶ Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2003), 114.

⁶⁷ Grose, “America’s Mothers Are in Crisis: Is Anyone Listening to Them?,” 90; Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 11.

their employer at least twelve months and for a company employing fifty or more employees.⁶⁸ The law requires them to be provided with the same or equivalent job.

Flourishing – is the idea that humans are meant to do more than just to survive. Humans are to thrive in relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the world. In doing so, they participate in the glory of God.⁶⁹

Grit – is pushing oneself with great passion for future results.⁷⁰

Highly Qualified – are people with advanced degrees or an undergraduate degree with high honors.⁷¹ Other terms include “high achieving.”

Intensive Mothering – a type of motherhood that requires lavishing copious amounts of time, energy, and material resources on the child “at the expense of postponing [the mother’s] desires and interests.”⁷² This term was introduced by Sharon Hays.⁷³

Invisible Work – is work rarely seen by others because it is not front and center.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ “Family and Medical Leave (FMLA),” Department of Labor, accessed February 15, 2024, <http://www.dol.gov/general/topic/benefits-leave/fmla>.

⁶⁹ Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 14; Crouch, *Strong and Weak*, 10-14.

⁷⁰ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 82–89.

⁷¹ Stone, *Opting Out?*, 9.

⁷² Consuelo Novoa et al., “Intensive Parenting: The Risks of Overdemanding,” *Trends in Psychology*, ahead of print, September 22, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-022-00229-9>.

⁷³ Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 8, 46.

⁷⁴ Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 11.

Leader – is “anyone who holds her- or himself accountable for finding potential in people and processes...nothing to do with position, status, or number of direct reports.”⁷⁵

Leaky Pipeline – is when highly qualified and trained women do not ascend to positions of leadership. They disappear, often to take care of children.⁷⁶

Motherhood Penalty – is “the phenomenon by which women’s pay decreases once they become mothers.”⁷⁷ Other terms include “mommy tax, pay gap.”

Maternal Burnout Syndrome – is persistent, disruptive, and overwhelming exhaustion as a mother.⁷⁸

Maternal Stress – is a combination of strain, anxiety, and guilt women experience when balancing the demands of work and motherhood.⁷⁹ Other terms include “maternal exhaustion, maternal burnout, maternal overload, maternal anxiety, maternal guilt, maternal ambivalence, maternal strain, and maternal fatigue.”

Matrescence – is a term coined by anthropologist Dana Raphael, similar linguistically to adolescence. It is a life transition where a woman gives birth to a new identity (mother) as she gives birth to her first child.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 185.

⁷⁶ Stone, *Opting Out?*, 38.

⁷⁷ Kevin Miller and Deborah J. Vagins, *The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap: AAUW Report* (Washington, DC: American Association of University Women (AAUW), 2018), 16, <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/simple-truth/>.

⁷⁸ Lebert-Charron et al., “Maternal Burnout Syndrome.”

⁷⁹ Maria Prima Novita and Arthur Huwae, “Challenges In Tough Times: Portrait of Stress on Housewives and Mother with Dual Role,” *Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy* 5, no. 1 (March 2023): 11–19, accessed August 16, 2023, <https://journal.kurasinstitute.com/index.php/bocp/article/view/391>.

⁸⁰ George Szasz, “Matrescence: A Great Adventure About to Begin,” *British Columbia Medical Journal*, April 5, 2023, <https://bcmj.org/blog/matrescence-great-adventure-about-begin>.

Mental Health – is psychological and emotional well-being.

Mental Load – is a never-ending mental checklist of things to do for one’s self and family.⁸¹ This may include physical tasks, maintaining family values, and traditions.

Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBI) - a moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and the surrounding environment.

Mommy Track – is a career path prioritizing family life over a mother’s career.

Opt-out – is the decision to leave the workforce to care for children. It is presented as a choice, but it is often a difficult and doubt-filled choice.⁸²

Orthopraxy - correct practice or behavior.

Parental Leave – is time off work to care for a new child. May also be called “maternity leave” for mothers and “paternity leave” for fathers.

Psychological Detachment – is the ability to mentally disconnect from work.⁸³

Resiliency – is the ability to adapt to change and persevere through adversity.⁸⁴

Bouncing back from stress.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 11.

⁸² Stone, *Opting Out?*, 122.

⁸³ Elisa Clauss et al., “Occupational Self-Efficacy and Work Engagement as Moderators in the Stressor-Detachment Model,” *Work & Stress* 35, no. 1 (January 2021): 74–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2020.1743790>.

⁸⁴ Bob Burns, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

⁸⁵ Daniel Goleman and Cary Cherniss, *Optimal: How to Perform at Your Best and Create Emotionally Intelligent Organizations and Teams* (New York, NY: Penguin Business, 2024), 63–64.

Rest – is when one stops using the part of one’s self that’s used up, worn out, damaged, or inflamed, so that it has a chance to renew itself.⁸⁶

Role Conflict – is the conflict that occurs when two roles are in opposition with one another, such as wife and mother.

Sabbatical – is a period of paid leave to provide time to travel and rest, traditionally three to twelve months for every seven years worked.

Second Shift – is the household and childcare chores a parent completes after paid work ends, such as making children’s lunches and buying cleats for soccer.⁸⁷

Spill Over – is when stress and emotions from one part of life influence another part of life, such as when conflict with a friend distracts one from work.

Stay-at-home Mother – is a mother who spends her work hours caring for the household and children. Other terms include “at-home mother.”

Stress – is a neurological and physiological shift that happens in the body when dealing with a stressful circumstance⁸⁸

Stress Cycle – is the body's response to threats or stressors.⁸⁹

Stressor – is a sources of stress

Work & Nonwork – is the interaction between career and the rest of life. Scholars in industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology are moving away from the term work/life

⁸⁶ Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski, *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2020), 156.

⁸⁷ Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 11.

⁸⁸ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 4–5.

⁸⁹ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 4–5.

balance. Other terms include “wholistic life balance, personal-professional balance, work/nonwork integration, work/nonwork fit, or work/nonwork equilibrium.”

Work-Family Conflict – is the conflict that occurs when one’s career interferes with the needs of the family.

Working Mother – is a woman who is working for wages with at least one child living in her home. Other terms include “paid-working mother.”

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish despite the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles. This literature review will first present the history of motherhood in the US, including the perspective of historians, journalists, and sociologists specializing in the history of motherhood, and report on the dual roles of career and motherhood for women throughout American history. Then, this study will look to biblical scholars and writers who discuss the goodness of work and the restorative power of rest. Third, this study will investigate the research and writings of counselors, psychologists, and researchers who address work-nonwork problems, maternal stress, and avoiding burnout.

Motherhood in the United States

Changing Views of Work and Family

This section explores three distinct phases of motherhood in the US: Colonial America, Post-Industrial Revolution America, and Modern America, each marked by societal and economic forces that shaped what it meant to be a good mother. American motherhood has a history of more than 400 years. Various ideals of the perfect mother have influenced US culture and shaped societal norms and expectations. Crittenden, Grose, and Warren note that motherhood in Colonial America was generally concerned with enforcing obedience and keeping children fed and clothed. As little time as possible

was invested in children emotionally or educationally. Children were seen as valuable homestead workers who cared for animals and younger children, tended fields, and cooked for the family. The community agreed that God was in control of children's destinies. In contrast, today's motherhood standards have more defined goals such as developing a child's full potential emotionally and intellectually while maintaining perfect health. Mothers may now succeed or fail at mothering — their children's destiny is in their motherly hands.⁹⁰

Work and Family in Colonial America (1607-1776)

Women have worked alongside men from the beginning of time, working as hard as men, doing everything needed to survive – feeding, protecting, and clothing everyone in their care. Westervelt, an award-winning investigative journalist, and Warner highlight that children were involved where they could contribute on the colonial homestead. Whole families worked together farming, clearing land, and setting up family-based businesses.⁹¹ This communal effort involved the extended family. Beaty remarks that from the earliest days in America, everyone worked except the very rich. “For most of human history, work was life, and life was work.”⁹² Faris confirms that both men and women worked; they were co-producers and co-laborers in the family economy.⁹³ Crouch

⁹⁰ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 48–50; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 42; Amy Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All”: How America Messed Up Motherhood--and How to Fix It* (New York, NY: Seal Press, 2018), 20–25, 202–4.

⁹¹ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 134; Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 64.

⁹² Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 99.

⁹³ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 52.

and Pearcey state that before factories, homes were places of productivity—producing woven textiles, candles, butter, and many other items.⁹⁴ In Beaty’s opinion, life in early America beautifully integrated life and labor for all members of the family. It was a family-centered work culture.⁹⁵

Integrated Work and Life

Most scholars agree that the homestead of Colonial America was a productive place. Demos calls it a “hive of instrumental activity.”⁹⁶ Warner calls it a “tapestry of work done in and around the home.”⁹⁷ Farming was not the only activity on the homestead. Worship, education, healthcare, candle making, brewing, and the care for many types of dependents (orphans, elderly, insane, hired hands, apprentices, servants, and criminals) also took place on homesteads.⁹⁸ Demos describes a visible framework of reciprocity — where everyone collaborated with one another, working in unity toward one goal of family health.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 18; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 331.

⁹⁵ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 99; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 13.

⁹⁶ John Putnam Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99.

⁹⁷ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 134.

⁹⁸ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 99–101; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 99; Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 54.

⁹⁹ Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 10.

Pearcey and Faris note that spouses were co-workers in many homestead industries, such as upholstering, silversmithing, printing, and brewing.¹⁰⁰ Both spouses participated in the family trade, earning wages, or bartering for the family's needs. Pearcey explains that family life and business life were not divided because small businesses were often in the same building as the family home. She adds, "This meant that the boundary between home and world was highly permeable: The 'world' entered continually in the form of clients, business colleagues, customers, and apprentices."¹⁰¹

Not all scholars agree about the division of labor on the homestead. Award-winning journalist, former economics reporter for the *New York Times*, and a Pulitzer Prize nominee Gail Collins sees a strong division of labor according to gender. She writes, "The idea that women were the weaker sex, meant to stay at home and tend to the children while the men took care of the outside world, was as old as Western civilization."¹⁰² While Demos agrees that labor was divided according to gender, with men out in the fields and women in the orchards or near the fire, he emphasizes that during harvest time, everyone was on call, including women and children. No matter who did the work, the family was always nearby.¹⁰³

Faris, Grose, Pearcey, and Westervelt examine how this integration of daily

¹⁰⁰ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 54–57; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 327–28.

¹⁰¹ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 327–28.

¹⁰² Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women From 1960 to The Present* (New York, NY: Little Brown Company, 1976), 4.

¹⁰³ Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 10.

work with family life meant that fathers worked alongside their children every day and were involved in their care. There was no concept of a stay-at-home mother because both parents were at home and both parents worked.¹⁰⁴

Value of Women and Children

G. Collins illuminates a detailed catalog of wives' productivity, which included crafting most of what her family needed (clothing, soap, shoes, and candles), tending gardens and animals, storing food for the winter, making bread, and providing an abundance of meals.¹⁰⁵ When Colonial people described American women, they used words like industrious and hardworking, not nurturing, says Faris. Westervelt states that while a productive wife was valuable, women had no legal identity, no income, and were not allowed to make a will.¹⁰⁶

Women were also valued for their fertility (an average woman was pregnant or nursing for twenty-five years of her life), even as they were seen as inferior morally, physically, and intellectually.¹⁰⁷ G. Collins confirms that while a wife was esteemed for her contributions in the family business, she was considered a dependent, and her husband owned any money she earned. "When most families lived at a bare subsistence level," teaches G. Collins, "these glaring inequities were somewhat irrelevant."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 54; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 96–97; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 327–28; Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 25.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 23.

¹⁰⁷ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 6–7; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 11; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 56; Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 23.

¹⁰⁸ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 6–7.

Sociology professor Sharon Hays of the University of Southern California describes the hierarchical system of the time.¹⁰⁹ Husbands were imagined to be shepherds, their wives as sheepdogs, and children as sheep. Hays explains that children were considered of minimal worth – unless they were exceptionally good workers – and wives were predominantly valued for their work performance or their noble connections.

Westervelt and Warner teach that Puritan theological teachings of original sin led to the belief that children were inherently flawed, defective, evil creatures and therefore needed to be taught to submit their will to a higher authority.¹¹⁰ Hays believes that on a daily basis children were ignored as much as possible until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Father as Primary Parent

Mothers were seen as too weak emotionally, morally, and spiritually to be responsible for the moral upbringing of children. Fathers were the primary parent who shaped a child's intellectual and spiritual life.¹¹¹ Fathers were considered superior in all ways to women, noting that parenting sermons and books of the time were addressed to fathers. Grose agrees that fathers were ultimately responsible for the children's upbringing but refutes that parenting books were written only to fathers.¹¹² She claims that the spouses shared "joint obligations" in child rearing.

¹⁰⁹ Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 23–24.

¹¹⁰ Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 24; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 64.

¹¹¹ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 4–5; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 10; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 72–73; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 328–29; Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 23.

¹¹² Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 11.

In early American parenting frameworks, instinctual maternal nurturing was not recognized, and fathers were the primary adults in charge of guiding, educating, and disciplining their children. And while moral upbringing was the father's responsibility, most children were physically cared for by wet nurses, servants, or any subservient person, such as a slightly older sibling, and sent off to apprenticeships as soon as possible.¹¹³ Beaty and Grose reason that wealthy families outsourced childcare as much as possible, believing that neither father nor mother needed to be hands-on at all times, and no one felt guilty about this outsourcing.¹¹⁴

Work and Family in Post-Industrial Revolution America (1776-1945)

The American Industrial Revolution initiated a great migration of families from rural homes to cities to work in factories, according to Faris, Grose, Hays, and Westervelt.¹¹⁵ Goods that were crafted in homes were now made in factories. These changes had a lasting impact on motherhood in the US.

Separate Spheres

Factory environments were dirty, loud, exhausting, and inhospitable, explained Pearcey and Demos.¹¹⁶ Factory work required men to look out for themselves, become competitive and ambitious, and, therefore, society created laws prohibiting women and

¹¹³ Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 25.

¹¹⁴ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 13.

¹¹⁵ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 57; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 12–13; Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 33; Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 64.

¹¹⁶ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 330–332; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 31.

children from the harshest work environments. Faris suggests that these laws led to a new phenomenon in American culture: the physical division of family members during the workday.¹¹⁷ The public business life of men was separated from the private family life of women and children. Percy puts it this way: “The Industrial Revolution caused both men’s and women’s work to contract and become more specialized; the work of both sexes lost range and variety and became more intensely focused.”¹¹⁸

Because factories were unpleasant, family homes needed to be sanctuaries of beauty, safety, peace, and warmth.¹¹⁹ Faris explains that men developed a dual focus: being excellent at earning money and having a lot of children.¹²⁰ They desired to be seen as good providers and protectors. Demos emphasizes that because men were the only members of the family out in the world, they became the family’s representatives.¹²¹ Husbands and fathers bore the burden of the family’s success or failure. Crouch reasons because men left the home in search of wages, they no longer had a visible framework of reciprocity where they could see with their own eyes the women’s workload at home.¹²² As a result, the value of women’s work was diminished.

¹¹⁷ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 60.

¹¹⁸ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 344.

¹¹⁹ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 5; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 31.

¹²⁰ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 58, 72-73.

¹²¹ Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 33.

¹²² Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 89.

The idealized family life after the Industrial Revolution was no longer a large extended family working together daily at a small enterprise on the homestead.¹²³ Instead it became a father leaving the house to work for wages, older children attending school to be educated by professionals, and a mother staying home to care for the homestead and babies and create a peaceful home. Crittenden teaches that when men left the home to go work in factories, home became “a place of leisure, consumption, and emotional replenishment; a ‘haven from a heartless world.’”¹²⁴ Demos asserts that family and home had been a place of community and productivity but now became a refuge from the harsh work world.¹²⁵ Faris aligns with this perspective, adding that the wife’s main goal was still not childrearing, nor was it producing goods for the family, but rather her aim was to create a comfortable home for her husband to return to after a long day working in a factory.¹²⁶ Warner commends this analysis and uses the label “angel in the house” for this new female calling.¹²⁷ A wife’s main function was to be a service to others, to have no needs of her own, and to create an entirely peaceful home.¹²⁸

Grose proposes that this shift marked the first time in American history when motherhood became a significant aspect of a wife's role or vocation.¹²⁹ This era was

¹²³ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 51; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 57; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 10–12; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 134.

¹²⁴ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 51.

¹²⁵ Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 31.

¹²⁶ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 57.

¹²⁷ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 135.

¹²⁸ Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 33.

¹²⁹ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 12–13.

characterized by the perceptions that wage earning was unfeminine, and idleness was a deadly sin. Creating a warm, comfortable home and taking over the development of the children became the duties of a good wife and mother. Crittenden reports that this vocational shift also represented a cultural shift.¹³⁰ Homesteading in Colonial America had involved multiple family members, but Post-Industrial Revolution homesteading was left to the women. Until recently, teaches Beaty, it was not expected for one solitary adult to be at home with the children as a stay-at-home parent.¹³¹ Faris echoes this sentiment. “The ‘nuclear’ family with a male breadwinner is the most nontraditional family in human history.”¹³²

For the first time in American history, “separate spheres” existed for people according to their gender; women worked domestically for free and men worked in the world for wages.¹³³ Beaty states that the Industrial Revolution, not biblical values, altered gender interactions by separating them vocationally and physically throughout the day.¹³⁴ Pearcey and Crouch describe it as a public/private split.¹³⁵

Crittenden explains that Alexander Hamilton, the first United States Secretary of the Treasury, defined productive work for Americans.¹³⁶ In his *Report on Manufactures*

¹³⁰ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 48–51.

¹³¹ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 99.

¹³² Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 52.

¹³³ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 48–51; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 12-13; Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 33.

¹³⁴ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 103.

¹³⁵ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 327.

¹³⁶ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 47.

in 1791,¹³⁷ Hamilton defined “the total produce” of a country as things that can be sold for cash. This definition of work excluded the labors of women and children, unless they were working in factories. The “intensive work of raising responsible adults,” caring for livestock, and maintaining a homestead was left out of economic calculations, continues Crittenden. This devalued women’s work because women’s work did not generate cash.

A “good wife” was a great asset in precapitalist (colonial) times, states G. Collins and Crittenden.¹³⁸ A good wife improved the family standard of living with her industriousness until families moved into cities to pursue factory jobs. Before 1850, according to Crittenden, entire families were listed on the census together as farmers, bakers, dressmakers, and other communal occupations.¹³⁹ But after 1850, the US required an occupation to be recorded for each individual person in the family. Men were listed in specific professions, and women who were married to these men and cared for children were listed as “keeping house,” even when they had side jobs, took in boarders, or participated in the family business. As a result, according to the government census, most women were unproductive, meaning, they earned no wages.

Thus, the work of family maintenance – all of the gardening and canning and cooking and cleaning, the animal raising, the sewing and mending, the care of the sick and the elderly – not to mention the task of rearing the next generation of productive workers, was stricken from the list of productive employments.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ This report can be found at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-10-02-0001-0007>.

¹³⁸ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 6–7; Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 46.

¹³⁹ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 46, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 59.

Mother as Primary Parent

The Industrial Revolution also changed parenting.¹⁴¹ Fathers ceased being the primary moral educators; their physical absence and lack of daily involvement in child-rearing marked a significant shift. The mothers filled this disciplinary role, given their proximity. And as women gained confidence in nurturing skills, says Faris, they began to view nurturing as their only talent.¹⁴² Because they were discouraged from earning wages outside the home, women turned motherhood into their primary occupation.

Society, which had traditionally regarded women as mostly industrious, now perceived them as mostly nurturing (possessing a maternal instinct) for the first time in history. Hays explains that affection became a significant element of mothering in ways it was not previously present.¹⁴³ Mothers were now expected to be a source of “gentle maternal guidance,” said Faris.¹⁴⁴

Views of Children

Children went from being seen as evil creatures needing to be subdued to innocent souls needing guidance, thanks to the Enlightenment, teaches Westervelt.¹⁴⁵ Hays concurs, observing that during this time children’s clothing, toys, books, and family

¹⁴¹ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 48; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 12–14; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 331; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 134–35; Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 65.

¹⁴² Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 72–73.

¹⁴³ Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 57.

¹⁴⁵ Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 29.

portraits became popular.¹⁴⁶ Childhood became regarded as a special time during which children needed protection.

Up until this point, only boys were given an education.¹⁴⁷ Society assumed girls would spend most of their life having children and caring for a homestead and working for the family business; it did not make sense to spend money on schooling the girls. However, literacy rates for American women rose dramatically after the Industrial Revolution because mothers needed to know how to read to educate their children.¹⁴⁸ Westervelt explains that after 1780, young women were taught to read as they were seen as “pre-pregnant.”¹⁴⁹

Work and Family in Modern America (1945-Present)

The Modern American era, which emerged following the end of World War II in 1945, found many women who had taken on traditionally male jobs to support the war effort being urged to leave their jobs and return to homemaking to make room for returning male soldiers.¹⁵⁰ C. Collins writes that women who did not want to give up their jobs were seen as neurotic, needing medication and therapy.¹⁵¹ Westervelt highlights that Post-war America assumed every married woman had a husband earning a family

¹⁴⁶ Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 25–28.

¹⁴⁷ Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 48.

¹⁴⁸ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 50; Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 46, 48.

¹⁵⁰ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 32–33; Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 60–65; Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 55–56. Warner, 136

¹⁵¹ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 55–56; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 32–33.

wage that would cover the family's necessities. It was assumed that a woman's income was allocated to discretionary family expenses, and therefore, employers reasoned that they could pay them less.¹⁵² Many were unfulfilled at home, but longed to be productive, so they created new chores to keep themselves busy (like daily dusting and sanitizing breadboxes), requiring an average of fifty-six hours a week to complete the chores. C. Collins and Grose note that in the rush to have babies after the war, women became empty nesters at an early age.¹⁵³ People were living longer, and many women had forty years or more left at home alone with only unfulfilling housework to occupy them. Previous generations did not have this problem.

Faris teaches that what many people today label as a traditional family (with the man working outside the home and the wife taking care of the children and home) of the 1950s was novel, not traditional at all.¹⁵⁴ This family structure did not last more than twenty to thirty years and was not fulfilling for every member of society. By the 1970s, over half of American mothers with young children had a job. Warner believes this phenomenon was the result of women's boredom at home, and a middle class expected cars, vacations, and college educations — all of which were impossible without a second income.¹⁵⁵ G. Collins and Bazelon agree that this change happened quickly but believe families needed women's earnings to maintain their middle-class status.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 123.

¹⁵³ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 55–56; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 32–33.

¹⁵⁴ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 65–67.

¹⁵⁵ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 137–39.

¹⁵⁶ Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 150; Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 214–17.

Warner writes that this massive change was the catalyst for a new cultural anxiety; if mothers were working, surely their children were being harmed.¹⁵⁷ She reports that in the late 1990s, several studies showed the positive impact tutoring could have on a child's academic life.¹⁵⁸ The nation rejected the notion that children were born with innate abilities and instead believed that children could be molded and coached to excel in life, if only mothers did the work. Society believed such intense involvement was unachievable for working mothers and that working mothers were jeopardizing their children's futures. Warner writes that in the 1990s, terms like "soccer mom," a mother who renounced all interests outside of her family, and "minivan mom," a mother who was always on duty, entered the vernacular.¹⁵⁹ G. Collins also notes another change during this decade. American women were no longer finished having children by age 30; they were only just beginning.¹⁶⁰

In the 2000s, Grose teaches that the culture shifted to an egalitarian idea of marriage, where mother and father equally shared the household chores and childcare.¹⁶¹ But in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and mothers took on most of the extra labor. Women had to be mothers, wives, house cleaners, online teachers, and hold down their jobs remotely.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 137–139.

¹⁵⁸ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 35.

¹⁵⁹ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 112, 115, 119, 166.

¹⁶⁰ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 302–3, 311.

¹⁶¹ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 42.

¹⁶² Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 66; Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 87; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 149; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 344; Stone, *Opting Out?*, 82–83.

Dual Working Households

The nuclear family with a single male breadwinner is no longer commonplace in the US.¹⁶³ Recent reports from the US Bureau of Labor reveal that 72 percent of mothers today are a part of the paid labor force, with about a quarter of them working part-time (one to thirty-four hours a week) and the remainder working fulltime.¹⁶⁴ In a study looking into the lives of Christian mothers working in a liberal arts university, Sellers writes, “We can infer that the majority of mothers are, by choice or necessity, negotiating the challenge of balancing work and family.”¹⁶⁵ The study goes on to say that only one in five American mothers stays home fulltime to care for children. The expectation that every mother stay at home is inconsistent with the reality of modern American life.

As Jean M. Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University, explains, the cost of housing has dramatically increased over the past few decades.¹⁶⁶ As a result, most newlywed husbands and wives must work out of economic necessity, but the financial relief is short-lived. Once they have children, they discover daycare can be more expensive than a college education. Maushart disagrees that mothers work mostly for financial reasons. She believes that mothers are afraid to admit that they like working, because admitting it would ostracize them and make them look like bad mothers.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 52; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 164; Sandberg, *Lean In*, 123; Stone, *Opting Out?*, 63; Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 194.

¹⁶⁴ Megan Dunn, *Who Chooses Part-Time Work and Why?*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/who-chooses-part-time-work-and-why.htm>.

¹⁶⁵ Sellers et al., “Women Called.”

¹⁶⁶ Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 125.

¹⁶⁷ Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, 211.

Bazon declares that working mothers can experience joyful freedom when they embrace work as valuable, rather than viewing it solely as a distraction from motherhood.¹⁶⁸ Work and family responsibilities may alternate over time, she teaches, with one being more important than another, and that is an acceptable arrangement.

Intensive Mothering

Many scholars believe the home ceased being a place of productivity during the Industrial Revolution.¹⁶⁹ Crittenden denies this and teaches that homes today are still very productive – they produce an “intensively raised child” instead of candles and clothing.¹⁷⁰ In 1998, Hays coined the term “intensive mothering,” which asserts that mothers are the primary parent who must offer constant, never-ending nurturing. Intensive mothering puts pressure on women to deemphasize their career because careers distract from mothering. Mothers are expected to continually educate their children (while driving, eating, reading bedtime stories, and every other mundane task) rather than simply keep them fed, clothed, and safe from harm. According to Hays, intensive mothering is, “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive.”¹⁷¹ C. Collins and Demos cite that the time demands of intensive mothering frequently result in women cutting back on their work hours.¹⁷² Sandberg and Westervelt

¹⁶⁸ Bazon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 50.

¹⁶⁹ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 18; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 331.

¹⁷⁰ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 51, 20–21.

¹⁷¹ Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 8, 39, 46.

¹⁷² Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 242; Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 41.

teach this new model insists women be perfectly motherly and their children must always take top priority. This results in feelings of shame and failure for working mothers because they cannot meet the unrealistic standards.¹⁷³ Faris confirms that this style of parenting is harmful to American mothers' mental health.¹⁷⁴

Loes Meeussen and Colette Van Laar are professors in Belgium who studied intensive mothers in the US and United Kingdom (UK). These were mothers who “feel pressure toward perfect parenting.”¹⁷⁵ They investigated intensive mothering's influence on career ambitions and found these mothers are more likely to experience maternal burnout and have lower work-family balance. Parenting pressures from intensive mothering can spill over into all areas of life. The researchers believe this is due to societal pressure insisting mothers put family above career, even when their career is important and valuable work. C. Collins finds that intensive mothering norms combined with ideal worker norms construct a no-win situation for mothers.¹⁷⁶ The “ideal worker” is unencumbered by family or health responsibilities. Westervelt proposes that the ideal worker is a myth, and it is driving Americans to overwork.¹⁷⁷ Pearcy agrees and suggests Christians must challenge the ideal worker standard as harmful to families¹⁷⁸ because no one is unencumbered by family and everyone will eventually face a health crisis.

¹⁷³ Sandberg, *Lean In*, 136; Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 203.

¹⁷⁴ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 87.

¹⁷⁵ Loes Meeussen and Colette Van Laar, “Feeling Pressure to Be a Perfect Mother Relates to Parental Burnout and Career Ambitions,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02113>.

¹⁷⁶ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 243.

¹⁷⁷ Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 221.

¹⁷⁸ Pearcy, *Total Truth*, 344–45.

Matrescence

The transition to motherhood, matrescence, is a key period of a woman's life. Crittenden describes being besotted with her baby after becoming a mother and feeling shocked at that instinctive attachment. When comparing motherhood to her previous career, Crittenden admitted she was surprised that motherhood “took more patience and inner strength – not to mention intelligence, skill, wisdom, and love” than she expected. Crittenden's matrescence revealed to her that mothering did not impress people. People formerly in awe with her nomination for a Pulitzer Prize or her experience working at *Newsweek* were not interested in hearing about her work with her new baby. Motherhood was not worthy of conversation. Crittenden describes how these experiences prompted an identity shift.¹⁷⁹

Pearcey shares her experience of matrescence. She was delighted to be pregnant yet did not know how the life growing in her would impact her deep desire to be an academic.¹⁸⁰ With ambivalence, she longed for both motherhood and career. Unexpectedly and unfairly, her husband was not facing these same questions; he had no ambivalence about becoming a father and pursuing his career. She reflected, “At the time, I confess, it struck me as decidedly unfair that women should experience such intense pressure to choose between the two major tasks of adult life – between pursuing a calling and raising the next generation.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 11.

¹⁸⁰ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 346–47.

¹⁸¹ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 347.

The experts have suggested how to make the most of this life transition. Ziegler, Stone, and Warner report that mothers who quit their jobs to become stay-at-home mothers commonly experience an identity crisis.¹⁸² They lose social status, question their personal value, and wonder if they failed to live up to their full potential. Warner added that these mothers felt tied down to their homes, experienced great boredom, and yet felt like they had no time for themselves. Ziegler writes that to smooth this transition, she encourages mothers to see themselves as a total of all their gifts and accomplishments throughout life, rather than simply the career they left behind or the motherhood journey they just began.¹⁸³

Rodsky reminds all mothers, regardless of career status, to remember that being a mother is incredibly important, but a woman cannot identify as “Braydensmom” for the rest of her life. She argues that women should not let their identity as a person fade away into being only someone’s mother. Rodsky also maintains that women should not allow “perfecting your children” to become a life goal.¹⁸⁴

Women today are told that a mother should have a successful career, attend to their baby’s every possible need, and get all the housework done while looking like perfection and without struggle, says Faris.¹⁸⁵ TED Talk sensation and pioneering shame researcher Brené Brown observes that the two most prominent shame triggers for women today are their appearance and their motherhood. It is believed that both beauty and

¹⁸² Stone, *Opting Out?*, 144–45. Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 52. Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 185.

¹⁸³ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 185.

¹⁸⁴ Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 96–98; Eve Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space: Reclaim Your Creative Life in a Too-Busy World* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2021), 149.

¹⁸⁵ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 5.

parenting should look effortless to outsiders. “The expectation is to be natural beauties, natural mothers, natural leaders, and naturally good parents,” writes Brown.¹⁸⁶ Grose offers a way to overcome these feelings of disappointment when perfection cannot be achieved: to remember there is more than one way to raise healthy and thriving children.¹⁸⁷ No mother must do it perfectly.

Summary of Changing Views of Work and Family

The history of motherhood in America can be divided into three significant periods: Colonial America, Post-Industrial Revolution America, and Modern America. In Colonial America, a family-centric work culture had wives, husbands, children, servants, grandparents and other extended family members working alongside one another to maintain the homestead and produce goods to sell. Fathers were considered the primary parents, in charge of a child’s moral and spiritual instruction.

Following the American Industrial Revolution, the family dispersed during the workday as fathers entered the factory to earn wages, children went to school, and mothers stayed home to care for babies and the homestead. Separate spheres developed for the genders — private lives for women and public lives for men. The private home symbolized a haven of rest from the stress of the outside world. Mothers were cultivating a tranquil home and raising the smallest children to be ready to attend school. In parenting literature and in the culture at large, mothers were portrayed as the primary parent because the father worked long hours in the factory. This period of the nuclear

¹⁸⁶ Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 87.

¹⁸⁷ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 4.

family life, with a wage-earning husband and a housewife mother, was short-lived. By the end of World War II, the idea of the “super mom” was born, and most mothers with young children were working fulltime outside the home.

In Modern America, dual-working households have become common, with both parents contributing to the family's income. However, the rise of "intensive mothering" has placed exorbitant pressure on women to devote substantial time and energy to their children's emotional and developmental needs. This pressure to pursue professional work and raise the next generation exhausts mothers as they struggle to balance career and home.

This next section will look at additional factors contributing to maternal exhaustion and burnout in Modern America: lack of community support structures, disproportionate labor in the home, intensive mothering, the pressure to be excellent, and inequality at work.

Lack of Community Support Structures

Regardless of political opinions on public policy issues, families face overwhelming challenges with childcare. There is not a right or wrong way to structure work and family life, reminds G. Collins.¹⁸⁸ Many family models have been used over the centuries. The problem with the current American structure for work and family life lies in the lack of communal support to sustain the culture's preferred approach to raising a family. C. Collins and Faris state that most families do not have aunts, uncles, cousins, or grandparents living with them to provide childcare, nor does the US have policies

¹⁸⁸ Collins, *When Everything Changed*, 279.

requiring paid family leave or free preschool, all of which would make parenting possible in dual working households.¹⁸⁹ Bazelon acknowledges this, indicating that no one individual should bear the responsibility of raising a human.¹⁹⁰ Women are not failing if they insist children need other adults in their lives.

Researchers at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) found that the absence of a social support network for childcare negatively impacts a mothers' mental health.¹⁹¹ Many measures could alleviate the workload of mothers. For one, Faris encourages men to take their full paternity leave, if offered, which then makes parental leave normative for both genders.¹⁹² Crittenden, Faris, and Westervelt see this time as essential for fathers to build a strong connection with their babies and gain confidence in caring for them on their own.¹⁹³ Faris reports that the global average for paid maternity leave is twenty-nine weeks and for paid paternity leave is sixteen weeks. In the US, paid leave is not guaranteed for either gender, writes Bazelon, Faris, and Hochschild.¹⁹⁴ For Grose, paid leave should be available all people, parent or not, since everyone will eventually face

¹⁸⁹ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 279; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 197–98.

¹⁹⁰ Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 110.

¹⁹¹ Sarah Gammage, Manon Mouron, and Naziha Sultana, *The Hidden Costs of Unpaid Childcare: The Public and Private Sectors Need to Work Together to Promote Gender Equality* (IMF Finance & Development Magazine: International Monetary Fund, 2019), <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2019/03/gender-equality-and-costs-of-unpaid-caregiving-gammage>.

¹⁹² Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 173–75.

¹⁹³ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 242–44; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 173–75; Westervelt, *Forget "Having It All,"* 38–39.

¹⁹⁴ Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 65; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 173; Hochschild and Machung, *The Second Shift*, 280.

circumstances requiring time off to care for another person.¹⁹⁵ Most Americans cannot afford to take a full three months off work without pay. Yet it takes at least that long, if not more, for women to recover from childbirth, Bazelon writes.

Stone reveals that half the women she interviewed state workplace inflexibility as the reason they left their careers after becoming mothers.¹⁹⁶ By offering remote work and flexible part-time schedules, organizations can facilitate healthier integration of work and life for all employees.¹⁹⁷ Pearcey argues that men and women should push back against the private/public split between work and home life.¹⁹⁸ She believes it is crucial to reintegrate family life into careers. Crouch agrees and emphasizes that with today's technological advances, adults should be able to take their work home when possible.¹⁹⁹

Crittenden believes a reduction in work hours should benefit everyone, not only parents.²⁰⁰ She notes that French workers now enjoy nine fewer weeks of work a year compared to Americans. Similarly, she observes that in 1870 the people of Japan and Germany worked as many hours as laborers in the US, but with technological advances, their workweeks have become significantly shorter, while those of workers in the US have not. Crittenden declares that other nations have observed higher productivity after reducing the work week. The additional time off may lower stress and absenteeism.

¹⁹⁵ Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 101–102, 184–185.

¹⁹⁶ Stone, *Opting Out?*, 86.

¹⁹⁷ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 254; Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 192; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 345; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 262–63; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 172.

¹⁹⁸ Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 345.

¹⁹⁹ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 91.

²⁰⁰ Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood*, 260–61.

Crittenden also believes laws should require employers to pay part-time workers prorated benefits and the same hourly rate as full-time employees. Stone corroborates this, saying that two-thirds of the women she interviewed tried to work part-time hours but left their careers because they were tasked with a full-time job but only part-time hours.²⁰¹

Americans tend to think of their problems with childcare as chiefly private rather than public, says C. Collins, Twenge, and Warner.²⁰² While most women think they had a choice (to work or not and for the type of childcare they wanted), the reality is they had few choices because society has made many of these choices for them. This lack of choice presents a two-fold problem: It makes the solutions private rather than corporate, and it places blame on the individual when things do not work. Warner believes that society should enable women to raise children without risking their financial futures.²⁰³ To alleviate the burden on women, society needs quality institutions to care for children.²⁰⁴ Westervelt summarizes the situation: “Forces have conspired to make it exceedingly difficult to be a working mother in America unless you’re very rich.”²⁰⁵ Faris and Grose report that while society benefits from children (“children are our country’s greatest national resource”), parents suffer financially to raise them. Collectively, the US does

²⁰¹ Stone, *Opting Out?*, 88-89.

²⁰² Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 199; Twenge, *Generation Me*, 206; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 32, 56–57.

²⁰³ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 262–263, 268.

²⁰⁴ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 268; Grose, *Screaming on the Inside*, 5, 156; Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 201-202; Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 136.

²⁰⁵ Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 6.

little to assist parents in caring for their children. Westervelt warns that more and more women will choose to not have children because of this lack of societal support.

Disproportionate Labor in the Home

According to Maushart and Rodsky, a considerable gap exists between the unpaid labor by mothers and fathers at home, placing an unequal burden on women.²⁰⁶ They cite data from a United Nations Report, indicating that mothers globally complete up to three times more domestic work than fathers.²⁰⁷ The so-named “second shift” refers to the household chores and childcare a parent completes after paid work ends, such as preparing children’s lunches or purchasing equipment for extracurricular activities. Faris, Warner, and Westervelt discuss women’s experiences of the second shift in their writings, noting that women often feel an imbalance in domestic work with their partners.²⁰⁸ Arlie Russell Hochschild is a professor emeritus of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and specializes in research on human emotions. Hochschild teaches that the burden of second shift work causes distress in women and frequently shows up in fatigue and additional sickness.²⁰⁹ When fathers share the childcare load, they take on enjoyable or occasional tasks rather than daily maintenance tasks (like feeding and bathing). Maushart and Rodsky state that this additional second

²⁰⁶ Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, 186; Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 11, 31.

²⁰⁷ “Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” Sustainable Development Monitoring Report, UN Women, 2018, www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report.

²⁰⁸ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 186; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 251; Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 188.

²⁰⁹ Hochschild and Machung, *The Second Shift*, 9, 197.

shift work depletes mother's leisure time, time that would have been spent sleeping, pursuing a hobby, or moving their bodies.²¹⁰

Many women are caught by surprise, writes Sandberg, when it comes the division of chores after becoming a parent. "During the same years that our careers demanded maximum time investment, our biology demanded that we have children. Our partners did not share the housework and child rearing, so we found ourselves with two full-time jobs...We anticipated none of this."²¹¹ C. Collins completed 135 in-depth sociological interviews of working mothers over five years in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and the US. The majority of the women she interviewed in the US believed that partners should equally share childcaring tasks, but few achieved it in daily life.²¹² Some women reported they could convince partners to complete specific tasks only if they asked, taught, and managed the partner, which they found themselves resenting, and they often found it easier to do the task themselves.

An example of this unequitable division of tasks comes from Rodsky's personal life.²¹³ After receiving a Juris Doctorate (JD) from Harvard and working for J.P. Morgan, Rodsky became a mother. Without any discussion on how to share domestic chores, all the housework and newborn care defaulted to her during maternity leave. After her partner left for work each day, she would feed, rock, entertain, tidy, launder, purchase supplies, scrub, and so on for the entire eight hours he was gone, and then continue to do

²¹⁰ Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, 178; Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 34.

²¹¹ Sandberg, *Lean In*, 13–14.

²¹² Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 215–17.

²¹³ Rodsky, *Fair Play*, 7–8.

those same things after he came home from work. He occasionally asked how he could contribute, but she did not know how to communicate what needed to happen. They unconsciously defaulted into her as the primary parent. Maushart writes that this is common as couples typically revert to gendered roles after the birth of a first child.²¹⁴

Westervelt states that creating gender-neutral division of labor in the home is important but not easy. Several truths must be acknowledged. Families depend on the income from working mothers, parents are happier when supported, and happy individuals make better parents. Additionally, children benefit from having happy parents and witnessing a successful woman in her career.²¹⁵ Bazelon and Sandberg say that perfect equality will never be possible, but reciprocity is a good goal. “The second shift will never disappear, but when it is a shared burden, it is half as long, half as hard, and half as draining.”²¹⁶

The experts have various suggestions on how to better divide household responsibilities. Rodsky provides step-by-step plans to teach women how to re-negotiate household and childcare chores with their partners.²¹⁷ Faris simply states that women should invite their partners and children to share household chores as a team but provides no advice on how to do so.²¹⁸ Bazelon and Mausheart blame the unequal load on a

²¹⁴ Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood*, 189.

²¹⁵ Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All.”*

²¹⁶ Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 80, 142; Sandberg, *Lean In*, 112, 118.

²¹⁷ Rodsky, *Fair Play*.

²¹⁸ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 219.

nurturing skill gap.²¹⁹ They urge women to give their partners the opportunity to develop caregiving skills, noting that it is often the mother's discomfort with a father's approach that hinders progress, rather than "man-ineptitude." Sandberg agrees and states that women should not let biology or lack of skill hold their partners back.²²⁰ As an accidental example, Sandberg shares that she had a complicated delivery and ended up on crutches for the first weeks of her baby's life. Her husband became their baby's primary caregiver and allowed him to develop skills in caregiving, avoiding typical patterns of maternal gatekeeping and instant baby-care expertise.

Failure to Rest and Connect

Most mothers are near the breaking point and losing themselves in motherhood, teaches Warner.²²¹ They experience sleep deprivation, as revealed in the interviews by C. Collins. She argues that the American cultural emphasis on hard work drives women to overwork, pushing beyond their limits and neglecting necessary rest.²²² Brody affirms this point, reporting that most mothers return to work after short maternity leaves and are completely sleep-deprived.²²³ Sandberg writes that if she could change one thing about

²¹⁹ Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 79, 190; Susan Maushart, *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Our Lives and Why We Never Talk About It* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1999), 194–195.

²²⁰ Sandberg, *Lean In*, 105, 108, 118.

²²¹ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 13, 55.

²²² Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 100, 220.

²²³ Brody, *The Fifth Trimester*, xxiv.

her years as a young mother, she would prioritize sleep, noting that lack of sleep makes one anxious, irritable, and confused.²²⁴

In other countries, notes Faris, mothers commonly hire help to free up time to work, focus on their health, and cultivate social lives.²²⁵ These mothers experience little to no guilt in this practice. In American culture, relying on assistance is viewed as a sign of weakness, as women are expected to handle everything on their own without outside help. Collins mentions that when American women outsource help, they are effusive in their gratitude, possibly because they are uncomfortable receiving help.²²⁶

Friendship is a critical component to avoiding burnout, stresses Faris. The absence of close friendships is a leading factor contributing to maternal burnout.²²⁷ Brody and Bazelon comment that mothers frequently feel isolated with their problems and would benefit from a community of supportive friendships.²²⁸ Stone declares that high-achieving mothers neglect self-care by failing to prioritize their own wellbeing and forgoing nurturing friendships.²²⁹

According to Rodsky, every parent, mother and father, needs the following things to avoid burnout: time to develop adult friendships, time to nurture their partnership, time to care for their emotional, physical, and spiritual health, as well time to develop as what

²²⁴ Sandberg, *Lean In*, 133.

²²⁵ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 89.

²²⁶ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 236–37.

²²⁷ Faris, *You Don't Have to Carry It All*, 214; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 35–37.

²²⁸ Bazelon, *Ambitious Like a Mother*, 42; Brody, *The Fifth Trimester*, 208.

²²⁹ Stone, *Opting Out?*, 139–40.

she calls “unicorn space.”²³⁰ Unicorn space provides the freedom to pursue activities they are passionate about, purely for the joy they bring — things that delight and satisfy one’s personal longings. Carving out time for both partners to have unicorn space reminds people who they are apart from family roles.²³¹ Brody acknowledges that mothers must find time every week to do something for themselves — things that replenish them as a person and truly make them happy.²³² Ziegler concurs, emphasizing this priority must be pursued, ideally in nature and with other women, as both those activities have been shown to lower one’s anxiety.²³³ Rodsky concludes that unicorn time must be protected, urging women to set boundaries around time for themselves and to become comfortable with not always being available.²³⁴ She further asserts mothers need to remember their identity apart from their dual roles of mother and professional.²³⁵

Summary of Mothering in America

Today, dual-working households are commonplace in the US, with both parents contributing to the family's income. The rise of intensive mothering has placed additional pressure on women to devote unbounded time and energy to their children’s emotional and developmental needs. Maintaining a meaningful career, which enables them to care

²³⁰ Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space*, 8–21.

²³¹ Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space*, 278–79.

²³² Brody, *The Fifth Trimester*, 240–41.

²³³ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 32–33.

²³⁴ Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space*, 73–79.

²³⁵ Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space*, 21.

for the family’s financial needs, while also working a second shift at home, exacts a heavy toll on mothers and can lead to burnout. Scholars offer several recommendations. Fathers need to share the household tasks more equitably; society must provide adequate family leave and affordable childcare; businesses can offer work from home, part-time work, and other flexible work options; and mothers must prioritize time to care for their own emotional, physical, and spiritual needs, including hobbies and adult friendships.

Biblical Theology and Orthopraxy of Work and Rest

The Bible presents a high view of both work and rest, reflecting God’s design for human flourishing and underscoring the importance for working mothers to nurture their emotional, physical, and spiritual needs.

The Beginnings of Work and Rest

God Created Work

The first thing revealed about God is that he works, teaches Ross Chapman, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Denver Institute for Faith and Work, and Ryan Tafilowski, a professor at Denver Seminary.²³⁶ John Mark Comer, a Teacher in Residence at a Los Angeles church known for his teachings on spiritual formation and urban discipleship agrees, “The first story in the Scriptures starts with God working and ends with him resting.”²³⁷

²³⁶ Ross Chapman and Ryan Tafilowski, *Faithful Work: In the Daily Grind with God and for Others* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024), 3–4.

²³⁷ John Mark Comer, *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 35.

Many biblical scholars and authors describe God as a thoughtful and creative worker, the very first worker,²³⁸ as is written in the opening chapter of the Bible: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”²³⁹ This text establishes a biblical foundation for work as inherently good and an ordinary part of life before the Fall.²⁴⁰ Keller exclaims that God works out of sheer delight, not coercion.²⁴¹ In Isaiah 65:21-23, God laid out his plan for work to be enjoyable and fruitful for all, teaches Leland Ryken, Emeritus Professor of English at Wheaton College and acclaimed author.²⁴²

God did not stop working after his initial work of creation; referencing Psalm 104, Doriani, Keller, and Ryken teach that God cares for the Earth continuously by providing

²³⁸ Elyse Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” in *Women & Work: Bearing God’s Image and Joining in His Mission through Our Work*, ed. Courtney Moore (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2023), 12; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 20; Joanna Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling: Step into Your Place in God’s World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 9; Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 20; Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 159; Amy L. Sherman, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 102; Amy Sherman, “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission,” in *Whatever You Do: Six Foundations for an Integrated Life*, ed. Luke Bobo (Overland Park, KS: Made to Flourish, 2019), 10–11; Chelsea Patterson Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate: A Gospel Vision for Women and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2023), 17.

²³⁹ Gen. 1:1-2.

²⁴⁰ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 24; Daniel M. Doriani, *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2019), 17; Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 12–14; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 45; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 37; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 184; Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 102; Sherman, “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission,” 11; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 19; A. J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018), 25.

²⁴¹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 21.

²⁴² Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 177.

water and cultivating the ground.²⁴³ In Psalm 145, God gives food to all creatures and cares for those who are suffering. Authors Elyse Fitzpatrick, Keller, and Ryken agree that Jesus teaches in John 5:17 that God is always working: “My father is always at his work to this very day.”²⁴⁴ And Jesus’ many years working as a carpenter and later as a healer and teacher show God’s continued work in the world, teaches Doriani.²⁴⁵

The creation narrative also reveals how God designed the world and humanity’s role within it. Genesis 1:28 says: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” From the beginning, God also created humans to work, and this work was intended as a gift.²⁴⁶ As Keller argues, “God calls us to be what he built us to be.”²⁴⁷ Nelson likewise highlights that in the creation narrative, God takes the initiative and grants humans a divine calling.²⁴⁸ Genesis 2:15: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” A.J. Swoboda, professor of theology at

²⁴³ Doriani, *Work*, 25; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 21; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 160.

²⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 13; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 21; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 160.

²⁴⁵ Doriani, *Work*, 25.

²⁴⁶ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 59; Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 2; Comer, *Garden City*, 48; Doriani, *Work*, 24; Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 15; Jeff Haanen, *Working from the Inside Out: A Brief Guide to Inner Work That Transforms Our Outer World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023), 9; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 43; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 9; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 20; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 184–85; Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 102; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 15; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 25; Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack: Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 56–59.

²⁴⁷ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 26.

²⁴⁸ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 25.

Bushnell University, teaches that the work assigned to humans is not a mistake or a curse, as some might assume.²⁴⁹ Through their labor, Adam and Eve were to accomplish God’s will. Tom Nelson, president of Made to Flourish, calls work in the paradise of Eden the opposite of a curse, and rather, “an exhilarating pleasure.”²⁵⁰

Image Bearers

God made humans in his own likeness. This gives humans a unique stamp setting them apart from all other creatures.²⁵¹ Genesis 1:27 says: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Sherman teaches that this creation narrative pictures things the way they were always meant to be, exactly as God wanted it, with humankind a unique creature sharing God’s image.²⁵²

In this divine design, humanity is working for God in a beautiful cooperation with God, teaches Ryken, similar to junior partners carrying out God’s delegated work.²⁵³ Chapman and Nelson write that humans, in their work, mirror the glory and excellence of

²⁴⁹ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 28.

²⁵⁰ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 36.

²⁵¹ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 15; Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 35; Portia Collins, “Don’t Waste Your Gifts,” in *Women & Work: Bearing God’s Image and Joining in His Mission through Our Work*, ed. Courtney Moore (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2023), 101; Comer, *Garden City*, 25; Doriani, *Work*, 26; Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 14; Carolyn Custis James, *Lost Women of the Bible: The Women We Thought We Knew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 32; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 36; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 9; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 21; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 162–63; Sherman, “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission,” 14–15; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 17.

²⁵² Sherman, “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission,” 11.

²⁵³ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 163.

God, representing him to the world.²⁵⁴ Sherman reminds that God does not need humans. He is omnipotent, but he wants to bring people along in his work.²⁵⁵ Work is a way people mimic their Creator, teaches Haanen.²⁵⁶ Humans are the only creatures set apart and given a job description, an office. Beaty references Genesis 1:26, 28, 2:19, Psalm 8:4-8, and James 3:7 to show how humans reflect God's majesty, glory, and power.²⁵⁷

However, men cannot rule over creation alone, declares Beaty, and society needs the image of God in women to flourish.²⁵⁸ Sobolik echoes this sentiment, arguing that God made all image bearers, men and women, to reflect the image of God together as described in Genesis 1:28.²⁵⁹ They are together, as a unified team, Beaty explains, to be his representatives on earth. "When I say that we need women's work in order for our communities and workplaces to flourish...I mean that male and female bear the image of God together."²⁶⁰ Joanna Meyer is the Executive Director of Women, Work, and Calling at Denver Institute. She teaches that when women hold back and neglect their God-given gifts, then part of God's original design is hidden from the world.²⁶¹ Sobolik emphasizes that women have always significantly contributed to the flourishing of the church, their communities, and the kingdom of God. The world would be profoundly different without

²⁵⁴ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 19; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 25.

²⁵⁵ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 86–87.

²⁵⁶ Haanen, *Working from the Inside Out*, 9.

²⁵⁷ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 8–9.

²⁵⁸ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 20–21.

²⁵⁹ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 15; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 19.

²⁶⁰ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 65.

²⁶¹ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 9.

the contributions of female image-bearers. “Women have fiercely defended the most vulnerable, built businesses that creatively solve problems, and served others with their giftings, skills, and passions. Women play a vital role in God’s call to work, to create, and to advance His kingdom.”²⁶² Courtney Reissig is a Bible teacher, writer, and ministry leader. She states that no one can discern from the first chapters of the Bible which tasks of ruling and subduing are assigned to men or to women. Adam and Eve were instructed to rule together and to reign together and be fruitful and multiply together. In working out the details of that ruling, reigning, and multiplying, she writes, “Every culture and family must discern what works best in their context.”²⁶³

Definition of Work

Not all work is done for pay or in an office, because some of the most important work is unseen and unpaid.²⁶⁴ A definition of work that includes only tasks completed in exchange for paid is too limited, teach Doriani and Ryken.²⁶⁵ Work fundamentally meets needs, even if it is not rewarded with wages. Willard defines work by focusing on goodness. “Your work is the total amount of lasting good that you accomplish in your lifetime. That might include your job, but for many of us, our families will be the largest part of the lasting good we produce.”²⁶⁶ Ryken does not mention goodness in his

²⁶² Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 15.

²⁶³ Courtney Reissig, “Motherhood and the Mission of God,” in *Women & Work: Bearing God’s Image and Joining in His Mission through Our Work*, ed. Courtney Moore (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2023), 117.

²⁶⁴ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 73.

²⁶⁵ Doriani, *Work*, 7; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 15–16.

²⁶⁶ Willard, *Life Without Lack*, 59–60.

definition of work but focuses instead on tasks which sustain life. “Work, then, includes the job or labor for which we are paid, but it extends well beyond that. It includes all that we are obliged to do to meet our physical and social needs.”²⁶⁷ Crouch talks about the transformative effect of work. “Work is the fruitful transformation of the world through human effort and skill, in ways that serve our shared human needs and give glory to God.”²⁶⁸ Beaty expands work to include growing flowers and caring for children. “Work happens whenever we interact with the created world, laboring to make it fruitful and beneficial to ourselves and others.”²⁶⁹

Cultural Mandate

The cultural mandate as presented in Genesis 1:28-30 and 2:15 is God’s commission to all people.²⁷⁰ It outlines God-given responsibilities including gardening, naming animals, forming marriages, raising families, and shaping society.²⁷¹ God instructs people to care for the earth and cause it to flourish. Chapman and Sherman instruct that people reveal God’s image to the world while carrying out the cultural

²⁶⁷ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 15.

²⁶⁸ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 83.

²⁶⁹ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 71, 89.

²⁷⁰ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 24; Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 14; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 174–75.

²⁷¹ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 6; James, *Lost Women of the Bible*, 31; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 44; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 9.

mandate.²⁷² Individuals can find dignity and meaning in their work by embracing their responsibility to reflect God and being completeness to God's creation.

The goal of the cultural mandate goes beyond mere reproduction. Sobolik highlights that people are called to cultivate the Earth by improving on creation. "When we engage in the work of cultivation, we are helping something or someone flourish."²⁷³ People are to be about the business of building civilization. Beaty imagines all the things God intended for people to cultivate when he gave us the cultural mandate: "buildings, food, laws, courts, gardens, clothes, calendars, dances, languages, and the million other artifacts and ideas that comprise culture are what God anticipates."²⁷⁴

Keller uses the imagery of park rangers and gardeners.²⁷⁵ Humans are not just caretakers of a park, preserving every inch of the Earth exactly as created. Humans garden, bringing out the potential in creation. The Earth was not ready-made. God made a world in need of work even before the Fall. Beaty follows this same logic, stating that God wanted humans to cultivate an undeveloped, untamed, and wild Earth.²⁷⁶ Doriani highlights the dormant possibilities within the Earth when he writes, "He placed vast potential in this world; it is our privilege to bring those riches to fruition."²⁷⁷ Nelson reinforces this notion, indicating that God desired harmonious human cooperation within

²⁷² Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 4–5; Sherman, "The Bible's Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission," 11.

²⁷³ Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 22–23.

²⁷⁴ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 62.

²⁷⁵ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 44–47.

²⁷⁶ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 210–11.

²⁷⁷ Doriani, *Work*, 27.

the creation, not “unspoiled pristine nature.”²⁷⁸ Comer repeats the image of gardening and imagines that humans work together to create a “garden-life world” out of a wilderness. In this garden-life world, humans will flourish and enjoy God’s generous love.²⁷⁹

God Created Rest

God is infinite, yet he chooses to rest.²⁸⁰ Ruth Haley Barton, spiritual director and founder of the Transforming Center, writes that rest flows from God’s very nature.²⁸¹ Doriani says that God stepped away from productivity to take pleasure in his creation, resting and reflecting on his accomplishments, and calling them good. Doriani encourages people to follow this rhythm of work, pause, reflect, and acknowledge their work as “good.”²⁸² Comer teaches that God built a rhythm of work and rest into the DNA of creation; anything that fights this rhythm goes “against the grain of the universe.”²⁸³ God set a precedent in Genesis 2 with his pattern of work and rest. In this pattern, work and rest are symbiotic:²⁸⁴

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he

²⁷⁸ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 24.

²⁷⁹ Comer, *Garden City*, 61.

²⁸⁰ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 72–72; Comer, *Garden City*, 186; John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 153; Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 15; Doriani, *Work*, 17; Haanen, *Working from the Inside Out*, 82; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 52; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 160; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 123; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 6.

²⁸¹ Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 17–18.

²⁸² Doriani, *Work*, 131.

²⁸³ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 153.

²⁸⁴ Comer, *Garden City*, 186; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 241–42; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 123.

rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.²⁸⁵

God deliberately modeled a rhythm of work and rest for humanity. “Humans were made to rest. Literally,”²⁸⁶ writes Swoboda. God’s plan always included humans working and resting in an ongoing cycle.²⁸⁷ The need for rest is not a consequence of the Fall. Jess Connolly, an author, speaker, and spiritual growth coach, agrees with this perspective, explaining that rest is not an add-on but an intentional and perpetual cycle.²⁸⁸

Drawing attention to the order of creation, Swoboda notes that humanity’s first full day on earth was one of rest: the seventh day.²⁸⁹ Adam and Eve did nothing to earn the rest; they were to join in God’s celebration of the goodness of all that he made. Human work had not yet begun.

Barton declares that work is not better than rest and rest is not better than work. God created both. God did both himself.²⁹⁰ Keller argues for an interdependent relationship between work and rest. People leave work to replenish themselves, and, in getting away from work, they gain perspective and return to do more and better work.²⁹¹ He says, “There is no better starting point for a meaningful work life than a firm grasp of

²⁸⁵ Gen. 2:1-3.

²⁸⁶ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 6–7.

²⁸⁷ Comer, *Garden City*, 26–27; Doriani, *Work*, 17; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 22; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 160–61.

²⁸⁸ Jess Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired: Receive God’s Realistic Rest for Your Soul-Deep Exhaustion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2024), 67.

²⁸⁹ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 7.

²⁹⁰ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 23.

²⁹¹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 241–42.

this balanced work and rest theology.”²⁹² Chapman disagrees with using the word “balance” in relation to work and rest.²⁹³ He writes there is no work-life balance in the Bible, because that would set one against the other when they are not in opposition.

Definition of Rest

Rest can be hard to define, explains Comer.²⁹⁴ Some things are clearly work (doing the laundry, going to an office, and building a house), and some are clearly rest (napping in a hammock or reading a beloved book), but the remainder can be unclear. Comer encourages people to ask themselves, “Is this life-giving?”, to determine if something is restful. Ryken substitutes the word “leisure” where other authors use the word rest. Ryken defines leisure as nonwork, or something not done out of obligation. He explains that leisure, like God’s rest, frees people from the need to produce, allowing them to enjoy what is already made. He contrasts leisure with work, noting that activities like planting flowers can be leisure if chosen for enjoyment rather than obligation. He describes leisure as serving three functions: relaxation which aids recovery and repairs the body, entertainment which alleviates boredom, and personal development which nurtures growth.²⁹⁵

²⁹² Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 30.

²⁹³ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 75.

²⁹⁴ Comer, *Garden City*, 221, 223.

²⁹⁵ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 23, 25, 166.

Creaturely Limitations

Jess Connolly is an author who is passionate about women's spiritual growth. She stresses that God is not disappointed by humans' need for rest.²⁹⁶ Kelly Kopic, a professor of theology at Covenant College, agrees that God is not disappointed in these limitations and states: "Finitude is an unavoidable aspect of our creaturely existence."²⁹⁷ People live in a culture that wants humans to be like God and deny that anyone has limitations.²⁹⁸ People must move beyond lamenting their limits as finite beings and instead embrace limits as part of human design. Kopic asserts that only God is infinite. He suggests that individuals might transform their perspective on human limitations if they praise God for the very boundaries they resist.²⁹⁹

Comer details some human limitations.³⁰⁰ Humans have bodies and can be in only one place at a time. Their minds can know only in part. They must sleep. Needs are not a result of the Fall. They are the result of being human. Humans have distinct giftings, personalities, families of origin, socioeconomic backgrounds, education, careers, seasons of life, responsibilities, and life spans. Ambitions will be frustrated as they learn that their embodied life limits success, teaches Beaty.³⁰¹ Through the very limits of physical

²⁹⁶ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 115.

²⁹⁷ Kelly M. Kopic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 6.

²⁹⁸ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 96–100; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 64; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 27; Kopic, *You're Only Human*, 10–11; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 79; Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 152.

²⁹⁹ Kopic, *You're Only Human*, 8–11.

³⁰⁰ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 64–69.

³⁰¹ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 220.

bodies, God communicates with people. Humans thrive with rhythms, teaches Barton, and it would do them well to listen to the rhythms God built into human bodies: breathing when needing a deep breath, walking when needing a clear head, eating when hungry, and sleeping when eyes are heavy.³⁰²

People must stop pushing their leaders to be superhuman because all humans have limits of time, space, strength, knowledge, perspective, energy, and capabilities, insists Barton and Kopic.³⁰³ Doriani expands this and writes that God knows that people cannot solve every problem they encounter. Only the divine can accomplish that.³⁰⁴

Sabbath

The word “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew word “Shabbat” (the Jewish day of rest, observed from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday) and literally means “to stop,” teaches Comer.³⁰⁵ He applies this meaning to modern life, teaching that people must learn to stop working, stop wanting, and stop worrying. Doriani teaches that the Sabbath is about stopping but also has room for playing, visiting the sick, telling stories, walking in the woods, reading, engaging in athletics, worshiping, and inviting over the lonely.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 42.

³⁰³ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 97; Kopic, *You’re Only Human*, 12, 181.

³⁰⁴ Doriani, *Work*, 155.

³⁰⁵ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 148.

³⁰⁶ Doriani, *Work*, 138–39.

The Sabbath is a means of grace — a channel for God to impart something important to us, teach Barton and Haanen.³⁰⁷ Like all spiritual disciplines, Sabbath-keeping opens one up to the transforming power of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Crouch reminds that spiritual disciplines require patience, and only those who repeat them over long periods of time will reap rewards.³⁰⁸

Command

Keeping the Sabbath was a command given to God’s chosen people in Exodus but was also tied to the story of creation.³⁰⁹ Exodus 31:13 reads, “It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.” God deliberately established a rhythm of work and rest for humanity, modeled after his own pattern of work and rest. This cycle is a part of the created order. And it is a rhythm, not only for God’s people, but for all people.

In the book of Exodus, writes Barton, God taught his people to trust his provision through the Sabbath.³¹⁰ They were instructed to gather a double portion of manna on the day before the Sabbath and to cease all work on the seventh day, trusting that God would give them all that they needed. Keller agrees that the Sabbath is an act of trust. Humans are not the ones keeping the world running; God is present and active.³¹¹ Wayne Muller is

³⁰⁷ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 20, 96; Haanen, *Working from the Inside Out*, 104.

³⁰⁸ Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 239.

³⁰⁹ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 44–45; Comer, *Garden City*, 204; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 243.

³¹⁰ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 44–46.

³¹¹ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 245.

a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and an ordained minister and therapist. Muller writes that honoring the Sabbath must also include honoring the Sabbath year.³¹² The people of Israel were instructed by God to refrain from planting, sowing seed, or harvesting crops every seventh year. The community was to rely on whatever food sprang up in the field unassisted, reminding the people that God himself fed them. In addition to a Sabbath year every seven years, the Year of Jubilee was every fiftieth year. All parcels of land needed to be returned to original owners, debts canceled, and prisoners freed. Muller believes this was God's way of communicating that everything belongs to him and is on loan from him.

In Deuteronomy 5, the command to keep the Sabbath changes in emphasis, away from a posture of rest to a posture of remembrance, writes Barton and Comer.³¹³ The act of sabbathing, of remembering God's goodness, faithfulness, and liberating power becomes worship. Comer highlights that slaves did not get a Sabbath. The people of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt, and while in Egypt, did not get a Sabbath.³¹⁴ God uses the Sabbath as a weekly reminder, writes Comer, that his people are no longer slaves. They have been freed by the mighty hand of God. Barton, Comer, Keller, and Sobolik liken the practice of the Sabbath to a declaration of freedom.³¹⁵ God delivered his people from a place where they were not treated as humans. The practice of the Sabbath

³¹² Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York, NY: Random House, 2000), 205.

³¹³ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 68; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 164–65.

³¹⁴ Comer, *Garden City*, 205.

³¹⁵ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 28–30; Comer, *Garden City*, 204; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 244; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 53; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 122.

teaches people how to be fully human. Speaking to modern readers of the Bible, Meyer writes, “Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave.”³¹⁶ They need the Sabbath practices to remind them of God’s redemption.

Dan B. Allender is a co-founder of The Allender Center and has specialized as a trauma and abuse counselor for over thirty years. He states that the Sabbath is not only a good idea but a command that must be obeyed – nothing about it is optional.³¹⁷ Allender teaches it is as wrong to violate the Sabbath as it is to kill or steal. Connolly and Ryken concur, stating God has commanded people to rest and honor the Sabbath.³¹⁸

Gift

The Sabbath holds a special designation as the first thing God labels holy, remind Meyer and Comer.³¹⁹ Keller refers to the Sabbath as a celebration of human design.³²⁰ Barton and Connolly call the Sabbath one of the best gifts God has given humans.³²¹ Nelson emphasizes the goodness of God’s design saying that God made the Sabbath for his people to flourish.³²² Warren says, “The holiness of rest and the blessedness of unproductivity is a foreign idea to many of us.”³²³

³¹⁶ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 53.

³¹⁷ Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath: The Ancient Practices* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 5–6.

³¹⁸ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 41; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 178.

³¹⁹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 157; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 54.

³²⁰ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 244.

³²¹ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 10; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 202.

³²² Nelson, *Work Matters*, 170.

³²³ Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 145.

Pattern

In speaking of the pattern of weekly Sabbath in Exodus 20:9-10 and the Sabbath year in Exodus 23:10-11, Crouch teaches that God's people, then and now, and anyone dependent on them, should continue to participate in ongoing cycles of ceasing and feasting.³²⁴ Comer and Connolly agree that the Sabbath is not only a day of each week; it is a way of being.³²⁵ This organizing principle, which Crouch refers to as a "Sabbath ladder," formed a foundational pattern of life for the Jewish people around human flourishing.³²⁶ It encompassed daily rhythms of sleep³²⁷ and gleaning laws,³²⁸ weekly Sabbath,³²⁹ seventh-year sabbath rest for the land,³³⁰ and the Jubilee celebrated every fiftieth year.³³¹ Muller believes all of life requires a rhythm and people have lost the rhythm of resting because they assume action and accomplishment are better than rest.³³² The people of God should implement both short- and long-term cycles of rest and feasting.

³²⁴ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 84, 98.

³²⁵ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 149–50; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 124–25.

³²⁶ Crouch, *Playing God*, 248–49.

³²⁷ Eccles. 5:12

³²⁸ Lev. 23:22

³²⁹ Exod. 20:8-11

³³⁰ Lev. 25:2–4

³³¹ Lev. 25:8-38

³³² Muller, *Sabbath*, 1–8.

Work and Rest Gone Wrong

The Bible presents a high view of both work and rest, woven together as an essential part of God’s design for human flourishing. Yet this divine rhythm was disrupted when sin entered the world. What was once joyful labor and restorative rest became marked by frustration. For working mothers, this tension is acutely felt as they navigate a multitude of demands.

In Genesis 3:17-18, humanity's experience of work was permanently altered.³³³ Through Adam and Eve’s disobedience (eating the fruit of the tree they were told not to eat), sin entered the world with devastating effects. They were expelled from the Garden. Their work and the earth were cursed. “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.”³³⁴ Some fruit will still come from work, but the fruit will not be everything it could have been. Chapman, James, and Keller agree that work is still necessary. Although it became frustrating and exhausting, work could not, and should not, be avoided.³³⁵ Comer instructs that the labor of work is not the curse God handed down to Adam and Eve.³³⁶ Work is cursed, just as childbearing is cursed, but

³³³ Comer, *Garden City*, 159–63; Doriani, *Work*, 18; Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 16–17; James, *Lost Women of the Bible*, 41; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 76–77; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 36–37; Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 2; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 20.

³³⁴ Gen. 3:17-18.

³³⁵ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 5; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 29; James, *Lost Women of the Bible*, 41.

³³⁶ Comer, *Garden City*, 160.

work and children are still gifts. Nelson calls work a gift and a curse: “Work greets us with both frustration and exhilaration.”³³⁷

Chapman notes five key relationships tainted from the Fall: relationships with ourselves, one another, systems and structures, created order, and God.³³⁸ Human sin produced many miseries at work, including human laziness, lust for profit, design flaws, work with difficult people, lawsuits, less desirable jobs, and fierce competition, teach Doriani and Nelson.³³⁹ Willard believes that another form of workplace misery is sacrificing family for career.³⁴⁰ Comer and Keller believe unemployment and retirement can be emotionally challenging because work is a core human need.³⁴¹ On the other hand, people are limited with what can be accomplished. They make goals for far more than they can complete, teaches Keller.³⁴² Comer shares that another workplace misery is that some people might not be able to earn a wage doing what they love to do.³⁴³

The good gift of work has been marred by the Fall, teach Doriani, Keller, and Nelson.³⁴⁴ People can become workaholics: people who worship work. Comer and Ryken agree that workaholics turn their work into their religion, searching for meaning and

³³⁷ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 42.

³³⁸ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 25.

³³⁹ Doriani, *Work*, 31; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 22, 40–41.

³⁴⁰ Willard, *Life Without Lack*, 60–61.

³⁴¹ Comer, *Garden City*, 27; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 23.

³⁴² Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 82.

³⁴³ Comer, *Garden City*, 161.

³⁴⁴ Doriani, *Work*, 35; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 27; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 42–43.

purpose outside of God and causing huge problems for themselves and their families.³⁴⁵ Some causes for overwork, instruct Doriani and Ryken, are the fear of failure, avoidance of boredom, overconfidence, or the use of work as a distraction.³⁴⁶ Meyer sees perfectionism as a cause of work burnout.³⁴⁷ People overwork to the point of exhaustion even though, on this side of heaven, perfection is not achievable. Chelsea Patterson Sobolik, Director of Government Relations at World Relief, believes workaholism stems from culture's glorification of busyness.³⁴⁸ Workaholics, states Ryken, never leave the job behind at home or on vacation.³⁴⁹ They have a compulsive drive and feel guilty if they relax.

Just as work is twisted by the Fall, so are leisure and rest, teach Doriani and Ryken.³⁵⁰ People who do not want to work or have extreme wealth may become sluggards, writes Doriani, making all of life leisure.³⁵¹ As a result, skills atrophy and people no longer seek to serve one another. Ryken adds that people can become "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," after 2 Timothy 3:4.³⁵² Both overwork and

³⁴⁵ Comer, *Garden City*, 166; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 9.

³⁴⁶ Doriani, *Work*, 35; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 51.

³⁴⁷ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 69.

³⁴⁸ Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 76.

³⁴⁹ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 66.

³⁵⁰ Doriani, *Work*, 26, 34; Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 187.

³⁵¹ Doriani, *Work*, 26, 34.

³⁵² Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 188.

underwork are extremes that violate humans' created nature and grieve the Creator, teach Chapman, Keller, and Swoboda.³⁵³

Jesus' Invitation to Rest

Jesus modeled a life without hurry, a life filled with deep rest, and he invites his followers to imitate his ways, teaches Comer.³⁵⁴ He declares that salvation in the New Testament includes a deep soul and body healing. By responding to Jesus' call to follow him, his followers will receive a life of rest as promised in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Following Jesus, Comer proposes, is not just a set of theological or ethical beliefs, but a way of living.

Kapic states that the incarnation of Jesus represents "God's great yes to his creation stating that limits are good."³⁵⁵ Rather than apologizing for finite creaturely boundaries, Jesus takes on human form with all its limits and validates the human experience of limitation as part of God's design.³⁵⁶ Warren agrees and writes, "Christianity is a thoroughly embodied faith."³⁵⁷ Jesus had to do all the typical daily maintenance: sleeping, eating, napping, and grooming.

³⁵³ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 74; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 243; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 8.

³⁵⁴ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 77-84.

³⁵⁵ Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 15.

³⁵⁶ Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 43.

³⁵⁷ Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 38-39.

Barton argues that Jesus did not have to teach his followers that they must follow the Sabbath because it was an assumed part of the culture.³⁵⁸ She shows that in Mark 2:27 Jesus and his disciples practiced the Sabbath along with everyone else. However, his practice of the Sabbath was different from that of the surrounding culture. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was created to benefit people, not God, and that he was Lord of the Sabbath. Barton believes that Jesus was teaching a restorative and less restrictive law. Doriani and Comer agree that Jesus ignored all man-made rules about the Sabbath.³⁵⁹

Connolly and Muller report forty-one instances of Jesus cycling through work and rest: retreating for prayer, worship, sleep, or to share a meal and then going out again.³⁶⁰ A few examples of these include Matthew 14:23, Luke 5:15-16, and Mark 1:32-36. Doriani teaches that Jesus loved to work, as seen in John 4:34, and yet had a pattern of working and withdrawing, a pattern that all followers of Jesus should emulate.³⁶¹ Jesus did not wait until all his work was completed to rest, notes Muller.³⁶² In building an argument in favor of rest, Ryken shows that Jesus was not endlessly evangelizing.³⁶³ Jesus established boundaries around work, even around the most important work of proclaiming the gospel and ministering to needy people.

³⁵⁸ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 6.

³⁵⁹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 151; Doriani, *Work*, 137.

³⁶⁰ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 134; Muller, *Sabbath*, 24.

³⁶¹ Doriani, *Work*, 25, 132.

³⁶² Muller, *Sabbath*, 24–25.

³⁶³ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 158.

The Experience of Work and Rest

Scripture can be separated into four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation. In the second act, work unraveled and resulted in toil and frustration.³⁶⁴ As it relates to work, Fitzpatrick labels these same four acts as eras: Work is good. Work is fallen. Work is redeemed. Work is eternal.³⁶⁵ “Work exists now in a world sustained by God but disordered by sin,” writes Keller.³⁶⁶ Sin permeates every aspect of work, instructs Sherman. “In place of harmony and delight with the created order, there is now decay, corruption, brokenness, and death.”³⁶⁷ Fitzpatrick and Nelson note that the entire universe is longing with humankind for redemption and rest by referencing Romans 8:22-23: “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”³⁶⁸

The most profound manifestation of peace is what the Old Testament calls shalom, writes Ryken.³⁶⁹ Shalom is the peace and fulfillment God offers to people who trust in him. Beaty, Nelson, and Swoboda teach that shalom means universal flourishing,

³⁶⁴ Chapman and Tafilowski, *Faithful Work*, 25; Doriani, *Work*, 18; Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 76.

³⁶⁵ Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 12.

³⁶⁶ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 76.

³⁶⁷ Sherman, “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission,” 14–15.

³⁶⁸ Fitzpatrick, “The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work,” 17; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 38–39.

³⁶⁹ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 169.

wholeness, and delight.³⁷⁰ Sherman describes flourishing in much the same way, as having peace in all areas of life: God, oneself, others, and creation.³⁷¹

People live in the now and not yet, explains Connolly, because they have experienced the Creation, Fall, and Redemption that Jesus bought, but they are not yet in the New Creation.³⁷² Steven Garber is the Senior Fellow for Vocation and the Common Good for the M. J. Murdock Charitable Trust, and he puts it this way: “Living our lives between the times is the human experience.”³⁷³ Sherman calls it the “time in-between,” a time when human flourishing is possible but not universal or complete.³⁷⁴ Keller writes, “You should expect to be regularly frustrated in your work even though you may be in exactly the right vocation,” because no one can fully realize all of life’s aspirations while living between the eras of Redemption and New Creation.³⁷⁵ In the affluent West, notes Sherman, those with money can forget these truths as “the culture around us promises youth, beauty, romance, and pleasure [so] we feel entitled to toil-less jobs, stress-free relationships, and age-defying bodies.”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁰ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 76–78; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 126; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 48.

³⁷¹ Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 24.

³⁷² Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 94.

³⁷³ Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 202.

³⁷⁴ Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 17.

³⁷⁵ Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 87.

³⁷⁶ Sherman, “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission,” 15.

Work was created to be “a source of blessedness, abundance, and joy that ripples through all eternity,” writes Warren.³⁷⁷ People should anticipate God restoring all things, including work, agree Meyers, Nelson, and Sobolik.³⁷⁸ Meyer writes, “The scope of the gospel is as broad as the needs of the world.”³⁷⁹ Sherman uses the language of the “kingdom of God” when teaching about Jesus’ work because it is a foretaste of kingdom realities.³⁸⁰ Sherman quotes Luke 4:16-21, where Jesus declares his mission to make all things new and invites his followers to accomplish that work with him. Through miracles and healings Jesus demonstrated this coming kingdom. Today, his followers are likewise called to join in the ongoing mission of renewal, including fostering environments where people can flourish, such as the workplaces where people spend their days.

As Christians strive for renewal, they will experience a tension between bringing light into the world and facing the reality of darkness in the world. People may “bump up against the wrecked state of the world,” explains Warren.³⁸¹ Amid this tension, she suggests that Christians draw near to God in prayer as they work from a posture of dependence on God.

Warren encourages Christians to challenge the cultural narrative of non-stop hard work and instead become known as a “community of the well-rested – people who

³⁷⁷ Tish Harrison Warren, *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 70.

³⁷⁸ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 12; Nelson, *Work Matters*, 53; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 20.

³⁷⁹ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 12.

³⁸⁰ Sherman, *Kingdom Calling*, 16–18.

³⁸¹ Warren, *Prayer in the Night*, 68, 72.

embrace our limits with zest and even joy.”³⁸² Taking time to rest, teaches Kopic, necessitates stepping away from work.³⁸³ This act imposes limitations on individuals — something Americans struggle with, yet, Kopic argues, embracing these boundaries cultivates healthy rhythms of life. Warren teaches that rest is learned over time with much repetition.³⁸⁴

Daily Rhythm

People must embrace non-productive rest, including sufficient nightly sleep, teaches Doriani.³⁸⁵ It is essential for human flourishing, acknowledges Crouch.³⁸⁶ While sleeping, the heart, mind, soul, and strength are all nurtured. Swoboda echoes this sentiment. Sleep originated before the Fall and is part of all that God calls good at creation.³⁸⁷ Ryken states that most Americans are living with a sleep deficit, getting almost an hour and a half less sleep than recommended.³⁸⁸ Fatigue has become part of the American way of life. Connolly indicates that people have grown used to pushing their bodies past their intended limits. Lack of sleep can affect every part life.³⁸⁹

³⁸² Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 152.

³⁸³ Kopic, *You're Only Human*, 183.

³⁸⁴ Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 152.

³⁸⁵ Doriani, *Work*, 133.

³⁸⁶ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 112.

³⁸⁷ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 15.

³⁸⁸ Ryken, *Redeeming the Time*, 41, 51.

³⁸⁹ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 52–54.

Sleep serves as a daily reminder of human creatureliness, emphasizing that people are not God and instead depend on a strong and loving Creator, teach Kopic and Warren.³⁹⁰ Kopic critiques the typical American view that equates the need for sleep with weakness, contrasting it with the life of Jesus, who—though never viewed as weak—slept.³⁹¹ Sleep, like other bodily functions, is also implicitly understood as part of Jesus’ human experience. Crouch teaches that God reassures his people that he delights to give them sleep in Psalm 127:2. He reassures them that he himself never sleeps and will watch over them as they sleep in Psalm 121:4.³⁹² Sobolik cites many additional verses to support that God gives his beloved children sleep including Psalm 4:8, 23:1-3, 62:1-2, 127:2, and 130:5-6.³⁹³ Warren believes that the act of sleep embodies the truth that God does not depend on human labor.³⁹⁴

Weekly Rhythms

For individuals to flourish wholistically, including working mothers, rest cannot be reserved for annual vacations or postponed until the children leave home for college. Rest must be woven into the weekly rhythm of work and rest.

Meyer speculates that God knew people’s tendency to overwork, took compassion on them, and preemptively created the Sabbath as a solution.³⁹⁵ Muller believes the

³⁹⁰ Kopic, *You’re Only Human*, 212; Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 152.

³⁹¹ Kopic, *You’re Only Human*, 214–15; examples include John 4:6, Matt. 8:24, and Mark 4:38-39.

³⁹² Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 113.

³⁹³ Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 117.

³⁹⁴ Warren, *Prayer in the Night*, 90.

³⁹⁵ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 52.

Sabbath proves that God does not desire for people to live in exhaustion.³⁹⁶ Meyer agrees that in keeping the Sabbath, the Israelites modeled “a flourishing way of life to a watching world.”³⁹⁷ Connolly enumerates the gifts of the Sabbath, asserting that it is perfectly structured to address the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional fatigue of the American experience.³⁹⁸

The pursuit of delight should be a primary goal of the Sabbath.³⁹⁹ Chapman and Comer see the Sabbath as a day to delight in God himself and the work of one’s hands.⁴⁰⁰ They teach that the Sabbath is not only a time to stop but also to celebrate — a restful celebration. Sobolik cites James 1:17, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” and teaches that God created some things simply for enjoyment, wonder, and delight. When God created the world, writes Swoboda, he entrusted Adam and Eve with a world of potential they could explore, discover, play, eat, and enjoy.⁴⁰¹ Barton teaches that some activities (like gardening or cooking) might be so enjoyable for some that they should save it for the Sabbath.⁴⁰² The things that bring people joy are not accidental or incidental, she writes; they are part of a person’s identity and should be pursued as part of God purpose for one’s life.

³⁹⁶ Muller, *Sabbath*, 26.

³⁹⁷ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 53.

³⁹⁸ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 202.

³⁹⁹ Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 6–7, 126.

⁴⁰⁰ Comer, *Garden City*, 186–87; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 155.

⁴⁰¹ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 6–7.

⁴⁰² Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 21, 166.

Allender teaches that the Sabbath is primarily a day delight for humans, animal, and the Earth.⁴⁰³ He derives this from the fact that God was not tired after creating/working after the six days of creation. God did not need rest, but he did take time to delight. Allender believes that some people misunderstand the word rest (*menuha*) in Gen 2:1-3. He argues that a better translation of the Hebrew word *menuha* is “repose, tranquility, or delight.” God entered the joy of his creation. Muller, on the other hand, writes, “If we believe life is fundamentally good, we will seek out rest as a taste of that goodness.”⁴⁰⁴ The two concepts are intertwined. Rest is an act of delight, an intentional pause to rejoice in the goodness of God’s creation.

To uncover their truest delights, Allender has people ask themselves, “What would I do for a twenty-four-hour period of time if the only criteria was to pursue my deepest joy?”⁴⁰⁵ Comer encourages people to ask a similar question, “What could I do for twenty-four hours that would fill my soul with a deep, throbbing joy? That would make me spontaneously combust with wonder, awe, gratitude, and praise?”⁴⁰⁶ Allender and Comer believe the answers to these questions should shape a person’s Sabbath day habits.

The discipline of solitude and silence is another category of non-productive rest that all Christians should practice on a regular basis, teach Allender, Connolly, Crouch, Muller, and Nouwen.⁴⁰⁷ Henri J. M. Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest. After two

⁴⁰³ Allender, *Sabbath*, 5, 12, 27–28.

⁴⁰⁴ Muller, *Sabbath*, 40–41.

⁴⁰⁵ Allender, *Sabbath*, 15.

⁴⁰⁶ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 155.

⁴⁰⁷ Allender, *Sabbath*, 165; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 122; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 145; Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 36–39; Muller, *Sabbath*, 55; Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of*

decades of teaching at academic institutions, including the University of Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School, and Harvard Divinity School, Nouwen moved on to work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at the L'Arche Daybreak, a community in Ontario. Nouwen writes, “Solitude is the furnace of transformation.”⁴⁰⁸ He believes that times of solitude allow Christians to experience gospel transformation. Muller teaches that silence changes people because it can alter their perception of events and relationships.⁴⁰⁹ Allender writes that silence is where God most often shows up in life. “The drama of silence is that it is the state where God shows up more frequently than in the bustle of our busyness.”⁴¹⁰ Foster believes that the main purpose of silence and solitude is to hear and see from God.⁴¹¹

As modern technology inundates society with inputs and constant stimuli that require ongoing attention, Comer and Connolly assert that no other practice offers healing from the pervasive mental exhaustion as effectively as engaging in solitude and silence.⁴¹² Crouch agrees, suggesting that solitude and silence foster spiritual growth by building spiritual resources for everyday life.⁴¹³ Foster teaches that if someone cannot

the Heart: Connecting with God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003), 15.

⁴⁰⁸ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Muller, *Sabbath*, 55.

⁴¹⁰ Allender, *Sabbath*, 165.

⁴¹¹ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), 123.

⁴¹² Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 122–30; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 145.

⁴¹³ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 36–37.

free up large amounts of time for these practices, then they can focus on small moments in ordinary life (early mornings before anyone else opens their eyes.)⁴¹⁴

The noise of the modern world, with all its digital distractions, makes it hard to hear God's voice and be connected to him, says Comer.⁴¹⁵ He offers that Christians should follow Jesus' example by visiting quiet, solitary places, thereby replicating Jesus' rhythm of work/ministry and retreat/silence. In times of busyness, Comer argues that individuals require more silence and solitude, not less.

Long Term Rhythms

If individuals want to flourish wholistically, including working mothers, then rest must be a lifestyle. Each author takes a slightly different approach. Crouch believes people should craft a modern-day pattern of Sabbath where they rest at least one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year.⁴¹⁶

Comer believes extended vacations achieve true mental and soul rest. He considers his long summer vacations one of his most important spiritual disciplines. Comer recalls that under the Torah, the people of Israel were commanded to observe three feasts annually, during which they were instructed to set aside their work.⁴¹⁷ These periods of rest typically lasted eight days, with a Sabbath framing both sides of the week-

⁴¹⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 120, 130.

⁴¹⁵ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 120–30, 140.

⁴¹⁶ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 98.

⁴¹⁷ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 241–42.

long feast. He does not list the feasts' names, nor does he give a biblical reference, but he uses these feasts as biblical support for long vacations.

Foster recommends people take three- to four-hour retreats several times a year to pray and hear God's goals for their lives, as well as a longer once-a-year silent retreat.⁴¹⁸

Vacations can be a source of rest and pleasure, but Barton warns that some people stay incredibly busy on vacation and therefore do not feel rested when they return home.⁴¹⁹ People must purposely plan their time to ensure they get rest while on vacation.

Swoboda notes that the Bible is silent on vacations and that vacations are a poor substitute for a weekly Sabbath.⁴²⁰ She suggests that if people took the Sabbath seriously, vacations might not be needed as human bodies are not designed to live off a yearly vacation while ignoring a regular Sabbath practice.⁴²¹

Barton believes that the unique stress of ministry life – being on call 24/7, weekends consumed with preaching and church activities, rarely enjoying two days off in row, chronic understaffing, and blurred boundaries between work and life – necessitate regularly scheduled sabbaticals for those in ministry.⁴²² Kapic writes that in a typical day, ministry leaders spend much of their time listening and counseling people. “Often what they hear is highly emotionally charged, stressful, and relationally complicated. They listen to confessions, absorb angry outbursts, witness debilitating fears, and encounter

⁴¹⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 132–33.

⁴¹⁹ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 157.

⁴²⁰ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 18.

⁴²¹ Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 129.

⁴²² Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 152.

hardened hearts, all in the course of one day.”⁴²³ The pressure faced by ministry leaders to prioritize the needs of others over their own often leads to personal strain. Kopic states that the human body has limited capacity to absorb pain and stress, warning that ministry leaders who fail to step away from their work and take time for rest are at risk of burnout. Without intentional breaks, the relentless demands of ministry can lead to exhaustion.

Barton argues there is no perfect time for a sabbatical because life and ministry will always have emergencies.⁴²⁴ Therefore, sabbaticals must be prioritized and defended. A sabbatical is needed when the regular cycle of Sabbath rest is no longer sufficient to combat exhaustion. Connolly teaches that the idea of sabbatical comes from Leviticus 25.⁴²⁵ Every six years of work, the Israelites were commanded to let the agricultural land rest for an entire year and eat only the food that sprouted without cultivation. If land needs a rest from productivity, teaches Connolly, then it follows that people’s minds and bodies also need rest. Crouch also believes that a periodic sabbath year would be the perfect time for people to plan a pilgrimage, learn a new sport, write songs, and have time for creativity that typical life does not allow.⁴²⁶ Sabbaticals need not only be for pastors or professors. Crouch writes that this practice could be transformative for women who have devoted their early or middle years to raising young children. The older children and the father could grant her a sabbatical leave from most household responsibilities for a season, giving her freedom to pursue other interests that were neglected while their

⁴²³ Kopic, *You’re Only Human*, 183–84.

⁴²⁴ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 141.

⁴²⁵ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 124–25.

⁴²⁶ Crouch, *Playing God*, 255–60.

children were young. Perhaps she might pursue a course of study, a new hobby, or simply rebuild healthy habits and community after the long, intensive season of raising children.

For many years the term “sabbatical” was confined to the academic environment, where professors take time off teaching responsibilities to pursue research and publication, writes Barton.⁴²⁷ Academics are expected to be productive during their sabbaticals. Thus, Barton prefers to use the term “renewal leave” rather than sabbatical for those in ministry, emphasizing the priority of rest and replenishment of the emotional, physical, and spiritual life. Barton believes that a renewal leave should follow the pattern found in Exodus 23:10-11, including times of rest, renewal, and delight, just like a Sabbath, but for a longer time. Barton argues there needs to be enough time on the renewal leave to allow the body’s hormones to settle into a restful state. She proposes that at least three months are required to reap physical benefits. People must be able to sleep well (rest for body), let go of work concerns (rest for mind), let go of the work persona (rest for soul), and simply be a child in God’s presence. Barton observes that most people benefit from a spiritual director guiding the formation of a comprehensive plan for rest.

Getting Started

No one accidentally keeps the Sabbath.⁴²⁸ Intention and planning are required as Sabbath rhythms oppose the habits of this world. The other six days must be spent well to make a Sabbath happen. Comer teaches that it takes discipline to follow a routine

⁴²⁷ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 150, 160, 163.

⁴²⁸ Allender, *Sabbath*, 62; Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 8; Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 55; Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 125; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 33.

Sabbath.⁴²⁹ He references the words in Hebrews 4:11 that Christians “make every effort to enter that rest.” Muller and Swoboda concur that people must be intentional with rest because it is the nature of work to feel like it is never completed.⁴³⁰ Muller writes, “If we refuse to rest until we are finished, we will never rest until we die. Sabbath dissolves the artificial urgency of our days, because it liberates us from the need to be finished.”⁴³¹

Connolly notes that people can prepare for a successful Sabbath by establishing rhythms in their day, week, and month but warns that rigid schedules set people up for failure, while rhythms give people space to breathe and are more fluid.⁴³² Sobolik encourages individuals to experiment and offer themselves gentleness when determining what rhythms work in their particular life.⁴³³ Allender and Muller similarly believe that to protect the joy of the Sabbath, one must guard against legalism.⁴³⁴ Barton and Connolly emphasize that the heart of Sabbath is about ceasing one's “usual labors,” rather than focusing on a long list of prohibitions.⁴³⁵ Connolly teaches that the Sabbath should not stir up anxiety that demands righteous obedience but should instead remind people of God’s generosity and care for their wellbeing.⁴³⁶

⁴²⁹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 149–50.

⁴³⁰ Muller, *Sabbath*, 83; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 36.

⁴³¹ Muller, *Sabbath*, 83.

⁴³² Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 190.

⁴³³ Sobolik, *Called to Cultivate*, 125.

⁴³⁴ Allender, *Sabbath*, 7; Muller, *Sabbath*, 31.

⁴³⁵ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 21; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 41, 201.

⁴³⁶ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 201.

Swoboda offers several practical suggestions to help people fully embrace a day of rest.⁴³⁷ She recommends using the days leading up to the Sabbath to complete tasks such as paying bills, caring for animals, going to the store, preparing extra food, and cleaning the house. Accomplishing these tasks in advance will allow the Sabbath day to be an uninterrupted and peaceful day dedicated to rest.

Connolly argues that, since few cultures encourage rest, individuals should prepare for misunderstandings as they reorganize their lives to prioritize rest.⁴³⁸ Choosing to rest may cost the approval of others, higher salaries, or job promotions.

Barton warns that a person must not overhaul their entire life in one day.⁴³⁹ She encourages people to begin with small steps, such as choosing one day to set aside as a Sabbath and gradually building from there.

Connolly stresses that women must resist cultural pressure to be over-responsible for everything and should guard their mental load and not just their physical load.⁴⁴⁰ “Is there work you are doing that someone else can do?”, asks Nelson when encouraging individuals to wisely delegate tasks and do fewer things themselves.⁴⁴¹ Barton expresses concern that most of the preparation for Sabbath falls on women, making what should be a day of rest and delight into a burden.⁴⁴² She encourages families to share the

⁴³⁷ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 36.

⁴³⁸ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 40–42, 126.

⁴³⁹ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 11.

⁴⁴⁰ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 104, 133.

⁴⁴¹ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 170–71.

⁴⁴² Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 110.

preparations rather than divide it based on gender. Warren references Matthew 11:28-30, recalling the words of Jesus calling everyone who is exhausted and weary, regardless of age, gender, and social status, to come to him for rest.⁴⁴³

Swoboda indicates that much of the work Americans engage in is mind-work, leading to tiredness that manifests as mental exhaustion rather than physical fatigue.⁴⁴⁴ He explains that people's brains also need a Sabbath from constant planning and insists that people should completely cease thinking about work on the Sabbath. He advocates developing counterrhythms on the Sabbath. Meyer also believes that the Sabbath should be known as a day of contrast.⁴⁴⁵ If one's work is primarily sedentary, then the Sabbath can be a time for physical activity and joy.

Summary of the Biblical Theology and Orthopraxy of Work and Rest

God both works and rests. He created humans in his image to reflect him, by imitating his cycles of work and rest, thereby enabling them to flourish. Both work and rest are gifts to be cultivated over a lifetime. Work encompasses the total amount of lasting good completed in a lifetime, paid or unpaid. For working mothers, this includes professional labor in their career and the often unseen work of nurturing and managing the home. Rest involves ceasing physical and mental labor while enjoying God's creation and nurturing important relationships. Yet for working mothers rest can feel elusive. Sin can twist and impact both work and rest. Jesus came to redeem all aspects of life,

⁴⁴³ Warren, *Prayer in the Night*, 104.

⁴⁴⁴ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 53–57.

⁴⁴⁵ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 55; Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 57.

including one's relationship with work and rest. Resisting rest (or being prevented from rest) constitutes a struggle against God's design. The Bible presents commands and patterns for daily, weekly, yearly, and extended periods of rest. Individuals must guard against a legalistic approach to rest, instead embracing it as a divine gift that restores some of the flourishing life God always had planned for humanity. When working mothers can view rest as part of God's blessed design for them as people, rather than a privilege for the few, they are better able to experience the wholistic flourishing God desires for his people.

Psychology and Counseling on Preventing Burnout

Defining Burnout

In recent years, burnout has become a recognized and pressing concern, particularly for those balancing multiple demands at work and at home. In 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) officially placed burnout in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD).⁴⁴⁶ The WHO describes burnout as chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. A triad of symptoms is used to identify burnout syndrome – chronic exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness.⁴⁴⁷ In

⁴⁴⁶ “Burn-Out An ‘Occupational Phenomenon’: International Classification of Diseases,” Departmental News, World Health Organization, May 28, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>.

⁴⁴⁷ Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships with Their Jobs* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024), 3; Arianna Molloy, *Healthy Calling: From Toxic Burnout to Sustainable Work* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2025), 4; Jennifer Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2021), 142; Mike Rucker, *The Fun Habit: How the Pursuit of Joy and Wonder Can Change Your Life* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2023), 7; M. Joseph Sirgy and Dong-Jin Lee, *Work-Life Balance: HR Training for Employee Personal Interventions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 33; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 19.

other words, individuals experiencing burnout are fatigued from working in a high stress and a hostile job environment and are pessimistic of their ability to do the job required. M. Joseph Sirgy, Professor Emeritus of Marketing, Virginia Tech, and Dong-Jin Lee, Professor Emeritus of Marketing, Yonsei University, understand burnout to be an emotional condition that occurs when a person cannot cope with work and life pressures. Their definition underscores that burnout is not confined to the paid workplace; it encompasses the whole of life.⁴⁴⁸ For working mothers, whose responsibilities extend far beyond their professional roles, recognizing the signs of burnout and prioritizing their emotional, physical, and spiritual flourishing are therefore essential.

Causes of Burnout

While the US has normalized long work hours and low vacation rates contributing to burnout, these are not the only contributing factors, explains Christina Maslach, a leading expert on burnout. She and her co-authors, Susan Jackson and Michael Leiter, state that job commute times may contribute to burnout, as can the emotional labor for workers in healthcare, teaching, and human services. When workers are not given adequate recovery time following periods of high stress, they “become increasingly tired, worn out, and unenthusiastic about going back to the job the next day.”⁴⁴⁹

Duane P. Schultz, a professor of psychology at the University of South Florida, and his wife Sydney Ellen Schultz, a researcher and editor, state that many people burn

⁴⁴⁸ Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 33.

⁴⁴⁹ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 15.

out because they put in long hours and yet cannot afford the basic necessities of life.⁴⁵⁰ They offer that there is no county in the entirety of the US where someone working a full-time minimum wage job is able to rent a two-bedroom apartment. Biola professor of communication studies, Arianna Molloy teaches that burnout also hits those who are passionate about their jobs.⁴⁵¹ Their passion makes them susceptible to workaholism. Workplace well-being expert Jennifer Moss writes that burnout can also happen when people feel unsupported and mistreated at work, resulting in people ignoring their own body, time, and energy boundaries to appease a difficult boss.⁴⁵²

Ziegler primarily works with mothers and has identified mommy burnout as a major problem for American women because they rarely get time free from work or caring for children. She describes mommy burnout as a “chronic stress, which impacts you both physically and emotionally and wears you down. You just never get a break; there are no pauses to your discomfort, which is exhausting.”⁴⁵³

Summarizing the bulk of burnout research, Maslach and Moss state that burnout is caused by overwork (which leads to chronic stress), lack of control, lack of reward, poor relationships, lack of fairness, and values mismatch.⁴⁵⁴ In workplaces that produce burnout, workers can feel ignored, manipulated, distrusted, micromanaged, second-

⁴⁵⁰ Duane P. Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz, *Psychology and Work Today: An Introduction to Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 7–8, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003058847>.

⁴⁵¹ Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 3.

⁴⁵² Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 41; Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 142.

⁴⁵³ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 19.

⁴⁵⁴ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 6–16; Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 5.

guessed, or overruled. Maslach and Moss believe that leaders need to provide conditions that support workers happiness rather than detract from it. Maslach, Moss, and Rucker warn that burnout is not an individual's fault, but rather a systemic problem in the workplace. Most workplaces are designed for the economic bottom line, wanting to get as much money out of the worker's time as they can, and can be bad for the people who work in them.⁴⁵⁵

Burnout Inventories

Maslach is credited with developing the first diagnostic tool for burnout syndrome. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was published in 1981 and lists questions that psychologists use to assess burnout.⁴⁵⁶

Using an informal set of criteria based on her years of treating mothers, Ziegler has created a motherhood burnout inventory grounded in the MBI.⁴⁵⁷ This tool allows her to assess if women are struggling with typical life stressors or actual burnout. During a new mother evaluation, she listens for the women's "level of emotional and physical exhaustion, resentment toward her children and spouse, feelings of failure, whether she still has hobbies and passions of her own, and whether she can ever turn her stress off." For example, one question probes for a mother's feelings towards her children after she returns home from a long day at work. If she is feeling dread as she approaches the house, knowing the long list of work that sits in front of her, instead of feeling

⁴⁵⁵ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 7.

⁴⁵⁶ Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 4; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 103.

⁴⁵⁷ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 27–29.

anticipatory joy at being reunited with her children, then Ziegler will ask follow-up questions to see how persistent this resentment and exhaustion is.

Kate Sustersic Gawlik, a professor of nursing at the Ohio State University, led a team of researchers who evaluated the new Working Parent Burnout Scale.⁴⁵⁸ Gawlik mentions two widely used and valid parental burnout scales (Parental Burnout Inventory and the Parental Burnout Assessment), but neither of them is specifically for working parents. Working Parent Burnout Scale fills that gap.

Consequences of Burnout

Though there may be short-term benefits from overworking and neglecting vacations, they come with destructive long-term costs. Malach shows that that working longer hours leads to illness and lower productivity.⁴⁵⁹ Employee loss and absenteeism is a huge financial penalty in any industry and only increase when burnout is present.

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang is the founder of The Restful Company, a nonprofit devoted to advancing the four-day week, and a visiting scholar at Stanford. Pang and Sirgy report that it is often the most talented, dedicated, and experienced people who burn out, and those very people are the hardest to replace.⁴⁶⁰ Pang summarizes the workplace

⁴⁵⁸ Kate Sustersic Gawlik et al., “Psychometric Properties of the New Working Parent Burnout Scale,” *Journal of Pediatric Health Care: Official Publication of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners* 36, no. 6 (July 2022): 540–48, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2022.05.020>.

⁴⁵⁹ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 13.

⁴⁶⁰ Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018), 161; Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 33.

consequences of burnout for the individual: “emotional exhaustion, a decline in performance, poorer decision-making, lower empathy, and higher rates of errors.”⁴⁶¹

Workers who burn out also suffer personally, as do their families. They suffer from marriage problems, depression, and higher rates of suicide. Moss, Daniel Goleman, a Harvard-trained psychologist best known for popularizing the concept of emotional intelligence, and Cary Cherniss, an emeritus professor of Applied Psychology at Rutgers University, write that heart attacks, strokes, hypertension, immune deficiencies, overeating, overdrinking, and chronic joint pain all occur at higher rates in people suffering from burnout.⁴⁶²

Solutions for Burnout

Corporate

The responsibility for employee burnout lies with the workplaces, teaches Rucker.⁴⁶³ Suffering from burnout is not a personality weakness, and preventing burnout is more than a personal wellness strategy. Maslach and Moss report that most people wrongly believe employees are at fault for their own burnout experience.⁴⁶⁴ Most American businesses squeeze as much work from employees as possible rather than caring for them as humans, states Rucker. These authors agree that burnout prevention is mostly an organizational problem. Moss details a multitude of methods for ensuring

⁴⁶¹ Pang, *Rest*, 161.

⁴⁶² Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 62; Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 25.

⁴⁶³ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 7.

⁴⁶⁴ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 36; Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 3.

employees do not burn out.⁴⁶⁵ This study will not examine corporate organizational methods of burnout prevention. Instead, the remainder of the literature review will explore how individuals can build resilience against burnout and sustain well-being within systems that may not support them.

Individual

Emily Nagoski, health behaviorist and researcher at the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, and her sister Amelia Nagoski, who has a doctorate in musical arts, teach that most people spend their lives pushing themselves to be productive by working harder.⁴⁶⁶ They strive to be tough, self-motivated people who can get through any challenge. Molloy agrees and identifies that many healthy, productive workers can have similar behaviors to those suffering burnout, while experiencing vastly different things internally.⁴⁶⁷ Goleman and Sirgy observe that since humans are built to handle short spurts of stress followed with periods of recovery and leisure, burnout can occur when stress is not followed by recovery practices.⁴⁶⁸

Clinical psychologist and professor at Brown University, Yael Schonbrun labels two forms of psychological toughness as grit and resiliency.⁴⁶⁹ She defines grit as

⁴⁶⁵ Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 20–28 drop needless work, promote flexible schedules, provide a living wage, gift time instead of physical gifts, allow people to regularly disconnect technology, resist micromanaging, celebrate leaving at closing time rather than workaholism.

⁴⁶⁶ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 197.

⁴⁶⁷ Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 63–64; Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 32.

⁴⁶⁹ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 82–89.

pushing oneself with great passion for future results. Gritty people, she explains, have a specific purpose they are working towards. Their clarity helps overcome stressors and challenging circumstances. Resiliency, on the other hand, as defined by Goleman, is bouncing back from stress.⁴⁷⁰ Schonbrun warns that if gritty people who are focused on long-term results are not aware of their limitations, they will burn out, ultimately limiting their long-term gains. Similarly, Molloy cautions that if people pursue grit without building their resiliency, they will be in danger of experiencing burnout.⁴⁷¹

To avoid burnout while pushing through a stressful situation, people must heed the body's communication. People who respond to their bodies' cues and practice self-compassion have improved moods and lower stress hormones, teach Nagoski and Molloy. Schonbrun writes that simply pushing through tough seasons is not enough; people must also pursue pleasure and meaning if they want to build resiliency. She writes, "Working parenthood isn't always fun, and it's rarely easy. But thanks to what I've learned about balancing pleasure and meaning, I've discovered that working parenthood can be profoundly happy."⁴⁷²

There are a multitude of methods available to prevent burnout, writes Gawlik.⁴⁷³ Some methods include: resting, sleeping, playing, bodily care, psychological detachment, managing energy, establishing boundaries, building supportive relationships, building a

⁴⁷⁰ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 63–64.

⁴⁷¹ Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 35.

⁴⁷² Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 269.

⁴⁷³ Gawlik et al., "Psychometric Properties of the New Working Parent Burnout Scale."

growth mindset, cultivating gratitude, and practicing mindfulness. The following section will look at some of these specific skills.

Rest

Pang views deliberate rest as an essential component of good work and a good life for all humans.⁴⁷⁴ Rest creates calm, keeps minds sharp, and bodies at their peak.

Attempting to define rest, Nagoski writes, “Rest is, quite simply, when you stop using the part of you that’s used up, worn out, damaged, or inflamed, so that it has a chance to renew itself.”⁴⁷⁵ Rest, writes Pang, leads people to turn down nonessential tasks, deepens emotional reserves, and builds resilience to stress.

Relaxation is the antidote to stress, teaches Goleman.⁴⁷⁶ Humans need about ten hours of rest a day, explains Nagoski. This amount of rest can be averaged over a month, but, if skipped, it will catch up with a person. The body may yawn uncontrollably or get sick, and the mind may become foggy or anxious. These ten hours a day, she explains, may include sleep, stress-reducing conversation, physical activity, relaxed eating, reading, games, play, and anything that will allow the mind to wander.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Pang, *Rest*, 2–14, 242–45.

⁴⁷⁵ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 156.

⁴⁷⁶ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 67.

⁴⁷⁷ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 156–70.

Pang notes that throughout most of history, leaders were expected to appear calm and unhurried, or in other words, well-rested.⁴⁷⁸ This expectation is countercultural in modern times, where being stressed and exhausted is a sign of talent and dedication.

Brown, writing on the importance of rest and play in preventing burnout, writes, “If we want to live a life of meaning and contribution, we have to become intentional about cultivating sleep and play. We have to let go of exhaustion, busyness, and productivity as status symbols and measures of self-worth. We are impressing no one.”⁴⁷⁹

Rest can take many forms, but an unexpected one is switching from one activity to another, teach Nagoski and Schonbrun.⁴⁸⁰ People can operate at peak capacity doing one thing for a limited time. Switching from one task that primarily uses the brain to another that uses the body can be restful, even if both appear to be work. Switching activities can also trigger the psychological detachment needed to rest and recover one’s capacity, teaches Schonbrun. When a mother chooses to not think about her children while at work, she may experience a type of detachment from her children that allows her to recover her ability to connect with them once they meet up again.

Amy Jen Su, cofounder and managing partner of the Mariswood Group, a leadership development firm, encourages people to take small restoration breaks where they can eat lunch away from their desk or plan ahead a few nights a week to get extra

⁴⁷⁸ Pang, *Rest*, 2–14, 242–45.

⁴⁷⁹ Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*. (New York, NY: Random House, 2018), 106.

⁴⁸⁰ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 161; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 108–11.

sleep.⁴⁸¹ Newport suggests building in recovery time at work after intensive projects by scheduling leisurely projects or days to fix small issues after intensive ones, providing a buffer.⁴⁸² Thus, hard work days alternate with lighter work days. He also advises people to restrain from volunteering for extra work and to be diligent to shut down their work at quitting time. Rucker also recommends exercising total autonomy during lunch breaks. Having the freedom of choice is more important than the activity itself, he writes.⁴⁸³ Schonbrun also encourages people to find a way to institute a midday rest as well, perhaps a nap or time to sketch.⁴⁸⁴ Midday daydreaming, solo walks, long showers, or tech-free time restores people and prepares them for more focused work in the second half of their day. Schonbrun also suggests taking the extra time to savor moments and experiences to amplify the positive sensory experience and stretch it out. People can create micro-rituals before they begin work. A hug, short meditation, hot tea, or coffee can cue the brain to step from one role to another. Newport uses the idea of “no meeting Monday” to make the transition back to work easier.⁴⁸⁵

Elizabeth Grace Saunders, the founder of Real Life E, a time coaching and training company, writes that micro-vacations of a few hours may refuel people if taken

⁴⁸¹ Amy Jen Su, “Six Ways to Weave Self-Care into Your Workday,” in *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), 186–91.

⁴⁸² Cal Newport, *Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout* (New York, NY: Portfolio, 2024), 138, 141, 147–50.

⁴⁸³ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 159.

⁴⁸⁴ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 115–24.

⁴⁸⁵ Newport, *Slow Productivity*, 147.

on a regular basis.⁴⁸⁶ These vacations do not have to be expensive or lengthy, she writes. Planning a three-day road trip requires less effort than a week-long trip and will not burden others with a build-up of work. Saunders and Newport agree that even very short periods can be beneficial. Taking off a few hours every other week to get a long lunch with a friend, see a matinee, go on a hike, or take a day-date with a spouse while the children are occupied at school can make a single vacation day into the opportunity to connect with four separate friends or do something enjoyable over multiple weeks.⁴⁸⁷ Pang agrees that taking shorter vacations frequently, every two months or so, can boost recovery. He states the psychological benefits of a vacation last only a few months, and therefore, planning a vacation every few months will maximize the benefits.⁴⁸⁸

Rest is a skill that can be developed, teach Pang and Schonbrun, and parents need to practice rest in their parenting.⁴⁸⁹ One suggestion they offer is to write a stop-doing list for parenting. Schonbrun writes, “Always adding without ever subtracting leads to exhaustion, overwhelm, and ineffectiveness.”⁴⁹⁰

Restoration and renewal happen through passive rest, and they can also be accessed through active means. Play is a form of active rest, writes Golman, where the parasympathetic nervous system is activated and the body can recover from stress.⁴⁹¹ In

⁴⁸⁶ Elizabeth Grace Saunders, “How to Get the Most Out of a Day Off,” in *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), 96–97.

⁴⁸⁷ Saunders, “How to Get the Most Out of a Day Off,” 98; Newport, *Slow Productivity*, 141, 147–50.

⁴⁸⁸ Pang, *Rest*, 171–72.

⁴⁸⁹ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 154–62.

⁴⁹⁰ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 154–62.

⁴⁹¹ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 6, 71–74.

the literature, play and fun are used interchangeably. Rucker agrees that fun is essential and another skill which can be learned. “Fun is a direct neurological route to improving our well-being – and yet, as I would find, it is also a skill that requires some training, at least for anyone deeply engaged in the serious business of adulting.”⁴⁹² He names fun as a fundamental good that should be available to all people because it develops the human brain. Children learn how to make sense of the world around them with fun games like “peekaboo.” Older children and adults need fun to encourage them to be curious. Fun also reduces anxiety, decreases stress, enhances self-esteem, and increases motivation while also relieving boredom and loneliness, writes Rucker.

Fun can establish healthy habits, teaches Rucker.⁴⁹³ People are more likely to change an unhealthy habit if they replace it with an enjoyable habit. He suggests activity bundling, where people reward themselves with something pleasurable for completing an activity they do not want to do. Fun can be a strong motivator. The release of oxytocin when people are having fun does more than feel good, teaches Rucker. It protects people from negative impulses and increases self-restraint. Fun empowers people to make better choices in how to invest their time and attention.

A specific type of play Pang discusses is “deep play.”⁴⁹⁴ This level of play is more than fun; it is mentally absorbing yet not overly effortful. Some people call them hobbies, but deep play includes only those hobbies that bring deep satisfaction. Pang labels them as mastery experiences. Some examples include sailing, billiards, painting, and hiking tall

⁴⁹² Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, xiv.

⁴⁹³ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 14, 35–37, 59–60.

⁴⁹⁴ Pang, *Rest*, 167, 200–201.

mountains. Deep play requires psychological detachment — something so absorbing that a person’s work life is completely forgotten as the person is absorbed in play.

In summarizing the importance of rest, Pang insists people make time for it. “Rest doesn’t just magically appear when we need it, specifically in today’s busy world. Taking rest seriously requires recognizing its importance, claiming our right to rest, and carving out and defending space for rest in our daily lives.”⁴⁹⁵

Psychological Detachment

To rest, feel calm, and avoid burnout, most people need to psychologically detach themselves from their typical work, teaches Pang.⁴⁹⁶ Elisa Clauss led a team of researchers from Germany to understand how to mitigate the high work load for teachers and encourage psychological detachment – that is, the ability to mentally disconnect from work.⁴⁹⁷ They found that taking short micro-breaks during the workday and cultivating a positive sense of self-efficacy, believing that one can successfully do the work, enhanced an employee’s psychological detachment from work and guarded against burnout. Similarly, Mehrzad B. Baktash and Lisa Putz are two professors in German universities who found that detachment from work improves employee wellbeing.⁴⁹⁸ They planned workplace trainings (end of day planning or positive work reflections) that can assist

⁴⁹⁵ Pang, *Rest*, 240–41.

⁴⁹⁶ Pang, *Rest*, 8, 160–68.

⁴⁹⁷ Clauss et al., “Occupational Self-Efficacy and Work Engagement as Moderators in the Stressor-Detachment Model.”

⁴⁹⁸ Mehrzad B. Baktash and Lisa Pütz, “Detach to Thrive: Psychological Detachment from Work and Employee Well-Being,” *Journal of Happiness Studies* 26, no. 4 (March 2025): 54, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-025-00883-7>.

employees with detachment. Ironically, if someone passionately refuses to detach from work, that person runs the risk of burning out, and part of burnout is detachment from work. Psychological detachment, instructs Sirgy, is essential for people who are passionate about their work and are perfectionistic.⁴⁹⁹ These people are most likely to burn out. The goal is to prevent negative spillover from one domain to another. Some suggestions include time controls on when work happens, physical separation between work and non-work, separate phones and computers for work and non-work times, as well as communication boundaries around people from work reaching out during non-work hours. Technology, reminds Pang, gives co-workers the impression that everyone is always accessible. People must communicate strong boundaries to practice detachment.

One recommended way to achieve psychological detachment is to reduce the number of hours spent at work, writes Maslach and Schonbrun.⁵⁰⁰ Goleman agrees and suggests alternating a series of longer or harder workdays with a few days that contain shorter work hours and a few renewal activities.⁵⁰¹ This pattern will help the parasympathetic nervous system recalibrate and reach a new equilibrium. Regular vacation, a specific type of work hour reduction, is highly recommended. Americans are poor at vacationing, declares Pang.⁵⁰² They tend to not use their vacation time and even while on vacation they do not put work out of mind. Moss and Pang explain that by not taking vacations, both men and women have worse health outcomes, including an

⁴⁹⁹ Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 103–9.

⁵⁰⁰ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 48–51; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 108–11.

⁵⁰¹ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 73.

⁵⁰² Pang, *Rest*, 160–62.

increase in heart attacks. When vacations are prioritized, people are restored, happier, and healthier.⁵⁰³ Rucker agrees and believes that under no circumstances should people work on vacation, because “doing work in a more beautiful backyard is not an escape.”⁵⁰⁴

Maslach recommends sabbaticals as another way to psychologically detach, admitting that not as many people can use this method.⁵⁰⁵ Sabbaticals are most common for professors in higher education, writes Ruckers.⁵⁰⁶ They typically last about six months and are a dedicated time to learn a new skill, publish research, or travel. Ruckers mentions that many people fall into a sabbatical of sorts when between jobs. Between interviews for new positions, they can take small trips with family or do other enjoyable tasks. Pang lists pastors as another occupation commonly granted sabbaticals, usually three to six months in length.⁵⁰⁷ He believes that anyone whose job includes thinking can benefit from a sabbatical; they do not have to be long to be life-changing. “A well-designed break from your normal working routine can recharge your creativity, help you discover new ideas, or lead you to achieve a breakthrough in your current work.”⁵⁰⁸

Mothers who have spent years caring for young children are encouraged by Neha Ruch to take a sabbatical. Ruch is a former brand strategist and Stanford MBA graduate who went on to found Mother Untitled, a platform for ambitious women leaning into

⁵⁰³ Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 122; Pang, *Rest*, 162.

⁵⁰⁴ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 88–90.

⁵⁰⁵ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 50.

⁵⁰⁶ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 98–99.

⁵⁰⁷ Pang, *Rest*, 224–34.

⁵⁰⁸ Pang, *Rest*, 224.

family life. Most mothers feel societal pressure to go back to work immediately, Rush writes, but taking six to twelve months off after children start kindergarten is reasonable. For mothers who do not have to jump back into work immediately for financial reasons, Rush recommends taking a sabbatical pause, giving them time to replenish after a strenuous season of mothering.⁵⁰⁹

Bodily Care

Maslach insists that everyone who wants to avoid burnout must get enough sleep to awaken restored. Rucker teaches that life cannot be enjoyable when sleep-deprived.⁵¹⁰ While sleeping, people's brains shuffle memories and information, sorting and storing it away for long-term recall.⁵¹¹ Toxins are also being eliminated from digestive systems, brains, and other tissues as people sleep. Bodies are not fully functional without sufficient sleep. Pang reminds people that living in a sleep deficit lowers a body's ability to fight off infectious diseases and increases the likelihood of making mistakes. A regular habit of fewer than seven hours of sleep a night will reduce quality of life. No number of fun activities will improve things if one is exhausted.

True humility, instructs Molloy, is knowing when one needs to take a break and care for the body.⁵¹² Maslach writes that people must stay healthy by eating nutritious

⁵⁰⁹ Neha Ruch, *The Power Pause: How to Plan a Career Break After Kids--and Come Back Stronger Than Ever* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2025), 246–47.

⁵¹⁰ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 45.

⁵¹¹ Pang, *Rest*, 142–52; Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 48–51; Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 162–67; Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 45; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 115–24.

⁵¹² Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 113.

food, moving their bodies, playing a sport, and keeping hydrated to weather the stressors of life.⁵¹³ Burns agrees and writes that it requires a selfless attitude to care for one's body and health. This can include regular doctor's visits, good nutrition, frequent exercise, and other positive health activities that develop the whole person.⁵¹⁴

The reality is, writes Nagoski, being well rested is countercultural.⁵¹⁵ In the US today, people are labeled lazy if they have enough time to be well rested and admired if they are busy and exhausted. Mothers must fight hard against this cultural message if they want to increase their chances of thriving long term. Even small gains can be impactful, writes Schonbrun. A nap in the middle of the day for ten to twenty minutes can improve self-control, emotional regulation, memory, and task performance.⁵¹⁶

Time Management

Another strategy suggested by experts to fend off burnout is time management. Pang, Schonbrun, and Ziegler say that people should problem solve ways to improve their schedule, tweaking time management strategies and becoming more organized.⁵¹⁷ People who prioritize time over money are usually happier, teaches Rucker. He encourages people to build time affluence into their life rather than monetary riches. If

⁵¹³ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 48–51.

⁵¹⁴ Burns, Chapman, and Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry*, 60–61.

⁵¹⁵ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 167–68.

⁵¹⁶ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 117.

⁵¹⁷ Pang, *Rest*, 244; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 211–12; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 32–33.

someone cannot subtract an agonizing task from their to-do list, he suggests outsourcing the unfavored task to a family member or paying someone to do it.⁵¹⁸

Cal Newport is a professor of computer science at Georgetown University. He writes about the intersections of culture and technology and is a founding faculty member of Georgetown's Center for Digital Ethics. Instead of turning away tasks and assignments when feeling overwhelmed, Newport suggests a proactive approach which he calls "slow productivity."⁵¹⁹ He advocates for doing fewer things and working at a natural pace. He advises people to turn down new tasks unless they have double the estimated worktime available on their calendar to complete the task. Newport and Schulte agree that most people underestimate task length.⁵²⁰ They need to build a buffer, giving the most important things on the schedule breathing room.

TED Conferences named Neil Pasricha one of the world's leading authorities on intentional living.⁵²¹ He holds an MBA from Harvard Business School, and his work focuses on themes of gratitude, happiness, failure, and resilience. Pasricha shares Newport's view and offers a similar strategy with what he calls "untouchable days." These days are set aside months in advance to work alone without interruption on creative work. Most creative work requires people to get in the flow. He purposely plans things during the day that give him a boost of energy for creative work: a quick gym

⁵¹⁸ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 27–30.

⁵¹⁹ Newport, *Slow Productivity*, 9, 21–22, 53, 62–63, 115.

⁵²⁰ Newport, *Slow Productivity*, 9, 21–22, 53, 62–63, 115.; Schultz and Schultz, *Psychology and Work Today*, 114.

⁵²¹ Neil Pasricha, "Why You Need an Untouchable Day Every Week," in *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), 90–93.

time, almonds, a nature walk, a ten-minute meditation, and new workspaces.

Interruptions interfere with flow. Thus, he suggests blocking off entire days, putting cell phones on airplane mode, and notifying people to not reach out. Pasricha insists that these days must not be skipped but rather rescheduled immediately for another time in the same week. Pang labels these untouchable days at work as a type of detachment.⁵²² Rather than a detachment from work, it is a detachment from the interruptions that make creative work difficult.

Another aspect of time management the experts discuss is boundary negotiation at work. Maslach teaches that some of the deepest stress recovery happens when people are not thinking of their jobs.⁵²³ But technology makes it difficult to stop thinking of work. Maslach encourages people to draw a firm boundary line around technology and believes that people ought to consider a technology shabbat, or Sabbath, each week. Ziegler encourages mothers to carve out phone-free and kid-free time.⁵²⁴ Pang combines boundary negotiation with his untouchable days.⁵²⁵ Moss and Rucker tell people to prepare before a trip by setting up an auto responder, delegating tasks, and setting up contingency plans.⁵²⁶ Schulte argues that planning vacations six months in advance will ensure calendars are open and all work projects can be scheduled around vacations.⁵²⁷ He

⁵²² Pang, *Rest*, 170.

⁵²³ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 95–97.

⁵²⁴ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 208–9.

⁵²⁵ Pang, *Rest*, 170–71.

⁵²⁶ Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 124; Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 92.

⁵²⁷ Schultz and Schultz, *Psychology and Work Today*, 115.

suggests adding a transition day on either side of the vacation to prepare to leave and slowly reenter.

To gain flexibility and avoid burnout at work, Daisy Dowling, a leading expert on working parenthood, suggests using the time management strategy of the “five percent solution.”⁵²⁸ She teaches that making small changes (about five percent of the time) to a weekly schedule will not be noticed by a boss, should not affect performance, and yet will make a difference in their ability to accomplish what they want in their non-work life. Some of Dowling’s five percent suggestions include going straight home after any work flight that lands after two in the afternoon, leaving work early for an occasional soccer game, and “No Meetings Mondays.”

Social Support

The absence of close friendships, explains Ziegler, is the biggest contributor to mommy burnout.⁵²⁹ Maslach, Moss, and Rucker agree that people must have social support.⁵³⁰ Real confidants with whom one can be honest about the hardest parts of life and parenting build resiliency. These friendships require consistent connection to seal the emotional bond, so it is best for mothers if their friends live nearby. Rucker agrees and states that proximity and repetition are key to developing depth and trust. People need friends in close proximity, not childhood friends on the other side of the country.

⁵²⁸ Daisy Wademan Dowling, “Balance Parenting and Work Stress,” in *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), 167.

⁵²⁹ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 39–41.

⁵³⁰ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 48–51; Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 107–8; Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 121–26.

Schonbrun agrees and writes that strong relationships are a sign of resiliency. “Connection with someone we care about helps us manage stressful experiences better.”⁵³¹ Ziegler states that unless women have someone to talk to, they have no gauge on how difficult parenting can be and if their child’s issue is typical. Rucker insists that friendships are not just “extras” in life. Supportive relationships with people outside of one’s family are a necessity, and a lack of supportive relationships is bad for one’s wellbeing. Connecting with others, teaches Nagoski, is a basic biological need and “loneliness is a form of starvation.”⁵³² People are to oscillate, she writes, between connection and autonomy much like they oscillate between work and rest.

Completing the Stress Cycle

Stress, writes Nagoski, is a “neurological and physiological shift” that happens in the body when dealing with a stressful circumstance.⁵³³ Not only do most mothers need to reduce some of the stressors in their life, but they must also deal with the physical repercussions of that stress. Physiological stress, writes Goleman, blocks people from their optimal state.⁵³⁴ Human bodies were designed to respond to stressors in a specific rhythm, explain Nagoski and Ziegler.⁵³⁵ First, the body responds to a stressor by going into protection mode, interpreting the stressor as a threat, and producing the hormone

⁵³¹ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 221.

⁵³² Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 134–35.

⁵³³ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 4–5.

⁵³⁴ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 62.

⁵³⁵ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 15–23; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 24–25.

epinephrine (also known as adrenaline). This hormone rapidly prepares the body for action with increased heart rate, breathing, and muscle tension. Goleman identifies cortisol as contributing to the physical signs of stress by increasing blood sugar and blood pressure and suppressing non-essential functions such as digestion or immune response. Emotional responses of fear, anxiety, irritability, and sadness often appear. If the body does not complete the stress cycle and get the signal that it is safe, it cannot come out of protection mode, teaches Nagoski. The person cannot relax, even if the stressful event is over. It takes twenty to sixty minutes for the body to process its stress and return to a state of calm. Activities such as swimming, dancing, biking, and other movements that cause deep breathing are the most efficient ways to complete the cycle, but movement is not the only way. Deep breathing, positive social interactions, laughter, affection from a human or a pet, and creative expression also allow a body to experience the world as a safe place and move the stress out of the body. This process is not an intellectual decision of the mind; it is a physiological shift that must take place in the body, teaches Nagoski. A six-second kiss, petting a cat, writing a story, painting flowers, belly laughing with a friend, having a hard cry, or telling a child a bedtime story are all ways to avoid the negative physical and psychological repercussions of chronic stress. Everyone experiences some form of stress every day and therefore must complete the stress cycle every day.

Growth Mindset

To prevent burnout people may be tempted to structure their work and life commitments in a perfect balance, but it can be nearly impossible to equally balance all life's commitments evenly. There will be times when family needs more attention and

other times that work takes priority.⁵³⁶ Therefore, it is no longer common in academic circles to talk about work-family balance but rather conflict and enhancement between work and non-work life. Business professors Brianna Barker Caza, Lakshmi Ramarajan, Erin M. Reid, and Stephanie Creary mention that getting everything equally aligned and in balance is not the goal. During some seasons, people will focus just enough time in one domain to get by while focusing most of their time and efforts in another domain. The Harvard Business Review editors summarize this viewpoint by saying, “Having a full life isn’t a bad thing, and it doesn’t have to be a constant source of stress. You’ll never divide your time or attention evenly, but you can discover ways to set priorities and make trade-offs, so that you feel less stressed about them.”⁵³⁷

Rather than discussing how work and life should be in balance, experts suggest that people think in terms of enhancement and conflict. Work-nonwork enhancement, or positive spillover, teach Schonbrun and Sirgy, is the positive interaction between two domains.⁵³⁸ When things are going well in one domain of life (say family) then those positive feelings can spill over into another domain of life (say work). The same is true for the negative effects between domains. There are times when work pressures can spill over and make family life difficult. This is called work-nonwork conflict or negative spillover. While work-nonwork conflict can be challenging, a life fully devoted to only

⁵³⁶ Brianna Caza et al., “Make Room in Your Work Life for the Rest of Your Self,” *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, May 30, 2018, 2, 59, <https://hbr.org/2018/05/how-to-make-room-in-your-work-life-for-the-rest-of-your-self>; Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 71–74; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, xxi–xxii; Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 25–27.

⁵³⁷ The HBR Editors, “Introduction,” in *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), 1–4.

⁵³⁸ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, xxi–xxii; Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 27, 115–21.

one domain will be unsatisfying and therefore cannot be the goal. Sirgy puts it this way: “Individuals with a balanced life tend to be fully engaged in multiple roles...the amount of satisfaction that we can extract from a single life domain is limited.”⁵³⁹ Sirgy suggests multiple ways to minimize domain conflicts, which include reducing work-load at work or at home, time management strategies, and stress management through activities like exercise, meditation, prayer, social support, and quality sleep, while Maslach encourages people to pursue self-understanding — personality, needs, and motives — to decrease domain conflicts.⁵⁴⁰ Schonbrun suggests that it is impossible to eliminate all work-non-work conflict, but the positives can outweigh the negatives. This positive mindset about work-nonwork enhancement is a growth mindset, declares Schonbrun, where effort, experience, and interest can create growth.⁵⁴¹ Believing that one can become better at work and believing that things can work out well are also parts of a growth mindset.

Gratitude

According to Goleman, Moss, and Nagoski, habits that foster gratitude aid in processing stress and guard against burnout.⁵⁴² Gratitude can shift negative thinking into a positive direction. Schonbrun talks about how gratitude helps people bounce back faster from disappointment.⁵⁴³ Moss mentions that gratitude is closely linked to happiness as it

⁵³⁹ Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 25.

⁵⁴⁰ Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 48–51; Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 75–77, 83.

⁵⁴¹ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 29–31.

⁵⁴² Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 71–74; Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 224–25; Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 208–10.

⁵⁴³ Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 84.

rewires brains to focus on what they have instead of what they lack. Nagoski agrees with the benefits and encourages people to focus on two types of gratitude. The first is gratitude reflects on specific people and their impact on one's life. The second way expresses gratitude for how things happen. Nagoski has people write down events they are grateful for, which can remind the body that it is safe, and things will work out well.

Mindfulness

Tarissa J. Hidajat leads a team of professors at the University of Queensland studying mindfulness-based interventions for teachers to prevent burnout.⁵⁴⁴ They studied Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBI) because they believe, along with Goleman and Maslach, that mindfulness can make people less reactive to stress.⁵⁴⁵ In other words, learning MBIs can make a person more resilient. Hidajat defines mindfulness as an act of attention to the present moment in which one sustains awareness to thoughts, feelings, and sensations. One MBI Maslach suggests is “savoring” the present moment to extend and deepen the enjoyment of pleasurable experiences. He also recommends meditation and peaceful music as methods to reduce stress by calming the body and bringing someone out of high stress arousal. Just as quick and shallow breathing triggers the sympathetic nervous system (stress response), slow and deep breathing calms the body, switching it to the parasympathetic nervous system, describe Goleman and Moss.⁵⁴⁶ Deep

⁵⁴⁴ Tarissa J. Hidajat et al., “Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Stress and Burnout in Teachers: A Systematic Review,” *Teaching and Teacher Education* 134 (November 2023): 104303, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104303>.

⁵⁴⁵ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 43, 71–74; Maslach and Leiter, *The Burnout Challenge*, 48–51.

⁵⁴⁶ Moss, *The Burnout Epidemic*, 224–25.

breathing guides the body from flight or fight mode and into recovery. Hidajat agrees breath training is a helpful MBI and further encouraged people to also practice guided reflections, body scans, meditation, yoga, journaling, and creative expression.

Autonomy

All humans crave autonomy, declares Rucker.⁵⁴⁷ When given greater control, they are happier, healthier, and feel less drained. Autonomy is a core psychological need, teaches Goleman.⁵⁴⁸ Pang agrees that autonomy is part of resiliency because having the ability decide how to spend one's time, energy, and attention lowers stress levels.⁵⁴⁹ Jen Su encourages people to figure out what they need to be their most constructive and effective in their workspace because physical environments can affect people's moods and productivity. She tells people to exercise their autonomy by investing in pictures, plants, candles, or whatever makes them feel like themselves for their workspace.⁵⁵⁰ If they cannot exercise autonomy while at work, declares Pang, then they should do so on lunch breaks or after work hours end. Lunch breaks, writes Rucker, are one place to take back autonomy. He encourages people to craft the lunch hour exactly as they prefer — a walk, eating with a friend, or running an errand.

⁵⁴⁷ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 154–59.

⁵⁴⁸ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 71–74.

⁵⁴⁹ Pang, *Rest*, 166–69.

⁵⁵⁰ Su, “Six Ways to Weave Self-Care into Your Workday,” 186–91.

Summary of Psychology and Counseling on Preventing Burnout

Burnout is a psychological condition affecting individuals worldwide. It is rooted in chronic workplace stress, and it is characterized by extreme fatigue, cynicism, and a sense of ineffectiveness. It negatively impacts organizations through absenteeism, low productivity, and high turnover. For individuals, the consequences are more profound, contributing to poor decision-making, diminished empathy, increased error rates, and a host of health issues (such as heart disease, immune dysfunction, and chronic pain), all of which hinder flourishing.

Research identifies numerous strategies to prevent and treat burnout. Completing the physiological stress cycle daily through physical activity, deep breathing, creative expression, relational connection, laughter, or affection can prevent burnout by removing the harmful physiological effects of stress in the body. Time away from work, whether through reduced hours, long lunches away from the desk, vacations, or sabbaticals, provides important time for psychological detachment and rest. Engaging in hobbies, making space for play, and prioritizing basic bodily self-care, such as adequate sleep, are likewise crucial. Effective time management practices like slow productivity, untouchable days, communication boundaries, and micro-flexibility can create a more sustainable rhythm of work. Deep supportive relationships in which to process life's challenges serve as a significant buffer against stress. While conflict between work and nonwork roles is inevitable, research shows these roles can also mutually enrich one another. Developing a growth mindset fosters resilience and emotional regulation, further protecting against burnout. Finally, individuals who experience greater autonomy over their lives tend to be healthier, more energized, and less susceptible to burn out.

Summary of Literature Review

Women have worked long, hard hours throughout human history. They have baked bread, tended animals, raised children, made clothing, cared for the sick, started businesses, planted trees, created new inventions, fought fires, and more. The combination of work and home life has taken many forms over the centuries, but the most common household arrangement in today's American economy has both parents contributing to the family's income. This is a challenge for mothers given the rise of intensive mothering, which expects mothers to devote all their waking hours to crafting the ideal educational and emotional environment for their children. Most US women are working full-time jobs, intensive mothering, and working the second shift at home to care for the home and the family's needs. For mothers to flourish, they need family leave and affordable childcare, partners at home who share the household tasks more equitably, and time to prioritize their own emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual needs, including rest, play, hobbies, sleep, and adult friendships.

Both work and rest are gifts to be cultivated over a lifetime. When people seek to imitate God's example and commands of working and resting, they are more likely to experience a life of flourishing. God works and rests, and he created humans in his image to reflect him, by imitating his cycles of work and rest, thereby enabling them to flourish. The Bible is clear that humans are to rest in daily, weekly, yearly, and extended rhythms. The work and rest in this life are only a glimmer of what awaits in the new heavens and new earth for those who place their hope in Jesus.

The consequences for people who refuse to rest or complete the stress cycle can be severe, putting their health and relationships at risk. Those who are most passionate

about their work are the most vulnerable to experiencing burnout. It is common knowledge that mothers are passionate caregivers for their children and that maternal burnout is a problematic phenomenon in American culture. Research offers numerous strategies to prevent and treat burnout. At the top of the list are physical activity, creative expression, meaningful and deep relationships with other women, autonomy to make choices about how they spend their time, exploration of hobbies, time away from work with the ability to psychologically detach from work's demands, and basic self-care in the form of sleep, good food, quiet reflection, and movement.

Sherman teaches that as people thrive in their relationships to God, themselves, others, and the world, they participate in the glory of God.⁵⁵¹ Crouch similarly asserts that everyone is meant to feel fully alive.⁵⁵² Yet a lot works against American mothers as they pursue flourishing lives of purpose, joy, and rest. Still the research is clear: burnout is not inevitable. With the right support and practices, flourishing is possible.

⁵⁵¹ Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 14; Crouch, *Strong and Weak*, 10-14.

⁵⁵² Crouch, *Strong and Weak*, 10.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish despite the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles. Its desired outcome was to gather best practices to mitigate maternal stress and avoid burnout. This study assumes that God calls all people to work, and this work may occur in multiple spheres, causing tension between dual roles. It also assumes that Christian women with professional careers and young children can have significant experiences and knowledge towards best practices in navigating maternal stress. Therefore, qualitative research was proposed to identify how Christian women overcome this tension and flourish in all their workplaces. After having been informed by the literature review, the researcher pursued a basic qualitative research study.

To address the stated purpose, the following questions guided the research:

1. How do professional working mothers describe the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles?
2. How do professional working mothers navigate the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles?
3. In what ways not currently experienced do professional working mothers desire to flourish while navigating maternal stress in their dual roles?

Design of the Study

A basic qualitative research design was used for this study. Qualitative research expert, Sharan B. Merriam, defines qualitative research as being “interested in how

people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and the meaning they attribute to their experiences.”⁵⁵³ Brown uses qualitative research methods in her studies and describes the method this way: “I proudly call myself a researcher-storyteller because I believe the most useful knowledge about human behavior is based on people’s lived experiences.”⁵⁵⁴

This qualitative research design allowed the researcher to gather information regarding the lived reality of women living in the tension between to roles. Qualitative research is “discovery-oriented research where the findings are not predetermined.”⁵⁵⁵ One benefit of qualitative research is that the researcher may obtain a “richly descriptive” product that includes not only facts but also thoughts, feelings, and meaning-making providing valuable data for analysis.⁵⁵⁶ These internal processes are understood through oral communication and depend on the interviewer’s ability to create a safe environment for sharing things that may not have been previously communicated.⁵⁵⁷ With this research design, the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis.” Therefore, Merriam cautions researchers to examine their biases so that the data collected is strictly from the interviewee’s perspective. The researcher acts as an empathetic listener, not a counselor or coach.⁵⁵⁸ Rather than coming to the data with a predetermined

⁵⁵³ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 3rd edition (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 5.

⁵⁵⁴ Brené Brown, *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York, NY: Random House, 2015), xiii.

⁵⁵⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 7.

⁵⁵⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 13–14.

⁵⁵⁷ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 23.

⁵⁵⁸ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 14.

hypothesis, the researcher in this study first transcribed the interviews, then coded the data, revealing patterns and recurring themes, and derived conclusions from participants' experiences through an inductive process and ultimately drawing conclusions from participant experiences of overcoming maternal stress.⁵⁵⁹

Participant Sample Selection

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Merriam explains, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.”⁵⁶⁰ This research required participants who could communicate in depth about the tension involved in navigating dual roles as a mother and a professional and how they overcame this tension, or navigated this stress, to experience flourishing in their Christian life. The study was conducted through in-person interviews with eight working mothers. They were invited to participate via an introductory email. To select participants, prospective interviewees completed a one-page a brief demographic questionnaire providing information concerning the selection criteria.⁵⁶¹ Twenty-seven women filled out the form and eight were chosen for in-person interviews.

A job primarily provides basic needs of food and housing security, health and safety. In contrast, a career is oriented toward flourishing. It offers the opportunity to set goals and pursue them, fostering a sense of pride, meaning, purpose, and competence.

⁵⁵⁹ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 23.

⁵⁶⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 77.

⁵⁶¹ See Appendix.

Careers ideally create deeper satisfaction than a job, and hopefully thereby allowing space for working mothers to more readily experience flourishing. Therefore, participants were chosen who worked in a professional career, indicated by having obtained at least a master's degree.⁵⁶² Believing that the richest insights leading to best practices could be gained from working mothers who both loved their work and regularly experienced flourishing, the researcher chose participants who indicated they worked primarily out of delight and a sense of calling to their field, rather than obligation. All but one participant indicated that that they experienced flourishing "a great deal" of the time. The one participant who indicated that they experienced flourishing "a moderate amount" clarified that this was only because she has four young children, and that caring for so many children left her less time to seek flourishing in her own life. Parenting young children is time-intensive, and the specific details of that season can be easily forgotten. To gain story telling of recent memories, mothers were chosen who had two or more children between the ages of zero and thirteen years of age living full-time in their homes. Snowball sampling was used. After identifying a few participants who met the criteria, the researcher asked them to refer other people who also fit the criteria.⁵⁶³

To minimize variables not a focus of this study, women were selected who were part of a heterosexual marriage five plus years, worked thirty plus hours a week, whose husbands also worked thirty plus hours a week, were members or regular attenders of a

⁵⁶² HarperCollins Publishers, "The American Heritage Dictionary," accessed September 24, 2025, <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=profession> "An occupation, such as law, medicine, or engineering, that requires considerable training and specialized study."

⁵⁶³ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 79.

church, described themselves as a follower of Christ, and indicated that their faith influenced their decisions about family, work, or relationships “a great deal.”

Due to travel limitations, the women do not represent a cross-section of all regions in the United States (US). The participants of this study are from the South, Southeast, and the West.

Also, due to limited time and resources, this study focused on a narrow participant group: women in professional careers with at least a master’s degree. All participants self-identified as Caucasian, had at least two children, and approach life with a commitment to Christ and the church. This study did not include women pursuing work because of family pressures, societal expectations, or financial need, nor was it researching women in blue collar careers. Consequently, further research is needed to broaden the participant pool to include mothers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds – such as in Latino, African American, and Middle Eastern homes – as well as women in different careers, single mothers, mothers of only one child, blended families, those with adopted children, those in homosexual partnerships, those in heterosexual non-married partnerships, and those with varied motivations for work.

Readers who desire to generalize aspects of these conclusions on the basis of similarity to their own work and home environments should test those aspects in their particular context. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. There are those in the Christian church, like the famous missionary Elizabeth Elliot, who argue that the ideal vocation for a Christian woman is to be a committed mother, fully dedicating herself to

her family's wellbeing.⁵⁶⁴ Other leaders advocate that a mother should choose the most suitable home and work arrangement for both their family's needs and their own aspirations. The scope of this dissertation is limited and will not address this debate.

Because participants were asked to reveal personal information and reflect on their behavior, relationships, and values, the Human Rights Risk Level Assessment is “minimal” per Covenant Theological Seminary IRB Guidelines. In addition, each participant signed a “Research Participant Consent Form” to respect and to protect the human rights of the participants. The following is a sample of this consent form.

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by C. JoAnna Schlecht to investigate maternal stress in working Christian women for the Doctor of Ministry degree program at Covenant Theological Seminary. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, and/or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

- 1) The purpose of the research is to investigate maternal stress in Christian women working in professional careers.
- 2) Potential benefits of the research may include best practices to mitigate maternal stress. Though there are no direct benefits for participants, the hope is that they are encouraged by sharing their experiences with an eager listener.
- 3) The research process will include audio recordings of interviews with seven women working in professional careers who have young children living in their home. The interviews will be transcribed following the interview and names will be changed to protect the identities of individuals involved.
- 4) Participants in this research will answer questions during a ninety-minute interview.
- 5) Potential discomforts or stresses: These might include feelings of anxiety or regret that arise from reflecting on relationships, values, or behaviors brought up during the interview.
- 6) Potential risks: There is minimal risk level to human participants. The participants will be asked to give their viewpoints, attitudes, and beliefs on previous lived experiences and as a result participants may experience some mild discomfort.

⁵⁶⁴ Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes to My Daughter on the Meaning of Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976), 112–17.

- 7) Any information that I provide will be held in strict confidence. At no time will my name be reported along with my responses. The data gathered for this research is confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the dissertation. By my signature, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research project.
- 8) Limits of Privacy: I understand that, by law, the researcher cannot keep information confidential if it involves abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or plans for a person to harm themselves or to hurt someone else.
- 9) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the study.

Printed Name and Signature of Researcher Date

Printed Name and Signature of Participant Date
Please sign both copies. Keep one. Return the other to the researcher. Thank you.

Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be addressed to: Director, Doctor of Ministry; Covenant Theological Seminary; 12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141; Phone (314) 434-4044.

Data Collection

The primary instrument for gathering data was open-ended, semi-structured interviews with women that lasted ninety minutes, in locations suitable for focused conversation and digital recording. The researcher performed a pilot test of the interview protocol on two people to evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness. After the pilot interviews, questions were reworded and structured in such a way that the RQs were adequately addressed.

The open-ended nature of the interview questions allowed the researcher to be flexible in the wording and allowed participants to speak openly. This approach encouraged participants to expand on their responses, providing data regarding not only factual details but emotions as well, allowing for opportunities of self-reflection. When

clarification or further description was needed, the researcher asked probing questions, such as “tell me more about that” or “walk me through that experience.” Merriam teaches, “This is where being the primary instrument of data collection has its advantages, especially if you are a highly sensitive instrument.”⁵⁶⁵

To accommodate both the researcher’s and participants’ schedules across many states, the eight interviews were completed over two months. The audio of each interview was digitally recorded with the online software Otter. The researcher made field notes and observations during and after the interview. Transcriptions were produced within one week of each interview using the online transcription software Atlas.ti and were checked by the researcher for accuracy. During the transcription check for one participant, it became apparent that the recording cut off fifteen minutes before the interview’s conclusion. A date was quickly rescheduled for a mutually satisfying time to re-do the missing fifteen minutes.

The interview protocol contained the following questions.

1. Boundaries: Imagine your professional role and parental role as two backpacks you are carrying, what have you done to make wearing both backpacks possible?
 - a. What rhythms have you discovered that make it easier to focus on work?
 - b. What practices help you mentally 'switch off' work to engage with your kids or home life?
 - c. When you're trying to rest or spend time with your kids, how do you manage things like email or phone notifications?

⁵⁶⁵ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 100–101.

- d. What personal expectations of motherhood impact your experience as a working mother?
 - e. What external expectations (from others) of motherhood that impact your experience as a working mother?
2. Rest: Looking back on the last few months, how did you make time for rest?
- a. Describe a moment you were able to prioritize your own needs and put down the work and parenting backpacks at the same time.
 - b. What kinds of experiences feel truly restful to you?
 - c. What activities make you feel most like yourself?
 - d. What are some things you love to do just for fun?
 - e. Tell me about the types of rhythms you have created to cultivate rest in your life? (daily/weekly/monthly/yearly)
 - f. What kind of things do you do in your spiritual life that bring you rest?
 - g. Describe an average Sunday in your life.
 - h. Are there physical activities that help you release stress?
3. Adult Friendships: What do your closest friendships look like in this season of life?
- a. What makes a friendship feel life giving to you?
 - b. Talk about any difference in your experience of friendship if your friend lives close by versus far away?
4. Support: Using the backpack analogy, when life feels heavy, who steps in to help carry the backpacks?

- a. Are there ways you've shared parenting responsibilities with others that have been helpful?
 - b. How do you and your husband share responsibilities at home?
(childcare, groceries, meals, yard, pet care, celebrations, cleaning)
 - c. Tell me about a time when flexibility at work has supported your role as parent.
 - d. What has your place of work done to help you thrive as a whole person?
5. Advice: What advice would you give to another woman who is navigating the tension between professional role and parental role?
 6. Future: In a perfect world, if resources were unlimited, what else would you like to see happen as you pursue flourishing?

Data Analysis

Following each interview, the questions and answers were instantly transcribed by Otter. Within days of receiving the transcription the researcher read and then reread the transcript, comparing it to the recorded interviews, making corrections where necessary. Notes and codes were written in the margins. The researcher did not wait until all the data was collected to start processing the information. The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data, enabling the researcher to look for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views across the variation of participants. This is the constant comparative method "...comparing one segment of data to another to determine

similarities and differences...”⁵⁶⁶ Research questions formed the basis for data coding, and the researcher found patterns and categories which answered the research questions.

The first interview was conducted, transcribed, read, and coded. Then the second interview was conducted, transcribed, read, coded, and compared to the first interview. Each interview was analyzed and coded in order, and as things progressed, new codes were created. The researcher then returned to the previous transcript and processed them for those new codes. As Merriam explains, data from both interviews was, “grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category.”⁵⁶⁷ Emic words and phrases were taken directly from the subject’s answers to identify categories and patterns after each interview. This is called “open coding” as the researcher does not come to the data with preconceived themes.⁵⁶⁸ This constant analysis allowed the researcher to improve each interview and refine probing questions. This was repeated with a total of eight interviews.

Due to the nature of this study, three participants were known to the researcher prior to the data collection: Gretta is a long-time friend in another state, Harbor was a member of the researcher’s former church in another state, and River is a member of the researcher’s current church. Prior acquaintance with participants may potentially create ethical challenges in qualitative research because the relationship may influence the interview dynamics if unaddressed.⁵⁶⁹ The researcher took deliberate steps to mitigate

⁵⁶⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 30.

⁵⁶⁷ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 32.

⁵⁶⁸ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 178.

⁵⁶⁹ Alan Peshkin, “In Search of Subjectivity - One’s Own,” *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 7 (1988): 17–21, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1174381>.

these risks and ensure objectivity during the interview and analysis: engaging in ongoing reflexivity, treating all participants equally and maintaining a standardized interview protocol for all participants ensuring personal knowledge did not guide questioning or interpretation.

Researcher Position

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, analysis, and reporting in qualitative research. All researchers are human and come to the interviews, data coding, and analysis with unique positions, experiences, and giftings. Therefore, researchers must note their own biographical information, experience, and biases.⁵⁷⁰

The researcher is in her 40s and a mother of four young children. She has been married for nineteen years, has a Master's of Divinity degree, and has worked both part-time and full-time in church and other non-profit settings. For most of her adult years, the researcher has been a part of the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) but recently transitioned to the Anglican Church of North American (ACNA). She is navigating the complexities of a calling to vocational ministry and motherhood. She is a committed follower of Jesus and member of her local church. The researcher looks to the Bible as the ultimate authority and truth but agrees with Saint Augustine that “wherever *truth* may be found, it belongs to the Master.”⁵⁷¹ Or to put it another way, “all truth is God’s truth.” Therefore, the researcher values scholarship in psychology, sociology, business, and other areas of study and sees it as useful in the Christian’s life and calling. However, if a

⁵⁷⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 14.

⁵⁷¹ Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.18.

discrepancy appears between the teachings of the Bible and the academic scholarship of these areas of study, the truth of God found in the Bible takes precedence. The above forms the assumptions and worldview for the researcher. They are also common experiences to those of the participants, which provide an insider's perspective and may heighten the researcher's understanding of the data.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish despite the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles. This chapter provides the findings of the eight interviews and reports on common themes and relevant insights pertaining to the research questions. To address the purpose of this study, the following research questions guided the qualitative research:

1. How do professional working mothers describe the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles?
2. How do professional working mothers navigate the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles?
3. In what ways not currently experienced do professional working mothers desire to flourish while navigating maternal stress in their dual roles?

Introductions to Participants and Context

The researcher selected eight working mothers to participate in this study. The findings of this qualitative study result from an analysis of the data collected during these interviews. At the time of the interviews, participants lived in Colorado, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Each participant was a member or regular attendee at the following church denominations: Anglican Church of North America, Episcopal Church in the United States, non-denominational, and Presbyterian Church in America. All participants held both bachelor's and master's degrees, with one holding a doctorate degree. Each women reported being currently in a committed heterosexual

marriage for thirteen to eighteen years. Six of the women work thirty to forty-five hours a week year-round, with the remaining two women working a seasonal schedule (more than thirty hours a week average per year). The same working hours are true for the husbands, with six working thirty-five to forty-five hours a week and the remaining two working a seasonal schedule (more than thirty hours a week average per year). All names and identifiable participant information have been changed to protect their identities. Listed below are the participants, their professions, their husbands' professions, and the number and general age of their children.

Drew is a physician assistant. Her husband is a nurse. They have two young children – both in preschool.

Gretta is a serial entrepreneur, involved in philanthropy, and a political candidate. Her husband holds a C-suite position in a second-generation family business. They have four children — one in preschool, two in elementary school, and one in middle school.

Harbor is a former teacher who is now the CEO of a small business. Her husband also holds a C-suite position in a small business. They have four children — three in elementary school and one in middle school.

Eliza is an elementary public-school principal. Her husband works as a pastor. They have two young children — one in preschool and one in elementary school.

Piper is a pastor, writer, and speaker. Her husband is also a pastor. They have two children — both in elementary school.

Felicity is a professor and a teacher. Her husband works in sports. They have four children — one in preschool and three in elementary school.

River is a business consultant. Her husband is a teacher. They have three children — two are in elementary school and one in middle school.

Cate is a research director for a university. Her husband is a small business owner. They have two children — both in elementary school.

Challenges of Maternal Stress Withing Two Distinct Roles

The first research question examined how working mothers describe the challenges of maternal stress and the tension of living within two distinct roles — professional and mother. The researcher sought rich descriptive narratives of the participants' experiences. These challenges included work interfering with family life, seasons of unusually heavy work loads, unending chores, pregnancy-related distress, difficulty securing reliable childcare, fears of missing their children's childhoods, the longing to be in two places at once, cultural expectations, and the struggle to live as authentically whole individuals.

Hijacked

Participants acknowledged work could creep into dedicated family time and vice-versa. For some, work creep was an unavoidable distraction. Other participants found balance once they settled into their roles as mothers and professionals.

Piper lamented that strained relationships at work often led to shortened tempers or a distracted mind at home. "When there's something really heavy happening, it can kind of hijack your thought life. It can hijack your emotions."

Gretta remembered a time she was expected to attend a homeowners' association meeting during her campaign. She chose to send her assistant to the meeting on her

behalf because her daughter was in a one-night-only performance in a school play. Gretta received significant pushback from a constituent who felt she should have prioritized the neighborhood meeting. In the end, Gretta knew she made the right decision prioritizing her daughter's needs even though she had to navigate an angry constituent as a result.

Was family life creeping into work life? Or was it the other way around? It was often hard to tell which one was interrupting the other. Gretta recalled a stressful interview with an award-winning podcast host. She was telling a story to the host about her community work registering people to vote when a message appeared on her computer screen. Distraction! Gretta thought she had turned off all notifications. She wondered how this one got through. The message was from her babysitter announcing that she would be late picking Gretta's daughter from school. Gretta struggled to ignore the message and stay on her talking point. She said, "I think it's hard as a mom to fully turn off your parenting mode...if there's a problem, I need to go get them. If they're sick, if they throw up, if there's a weather alert, and they dismiss the school early, I can't fully check out."

Drew struggled to fully be at work during her first year as a mother. She wanted to do a good job, but she was pumping three times a day and constantly thinking about her son. "It's such a big transition having kids," she said. "I think it took me at least a year to feel like my brain was checked into my work.... My brain was constantly elsewhere." But as things progressed, she felt herself change. No longer distracted by her tiny baby, Drew did not feel like her career invaded her family time. She explained how her experience was different than many of the participants: "I'm really fortunate that I don't feel like my work life invades my home time very much, and that's one of the

reasons that I chose my career. It's one of those jobs where I can keep work at work, and you know, this job allows me to do that, which is great...when I'm home, I'm not worried about work, so that is a blessing.”

Intense Seasons

Many participants talked about the challenge to fulfill their roles as mother and professional during busy seasons at work. The start of a new school year was an especially busy time of year for Eliza and her husband. Piper's speaking engagements tend to cluster together, she said, and at times she might be away from home for a longer stretch of time than she would prefer. The closer she was to election night, the busier things got for Gretta. She explained to her children that she was going to be canvassing and speaking at gatherings most evenings and weekends, but when the election was over, she would be home a lot more. She said, “That level of intensity...the amount of work it took was hard because I could tell my kids missed me and wanted me around...I was not able to be home and to run my campaign well.”

River explained that she does not strive for a work-life balance, where everything is equal in terms of time, but instead works for work-life harmony. “There are going to be some seasons of life where work is more intense and I'm spending more time at night and on the weekends, but I am okay with that, because I know it's not the norm, and on the reverse, some seasons my family is going to need more attention...” Drew remembered advice from a friend who encouraged her to stop striving so hard for balance and instead order things in a manner that allowed her to do good work and be there for her children, no matter the exact division of hours since things would never be perfectly balanced.

The busy seasons come from work but also from the children's commitments. River discussed the winter holiday season being especially hard for working mothers with special recitals, awards shows, mystery readers, class parties, spirit days, and more. "You're supposed to be working full-time, and yet school has a full-time expectation of parents to be present, and that is infuriating. ... You are setting up those working parents to feel like failures."

Getting It All Done

All the participants spoke about how difficult it was to complete everything required of them in a week. There did not seem to be enough hours. They worried about putting the laundry away, how to get dinner on the table, and what chores the children needed to do. Cate admitted she often asked herself, "How do I get it all done?" Gretta talked about how something that worked last year for her family may not work well the next year and that she had to be "always adapting." Adding a child to the family, she said, can be especially difficult. For months it is just "survival mode" as the household rhythms must be adjusted repeatedly.

Pregnancy Darkness

A few of the mothers recalled pregnancy as a time they struggled with maternal stress. They described being filled with fear on the day they found out they were pregnant with their first child. These participants had reached an exciting point in their careers, and it took so much sacrificing to get there. They were excited about their professional futures when motherhood arrived sooner than planned. They couldn't imagine how to

combine the two roles, and then the physical and emotional demands of becoming a mother hit.

Harbor, in particular, looked back at that time as being dark: “I was devastated. ... I'm gonna do this cool career thing to show that I could do it, yeah, and then I'll have kids. [Pregnancy] totally interrupted it.” And even though Harbor had a supportive boss, the first year as a mother and a teacher felt hard. “It just felt kind of intense...that year feels a little dark in my mind, like it was heavy.” Felicity remembered being surprised by a pregnancy in the early years of their marriage. For a time, she stayed at home with the baby and spent time with other stay-at-home mothers. One of her friends confided that when mothering felt hard, she reminded herself, “This is the life I prayed for.” Felicity realized in that moment she did not share that sentiment; being a stay-at-home mom was not what she wanted. “Oh! this is not the life I prayed for, and perhaps I should try to change something,” she thought.

Making Childcare Work

Another theme the participants shared was the struggle to find affordable and reliable childcare. Felicity was disappointed by the significant cost for childcare. “I started looking at daycare costs, and I thought, based on how much I'm making as a teacher that doesn't make any sense. So that spring, I went very part-time at school, and so had our son in very part-time care, and still, the amount of money I was making just didn't make sense for what we were doing.” Eventually, Felicity quit her job and then immediately questioned her decision because she loved her job and knew that her career was more than a financial decision. Felicity said, “Man, I really loved that job, and I love my child too, but I couldn't figure out how to make it all work. I was not well suited for

stay-at-home mom life....I remember thinking, why can't I just be happy with this?" She tried other part-time jobs, but Felicity expressed that she was "not feeling energized by what I was doing."

Both Drew and her husband work in healthcare. If one of her children was ill and needed to stay home from school to recuperate, it was difficult to decide which parent would stay with them. "If I don't show up to work, there are fifteen people who had rescheduled their lives to come in and see me, found care for their children, or took time off work. And so, that carries a lot of weight for me." It was hard for Drew to find a suitable solution when there is the potential to hurt or inconvenience so many people, she said. "That is definitely an area that I carry guilt." For now, Drew said that her best and only solution is alternating with her husband who stays home and cares for sick children and upends their work life.

Many participants shared a childcare hack for evenings and weekends, when they had no other childcare option, but they needed to get some work completed. They said they take their children to fast-food indoor playgrounds and let the children play while they worked on a laptop at a nearby table. Piper took her children to the childcare room at the YMCA and used the time to write one of her books. She said, "When my kids were little, that's how I wrote books. I would go to the YMCA, which had two hours of childcare, I would work out for an hour, and I would work for an hour."

Never Have This Time Back

Several participants labeled "missing stuff with the family" and "you can never really have this time back" as two fears they had to manage internally. Drew was concerned she was missing out on some of her boys' childhood when she said, "It is just

the time, and how do I make my kids feel seen and valued and like they're not just being raised by their daycare?" Eliza regretted the time she spent getting her newborn on a perfect schedule to ease his transition to childcare. She wished she had simply enjoyed the newborn stage without putting pressure on herself to get him ready. She said, "I think I missed out on a lot of the things I should have been soaking up. At the time I was just more worried about regimented naps and feedings and stuff. And I would go back and release myself of that pressure and...enjoy it a little more, because that is something I live with a little bit of loss around."

Two Places at Once

Many participants noted the challenge of wanting to be in two places at once. Eliza described spreading out the nights she worked away from home. Reflecting on how many church meetings happen in the evenings, she said, "I've got something Monday night and I'm going have something Wednesday night, so I'm going try not leave them again on Thursday night." Eliza said that she loves her career, but she also values being home with her children in the evenings.

Drew described an incident when her son was moving rooms at daycare, and he was having a tough time. The teacher called to ask Drew for advice on how to calm her son, and she grieved that she could not be there with him. She knew if she left her work and rescued her son, she could make everything temporarily better; however, the next day he would again need to go to daycare, and she would have to go to work. She said, "I decided to take a deep breath and be like, okay, he's going to figure this out. It was really very hard." The teachers stepped in and comforted him, and he got through the transition,

but the experience of being needed in two places stayed with Drew. Drew expressed, “I feel like my brain is in two places at once a lot of the time.”

Soaring Expectations

Most participants reported receiving similar messages regarding what the culture and the church expects of mothers. Gretta felt pressured to homeschool her children and to be home with them full-time, neither of which she nor her husband desired for their family. Gretta said, “There were some of these expectations about [how] a good Christian family would homeschool their kids...” She took a lot of time to reflect on these expectations and realized she was a better parent when she had dedicated time away from her children to complete her work. Then, when her children are with her, she can focus her attention on them. She said, “I’m realizing that I’m a better parent when I send my kids to school. I’m also a better parent when I send them to a day camp in the summer to let me get some work done in the morning.” Gretta found that when she tried doing both, she ended feeling like, “I’m not doing either of them very well.”

Eliza expected that she would always make meals from scratch. River shared that early motherhood brought a ton of expectations of what “good” motherhood should look like, but thirteen years of motherhood resulted in letting go of most of them.

Cate’s mother did not work outside the home, and as a result Cate internalized the idea that she ought to do the same, even though her mother never expressed it as an expectation. “I felt like I was disappointing her,” said Cate.

Piper shared she did not struggle with mom guilt or external expectations regarding her mothering, noting, “I’ve not wrestled with a lot of mom guilt in that regard.” Instead, Piper focused on ensuring her children understood they were loved and

their needs were met, even if that was accomplished by coordinating other loving adults to meet their needs. “I have never wrestled with these like soaring expectations of what it means to be a good mom,” said Piper. “I primarily think that as long as my kids know that they are unconditionally loved and I am doing my best to be present to them when I’m with them, and that they’re not necessarily competing with my work for time with me.” In fact, Piper said that she believes parents should not let their lives revolve around their children. “I think it’s unhealthy to just orbit around your kids.”

One external pressure Piper did identify was her father’s opinion about her speaking schedule. He would occasionally mention that the children missed her and she needed to travel less for work. Piper, however, felt comfortable with the boundaries she placed around work travel. Rather than panicking at her father’s comments, she reminded him of the larger purpose of her work and that it was appropriate for the children to miss her while she was gone and that she would return quickly. “It is developmentally appropriate for them that I’m gone sometimes, especially if I’m telling them I’m gone because our family exists for a purpose that is larger than ourselves.”

Felicity never felt well-suited for stay-at-home mom life. During her short stint as one, she remembered asking herself, “Why can’t I just be happy with this?” She admired so many of the mothers in her own life and said, “I’ve had beautiful examples of motherhood set for me. I have two grandmas that I respect, and my own mother is a delight, and my husband’s mother is amazing.” And while she said she would love to “embody the very best things about all of them,” she acknowledged it was not a realistic goal. Yet Felicity developed a list of internal expectations for herself: she would make all meals from scratch, she would curate time to make “meals a lovely, magical time,” keep

the home clean, be a gracious hostess, and teach her children to host and cook as well. Felicity stated that she expected way too much of herself, and her husband “who knows me so well” lovingly said, “You've decided these things for yourself... None of us are asking you to do these things. You can do them as long as they bring you joy, but as soon as it's burdensome, you need to just let some of that stuff go.”

River also felt cultural expectations to be everything for her family. She thought a mother should be “making homemade meals every night, and the primary caretaker, and the cleaner, and the programmer, and mental load carrier of the house.” River knew she could not be all those things and pursue a career too.

Drew felt the expectation that she should quit her career and stay home full-time with her children. “I never had anybody come out to me and say...why aren't you staying home, or why are you still working? It's just what you see a lot. Women have babies and then they quit their jobs and they stay home.” During a time of prophesy, a church leader spoke a word over Drew saying that God was going to bless Drew's husband with a high paying job, and as a result Drew was going to have many babies and stay home with them. She felt traumatized by the experience. Drew loved her career. She did not think having a small family was ungodly. But here was a church leader, on behalf of God, asking her to give up her beloved career and be a stay-at-home mother.

Harbor remembered feeling it was “a given” that she would stay home with her children when she became a mother. Her mother had set that as an example, and Harbor assumed she would do the same. Her youth pastor even remarked to her, “You are going to make a great mom one day.” While she was excited to eventually have children as a young woman, Harbor was attempting to achieve a lot in her career before having them.

“In my mind, it was probably, like, I’ll see how much I could cram in before I have my first kid.” But then her first child came sooner than expected, and she found herself not wanting to quit her career.

In contrast to the others, Piper did not feel cultural pressure to stay at home full-time with her children. In the area of the country where she lives, Piper reported that women are expected to continue working as mothers. “This is one of the most highly educated areas of the country....It is pretty normal for women to be working here.”

Finding Flexibility

One of the difficulties participants noted in navigating their dual roles of mother and professional was finding employment that allowed them the flexibility to meet their family’s needs. Harbor, mother to four, talked about how her previous career in teaching was not sustainable with a large family. Drafting substitute notes and finding a substitute every time one of her children needed to go to the doctor or stay home sick was daunting. And she was surrounded by children at work and at home. She missed adult interactions. “I stepped away from full-time teaching because it just felt like it’s a lot of kids, and teaching is not wildly flexible.” She made a conscious decision to switch career paths so that she could be more available to her children during the day.

Drew specifically chose to be a physician assistant because she wanted a flexible career. “I always knew that I wanted to keep working even once we had kids. I had spent a lot of time getting my degree and had planned for a long time and actually chose to become a physician assistant.” But even within the profession, she had to make concessions. She said she prefers to work in the more exciting and engaging hospital setting, but for now she works primarily from an office. The hospital was too

unpredictable and inflexible for her life as a mother. To gain flexibility, Drew has also chosen to work fewer hours. Two Fridays a month she spends one-on-one at home with her one of her children instead of sending them to daycare.

More to Me Than Just Being Their Mom

The desire to model strong womanhood and a healthy work ethic motivated several participants, even in the face of the tensions this lifestyle carried. Eliza said it this way: “It’s been really important to me for my boys to see their mom doing something that she’s called and gifted in. And I think that every boy should see that in their mom.” Drew agreed and shared, “That’s something that has influenced how I approach work...I think that it’s really valuable for my two boys to see a woman hold a career...to have something that’s important and valuable and contributing to society outside of the home.” Drew continued that it is also “valuable for them to see that there is more to me than just being their mom.”

River expressed that work gave her a place to develop giftings that might have remained dormant had she not been a working professional. “I have outlets for intellectual, competitive, performance-based drive.” When asked about her work, Cate replied enthusiastically, “It is amazing. I really love my job... I can be really authentic at work.” She listed everything she loves about her job: mentoring people, leadership strategy, encouraging supervisees, and finding ways to systematize things. She noted that many of her administrative skills may have gone unnoticed without investment in a career.

Gretta expressed she has felt tension over being her own person and meeting her children’s needs. On one hand, Gretta said, it is “good for them to see me as an

independent person that has my own interests and my own things, and not just like their little like servant and chauffeur...for them to see me doing these other things and accomplishing other things.” She said that while she wants to be available and accessible to them and build strong relationships, Gretta wants her children to see her as more than a mom. She wants them to see her as a whole person.

Integrated and Authentic People

A frequently stated belief for the participants was that they were more integrated and fulfilled people when they were working in a professional capacity. They felt like better people and better mothers.

Harbor shared, “I genuinely always felt like I'm a better mom when I have something else that I'm thinking about.” Felicity said that after she and her husband both tried to be the primary parent at home without full-time employment, “We found that for each of us to be doing things that energize us and excite us, outside of our parenting roles, actually makes us better parents than when we're in those roles.” Gretta stated that at times she felt bored in the mundane aspects of homemaking and mothering. Having a career gave her an outlet for her skills in ways mothering did not. She said, “I feel like I'm a much better mother when I have a creative outlet.” River agreed and said that she felt “like my job is actually a resource that gives me energy to be a better parent and a better, more integrated individual.”

Summary of Challenges of Maternal Stress

Working mothers used many phrases to describe the challenges of living with the tension between their roles of professional and mother. They described “hijackings,”

where either family life would interrupt work life or work life would negatively impact family life. They recounted stories of intense work seasons that limited their ability to be with their families. They reflected on how they were always adapting their schedules, priorities, and processes to meet the needs of work and home. Some participants shared stories of pregnancy darkness and distress when they worried about how they would manage their feelings, roles, and childcare while pursuing their careers. Participants shared their grief over the challenge of making childcare work and their fears that they would never have this time (children's childhoods) back. Participants often longed to be in two places at once. They sometimes lamented, "Why can't I just be happy with this?" All but one participant shared that they encountered soaring expectations regarding motherhood, whether from internal pressures or external influences. They talked about choosing flexibility in their careers and that one motivating factor in pursuing a career was modeling to their children how to be whole, integrated, and authentic people who had gifts and interests outside of parenting. Participants described several strategies they used to navigate these ongoing challenges; these will be discussed in the next section.

Navigating Maternal Stress

While the first research question focused on describing the tensions of working mothers, this question sought to understand how working mothers responded to those pressures in life-giving ways. Their responses revealed strategies for managing stress and insights into how they sustained joy amid competing demands. Their methods fell into three broad categories: establishing boundaries, pursuing rest, and cultivating support.

Boundaries – Clear Expectations

Technology

Boundaries can take shape in many ways, including personal habits around technology. Felicity designated her laptop for work purposes and phone for socializing. She said her children know “if I have my computer out, I’m probably doing work. And if I have my phone out, they can interrupt me at any point.”

Some participants communicated to their co-workers, bosses, and employees how and when they prefer to be contacted. Eliza said that because she manages over 100 school employees, she had to be clear about her boundaries. In the evenings and early morning hours her employees must email her rather than call or text “because it is really annoying to be getting ready for work and getting texts about this person’s diarrhea and this person’s dog.” With this boundary in place, she could choose when to read the emails and be prepared emotionally for whatever they contain.

At River’s consulting firm, it is part of their work culture to use email for all work communication, she said, so she turned off email notifications on her phone so she can be present when she is with her children. She has told her co-workers they must text her if they need her to respond quickly to work-related issues. “I think communicating expectations has been huge,” she explained. Sophie phrased her strategy as “reframing expectations.” Harbor agreed and stated she often tells her team ahead of time if she is not going to be online for the day and then adds the caveat that if they need her, they can text or call. “[B]ut people almost never do that,” she said. “I just put up that barrier and that feels really good.”

Many participants discussed disconnecting entirely from technology while on vacation. Piper said, “We are totally off grid when we go on vacation.” Her staff’s culture respects the need to disconnect. Sophia said she often spends time at her parent’s mountain cabin where there is no cell phone or internet service, and considers that fact a benefit.

Gretta said she has a side gig reselling things on Posh Market. She described it as “a blessing and a curse that I can do it from anywhere and take it anywhere. It’s always available.” Recently she began using the vacation mode for her online shop so work does not pile up when she is out of town with her family. She also found the Brick™ a useful tool, as it allowed her to block applications on her smart phone that were distracting. The Brick™ is a small, square device equipped with Near Field Communication (NFC) technology to initiate or disable “Brick™ Mode,” a feature that renders selected applications unusable until the user reactivates them by tapping the device again.

Harbor talked about a season when she turned her phone into a “dumb phone” and how beneficial it was for her. She said she would like to repeat the experiment because she has found herself once again being distracted by her phone.

Gretta also mentioned being overwhelmed by the volume of communication needed to navigate on behalf of her children. Power School, GroupMe, and email are all used to check grades, plan class parties, and schedule parent-teacher conferences. The excessive school communication was overwhelming. To manage the intrusions into her work life, she and many others removed the dings and screen notifications. Eliza recounts, “I took email notifications off my phone a long time ago.”

Drew and Felicity have not struggled with technology interrupting key work or family moments and do not typically receive phone calls or check email after work hours.

No Carrying Work Home

Because technology allows people to work from home, or anywhere for that matter, participants repeatedly talked about creating boundaries around work. Many have rules about not working after hours once they get home and not allowing themselves to multitask. River said that while she can multitask, it does not produce excellent results. “I can multitask.... When work is over, it has been part of the rhythm [of having an office] to come home and it is just home.”

Piper said that she travels away from home only twice a month for speaking engagements and it is extremely important to her that she be home on Sundays to attend their church, so she structures her travel to make that a priority, even if it is an 11 p.m. Saturday night flight.

In Drew’s deliberately chosen profession, where she has worked for nine years, fellows and nurses must provide on-call services, not physician assistants, thus protecting Drew’s time at home and eliminating work distractions. Drew shared, “I’m fortunate that I don’t feel like my work life invades my home time very much. And that is one of the reasons that I chose my career.” Drew also “prioritizes efficiency” at work, having learned to complete all her notes at work and not take them home.

Felicity noted that when she was a freshman teacher, she would work on lesson plans and grading during any free time she could find. But now that she is more experienced, she found, “I might not think about work the whole afternoon or evening....I have learned to just say, I can’t. I can’t carry it home with me. I just can’t.”

A few participants mentioned they tried working from a home office, but struggled, and found things improved when they rented office space. When first planting the church, Piper worked out of nearby coffee shops and felt constantly distracted. The same thing happened if she worked from home, as she found it hard to concentrate if it was dirty or messy. Others confessed they too struggled to ignore household chores when working from home. Harbor recounted, “It is really hard for me to not do laundry and think about kid stuff and all that when I’m at home.” At the same time, she expressed gratitude for the flexibility afforded by remote work, which enables her to attend to her children’s needs. As a compromise, she said she maintains a schedule of four days in the office and one day working from home.

Piper and her husband have a unique situation in which they both work at the same church. To protect family time, they decided to not discuss work at home, calling it an intentional “discipline” to keep this boundary. “With being married and leading together, work and life just bleed into one another. And it has been helpful when we are home, we are not working, we are not talking about it...we just have boundaries around the home.” They established weekly meetings and Slack, a professional messaging platform used for workplace communication, as structured spaces for work-related discussions, which she noted, “has helped me a lot.” When topics arise in the evenings or weekends, she said they record notes for themselves to discuss those topics at the office during their pre-arranged meetings.

Many participants stated their willingness to work from home, but only after the children went to bed or were otherwise distracted. River said her children are of an age where she can settle them into an after-school routine (completing homework and

practicing sports) and then return to work. She blocked time on her work calendar for these transitions. “I spend thirty minutes, that is on my calendar, welcoming them home from school, getting them set up into their routines, and then they are old enough now I can do back to work...I just block off the time.”

The COVID-19 pandemic came up in interviews with a couple participants because the stay-at-home order blurred the lines between home and work. Piper said, “It was impossible to have boundaries between work and family life, and so I ended up feeling frustrated all the time. I remember feeling this kind of low-grade anger, honestly.” She felt like she was never really “off” because everyone was working from home. She described it as “a disaster.”

Even those participants who typically left work at work received the occasional emergency work call. Felicity admitted she does not love the interruptions and felt flustered when they happen. “I have a job that is easily contained....I’m not a work all-the-time person.” She recognized that while she is not gifted at creating boundaries, she is grateful to have a career where they are built in. “There are clear expectations....I really enjoy that about teaching....I like the boundaries....I’m not always good at setting my own boundaries, but I like that I’m working in a place that has them for me.”

Letting Yourself Off the Hook

In other circumstances, boundaries took the form of intentionally accepting fewer commitments. Drew stated that to prioritize time with her children and be a faithful at work, her family has to limit their other activities: “We say no a lot more,” including “no” to community groups at church or even social events with friends that require a

babysitter. She said she wants to be with her children in the evenings rather than leave them with a babysitter because she already spent so much time apart from them.

Gretta admitted that while she loves to cook and wants to expose her children to great food, it is one of the things she had to let go. “I’m letting myself off the hook.” She said she is learning to be okay with a regular rhythm of breakfast for dinner and eating spaghetti fifty times a year. To cope with her disappointment in menu choices, Gretta said she reminds herself that a fancy meal is not the most important thing during this stage of life and prompts herself “to stop stressing about this.”

Gretta was one of many to mention meal preparation. Many participants listed it as enjoyable but felt that this season of life required them to cut back on complicated meal preparations and find conveniences. Harbor said she simplified life and shops only at the two grocery stores closest to her house. It cost her more money, but it also reduced the number of stores she needs to visit. Sophia said she pays extra for pre-sliced fruit saying, “That’s just what I have to do in this season. And I know I’m very privileged and blessed to be able to do that. I know that is not everyone’s story.”

Proximity and flexibility are values River mentioned, “I have learned to just take some stuff off my plate.” She avoided committing to social invitations to simplify her life. “I’m really avoiding that right now, so I don’t feel overcommitted.” Drew spoke of the many years where her family also had to say no to social gatherings. They did not have extended family in town to watch the children, and their small group at church did not provide childcare. They let themselves off the hook saying, “We don’t have the finances to pay for a babysitter every week. We don’t want to spend a weeknight away from our kids, that time is so short and valuable.”

When Felicity's children were young, she decided to say no to extra responsibilities at work. The school would ask staff to volunteer to chaperone the school dance or host "meet and greets" with prospective parents. She said, "There have been years where I don't do it at all...I say, Okay, not everybody I work with has three kids under 10, and I'm just going to say I can't do it right now."

Rest – Mental and Physical Breaks

Participants also navigated the challenges of maternal stress by pursuing rest. While describing how important rest was to her, Harbor said, "I can feel it when it's not happening." She said she carved out twelve hours of alone time "to be really intentional" about rest between a work trip and a friend trip.

Gretta described rest as activities that "pour back into your soul so you're just not fully depleted." She noted that she constantly reminds herself that she will be a better mom "if I can refill my cup." She declared, "Mental breaks are huge." She said she loves anything where she can "sort of turn my brain off." Drew agreed and described times when she was occupied by another task but could still "be with my thoughts" as rest.

Several participants stated they were just as motivated to work as they were to have fun. They organized their work lives to free up time to pursue fun. They prided themselves on their work ethic, but, as Piper stated, "It just means planning well and being organized. I'm highly motivated to have fun."

Others identified as workaholics and had to be intentional about remembering to rest. One participant, Eliza, uncovered a formula to help her plan free time and maximize it for relaxation. The formula included the following three ingredients: a small indulgence (a coffee shop latte), a small productive task (clean out the closet), and downtime (watch

a movie). She named one combination of these three elements “Suburban Mom Saturday.” On those days, Eliza and a friend take their children to the YMCA childcare and walk on treadmills while chatting. The children love the childcare room and being together. The moms love getting exercise checked off their to-do list while they connect over conversation. Then they gather the children and head to the library. They get books, a smoothie, and take the children home in time to nap. Arriving home they read a favorite book while the children sleep.

Rest was identified as an important way participants mitigated maternal stress. This next section will look at the many ways participants prioritized rest by ensuring sleep, changing rhythms, developing hobbies, travelling, engaging in enjoyable physical activities, accomplishing discrete tasks with a clear beginning and end, spending time with others, spending time alone, and maintaining healthy spiritual practices.

Sleep

Most participants mentioned that sleep is important. “Sleep is pretty easy,” said River. She said that over the years her family has developed “consistent sleep hygiene” to foster deep sleep for all family members. It is a family priority. Piper also stated that she does not struggle with sleep, and she falls asleep as soon as her head hits the pillow. Cate highlighted her love of slow morning lounging in bed after a long restful sleep. “It just feels restful and a good way to start the day.”

Change of Pace

Rest can be experienced as a departure from one’s ordinary routine. Several participants emphasized that rest did not always feel like doing nothing but rather was a

“change of pace,” as Drew described. Some lamented they never felt completely free of their parental and professional duties at the same time, but others mentioned that simply switching back and forth between the two different roles felt restful. Harbor recognized adventure as being a key component of rest for her, as it brings something that is “outside of the normal day to day. It kind of gets me alive in a different way.”

Piper recalled a friend telling her that since she primarily used her mind for work, she should move her body to encourage rest. “The idea that is you work with your mind, you should rest with your hands, and if you work with your hands you should rest with your mind.” Piper admitted she loves doing yard work on a day off for this reason. Cate recalled that she enjoys watching HGTV at her parent’s mountain house because the channel is not available at her home, and the novelty of a new channel was relaxing.

Hobbies

Participants also identified play and hobbies to be restful. All but two mentioned conventional hobbies as a way to replenish themselves. With further follow-up questions, both participants who did not initially identify a hobby mentioned one or two without labeling them as such. Reading, hiking, and cooking were all popular. Cate stated that she no longer has hobbies since having children but then described making a live edge countertop in her free time. She also said she enjoys meandering around farmer’s markets and reading, as long as she is caught up on sleep.

River mentioned her love of mountain biking, and Eliza listed watching movies and hosting people in her home. Piper, a self-described lifelong learner, mentioned the podcast *How I Built This* by NPR.

Felicity spoke of her love of baking and sourdough. “You are making a thing with your hands, and there is a specific result, and it feels really rewarding and finish-able.” Few things in Felicity’s life have an ending point. “I think with parenting and teaching, it feels like there is really no end. You are just kind of doing your best to nurture what is in front of you, but you are not going to be like – here is my finished product. I’m done. And that is what I like about baking.... Now it’s done, and we get to eat it. That’s so great!”

Most hobbies that participants spoke of were solitary activities like Harbor’s cross-stitching or Drew’s love of cooking. But there were also communal activities: Gretta and Harbor taking their children on hikes, Felicity teaching others baking, and Harbor participating in a fantasy football league with her nieces and nephews. Most of River’s hobbies were communal and playful. She spoke of her love of mountain biking with her children, working out at the CrossFit gym with her set of gym friends, and playing on a community soccer team every Sunday. “Play, I think for me, is restful....Movement makes me feel grounded and in my body. It is usually with others, so I feel connected as well. It’s just a time where I get to really have joy!”

Travel

Travel provided additional opportunities for participants to rest. Gretta noted that one of the reasons vacations were crucial to her recovery as a young mother was that when she was at home with all the children, she rarely slept through the night. The constant waking and feeding and comforting were taxing. Having time away by herself or with other adults was a way to get good sleep, among other things.

Piper mentioned her love of vacations. “It’s not hard for me to be on vacation like it is for my husband.” She described how his love of working often got in the way of having fun, but she did not experience the same tension. Dollywood is her location of choice, she said. She goes with friends, co-workers, her husband, and her children on all sorts of combinations of people. She recalled it as a source of precious childhood memories and returning there as an adult with her own children is special. Piper also admired Dollywood’s excellence. “I think the level of excellence, the level of imagination, vision, execution, all of it is like, deeply inspiring...I’m a creative.”

Drew talked about how challenging it can be for her to leave town without her children. She said her anxiety rises when she is far away from them. Yet she values travel and wants to find a way to once again enjoy a favorite hobby. Drew experimented with an overnight trip, forty-five minutes from home, with her husband. She reminded herself that the children were going to be fine. “I knew my kids were safe, and we were not far away.” She recalled how she and her husband had a lot of fun — going to a yoga class, walking around an art fair, and stopping by shops she cannot take small children into. It went so well that she planned another trip with a friend. Her friend has breast cancer, she explained, and as part of her treatment, she will be getting a tattoo. “I’m going to go with her to get this tattoo. That is so special, really fun. I feel like it will be a chance for me to relax.” And since her husband and her parents would be with the children, she felt calmer about leaving them and trusting they will be okay.

Several participants mentioned traveling to visit family as relaxing. Drew recounted that her parents have a vacation home in Michigan that they love to visit, in part because there are more hands to help with the children.

For one summer Felicity spent six weeks apart from her husband and children in an immersive language program. She remembered feeling taken care of, having all her meals prepared for her and getting to do something every day that she loved. “[I]t was kind of like a retreat, and then it also made me, when I came back, so thankful.... I would be driving from here to the daycare to pick kids up, and I thought, it's so beautiful here. I love our life.... [T]he smallest things about being with the kids felt so much more meaningful because I had missed it for six weeks.” She had a hard time being away from her family for so long, and would never do it again, but it taught her to savor the small moments of alone time at home as a part of normal daily life. Felicity also regularly accompanied students on summer trips to Europe. Though she missed her children and worried about them, she was energized by watching her students experience the culture and improve their language skills. On one two-week immersion trip, she brought her husband, and they enjoyed much needed time together, even though they had high school students with them. “It does feel like we are just on a big date.”

As a baseball mom, Cate spends many weekends in other cities with her family. Recently, they tacked on a trip to the Grand Canyon during a series of games in Arizona. “It’s just super fun. You are with the other families, and they are having fun. There are hotels. It is just exciting for the boys.” She sees these trips as an adventure for the family.

River and Harbor both had standing trips with college friends to look forward to. River said that she and her friends go away on either MLK or President’s Day weekend to a lake house. “It is a sweet time to recharge, no parenting responsibilities, there is not great WIFI there, and it is kind of out in the middle of nowhere on a lake.” Harbor said that her trips are one big adventure. She and her two college friends take turns planning

mystery trips for the past fifteen years. Only the person planning the trip knows any details of the location or activities. All of it is coordinated with the husbands' assistance, and all expenses are split. She said one of the best parts is having no responsibilities when you are not the one planning the trip. She does not have to make any decisions. "You're connecting to that part of yourself that's not responsible so you can just have fun." The yearly trips help her feel alive, she said, and they end up doing "ridiculous things that you never do in normal life," like stumbling upon a "Neil Diamond tribute band concert." She spoke about why this tradition is meaningful. "I think having fun is really important to me....Maybe it really lightens all of motherhood, work stuff, that you can get bogged down by." She said the trips lead her to a place of gratitude to God and connection with her friends. "There is such fruit from this time....God gives us so much to delight in nature, in moments, and friendships."

While Cate did not have a standing trip with her college friends, she did take a trip with them for everyone's fortieth birthday to Waco, TX, to visit the Silos. A side benefit of taking a trip together was reinvigorating an old text thread. They now send each other weekly prayer requests, book recommendations, skin care product reviews, and praises for answered prayers.

Harbor described some of the trips she takes as retreats. She has retreats with her mentoring group and a silent retreat with a spiritual direction group. Harbor also spoke about three ski weekends with several girlfriends and their families that she looks forward to each winter. They use a family cabin in the mountains. Everyone takes turns skiing with different people, playing games, and sharing cooking responsibilities. "It's a

really fun and special time away, which is only possible because they have this big, old ski house.”

Piper and her husband were slated for a joint summer sabbatical next year; she said she dreams of spending most of it in Europe as a family.

Once a month, River and her husband separately plan a weekend day off for themselves. They add it to the calendar as “River’s Day” or the equivalent for her husband. Each person has total control over how they spend the time. A few times, River drove to see a friend who lives a few hours away. She said, “There are no expectations that I would come home to cook dinner.... We would plan three months at a time... It gives us space with no expectations or responsibilities.”

Eliza works in a school, and yet she does not get her summers off. As a result, she noticed that she could feel jealous of others who had a long summer break. To combat this, she planned a trip with her girlfriends at the end of each July. “One last hurrah when everyone is starting to come back so that I don’t feel like the summer is gone, and I have just been here all summer.” She said it is important to have things like little trips to look forward to. While not a fancy trip, she said she also tries to find days to work out of a coffee shop during school break to feel like she is not a “ball and chain to the school.”

Eliza and Gretta specifically mentioned trips they took with their husbands as being rejuvenating. Gretta and her husband took a trip to Europe for just over a week; Eliza spent half of spring break away with her spouse. Eliza explained these types of indulgences are possible because of the financial stability provided by her full-time professional career. “I’m at a place in my career where I am compensated a little more, and it helps us do these things.” She recalled that a friend had encouraged her to read

Lean In during pregnancy, and she attributed much of the flexibility, childcare options, and ability to take vacations to her decision to continue her professional ambitions.

Physical Activity

All but one of the participants listed some type of physical movement as a favorite way to rest and relax. River described one of her days off that included mountain biking and hiking. “I ran the trails, brought my bike, and then mountain biked on the trails and had my notebook and podcasts and music. And then afterwards, I met a friend for lunch,” Drew shared her enjoyment of working-out. “I really like to make time to work out. It makes me feel good. Energized!” Eliza highlighted her time walking with a friend. Both Harbor and Felicity reported taking a lot of walks alone and loving yoga. Harbor especially enjoyed hot yoga at a studio near her house. Her children often teased her about her t-shirts that drip with sweat when she returns home.

A few of the women, when remembering particularly hard times in their life, listed physical activity as a key component of their recovery. Eliza took out her frustrations on the rowing machine and sprinted on a treadmill. River did the same with a season of Muay Thia lessons.

Gretta noted she finds the gym helpful for her active brain and it leaves her feeling energized for the rest of her workday. “Going to the gym has been really helpful....It is a rest for my brain and the responsibilities, because I’m not having to think about those things while I’m doing other stuff.” Both Gretta and River attend a CrossFit gym. River summed up the benefits by saying, “I think it hits every facet that I know I need. It has intensity, it has structure, has reliability and community....I know I’m going to get all those things that I need without having to put any additional mental energy into

the design, timing, coordination. There is so much mental energy done in parenting and work. I don't want sports to be something that I have to do those things with." Harbor stated this is the same reason exercise classes work so well for her, because she does not have to think about anything after she shows up. Exercise no longer feels like a punishment or a way to change the look of her body; she sees the benefits of exercise in improved sleep and reduced anxiety.

Moving her body is part of River's wholistic view of life. "Exercise absolutely fits into rest, being healthy wholistically, spiritually, socially...knowing I'm a whole person and I need to have all these facets supported." She reported that she is integrating breath work and stretching into her routine, especially during times of stress and anxiety. "When I feel anxious, I think that is my trigger to breath and stretch, and that is not as fun for me." She finds even five minutes of breathwork along with an app has big benefits.

Deciding how to fit in things that are important to her, like exercise, was a lesson Cate reported learning when one of her colicky sons wouldn't let her take a shower. She made a choice that he would be okay crying for ten minutes while she showered. "I just realized I have to do things small and be okay with small," Cate said. Applying this lesson to exercise, she said she makes time most mornings to do a short, fifteen-minute YouTube exercise video, and she walks their dog around the block in the afternoon. She explained that if she tried to find an hour or two to go to the gym, it would never happen. However, making small goals for moving her body has had big benefits. Drew agreed that she can no longer find time to go to the gym as much as she used to before becoming a mother. Instead, she rides her Peloton at home. She and her husband also lift weights together thirty minutes each night after the children go to bed. "That has been really

good....The dishes can wait; the kids are asleep. We are going to take this time and work out and laugh at each other, and that has been a good way to do it.”

Piper said that exercise is not enjoyable for her. She stated that although she hates it, she works out five days a week and sees it as “a discipline” to cultivate a healthy body. She chose to work out at night, when she has uncommitted time, and use the TV or podcasts to distract herself. “It’s one of those things that I think as a mom, there is so much you end up doing in the cracks and crevices of your day.”

Accomplishing a Task

Completing a project or marking a task off a to do list was mentioned as a restful activity by several participants. None of the tasks had to do with work projects. Rather they were related to caring for the home or yard. Gretta said, “I love some kind of project, you know, like painting a room, hanging pictures, or even a deep clean, like organizing my closet.” Eliza agreed that organizing a closet felt restful. Piper mentioned power washing her driveway as a fun activity. “It’s very rewarding. I did our back porch too. Everything just is clean, it feels so good.” At the end of a “River’s Day,” River wanted to go grocery shopping, to make the next day easier. “If I get this done,” she said, “then I can really rest on the next day and be present with the family.”

Time Spent with Others

Participants also fostered rest with others, including family and friends.

Family

Some participants communicated their love for slow family time at home as being restful. Drew stated it this way. “I really value that time. I’m fairly introverted, so not having to interact with people who don’t know me well allows me to be myself and to rest mentally.”

Along with watching movies at home and eating good food, participants mentioned swimming at the pool, doing yard work, and spending time at the park with their families. Piper and Felicity in particular talked about loving unstructured family time. Eliza pointed out that it is not restful to take small children to a restaurant, but “I just enjoy being around my family.” She and her husband found a work-around. They bring take-out to a park and let the children play while they eat.

Participants who have parents and siblings involved in their lives talked about how much they enjoyed spending time with them. They travel to see them, they take trips with them, they use them for babysitting, and they enjoy activities together, such as celebrating milestones, going to museums, cooking big meals, watching sporting events, and many other things. Drew mentioned how refreshing it was that her parents would volunteer to babysit the children every time they travel to visit them so she and her husband can have a date night while the grandparents handle the bedtime routine. Eliza spoke about her two sisters and their special bond when she said, “I’m the middle of three girls, and we all have similar age kids and are similar working moms and sort of career driven. Meaningful work is important to all of us.” Eliza stressed they share the same

values, are at similar life stages, and can understand home and work dynamics without any background explanation.

Many participants spoke about trips and date nights with their husbands as points of rest and refreshment. Gretta said she gets away a few times a year for two to four days with her husband, and family and babysitters watch her children as she tags along on business trips. Piper also mentioned that she and her husband try to get away once or twice a year. She was also the only participant to mention a regular weekly, deliberately planned date with her husband. Felicity admitted that she and her spouse are not good at regular date nights but take advantage of any offer friends and family make to watch their children so they can go out. They have “former babysitters who moved away, and then when they come back to town they say, ‘I really want to hang out with your kids. Let me take them for the night.’ And we say, ‘OKAY, sure!’” Felicity explained to her husband that she does not even care what they do on a date night; they don’t need to spend a lot of money or even go out. She explained she wants to anticipate connecting with him. “It’s fun to say that on Thursday night we are going to look each other in the eyes and talk to each other for an hour.”

Drew and her husband created a unique approach to dating. They both call out of work, but take the boys to daycare as usual, and then spend the day together. Drew said, “My birthday was a couple weeks ago, so that was a great opportunity....This is just going to be our day....We roamed around and went to the grocery store and saw a movie.”

Two participants mentioned that date nights have become easier now that their children do not need a paid babysitter. Harbor said that she and her husband often walk to

a neighborhood restaurant for dinner while their oldest watches the younger children at home. Harbor shared about how they enjoy walks to Trader Joe's. "I cannot believe we have the freedom to do this now.... We just walk to Trader Joe's and get groceries."

Chloe stated that a side benefit of her boys being a part of sports teams is that there is often an hour or more of free time in between dropping them off at the field and the start of the game. "They are there an hour early, so we'll go get coffee, or we will take the dog on a walk together."

Gretta and Eliza spoke about trips they took with one single child as being fun and restful. Gretta took her oldest daughter on a trip to New York to enjoy the shows and the sights. Eliza took her daughter to a "Moms on the Mountain" weekend at the YMCA Camp. Friends from out of town joined them, and the girls participated in activities while the moms hung out. "They have camp programming with campfires and skits, but then they let all the kids go do all the different archery and BB guns and rock climbing. And then for the moms they have yoga and arts and craft and extended coffee hours."

Friends

Friendships proved to be a cornerstone for the long-term health of many participants. Some mentioned using apps like Marco Polo to stay in touch with friends who live far and near. Felicity said, "It's funny. I feel like...so many of my friends stay in touch because of apps on our phone. Just as much as me and my friend in New York...even if they live close, we are not seeing each other in person anyway."

One the other hand, proximity helped other friendships to grow. Cate shared that most of her friends moved away after college, but she has one friend who works in the

building next to her, and they often get together for a coffee break. Felicity described blossoming friendships at work that developed because their paths regularly cross.

Reoccurring themes emerged regarding the preferred activities participants enjoyed with their friends: shared meals, time with one another's families, trips, and having fun together around games and sports. Shared meals, often accompanied by extended conversation, consistently topped the list as the most meaningful ways to rest together. Eliza phrased her need for friendship and connection this way. "Personally, I know I need to recharge to sort of stay afloat." It might be "grabbing dinner with a friend and knowing my husband is fine with the kids that evening or...taking the kids to Memphis and seeing family and friends." It could be a simple, unplanned weeknight dinner or a longer birthday celebration. What participants emphasized was the lingering conversations around the table.

Another theme was the integration of families into friendship networks. Friends often spent time in each other's homes (or on trips), allowing children to play while adults connected. Whether attending a football game, or cheering for a child's sporting team, or surviving camp together, many participants wanted their friends to know and love their husbands and children. Eliza described some of her favorite things she and her friends have done together with their families when she said, "We to go to the Fall Festival...and we also always trick-or-treat together at their house."

Drew described a close group of friends who walked together through a difficult transition after a hard church season. The bonds among the couples were strong, she said, but they also wanted to foster the friendships among the children. In Drew's words, "They are like our family here." The group has made a deliberate effort prioritize these

friendships with restful, connective time together. Three or four times a year they jointly rent a vacation house and spend twenty-four hours in one another's company. Drew said they were all friends before they added children to their families, and after kids they started to ask, "How do we find time for each other now?"

Travel with friends also surfaced as a cherished form of bonding and rest. Participants described a range of experiences – from trips with college friends to Waco, TX, annual weekend "mystery trips," holidays at a lake house, and even a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Scotland. Each story was marked by joy as they recalled the adventure, play, and rest that travel provided.

Gretta, for instance, had an opportunity to visit a friend in Scotland who was presenting an academic paper. The two expanded their trip by attending a Taylor Swift concert before heading home. In other seasons, Gretta joined friends for book release parties and prayer retreats. Piper, unsurprisingly, recalled going to Dollywood with her friends, where she could share the wonder and joy alongside those she loves.

Finally, board games, card games, and sports often drew friends together for light-hearted moments. Drew said, "Oftentimes just getting together at someone's house, playing games, talking about life, talking about the kids was meaningful." River said she treasures her weekly soccer game with her friend and protects it on the family calendar. She also derives deep satisfaction from her regular gym attendance and noted the relationships there as most meaningful. Reflecting on this community, River highlighted that many dimensions come together in the gym. "I just feel like I can be super silly but also super ambitious. Again, it is another sphere where I can integrate seemingly

disparate parts of myself in a cohesive place. Like I can be strong and aggressive but also hug all my friends and be tender and empathetic and laugh.”

When asked to describe her current friendships, Felicity shared that what she valued was having “dear friends that feel like home.”

More than one participant admitted they felt it was challenging to make intentional space for friendships. Felicity, who described herself as more of an introvert, confessed that she reminds herself to reach out to her friends when she has unstructured time. “Sometimes I think, ‘You should think about asking someone to hang out with you because that could be really good for you.’” Cate admitted she ached, missing her college friends. “After college things change as people move. And I think (we had) different expectations. A lot of them all moved away, and their families were here so their time back here was really challenging.” After a time of distance and healing, Cate reached out to mend the relationships. “I finally feel like I kind of healed from having too high of expectations.”

Time Spent Alone

Time without anyone around was hard to come by for all the participants, but most of them stated alone time as helpful for achieving rest. Felicity’s drive to and from her second job is a 12-minute car ride, alone, twice a week. She finds the time peaceful. “Even just the small windows [of time alone] become so much more special.” Every time she makes space for time alone, Felicity thinks, “Oh, yes, this is a necessity.” She admitted she was not good making time for it during early motherhood but recognizes she must cultivate space to be on her own. Felicity talked about taking advantage of the back deck on her townhouse. She said she has trained her children to come get her only if there

is an emergency and uses the time to read and write in a journal. Cate said she also loves to read a book on her deck and finds the time alone to be beneficial.

Harbor pops into a tiny chapel near her house that is open 24/7 for a short spell to gather her thoughts and have some time to herself. “I have found rest and silence to be critical,” she said. Harbor also spoke about walking alone — mostly silently. She calls them her “crunchy walks,” because she walks on a gravel trail and said that when she announces to the children that it is time for her “crunchy walk,” they know she needs alone time. Felicity also loves walking and yoga. “I feel like I’m doing something that’s just for me....It’s become a real respite for me.” Eliza shared that she finds solitude to be challenging because she cannot turn her brain off. Reading a book, she said, can help. “I do find that I can sort of escape into a world for a book and turn my brain off.... If it’s quiet and still my brain is just going to be going.”

Spiritual Practices

Maintaining healthy spiritual practices, including Sabbath, church attendance, Bible reading, and silence, helped many participants pursue rest. In the past, when her husband served as a college pastor on a church staff, Eliza remembered Sundays being a struggle. It was not a day of rest for her family with young children in tow. Now that he works for a parachurch ministry, Sundays feel more like a family day, she said. Felicity said that she has struggled with the fact that her husband must work a lot of weekends, but they still need that income. Switching to a Saturday night church service has helped, she explained, and the family can sleep in on Sundays and make a slow breakfast together. Felicity said, “Sunday mornings used to feel really hectic and like everyone needs to be clean and dressed....It felt more like just a regular day.” But with the change

to a Saturday service, they can relax on Sundays, and even though her husband must work on the weekend, he can usually attend church with them.

Piper said that she and her husband, both pastors, work on Sundays, but they take another day off during the week for rest. For Piper, that day is Saturday, and they designate it as family time. She said she prefers following the Jewish Sabbath tradition, where the time of rest begins on Friday evening, “like a traditional Sabbath, where in Jewish tradition, it starts on Friday night.” Because her parents live in town, she said that she drops the children off at their house, where they spend the night, giving Piper and her husband the evening alone. After a family day together on Saturday, they feel energized and ready to give their best on Sunday with their church.

River reported that they were “not strict Sabbath keepers” but that they emphasize church attendance on Sundays, not working, and an absence of striving. “I try to be mindful of that so I’m not trying to get ahead on work...I don’t typically work on Sundays unless it is absolutely necessary.” She said that they spend the rest of their Sundays watching tv, playing games, or grocery shopping.

Although she loves working, Cate said that she is committed to not working on the Sabbath. She said it is an opportunity to trust in God. “Sabbath for me is about trust...that I’ll be fine on Monday.”

Gretta said that she recently switched denominations to one with more liturgical elements and a children’s church during the service. She noted how lifegiving this has been for her family of four. “The repeating of the prayers, the physicality of going up and taking communion...the predictability of the service...have felt very restful.” She said they put her youngest in nursery and the two middle ones in children’s church, while her

eldest stays in the service with them. In her old church they had to try to wrangle all the children in a pew during church, she said, and Gretta found herself unable to participate. She noted how life-giving church is now when she said, “We are actually able to sit and listen to the sermon and scripture readings....it pours back into our souls.”

Many of the participants listed Bible reading as a way to renew themselves spiritually. Cate reported that she is in her second year of reading through the Bible in a year. Harbor and Felicity said they find time in the mornings to read. And even though she is a preacher and Bible teacher, Piper stated that she finds a lot of enjoyment from studying the Bible. “I really experience him through studying his word.”

Eliza spoke about a set of reflective questions she asks herself and the prayers that follow) as rest in her spiritual life. She asks herself, “What am I actually feeling right now? What is it that has stolen my peace? How do I give it to God and work through it?” River also noted prayer as renewing. She said she begins her workdays asking God to be present and to guide her in her work. “I pray for the day, for the Lord to guide my direction, my energy, my intentions, that would be faithful to whatever he has for me that day.” Drew spoke about how praying with her friends felt refreshing. “We've tried to be pretty intentional, too, about praying for each other, creating time and space for that.”

Drew said she finds a lot of joy from serving others, such as doubling a meal for her family and taking the second one to another family. Gretta mentioned that they switched churches for better children’s programs during the worship service but also to be in a church where women were encouraged to use all their gifts. She said their new church is somewhere “women use their voices and exercise their gifts and that is one of the biggest things that has helped me to thrive.” She credits her volunteer work teaching a

Bible study in a local prison as something that has also helped her flourish. “The act of giving back to other people is lifegiving.” She said, “It has been so good for my faith.”

A few participants spoke about the spiritual practice of solitude bringing them peace and rest. Piper learned a new appreciation of this practice when her church did a study on it. She recognized that in turning to podcasts or audiobooks, she was running from silence. “I can make the choice to not turn on music or podcasts in the car and just sit in the silent and bring my thoughts to God.” She realized that the noise in her life was keeping her from “processing things with the Lord,” said Piper. “I’m just making sure I now have spaces to be present and to make myself present to the presence of God.”

Support - Not Meant to Do Life Alone

It is widely recognized that no child can be raised without a village. All participants identified members of their community who supported them in raising their children and managing their households and enabled them to succeed in their professional work and thrive as individuals.

Bosses

Multiple participants identified their boss as instrumental in navigating the demands of work and motherhood. Harbor and River stressed that their bosses have insisted on open communication regarding their needs. The bosses have cultivated a culture of trust and wellbeing. River said, “My boss is great...[S]he makes space for us to be human.” River said that her boss gives her freedom to set her own schedule as long as her work is getting done, and so she blocks off time for herself or the family. “She absolutely creates the environment and the freedom to do what I need to do,” said River.

She continued, noting that her boss also encourages her to book more expensive flights home rather than sitting in a long layover and missing family time. Often, after a long project, her boss checks in to encourage her to take more time off. Things like this, said River, “make life more sustainable.”

Felicity said that she knows she has a supportive boss and feels safe to brainstorm ideas to help her flourish because her boss asks her during every meeting, “What can I do to help you flourish? Do you have all the tools you need for your professional flourishing? What can I help you with? How can I support you?” Felicity said she also feels supported by the human resources department at the school. When she was feeling overwhelmed about maternity leave, the lead human resource officer sent Felicity a spread sheet to consider all her options. “She sent me all these different scenarios and came to meet with me to explain it.” Felicity said she is confident that if she or a loved one were ill and required a lot of time off work, everyone at work would “rush to my aid.” She expressed feeling “very spoiled” by her supportive work environment when she said, “They don’t just care about what I do in the classroom, but they care about me as a whole person.”

When Harbor was expecting her first baby, she felt like she was letting everyone in the district down because she needed to delay a new job role. Her program director said to her, “You don’t need to apologize for being pregnant.” Harbor felt cared for, and now that she is a boss herself, Harbor said she has communicated her desire to create a warm, supportive environment for working parents too. She reported that out of her twelve team members, ten are parents, and eleven are primary parents. When Harbor has taken time away from the office, she does not hide her vacation. She said she wants her

employees to see her setting a good example of prioritizing family life and also stated that the owner of the business also makes it public when he is unplugging. “[The boss] personifies this. He’s on a fishing trip, and you probably won’t get a hold of him.”

Harbor clearly communicated to her team that they should not compare their work hours to others. “[W]e’re all on Slack, and we all work very different schedules, yes. And so just because someone sets a Slack at six in the morning doesn’t mean you need to be working at six. They might be signing off today at noon, right? And you’re working noon to three.” She stated that she is trying to cultivate a “high trust” environment.

Similarly, Eliza has a team of over 100 teachers and staff in her care. She said she sees it as part of her calling to foster a flexible work environment that allows women to do well in their role as a professional and as a mother. She noted that two assistant principals are mothers with young children and two other school leaders have other older children. The school office is filled with people who encourage one another to soak up “the little years, as a mother with small children at home. They allow one another to take off early or come in late if there is a doctor’s appointment or if they have been working late multiple days in a row,” she said. Eliza has worked hard to cultivate a safe environment for working mothers. “We have had a lot of mothers come back after they have a baby, and not to toot my own horn, but I really like to believe that seeing other moms do it is part of what makes you more willing to even try it yourself.”

Gretta said she is her own boss and purposely created jobs, as her children grew, that could flex around her family’s needs. “I’ve been able to say, they’re starting school in three weeks, so I can put this stuff on the back burner until they start school.

Cate highlighted the generous time off, holiday leave, and sick leave at her university as a contributing factor to her success as a working mother. She appreciated having time to care for herself and her children when they are ill and make family memories together over the summer and holidays. She also cited the collaborative, laid back culture as a bonus. She said she feels cared for by all the opportunities for deeper learning, noting, “You can do LinkedIn Learning; you can go Grand Rounds,” as ways the university develops their employees as whole people.

Friends

While living abroad for her husband’s career, River had international friends who encouraged her to pursue graduate school and a career. “They said, ‘Of course you should go to grad school. Absolutely!’”

When answering the question of how her friends offered support, Harbor spoke about feeling no judgment around them. She said, “I feel like I have space to be a multi-faceted person, which is really key. I don’t feel like I have to justify or compensate or hide anything.” Harbor referred to her many roles in life (mother, worker bee, professional, and wife) and said she does not feel the need to hide the hard parts with her friends. “It just feels helpful to be fully known.”

Both Grett and Eliza identified early motherhood as “isolating.” Gretta found adult conversation life-giving and an antidote to the isolation. “It just works a different part of your brain.” She said she appreciated the commiseration friends can provide. “Parenting can be so lonely. Talking to someone about it normalizes some of the things you’re going through...it gives perspective...and you don’t feel so alone.”

Through the years River saw a string of people who have supported her. “I’ve had a support group of people that have seen me and have believed in whatever that stretch was like... It is the power of bearing witness...to remember and to recall and to hope.” Proximity is important to River, she said, because coordinating time to see friends is stressful. She appreciated the “deep presence” Marco Polo provides with two friends she cannot see on a daily basis.

Friendship was a paradoxical subject for a few participants. Some wished they had more friends, and others said they wish they were better at reaching out to friends. Felicity said, “I often feel like I’m messing [friendships] up, like I’m not doing them well enough.” Yet when reflecting on the support friends have provided her, she said, “I think it is a feeling of this person loves me and knows me as I am and doesn’t have expectations of me because of something they’ve heard... They are okay with me showing up as me.” Some of her friends recently moved to Birmingham. As a result, they have had to be deliberate about seeing one another. She said, “We were just laughing recently because I think we’ve seen them more since they [moved] to Birmingham than when they lived 5 minutes away. We just plan it better.”

Piper identified her role in ministry as a unique complication for forming friendships. Some people are drawn to her perceived status, she said, which casts doubt on the authenticity of their interest. “You’re meeting people who know you as this leader and that creates a weird friendship dynamic where people don’t realize that they’re wanting to be your friend because of what they can get from you.” In addition, Piper said she is aware of the power dynamics that exist when her friendships come from within the church or even on the church staff. For this reason, she intentionally confided in a friend

outside her church, expressing her need for that friend to be more active in her life. “I just had dinner last night with a friend of mine that I've known for twenty years, and I said to her... ‘Girl, I need you in my life. I need people who know me.’” Piper also identified another close friend from outside her church community as being a key support. “She is someone that if I’m struggling, I will text her and say, ‘Can you pray for me right now?’” She recalled this friend as a true support when friendships at church were tricky. “If I was going through a rough season in marriage where we aren’t really connecting, she was someone I could tell. Because I can’t tell our staff about that. That’s their boss, but I can tell her... She is someone I can tell literally anything to.”

Mentors

Mentors also provided support to participants. As a new mother, Harbor heard from someone close to her that she should not be working with a baby at home. She wrote to a college professor for advice. The professor wrote back and emphasized the freedom mothers have in choosing what is best for them their families. She told Harbor that there are a lot of good choices in life and to watch that she does not let others make decisions for her. She told Harbor, “The important thing is that you know you are making the decision, and you feel peace in that decision.”

Later in life Harbor again sought out a mentor. She and another friend were lamenting that while their husbands had multiple opportunities to be mentored in their profession and their fatherhood, they as mothers had no opportunities for the same support. Together they formed a group of career-minded women and hand-selected a mentor. They have been meeting monthly for two years and find the time life-giving. She explained that they fill out a pre-survey before each meeting, which everyone can read. It

updates each other's spiritual health, marital issues, family news, and physical health. When they gather, she said, they spend four hours sharing and praying for one another. The mentor also prepares a lesson based on something she thinks they need to hear.

Husband

All participants listed their husbands are a crucial support to them in managing the tension between their roles as a mother and a professional.

While Eliza's husband may not know all the hard details of a typical day as a principle, she said, he provides a listening and empathetic ear. Cate's husband encouraged her to pursue a career rather than remaining at home full-time with the children. Harbor identified a weekly Sunday meeting with her husband as being central to thriving in both her roles. Weekly they gather with a cocktail and review the calendar of events for the next two weeks, she said, and they also ask each other a set of three questions: "One, how did you feel loved by me this week? Two, what do you need from me this week? And three, what can I pray for?" Harbor shared that her husband fully owns any task he commits to. They developed the term "point person" to identify which one of them will take the leadership on a task. For example, Harbor was the point person for one of her son's birthday parties. She oversaw decorations, gifts, food, and overall planning. As part of their weekly meeting, when her husband asked, "What do you need from me this week?" she asked him to select and buy one gift for their son. This arrangement frees up the mental space for the person who is not the point person and also allows the point person to ask for assistance, if needed, she concluded.

Several participants tried many iterations of part-time and full-time work along with their husbands. They switched who was the primary caretaker and who was the

primary income earner until they found what worked best for their family. In several families, the husband stayed home with children for a season. Harbor said she never would have imagined the “ebb and flow” that she has had with her husband but credits it as the reason they can both have careers that they love alongside parenting four children. Felicity shared that she and her husband have tried every combination of work they could imagine and, in the end, decided it was best with them both working full-time. “[W]e've tried lots of different options... I work part-time and he works full-time. He works part-time and I work full-time. I work full-time, and he works no time. We've tried all the things. And I think we've landed on both of us working full-time, but we both have seasonal jobs.” Gretta also credits her husband as the man behind her ability to pursue a career. “I would not have been able to do all these other things if he were not helping me. I would not have been able to run for office had he not been able to step in.” All three women praise their husbands’ commitments to pursuing their wife’s flourishing despite cultural pressures to put their own needs and careers first.

When Felicity was struggling with career frustration, her husband figured out a path to her flourishing. She said through grateful tears, “The only reason I’m flourishing as a working mom is because I’m married to a man who’s completely invested in my flourishing...He knows what it looks like when I’m flourishing, and he knows how to help me figure out what’s not working.” She said her husband was committed to this, even to the detriment of his own career: “He has a job that he is kind of mid about while I have a job I adore.... He especially loved me well into what I’m doing.”

Extended Family

“I don’t think I could do this without our family and friends,” said Drew. She said that they do not live close to their families, but she speaks to her mother every day on the phone. “[We] actually both really value our parents’ advice and encouragement.” When her baby was 12 weeks old and needed to go to daycare for the first time, Drew had to drop him off at the door with a stranger because of COVID-19 precautions. She returned home sobbing and exclaimed she could not continue to take her baby to childcare, but her parents helped her get through the emotional first week. “I remember coming home, and I just cried every single day, and I told my mom who was with us to help with the transition, ‘I think I have to quit. I think I have to quit my job.’ And they said, ‘Hold your horses. You can get through this. Don’t make a decision like this the first week.’”

Drew said that she and her husband rely on their parents’ emotional support to such a degree that every time they visit their family out of state, they wonder if they should move closer to home to have their daily involvement or stay where they have jobs and community they enjoy. Drew said they ask themselves, “Are we making a mistake...Do we need to move closer to home? It is hard to have kids without family around. We have a very good support system [where we live] and really good community of friends. We love our church, and it would be giving up a lot if we moved.”

Eliza said that she counts her sisters as two of her closest friends. They talk regularly and offer guidance, advice, and support. After a job move, Eliza and her husband struggled to find childcare for their new baby, as most places would not take a child younger than 6 months old. Eliza felt “helpless” and so her mother stepped in and filled the gap. “My mom came initially when we moved, and she stayed with him the first week, because we legit didn’t have anywhere to send him.”

Gretta said she has taken many trips out of town with her husband, but she cannot think of a time when her children have spent the night with anyone other than her mom or her sister. It comforts her to know that they are safe in the care of people who love them deeply. Gretta said, “I feel like they are in really good hands. And that makes me be able to step away and rest.”

Piper said she is grateful that both of her children’s grandparents live nearby. “They are a huge help,” she said. Piper recalled when she and her husband were feeling more stressed than normal, and her parents reached out to say, “What can we do? How can we help?” She added that her daughter loves spending time with her husband’s mother and will spend three or four days with her at a time. “We are very lucky to have so much help,” she said.

Several participants with involved grandparents voiced concerns about their parents’ health and energy, noting a growing hesitation to ask for help from them as their parents age. Felicity was worried after a two-week work trip to Europe. She came back and said, “I was more concerned about the grandparents’ energy and wellness.... We really asked a lot of our parents this summer.”

Household Chores

Every participant described a unique arrangement for tending to the needs of the house, gathering and preparing food, building and executing holidays, paying bills, and caring for the yard. A few couples said they split things along traditional gender lines while the rest adopted more flexible approaches.

“I definitely don’t think I could do this job,” said Cate, “if my husband did not participate, because he is very present.” She said that they “share duties” and that it is a

“pretty even split.” Some families have a paid house cleaner to lessen the load. Harbor mentioned, “I have a cleaner every other week. Very practical. Very helpful.”

Eliza said she and her husband split up the school pick-up routine as well as trade-off the bedtime routine. River said she and her husband alternate making meals, which includes buying all the ingredients. “Sharing chores, sharing the mental load, and delegating” are all important to River, she said, and she knows she does not have to carry the entire load of running the household. Felicity said that she washes the clothes, but her husband insists on folding them because he does not like how she does the folding, and she was not complaining about it one bit.

Piper said she oversees buying groceries and cooking, though she doesn’t love cooking, and her husband is in charge of finances. Recently they considered switching things up so that her husband, who wants to trim expenses, would purchase the groceries. “He asked me, ‘How can we save [on groceries]? And I said, ‘If you want to help with grocery shopping and meal planning, that would be amazing.’” Piper noted that they are figuring out the distribution of labor and childcare in ways their parents never talked about. “We are sharing a lot of that, which my parents didn’t do.” She noted that he makes the children breakfast every morning and makes her coffee. “[He] really is incredibly servant hearted,” she said.

Drew stated that she and her husband’s chores have shifted over time. “That has definitely shifted throughout our marriage, and we’ve been married fourteen years now...It’s different in different seasons, and that has been great that we’ve been able to kind of shift those roles and adjust based on where we’re at.” Felicity has also seen responsibilities shift over time. Her family was spending many hours taking care of the

yard, and no one was enjoying it. “We are not yard care people,” she said. They moved to a townhouse with no yard to keep up, and everyone is a lot happier. It took some creative thinking to remove that burden from their list of responsibilities.

During the last few months of her political campaign, Gretta remembered telling her husband that she needed specific help with the laundry, which was typically her chore. “In the most intense time of the campaign, I told my husband... ‘I need you in charge of the laundry... I don’t care how that looks. I don’t care if it means you hire someone to come and do it. I don’t care if there is a laundry service or if you do it all... I just need to not be in charge of it for now.’” He willingly took over for a few weeks to give her time to focus on campaigning.

Eliza said that her job as a school principal is so time-consuming that when she first accepted the position, she told her husband that they both needed to be ready for what saying “yes” to the offer would mean for their family. “I’ve been very clear from the start; I can’t do this job if I’m also running the household.” She said that she and her husband depend on their yearly “State of the Union” meeting where they work on “realigning goals and vision setting for [the] family.” They review their family mission statement and then take turns sharing their “three main goals for our children, three priorities for yourself, three weekdays ‘must do’ activities, and three ‘most do’ weekend activities.” For example, she said, if a weekday priority is more family meals at the table, they figure out how they will implement that goal. What nights of the week? What type of meal? How do they get dinner on the table when everyone is overly hungry? Eliza identified this meeting as a critical part of partnering together to set the values and goals for their family.

River said that she and her husband include their children in caring for the household. They have chore charts, and as they age, they increase their expectations of the children's contributions. "We start small. As their capacity increases, we can increase responsibilities." River stated that sharing the household labor with her husband and children greatly impacted her ability to work professionally. Reflecting on the possibility of not having the household support, she said, "It is not sustainable," and that she wouldn't "have joy in it. I get resentful... trying to work at a superhuman pace."

Childcare

It is good and healthy for children to be cared for by multiple people, explained Gretta. "Letting [the children] see that there are other people... trustworthy adults in their life who can take care of them and who pour into them, that is a good thing." It is also good for her as a mother, she explained, because after some time apart, she can be more focused when she is with the children. "Delegating some of the parenting is actually a way for me to be a better mother and more in tune with the kids when I have them." Though overnight care is mostly performed by relatives, Gretta said she has several long-term childcare providers who help throughout the day. One of the women has been working for them since she was 14 years old. She said, "I like having a long-term relationship with people... We are not meant to do life alone. We are not meant to raise kids alone."

Felicity agreed with Gretta. She believed that their reliance on their parents to provide childcare and love their children is "moving closer towards the community that God envisioned for us all. We should be relying on each other.... I think they enjoy it. Our children enjoy it. We love having them. It is such a huge gift all around." Felicity's

mother-in-law moved to their town when Felicity was pregnant with her third child specifically to help watch the baby during the workday. “My mother-in-law keeps him two days a week [now], and they moved here when we got pregnant with our third for the expressed purpose of helping with the kids, which has been amazing.” She said, “Neither my husband nor I would be able to do as much as we do professionally if we didn’t have the grandparents’ help... It helps us enormously.” She never imagined that she would enjoy her parents and in-laws living close-by, but she said she is grateful they do. “It makes parenting possible,” Felicity said.

Drew appreciated the childcare their parents provide each time they visited them, especially getting a break from the bedtime routine and space to fit in a date or two. She said their parents want to relieve them of some of the parenting load. While Drew and her husband have great friends, she finds it hard to ask them for childcare. “Even with a community of really good friends, I feel like everyone also has their own lives. A lot of them don’t have family in the area. That feels like a big ask to say, ‘Hey, can you watch my kid? Can you do this thing?’” But she said she is not afraid to ask family for help.

Cate has experienced the blessings of community carpooling and giving and receiving help from her friends and neighbors. She said she is eager to ask for help and reciprocate it. They have a messaging app with the other baseball families and frequently text one another for a ride. She recalled how satisfying it is to help one of the other families. “We are helping each other a lot, which is really neat.”

On days Eliza and her husband cannot get the children to t-ball on time, she said that they now have family in town to fall back on. Both her mother-in-law and sister-in-law moved to town about two years ago. She reflected, “It has all been simpler when I

have that village.” Another part of their village is all the college students in their life, she added, since her husband works with college students, and they naturally love being around their children and often volunteer to babysit. “Working with college students is honestly a big part, because it is really easy to find sitters.” And if something happens where her husband must take one of his children to a meeting at the ministry center, she said, it is not big deal, because the students don’t mind the children being around. “We live a life where [the kids] can be part of in a way that is really nice.” In the first years of church planting, Piper also had a lot of college students in her community and found them to be a blessing to their family for similar reasons.

River and her husband lived overseas for a time where they had a great support structure. They had students who lived with them and neighbors they interacted with multiple times a day. “They coparented with us and really loved on the kids,” she said. She stated it has been much harder to find a similar community since returning to the US. River appreciated that when they spend time with her sister and her brother-in-law, who live out of state, they “absolutely jump in” with the children and help parent them. River said she also has neighbors who are pseudo-grandparents and take great delight in the children. River shared that she has read research that says the best predictor of a child’s future success is “having an adult in your life that is invested and really sees you.” She concluded that she is trying to build that village of family, friends, and neighbors around her children.

All participants indicated that their husbands were active and involved fathers who carried the burden of childcare. Gretta said, “My husband is very much a co-parent.”

This knowledge helped Gretta be confident that if something comes up at work or church or with her volunteer work, her husband would provide excellent care for the children.

Felicity described how she and her husband both work seasonal jobs. She has off the summer, and he has off the winter. They can trade being the primary parent during the times they are not working. Felicity reported this seasonal approach works well for them. Harbor recalled a season when she carried a heavy mental load — worrying about a re-infestation of lice. She said to her husband, “I’m feeling hyper-vigilant on the lice thing. I’m worried about [us] getting it again...but it is not even on your radar. I hate it because I’m carrying all of it.” Then Harbor’s husband suggested a creative solution. He volunteered to set a phone alarm and complete a lice check on each child every Sunday. In doing so Harbor could put down the mental load, knowing her husband was caring for the children’s wellbeing with her, even though he himself was bald.

Summary of Navigating Maternal Stress

The participants outlined three broad categories for navigating the tension between their dual roles: establishing boundaries, pursuing rest, and cultivating support. To establish boundaries, they reframed expectations around technology use and accessibility, set work hours that worked best for their family, and granted themselves permission to decline additional responsibilities. To pursue rest, they prioritized sleep and fun, developed hobbies, traveled, engaged in enjoyable physical activity, and completed tangible tasks that fostered a sense of accomplishment. They emphasized the restorative value of time spent in community and in solitude. They also maintained consistent spiritual practices that grounded their well-being. To cultivate support, they advocated for flexibility at work, shared household labor and childcare responsibilities with spouses and

extended family members, and accepted encouragement from bosses, family, and friends. Through these strategies, participants demonstrated resilience, developing rhythms of work and rest that allowed them to flourish amid ongoing demands. Many also expressed hopes for greater flourishing in the future, envisioning how additional resources or support might further enhance their capacity to thrive in both domains of life.

Future Flourishing

The final research question examined the many ways working mothers of young children envision greater flourishing for themselves. Their responses reflect a desire for minor adjustments to their professional workload and outsourcing certain household labor. They also identified a range of activities they would pursue if afforded additional discretionary time to nurture their well-being, creativity, and relational connections.

Lightening the Load

“If resources were unlimited,” Harbor and Felicity mentioned that they would like to work less than forty hours a week. Harbor said “I have this really small, little goal. I would reduce my hours slightly.” Felicity said that she would choose to teach “slightly fewer classes or maybe fewer different classes.” Both participants signaled that while their bosses would support this change, this was not the moment to make the transition. Felicity cited financial reasons, and Harbor noted the current needs of her company.

Outsourcing household chores was a popular response. Harbor recalled a recent *New Yorker* article on the mental load on mothers regarding children’s clothing. In the article the author numerated the burden of buying, sorting by size and season, culling, donating, re-selling, and storing of children’s clothing on at least a biannual basis. Harbor

does not enjoy this monumental task and would happily pay someone else to manage her children's clothing: "It's a silly little thing but let someone else figure out if my kids need snow pants."

Eliza and River mentioned their desire to hire a house cleaner. Cost is a hinderance for them both, and Eliza also mentioned pride can get in the way. "There is some sort of pride element there about having to hand that off and not be able to keep up with it myself." River felt like a messy house was a barrier to peace in the home because everyone is tired and has little energy for cleaning. "So instead of that being a barrier to peace, that could just be something that was outsourced."

Given endless resources, Eliza and River would also desire someone to prep meals, but not just any meals, ones that would nourish their families. "Nutritional meals without the prep work," said Eliza. A hefty amount of time is spent on planning and executing a meal plan, stated River. She reflected on how she would love to have someone remove that mental load. She would like someone who would "cook healthy meals and make eating healthy more accessible."

Several participants identified "redistribution of household tasks," as Gretta described it, as something that would contribute to their flourishing. Gretta has four children, and as they mature, she thought they should take on more household chores. Additionally, as each child joined the family, Gretta and her husband felt like they were making decisions moment by moment rather than in an organized fashion. She would like to "intentionally set up how we are going to do things" to keep the home in order. As a simple example, she noted, the children need to brush their teeth every morning, but there is no structure in place to make sure the task is accomplished.

Eliza stated that she and her husband use the Fair Play Card Deck by Eve Rodsky to divide chores. She said she would like to have a follow-up conversation with him about the “minimum standard of care” required for each task, so they have the same expectations of when a task is completed adequately. An example she gave was not starting laundry unless you have the time to finish the complete cycle. She said their communication has improved on task execution, and she knows they will keep tweaking their system moving forward. “I have gotten better at asking for what I need and, like, fully letting him do whatever the thing is and own it from start to finish.”

Recovering the Moments That Bring Life

Eliza said that if she outsourced a few things, then it would be as if “I’m gifting myself that time to do other things...things that would give me back my time.” She said she loves cooking and baking and ironically when asked what she would do with the extra time if she hired a cook, she responded that she would like to bake and make food for shared enjoyment, not for the thrice daily need to feed a child. She would love to host people but would have the house cleaned by someone else so that she could focus on connecting with the people they invite over. Felicity also shared the desire to carve out more time for baking. She would also like to spend more time with friends on walks and enjoy “slow moments with my children.” Harbor, as a former teacher, would like to volunteer in her children’s schools and have time at home to make a cake for someone’s birthday and “a little more homemaking.”

Gretta identified a few ways she would like to care for her physical body: returning to a regular running routine and making time for naps. Drew identified a desire to spend more time with her husband, as their time alone together is limited. She said she

wants a strong relationship that will continue even after their children are grown and gone. “[O]ne day my kids are going to grow up and [he] is still going to be here. I want to still have things in common and have built memories with just him.”

“I wish I could travel more with my kids...expose them to more of the world,” said Piper. Several participants shared this desire. While Piper stated that she wants to take her children to Europe, River did not mention a specific place. She desired the freedom to plan vacations with fewer financial constraints. “I would have a lot more capacity if I was not having to maximize everything.”

Mission trips and volunteering were also a common theme. Before kids, Cate and Drew both volunteered much of their discretionary time to organizations they cared about. It became harder to do that while parenting small children. Drew said, “I think that’s been really hard because one of the reasons I was attracted to my job is because I’m working with people and trying to help them and trying to make them thrive in their own lives.” She described this season with small children as “inward focused,” but that her heart is still oriented outward towards others. She desired to teach her children to be servants of others. Cate desired to use her professional skills to serve young women in areas with less economic opportunity develop career skills and become leaders in their communities. She has been asking herself, “Where can I serve that is meaningful and impactful?”

River wanted to be proactive about building a community of adults around her children who can support and model to them a life of faith and love. She desired for the relationships to be reciprocal and not inconvenience anyone too much. For example, a neighbor owns a bike repair shop and River’s son loves to tinker with his bike. River

watched the neighbor's newborn so the mother could have a silent retreat and another day River's son hung out in the shop to observe and learn.

Advice for Other Working Mothers

Asking participants to reflect on advice they had for other mothers provided insight into the strategies and practices that they viewed as most effective for flourishing.

Gretta advised others to pick their battles and “don't major on the minors.” She recalled a time she let one of her children wear something she didn't prefer. “My daughter wanted to wear these Sunday shoes with these shorts, and it looked kind of ridiculous.” Then a few minutes later when her daughter refused to buckle her car seat buckle, Gretta was able to hold the boundary about something that important. “We are going to sit here, and you are going to do this because I didn't fight you for twenty minutes about getting dressed. This [buckling] is not something I am going to compromise on.” Similarly, she would tell other moms to “stop stressing themselves” and instead “let yourself off the hook” for things like a fancy meal plan. She would tell them that their meals do not need to look like Pinterest or Instagram. Cate agreed and would remind working mothers that there is freedom in what parenting looks like. It is okay to bring store-bought cookies to a school event rather than making them from scratch. They should not be bound up in what “you should do.”

Friendships will change after you have children, said Gretta. “That is normal... It is just going to look different.” She would encourage women to keep up with friends who can integrate into their new life but not expect everyone to remain close. Every mother is going to feel overwhelmed at points, she said, so “let go of the things that you can let go of and just hold onto to the things that are important.”

The annual “State of the Union” meeting is something Eliza advised all working mothers to try. She appreciated the way it brings her and her husband’s values to the front of the planning process. She said she would also let them know there are seasons in parenting where work will win out, and other times family will win out. “Everything is actually going take turns winning out... There are seasons to all of it.” She would also remind working mothers their children are watching them use their gifts in pursuit of a calling and that is a noble and worthwhile thing to teach them by example.

A regular day off from work and parenting is something River strongly recommended. She understood that not everyone may be able to start with an entire day and therefore they could start with even a few hours. “If a day is too overwhelming, start with two hours. Or start with half a day.” Boldly, she said that working mothers should be advocating for themselves by “demanding support” from their workplaces and their husbands, if they are not already offering it. She would encourage them to speak up and say, “This is what I need in order to feel well,” and expect that others will want to meet those needs. “Ask for what you need,” she said. “Advocate for equitable pay, responsibilities, support structures, and don’t feel bad about it; both in the home and in your workplace.”

Cate, Drew, Piper, and River would tell working mothers to go easy on themselves and recognize the life they are living is a short season. “Be gentle with yourself, know your limits, honor your limitations,” said River. “There are creative solutions for everything.” Embracing the limitations of having small children is something Piper echoed. “Embrace the natural limitations of the ages of your children. When your children are little, you can’t do as much.... Do not fight against it too much.”

She said that like other life stages, there are natural limitations to what anyone can accomplish. Life will be more pleasant for working mothers with young children if they can “operate within [the limitations] instead of treating them as an obstacle to overcome.” Drew said that she would remind others, as she reminds herself, children will not be little forever. “They grow up. They won’t always need us so intensely...One day I’m going to have some of that [rest] back.” Cate would encourage them that life is messy. “They are going to have really great days – celebrate those. You are going to have really crappy days — hang in there. It is so messy.”

Giving themselves grace, in the form of outsourcing some of the workload, is something Drew recommended for working mothers. She also encouraged them to approach problems with creativity. “Be creative with how you spend your time.” One example was her decision to take off every other Friday to spend one-on-one time with each of her children. The reduction of work hours and pay was worth it for her.

Cate and Felicity would remind other women that what works for your family might not work for a friends’ family. Felicity said, “I would say it doesn’t have to look like anyone else thinks it needs to look like. You can figure out with your partner what it looks like for your family, your rhythm, and your preferences, and your personalities, and your callings.” Along those lines, she would encourage them to “communicate about every single detail” with their spouse, so that no one is “resenting anything...or operating out of assumptions.”

The choice of spouse is crucial for thriving as a working mother, said Felicity. And a good husband is a gift. She would advise women who have not yet chosen a life partner to choose one carefully, making sure that their future husband wants to be

partners in raising children, caring for the home, and that they care about their wife's flourishing as much as they care about their own. "Make sure you choose the right spouse," Felicity said. "Life is intense no matter whether you have children or don't have children, whether you keep a full-time job and have children, or whether there is one full-time job in the family and someone stays home... any scenario you will find into hardships." She stated, "Having somebody to do that hard life with is a gift."

A final piece of advice was not directed at working mothers but rather at the church. Cate recalled with grateful tears a pastor's wife who asked her to tell her what it is like to be a working mother. They had a church culture where most mothers were stay-at-home mothers who were home-schooling, and Cate felt like an outsider. The pastor's wife wanted to better understand her experience as most of the new families visiting the church also had working mothers. She said to Cate, "Would you tell me what it is like? I would love to hear what it is like for you." Cate mentioned that no one had ever asked her to share her experience before and said, "It means a lot to be able to share your story." She would encourage church leaders to ask working mothers what it is like and to take the time to listen to their story.

Summary of Future Flourishing

Participants described a variety of ways they envisioned flourishing in the future. Many expressed their desire to outsource responsibilities such as healthy meal preparation and household cleaning to have more meaningful time with their families. Others explained that if they could redistribute domestic tasks by assigning chores to spouses or children, it would lighten their load and foster shared responsibility. Family vacations and intentional slow time at home were also named as life-giving rhythms,

offering opportunities to rest, bake, plan celebrations, and enjoy one another's company without the pressure of productivity, recovering the moments that bring life. Several participants expressed a longing to reengage in volunteer work and community service, activities they had cherished prior to motherhood and hoped to reincorporate as their children grew more independent. Through their reflections and the advice offered to other mothers, participants indirectly revealed their own hopes for continued flourishing: to outsource some chores, release perfectionistic pressure, embrace limitations, advocate for their needs, prioritize rest, and seek mutual support in their marriages. They also underscored the importance of a compassionate church environment, desiring a community that listens to and values the experiences of working mothers.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish despite the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles. This chapter presented the findings from eight participant interviews, organized around three research questions. Together, these findings offer an understanding of how mothers experience the tension of competing responsibilities, strategies they employ, and aspirations for future flourishing. Despite all the challenges, participants demonstrated resiliency by establishing boundaries, cultivating rest, and leaning on networks of relational and spiritual support. Their visions for greater flourishing centered on reclaiming time through a redistribution of household labor, recovering unhurried moments to pursue interests at home and connection with their family, and reengaging in meaningful service in their church and community. The next chapter will consider how

these findings align with and expand upon the existing literature, offering reflections on the theological and practical implications of this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study is to explore how Christian women with professional careers and young children flourish amid the challenges of maternal stress in their dual roles. As Lee Camp suggests, “the human calling is to be a human being fully alive,” yet for many working mothers, lived experience does not always align with this vision of being fully alive.⁵⁷² This study examines resources and strategies that support working mothers in cultivating joy and fulfillment as humans, parents, and professionals.

In Chapter 2, I summarized the available literature on three areas relevant to this study. First, I looked at the history of motherhood in America. Most women today work full-time jobs, parent intensely, and work the second shift at home to care for the home and the family’s needs. For mothers to flourish, they need family leave and affordable childcare, partners at home who equitably share the household tasks, and time to prioritize their own emotional, physical, relational, and spiritual needs, including rest, play, hobbies, sleep, and adult friendships. Next, I summarized biblical scholars’ literature on work and rest. The Bible clearly teaches that humans are to rest in daily, weekly, yearly, and other extended rhythms. Third, I analyzed the literature on burnout prevention and treatment from sociologist, physiologists, and other experts. The top recommendations were physical activity, creative expression, meaningful and deep relationships with other women, autonomy to make choices about how they spend their

⁵⁷² Camp, *Subtext*.

time, exploration of hobbies, time away from work with the ability to psychologically detach from work's demands, and basic self-care in the form of sleep, good food, quiet reflection, and movement.

In Chapter 4, I presented the data from eight in-depth interviews with working mothers. In answering the first research question, the data indicated that all eight participants struggled with maternal stress as they navigated their roles as mothers and professional women. They described three types of challenges: logistical challenges in managing overwhelming demands, emotional and relational challenges with longing to be fully present both at home and at work, and the cultural pressures and expectations of ideal motherhood.

In answering the second research question, the findings demonstrated the various strategies working mothers use to flourish despite maternal stress. Their responses revealed approaches for managing stress and practices that sustained connection and joy amid daily demands, which included establishing boundaries, prioritizing rest, and cultivating support.

In answering the final research question, the interviews revealed the many ways these professional working mothers envisioned greater flourishing for themselves. The participants desired to restore sustainable rhythms of work in their professions and in their homes, and they identified activities they hoped to prioritize if given more time.

Everyone is meant to feel fully alive, and although much works against American mothers in this regard, burnout is not inevitable; with the right support and practices, flourishing is possible.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents a dialogue between the findings of this study, the existing literature, and my own reflections as a researcher and practitioner. Through qualitative research consisting of eight in-depth interviews with working mothers several key themes emerged — resisting the demand of constant availability, lack of structural supports, intensive parenting expectations, psychological detachment, cycles of rest, spiritual practices of solitude and silence, unicorn space and deep play, time with friends and family, accepting help and cultivating support, bodily care, healthy limitations, and living as whole people. These themes provided insight into both the challenges and best practices professional working women can use to flourish wholistically.

Resisting the Demand of Constant Availability

Mothers in Colonial America worked alongside their husbands, children, extended family, and apprentices in a communal effort.⁵⁷³ Life in early America was beautifully integrated in a family-centered work culture.⁵⁷⁴ This is no longer true today. Most of today's families have two working parents, with no other adults in the home, and everyone, including the children are divided in separate spaces for the workday. Despite this, mothers are still expected to be available for their children whenever they get sick, need tutoring, or bring a forgotten item to school. When describing the difficulties of navigating working motherhood, participants talked about the struggle to be in two places at the same time and wanting to give their best at their jobs without neglecting their

⁵⁷³ Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal*, 10.

⁵⁷⁴ Beaty, *A Woman's Place*, 99.

children. Gretta shared how a rogue text message from her nanny interrupted an important podcast interview. In the middle of answering the podcaster's question, she felt her mind wander to her young child, and she struggled to stay on topic. Piper similarly lamented that when something hard was happening at work, it could negatively affect her emotions around her family. River spoke about the challenge she faces with the school system. For example, their holiday expectations included attendance at special recitals, award shows, mystery readers, class parties, spirit days, and more. The school system should not assume that working parents can make all these special events, said River.

Participants shared their preferred ways to contain work and prevent it from spilling over negatively into non-work life. Felicity noted that, as a seasoned teacher, she no longer spent nights and weekends grading and lesson planning. Piper and her husband are both on staff at the same church and put a boundary around the home; they do not discuss work. Others chose professions where there was not a lot of work spillover into non-work life, and they maintained this by refraining from checking work email while at home.

Lack of Structural Supports

People who are passionate about their work and have few supports, such as mothers, are more likely than the average person to burnout.⁵⁷⁵ One way participants experienced this lack of support was in their struggle to find reliable and affordable childcare. Felicity was disappointed by the significant cost for childcare when she was a new mother looking to return to teaching. In the end, after much experimentation, she and

⁵⁷⁵ Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 3.

her husband found a solution that worked. She said they had to realize that her career was more than simply a financial decision; it was something she loved to do and that, even if they broke even between her salary and childcare costs, it was worth it because it allowed her to do something she loved while building a career. Piper and Eliza used the YMCA and restaurant playgrounds when they couldn't find or afford childcare that allowed them to complete their work. So, while all the participants could have benefited from community childcare, none of them identified larger societal supports as part of the equation. This omission likely resulted from Americans' hyper-individualism and their inclination to approach solutions privately rather than corporately.⁵⁷⁶

Intensive Parenting Expectations

The participants frequently cited that they were falling short of their own expectations of what a “good mother” should be. Whether the ideals came from the surrounding culture or the church, they struggled with pressures to provide healthy meals, a nurturing home, a highly individualized educational environment, and to never miss an important moment in their children's lives. For example, Gretta felt pressure to homeschool her children, Eliza felt like she had to make every meal from scratch, and Cate and Drew each felt pressure to be stay-at-home mothers. Consistent with the research on “intensive mothering,” mothers are the primary parent who must offer constant and never-ending nurturing that is expert-guided, child-centered, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, and financially expensive.⁵⁷⁷ These standards are unrealistic,

⁵⁷⁶ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 262–263, 268.

⁵⁷⁷ Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, 8, 39, 46.

especially for working mothers.⁵⁷⁸ Studies have shown that women who embrace intensive mothering are more likely to burnout.⁵⁷⁹

Psychological Detachment

Willard defined work as “the total amount of lasting good that you accomplish in your lifetime,”⁵⁸⁰ and Beaty as our interaction with the created world, “laboring to make it fruitful and beneficial to ourselves and others.”⁵⁸¹ While some work earns financial rewards, other work does not. To avoid burnout and build resistance to work stress, people must psychologically detach from both paid and unpaid work.⁵⁸²

Technology ties people to their work; therefore, experts recommend placing strong boundaries on technology in and out of the office. Many participants communicated they disconnect entirely from work email and phone notifications while on vacation. For some, they purposely left behind their devices and turned on vacation settings, and others chose locations where WIFI was unavailable. Harbor and Gretta used various methods, including the Brick™ and turning their smart phones into dumb phones, when they need undistracted hours. And others, like Eliza, permanently removed distractions on their phones by removing all notifications.

⁵⁷⁸ Sandberg, *Lean In*, 136; Westervelt, *Forget “Having It All,”* 203.

⁵⁷⁹ Meeussen and Van Laar, “Feeling Pressure to Be a Perfect Mother.”

⁵⁸⁰ Willard, *Life Without Lack*, 59–60.

⁵⁸¹ Beaty, *A Woman’s Place*, 71, 89.

⁵⁸² Pang, *Rest*, 8, 160–68.

Psychological detachment occurs when work is absent and the mind is engaged in something other than work. Piper turned off the work conversations in her head while she power-washed their deck. Both she and Meyer said essentially the same thing: “If one’s work is primarily sedentary, then the Sabbath can be a time for physical activity and joy.”⁵⁸³ They employed the concept of a counterrhythm, an intentionally opposing pattern, to their pursuit of rest.⁵⁸⁴

An unexpected form of physiological detachment was switching activities. Some participants described work being a place to rest their parenting self. They left at the end of a work day with a restored capacity to mother their children. People can operate at peak capacity for only a limited time, but switching from one activity to another can be an unexpected form of rest.⁵⁸⁵ For others, they needed time away from both forms of work, parenting and professional, in order to fully rest. In life, each woman will need to determine for themselves, along with mentors and other advisors, what combination of psychological detachment is right for them.

Cycles of Rest

God created work and rest and gifted both to humanity to rotate in a perpetual cycle.⁵⁸⁶ People are meant to handle short bursts of stress followed by rest and recovery. The stress cycle is a neurological and physiological shift in the body. The body feels

⁵⁸³ Meyer, *Women, Work, and Calling*, 55.

⁵⁸⁴ Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*, 53–57.

⁵⁸⁵ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 161; Schonbrun, *Work, Parent, Thrive*, 108–11.

⁵⁸⁶ Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 67.

stress and sounds an alarm through a series of hormones; this stress cycle must be processed through our bodies every day.⁵⁸⁷ It can take between twenty to sixty minutes of absorption in the following activities for the body to return to a state of rest: swimming, dancing, biking, warm social interactions, laughter, affection from a pet, and creative expression.

When rest is neglected for too long and the stress cycle stalls mid-cycle, burnout can occur.⁵⁸⁸ Nagoski defines rest as “when you stop using the part of you that’s used up, worn out, damaged, or inflamed, so that it has a chance to renew itself.”⁵⁸⁹ Gretta described rest as any activity that “pours back into your soul so you’re just not fully depleted.”

To flourish, people must develop short- and long-term practices of rest. Crouch suggests organizing life around the principle of a Sabbath ladder, including daily sleep, weekly Sabbath, seventh year of Sabbath rest for the land, and a jubilee celebrated every fiftieth year.⁵⁹⁰ Part of honoring the Sabbath is honoring the Sabbath year.⁵⁹¹ If land needs a rest, then it follows that people’s minds and bodies also need short-term and long-term cycles of rest.⁵⁹² This rest does not need to follow Old Testament Sabbath law. I believe a modern Sabbath ladder could be divided into “Daily Rest,” with moments of

⁵⁸⁷ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 4–5, 134–35.

⁵⁸⁸ Goleman and Cherniss, *Optimal*, 63–64; Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 4–5, 134–35; Sirgy and Lee, *Work-Life Balance*, 32.

⁵⁸⁹ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 156.

⁵⁹⁰ Crouch, *Playing God*, 248–49.

⁵⁹¹ Muller, *Sabbath*, 205.

⁵⁹² Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 124–25.

pause (see *Solitude*) and sleep (see *Bodily Care*); “Weekly Rest,” with a habitual sabbath rhythm and the possibility of a technology free day; “Seasonal Rest,” with longer pauses of many days or weeks, which provides time for vacations, holidays, travel, or retreats; and “Sabbatical Rest,” with many months off to recover from seasons of demanding work (see *Mothering Sabbatical*).

One of the many ways God provides rest for his children and encourages their flourishing is through his required weekly sabbath rest.⁵⁹³ The Hebrew word “Shabbat” literally means “to stop.”⁵⁹⁴ The Sabbath is a time to stop working and to rest and pursue joy and delight. To imagine and plan the best possible sabbath experience, Allender and Comer encouraged people to ask themselves the following questions: What would bring me the deepest joy today? Or is this life-giving?⁵⁹⁵ Spiritual disciplines such as observing the Sabbath require patience and years of repetition, teaches Crouch, but the benefits are enormous.⁵⁹⁶

Piper, a pastor, affirmed that Sunday is an impossible day to rest. She and her husband instead begin their full day of rest on Friday evening. By Sunday morning, she is well rested and prepared to give herself to her work of preaching and shepherding. A few other participants noted they do not work on Sundays. Most participants, while finding snippets of time to rest during their weeks, did not have a routine Sabbath practice, and it would benefit them greatly to make that gift a priority.

⁵⁹³ Nelson, *Work Matters*, 170.

⁵⁹⁴ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 148.

⁵⁹⁵ Allender, *Sabbath*, 15; Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 155; Comer, *Garden City*, 221–23.

⁵⁹⁶ Crouch, *Playing God*, 239.

All participants identified purposeful restful practices, and several identified formulas to curate an amazing day of rest just for them. For Eliza, that formula included an indulgence, a small productive task, and downtime. One of these days may look like grabbing a coffee shop latte, cleaning out a closet at home, and watching a movie while her husband took the kids to a park. For River, her formulas typically included moving her body (mountain biking, soccer, hiking), time alone, and connecting with other people.

Vacations are a type of Seasonal Rest. Comer and Connolly describe the Sabbath not merely as a day of the week but a “way of being,” suggesting that a vacation functions as an extended sabbath, akin to a week of feasting and celebrating.⁵⁹⁷ Comer considers his long summer vacations to be a spiritual discipline.⁵⁹⁸ All participants described vacations as a delightful way to experience rest. Psychological detachment, or forgetting about work, was central to the relaxation they felt. Additional enhancements to the restorative nature of vacations include deep play, adventure, time in nature, spending long hours with people you care about, and having more time for bodily rest. Harbor’s mystery vacations embodied all these elements, while also offering deep connection with people who know every facet of her life.

Spiritual Practices of Solitude and Silence

Our world is full of constant stimulation via 24-hour news cycles, social media, and smartphones. We must cultivate the spiritual disciplines of solitude and silence to

⁵⁹⁷ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 149; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 124–25.

⁵⁹⁸ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 241.

quiet the noise and help us hear God’s voice.⁵⁹⁹ Crouch suggests turning off all technology for at least an hour a day as a small step towards practicing this discipline.⁶⁰⁰ Several participants shared their practices for cultivating stillness. Felicity said she uses her short twelve-minute commute without technology as a time to savor the moment and practice gratefulness. Harbor visits a small, quiet chapel near her home to grab a few minutes alone. Piper makes a deliberate choice to turn off podcasts and practices listening for God’s voice. Others carve out time during children’s sports practices or on the back deck while children nap to read, journal, and spend time alone praying. Participants found deliberate ways to quiet the constant noise of our world and create space to enjoy contemplation.

Unicorn Space and Deep Play

Unicorn space and deep play are two vehicles for experiencing lifegiving rest. River said that she and her husband intentionally schedule one full Saturday each month as their unicorn space. It is a time with complete freedom to pursue activities they are passionate about, purely for the joy and delight they bring.⁶⁰¹ When it is River’s turn, she said, they call it “River’s Day,” and there is no expectation that she will return to the house and need to clean up, cook dinner, or put the children to bed. Rodsky says that

⁵⁹⁹ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 122–30; Connolly, *Tired of Being Tired*, 145.

⁶⁰⁰ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 98.

⁶⁰¹ Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 262–263, 268.

unicorn space reminds people who they are apart from family roles and responsibilities.⁶⁰²

Deep play appeared in Felicity’s life in the form of baking. Each baking project has a beginning and an end, something not true in her teaching career or parenting. This type of rest offers mentally absorbing fun that is not intensive but brings tremendous satisfaction.⁶⁰³ Some call these hobbies or mastery experiences. A defining characteristic of deep play is the ability to completely forget about work while involved in the activity (psychological detachment). Piper and Harbor find deep play through their travels, while Gretta and River find theirs doing CrossFit.

Time with Friends and Family

The absence of close friendships, explains Ziegler and Faris, is the biggest contributor to mommy burnout.⁶⁰⁴ Women must spend time with a close friend every single week – preferably in nature, as it has shown to support a person’s mental health.⁶⁰⁵ Participants continually referenced their friendships as contributing to their resiliency in mothering. They described motherhood as isolating and found adult conversation lifegiving, an antidote to loneliness. Nagoski agrees with the participants and called loneliness “a form of starvation.”⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰² Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space*, 8–21, 278–79.

⁶⁰³ Pang, *Rest*, 167, 200–201.

⁶⁰⁴ Faris, *You Don’t Have to Carry It All*, 214; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 39–41.

⁶⁰⁵ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 32–33.

⁶⁰⁶ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 134–35.

While participants mentioned Marco Polo and other technologies as helpful for staying connected with long-distance friends, most found proximity was needed for their friendships to thrive. Shared meals, travel, and group activities with their families were the preferred ways to spend time together. Cate said she enjoys her lunches with her friend who works in the office building next to hers. Harbor talked about ski trips with friends and their families in the mountains; Gretta highlighted a trip to Scotland to hear a friend present an academic paper and see Taylor Swift in concert.

Participants spoke frequently of their love of family time, but a few specifically mentioned times with their immediate families as restorative. This finding surprised me and did not appear in the literature. Based on the literature and personal experience, I expected all the mothers to need time away from their children to rest. Drew, Felicity, and Piper in particular loved slow time at home with their families. Drew stated that, as an introvert, she found time with family restful because she can truly be herself. I wonder if this finding depends on the mothers' personality, the personality of the children, special needs, mental health diagnosis, the number of children in the family, and their ages. I know that in my family, two of my four children have been diagnosed with ADHD, and family time is precious, but I would not call it restful. For introverted mothers raising children without special needs, engagement with their immediate families may be a primary source of connection and safety rather than a drain on emotional resources.

Some participants enjoyed trips with just one child. Gretta took her eldest daughter to New York City, and Eliza took her daughter to a YMCA camp for mothers and daughters. Having only one child on the trip prevented sibling conflicts, provided time to bond one-on-one, and created memories with their beloved child.

Participants spoke about trips and date nights with their husbands as points of refreshment. Drew said that she and her husband have a fun habit of taking day-dates on special occasions while their boys are in daycare. Gretta and Piper said they get out of town a few times a year with their husbands to rest and reconnect by themselves. Piper said she has a regular Friday date night with her husband while the kids stay overnight with the grandparents. The literature did not elaborate on this finding, but nearly all participants confirmed it.

Accepting Help and Cultivating Support

Bazon believes no individual should shoulder the responsibility of raising a human alone.⁶⁰⁷ Children are the citizens, workers, and artists of the future, and the burden to build a world where they can thrive should be shared. Workplaces, bosses, extended family, neighbors, spouses, and many others can form a working mother's support system. Many participants spoke of working in high trust environments with bosses who believed the best of them and understood they were whole people with many outside responsibilities. River described her boss as giving them all space "to be human" and providing an atmosphere where she could have "the freedom to do what I need to do" as long as she got the work completed. This freedom included taking earlier, more expensive flights home rather than spending more time away from family on a cheaper flight with a long layover. Felicity said her boss ends each meeting with a series of supportive questions, "What can I do to help you flourish? How can I support you?"

⁶⁰⁷ Lara Bazelon, "The End of Mom Guilt: Why a Mother's Ambition Is Good for Her Family," *Atlantic* 329, no. 4 (May 2022): 110, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/working-mom-career-women-guilt/629364/>.

Open communication with one's boss about communication preferences and flexibility requirements were crucial for participants to flourish as working mothers. Pearcey recommends mothers and fathers push back against the private/public split between home and work life. She and Crouch believe that with all our technological advances, we should reintegrate work and family life, including work from home when possible.⁶⁰⁸

Several participants were themselves bosses. Eliza shared that her leadership goals include creating a "working mom friendly" place of employment. Participants who could not find flexible jobs created their own. Gretta said she is a serial entrepreneur and flexes her work around family life.

Drew said that while she lives hundreds of miles from her extended family, they have been an essential support to her in her work and mothering. Piper's parents live nearby and are always helping. They care for the children, make them meals, and chauffeur them to activities. Felicity recognized the mutual benefit of her extended family caring for her children. She said her parents love the time they get with their grandchildren; she loves knowing her children are cared for by wise people, and her children are developing strong relationships with their older relatives.

All participants spoke of their spouses as partners in household chores and childcare. They took time to divvy up chores based on each other's career workloads, preferences, and individual health. Some couples took turns being the primary caregiver of the children over the years. They described an ebb and flow of who did what and how they creatively met their families' needs. Many praised their husbands' commitment to their wholistic flourishing despite cultural pressures to put their own needs and careers

⁶⁰⁸ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 91; Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 344.

first. Felicity said with grateful tears, “The only reason I’m flourishing as a working mom is because I’m married to a man who’s completely invested in my flourishing.”

Bodily Care

Nagoski writes that getting enough sleep is countercultural in the US, because well-rested people are often labeled as lazy, while exhausted people are admired for their work ethic.⁶⁰⁹ Maslach and Rucker shared that life cannot be enjoyed while chronically sleep-deprived.⁶¹⁰ Most participants mentioned sleep came easily for them, and they made it a priority, suggesting that good sleep plays a part in a mother’s flourishing. River spoke about her family’s deliberate attempts for a consistent sleep hygiene. Gretta recognized that one reason she loved traveling with her husband or friends as a new mother is that it allowed her to catch up on missed sleep from years of tending to sleepless babies.

To avoid burnout, people must recognize and respond to their body’s signals following a stressful event.⁶¹¹ Movement can improve moods and lower stress hormones. All participants exercised to strengthen their bodies, prolong their lives, process stress, and to feel more at peace. Only one mentioned she did not enjoy exercise yet does so every evening for her health. Several mentioned they no longer moved their bodies to change their appearance but to improve their mental health. The participants listed multiple forms of regular physical activity: Harbor’s “crunchy walks” on gravel roads,

⁶⁰⁹ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 162.

⁶¹⁰ Christina Maslach, *Burnout: The Cost of Caring* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982), 48–50; Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 45.

⁶¹¹ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 97; Molloy, *Healthy Calling*, 35.

Cate's fifteen-minute morning You Tube videos, Drew's evening weight-lifting with her husband. Everyone's choice of activity was different. There was also hot yoga, hiking, stretching, Peloton™ bikes, mountain biking, soccer games, and CrossFit workouts.

Healthy Limitations

Warren encourages Christians to be known as a “community of the well-rested – people who embrace our limits with zest and even joy.”⁶¹² God is not disappointed by our limitations; he made us limited creatures, said Kapic.⁶¹³ Jesus' life exemplified true human embodiment, embracing its inherent limitations.⁶¹⁴ Despite his divine calling to usher in the kingdom of God and proclaim the Good News, Jesus modeled a life of deep rest.⁶¹⁵ Jesus also reframed the Sabbath, teaching us to not worry about manmade rules and instead allow the Sabbath to return to its original intention, a restorative day of peace and delight.⁶¹⁶

When Eliza received the job offer to become a principal, she immediately recognized it would have significant repercussions for her family's life. She told her husband that he would need to bear more of the household burden if she was to take on this larger leadership assignment. Together, they acknowledged her human limitations and determined what was sustainable given the demands of her new role.

⁶¹² Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 152.

⁶¹³ Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 6.

⁶¹⁴ Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, 77–84; Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 15.

⁶¹⁵ Muller, *Sabbath*, 24–25.

⁶¹⁶ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 6.

When asked to advise other working mothers, Piper said she would remind them of their limitations during this season and live within those limitations. Most participants said they would encourage young mothers to be gentle with themselves and know that while their children are young, they have particular creaturely limitations.

Whole People

River explained, echoing the perspective of most participants, that her career provides an outlet to exercise gifts that may otherwise lay dormant. She described her work as a thing that gives her energy and makes her a better parent and a better, more integrated individual. Similarly, several participants described how professional fulfillment positively shaped their parenting, giving them more energy when present with their children. After many configurations, Felicity and her husband determined they both felt best working full-time in seasonal jobs. They alternate between months with one of them being home full-time while one works and then both of them working full-time. This arrangement works for their family because they found jobs that energize them and give them life.

The desire to model strong womanhood motivated many participants. They wanted their children to see them as more than simply a mother. They did not want to lose themselves in one facet of their identity as they moved through matrescence, a life transition where a woman gives birth to a new identity as a mother, and to model an integrated whole life to their children.⁶¹⁷ Eliza said it was important for her boys to see her doing work she was specifically gifted to do.

⁶¹⁷ Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 152.

Ziegler supports this and encourages mothers to see themselves as a total of all their gifts and accomplishments throughout life so that they do not lose themselves in motherhood during their matrescence.⁶¹⁸ Harbor described her friendships as where she feels most integrated and fully known across her various roles: mother, worker bee, professional, friend, and wife. Several participants identified acts of service as a key to feeling integrated and whole. Gretta, for instance, described finding deep fulfillment in leading a Bible study at her local prison.

Recommendations for Practice

Unlike the sleep-deprived women verging on burnout who C. Collins and Warner interviewed, the eight women in this study identified themselves as flourishing.⁶¹⁹ The following recommended practices, grounded on expert advice from the literature, data from the participants I interviewed, and personal insights, aim to help working mothers live a more rest-filled, integrated, and flourishing life.

Individuals

Boundaries

Working mothers need to be very careful with their time. It is a limited and precious resource. To protect their time, they must establish boundaries around technology, conversation about work, location of work, and relational and emotional availability.

⁶¹⁸ Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 185.

⁶¹⁹ Collins, *Making Motherhood Work*, 100, 220; Warner, *Perfect Madness*, 13, 55.

Technology is a primary way the outside world interrupts our current reality; therefore, working mothers need to place limits on their use of technology. For some women, it may be wise to keep all work emails and documents on a dedicated work computer. The same can be applied to phones. Some women would benefit from having a separate work phone; when they take long vacations, they can leave the work phone turned off at home and dedicate all their attention to spending time with family and loved ones. Other women are comfortable using the same devices for work and personal life but must rely on disciplined practices, such as regularly using vacation settings and communicating their intentions to their co-workers to be “off the clock”. If a woman uses the same phone or computer for both work and personal life, I strongly suggest looking into tools, such as Brick™, that allow specific apps to be turned off during family time. Still others choose one day each week entirely free of email and phone, allowing their mind time to reset and focus on the present. The technology-free day would not have to happen on a weekend. It could be a workday set aside specifically to focus on deep or creative work.

For women who work in a family business or a start-up, where work can follow them home even when devices are turned off, it can be wise to set boundaries with their partner about when and where work will be discussed. Some couples decide not to talk about work at the dining room table or in the bedroom, limiting work conversations to a home office or another designated space. Others determine that they will only discuss work matters at the office. Some women are friends with their co-workers and may benefit from establishing boundaries with their friends about appropriate places for

work/private conversation, allowing the time and space for both of them to fully engage in their personal life when not working.

Working from home can significantly benefit parents in our modern society, but it can also intrude into one's personal life. Because of WIFI and 5G, working from home has become possible and convenient. The type of embodied boundaries, physical or sensory limits, each person requires around the home can vary. Some women may feel comfortable working on their laptop from their dining room table, and others may not be able to focus on work if she can see an untidy mess and piles of laundry. Other women can find a quiet corner of the house to work in and are able to face their desk towards a window or sit outside on their patio with limited distractions. Each person must decide how "on call" they want to be with their place of employment. (Will they have protected hours around meal times or weekends? Will they allow work projects or conversations interfere with their home life?) I suggest each woman regularly survey her use of technology, evaluating whether each tool is benefiting or harming her relationships, interests, spiritual life, and other priorities, and discern whether she should limit the time, location, or manner of its use, especially in her domestic spaces.

Part of the challenge for working mothers is transitioning between roles. They often do not get a generous transition period. I suggest establishing small, embodied rituals, that do not take a lot of time, to mark the transition from work time to home time, or vice versa. Here are a few easy practices that can protect their relational and emotional availability as they transition. Some women set goals for themselves during the first hour of the workday. They refrain from checking email at home and wait until they safely delivered their children to school and spent thirty minutes at their desk tackling a pressing

assignment. Others spend thirty minutes at the end of every work day reading a book on personal, professional, or spiritual development, taking time to develop themselves before the transition home. Others listen to a favorite podcast or take time to silently pray or meditate on their commute home. I have recommended to a few women who work from a home office that they could light a candle to embody and mark the transition. Other possibilities include putting on a favorite cozy sweater, making a cup of tea, turning on a seasonal playlist, completing two or three relaxing yoga stretches, or reciting a short liturgy of thanks to the Lord for the day's work. All these activities mark in time the completion for that day of one type of work and the transition to something new.

Rest

Rest is definitely vegetating passively on a beach hammock in the glorious sunshine, listening to the calming waves, and it is binge-watching a favorite online series while cozied up under a weighted blanket - but it is also more than that. Researchers agree that our bodies and our minds need time off from work. They need to be recharged to be faithfully expended in our vocations. A friend of mine once put it this way: We have to store up grain in the storehouses to draw on them when we need fuel. If we are always withdrawing, then in stressful times - times of famine, crisis, or emergency - we will have nothing left to sustain us. The following sections are a compilation of restful pursuits I encourage all working mothers to make a priority in their lives.

Bodily Renewal

Working mothers must rest their bodies. We were created not only to work, but to live within regular rhythms of work and rest. Daily rest is essential, including adequate

sleep. Researchers agree that at least seven hours of sleep per night is required for human flourishing; the body cannot sustain long stretches where it receives less than seven hours of quality sleep.⁶²⁰ I encourage women who struggle to sleep to meet with their doctors and see what supplements, medication, or devices (such as a CPAP) are available to them. I also encourage them to learn about good sleep hygiene and make a practical plan with their spouse to craft a family schedule that allows for everyone to get the sleep they require.

The body needs an average of not only seven hours of sleep a night, but also another three hours of additional a rest a day. This may be averaged over a week or a month, but if delayed too long, people burnout. Everyone needs time for restorative conversations, enjoyable and deliberate eating, reading for pleasure, walking, connecting with friends, and delighting in the world around them. Without these rhythms, sickness, mental illness, and broken relationships become an unfortunate reality. Women must make their own rest a priority or their body will break down and eventually burn out. At times, women must proactively collaborate and advocate for themselves with their spouses to arrange paid childcare or more equitably share childcare responsibilities between the two of them, so that both partners may claim guilt-free time to regulate their nervous systems and refresh their spirits. This is not selfish “me time.” This is living in alignment with the way the God of the universe created their bodies and spirits to function.

⁶²⁰ Nagoski and Nagoski, *Burnout*, 157–60; Pang, *Rest*, 2–14, 242–45.

Moving the Body

Every participant in this study emphasized the importance of moving her body. Not every participant enjoyed exercise, but all made time for it, knowing it would reduce stress and improve overall health. I suggest that working women, without guilt, take time to go to the gym, participate in an open swim at the YMCA, join a sports team, or engage in any other physical activity that encourages movement that is enjoyable to them. It is not selfish to make time for these practices. It is responsible. Exercise should not be motivated by shame or fear of how one's body is perceived, but by the freedom that comes when bodies are healthy and strong, and the mental benefits that accompany physical movement. Exercise looks different for each individual. Women may choose to use this time alone—to think, pray, daydream, meditate, or listen to an audiobook or podcast—or they may prefer to move their bodies in community, whether with friends in a class or with their husband after the children are in bed.

Travel and Vacations

Travel emerged as a consistent theme among participants. Whether traveling with a spouse or a favorite friend, or to visit family, women found rest by spending time away from home. This could be due to a combination of factors. Many people crave novelty. New surroundings can spark joy and creativity boosting one's sense of wellness. Others benefit from the removal of typical household chores, such as laundry, pet care, and washing the dishes. Oftentimes trips are a dedicated space to reconnect relationally, as all the daily habits are left behind. As able, I recommend women consider a variety of trips over the course of a year or two. A few hours at a silent retreat a couple of times a year can be deeply beneficial spiritually. A personal day or two with friends to journal, plan

for the future, and hold one another accountable to upcoming goals can be vocationally helpful. A weekend away to attend a concert, hear a speaker, hike, swim in the ocean, or any other enjoyable activity, can foster deep delight that might be missing in the mundane daily chores that occupy most of life. Unstructured time with a spouse while a babysitter or family member watches the children for a week away can help people reconnect to their loved one in ways it is not possible over a short dinner in their hometown.

A mentor once encouraged me to reframe my expectations regarding time off and travel with children. You either take a “memory-making trip” with your children or you take a “vacation” alone or with other adults. She observed something I have since found to be true for myself and many of those I coach: that trips with children are essentially parenting in a prettier location. While removing work distractions and silencing technology can assist us in deeper connection with our children and spouses during these trips, such experiences do not always provide genuine rest. For this reason, I encourage working mothers to distinguish between family trips and restorative vacations, intentionally prioritizing opportunities for true rest in their annual planning as often as possible.

For those who do not have extended family around to help, there are creative solutions. If your children are in daycare or school, you can plan to take a trip during the week, limiting the hours you would need to find additional childcare. You can arrange to trade childcare with a close family friend. You watch their children in the Fall for a week while they travel and then they do the same for you in the Spring. If even that is not possible, you could have a stay-cation in your home town. Hire a babysitter to pick up

your children from school and watch them until bedtime while you and your spouse spend the entire day enjoying all the activities your city has to offer. Then at night, you return home, connect with your children, put them to bed and then do it all again the next day. If travel is a value and you miss having it as a part of your life, I encourage people to find ways to make it happen.

I agree with Schultz, who advises people to start planning their vacations at least six months in advance.⁶²¹ Securing its place on the calendar ensures that work projects can be scheduled around these important times of rest and recovery. I also suggest setting clear priorities (e.g., family connection, adventure, bodily rest, spiritual practices, technology break, or learning a new skill or hobby) for times of rest. Clarifying these priorities helps individuals discern what to say no to during their time away and how best to invest their time and resources. Career mothers should have multiple types of rest on their calendar over the course of six months: time to rest with the family on a fun trip, time to rest each night curling up with a good book, and time to rest totally on their own, doing whatever they want for an entire day. Every person needs short-term and long-term rhythms of rest.

Unicorn Time

Unicorn time moves beyond superficial self-care, like a massage or pedicure, and allows people to be authentically themselves. It is a time of sustained attention to engage in activities women are passionate about, purely for the joy they bring.⁶²² These tend to

⁶²¹ Schultz and Schultz, *Psychology and Work Today*, 115.

⁶²² Rodsky, *Find Your Unicorn Space*, 8–21, 278–79.

be active pursuits, not passive rest, and serve to remind someone of the fullness of their identity beyond her family and professional roles.

Many people struggle at the beginning to decide what to do with unicorn time. They are not accustomed to spending time in ways that bring them joy rather than just passive entertainment, distraction from the world, or productivity. I suggest participating in multiple mini experiments to figure out what is life-giving to you. Some suggestions include signing up for a four-week ceramics class, writing one haiku a day for a month, training for a Tough Mudder™ competition, enrolling for a graduate certificate course unconnected to one's career, writing book reviews on Goodreads for your favorite books from last year, joining a hiking club in your area, or picking up a hobby you have always dreamed of trying but couldn't justify the time or the cost. It can be anything. It is guilt-free time to be curious about what brings you happiness, as you live into the beautiful and unique person that God created you to be.

Mothering Sabbatical

Extended rest is a wise component to the greater conversation regarding rest. When regular weekly rest or vacations no longer restore a mother, she may require a mothering sabbatical. When neglected for too long or unreachable because of difficult season of parenting, a weekly sabbath rest is no longer sufficient to reestablish equilibrium and avoid burnout. Experts argue that pastors need sabbaticals specifically because their calling uniquely combines emotionally draining and relationally complicated work. These pastors are always on call and need to be prepared to absorb

angry outbursts and emotionally charged situations while providing wise counsel. Because of this, many pastors are overworked and stretched thin.⁶²³

These job stressors are also typical for mothers and high performing professionals. While this study focuses on mothers of young children, the need for sabbatical is not exclusive to this population. Men and women alike, both those with and without children, may require extended periods of rest when they occupy roles characterized by sustained stress, high-stakes decision-making, emotional labor, and the ongoing responsibility of shaping organizational story and culture.

Given the well-documented necessity of sabbaticals for sustaining long-term pastoral leadership, it is both inconsistent and unjust to deny comparable rhythms of extended rest to mothers who have borne years of taxing caregiving. Seasonal maternal sabbaticals should be understood not as optional luxuries, but as a vital practice for preserving maternal well-being.⁶²⁴ The human body has a limited capacity to absorb pain and strain. We are meant to handle short bursts of stress followed by periods of restoration. Crouch and Ruch specifically encouraged women to take advantage of mothering sabbaticals, proposing intentional seasons in which spouses and older children assume greater household responsibilities after the most sleep-deprived years of parenting have passed. These seasons, which may last from three to twelve months, create space for mothers to pursue other interests, restore their capacity, and reengage their callings with renewed energy.⁶²⁵

⁶²³ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 152; Kapic, *You're Only Human*, 183–84; Maslach, *Burnout*, 50; Pang, *Rest*, 224–34; Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 98–99.

⁶²⁴ Barton, *Embracing Rhythms*, 141.

⁶²⁵ Crouch, *Playing God*, 255–60; Ruch, *The Power Pause*, 246–47.

Many will understandably raise concerns that a mothering sabbatical is impractical. Who has the money or the time? And who could possibly take an intentional step back from their children, when they are the most precious gift in the world? I am not suggesting that mothers detach from their families for months on end, but that they curate, where possible, extra space in their lives for a season of replenishment and renewal. These same hinderances are present in the life of a pastor, yet it is accepted practice for them to prioritize their physical, emotional, and spiritual health so they can fully embody their calling as a shepherd to God's sheep. The same principle should apply to mothers. They, too, must attend to their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being if they are to live out their vocations with faithfulness and endurance. For the women who desire to flourish as whole-hearted integrated mothers and avoid burnout, sabbaticals are a life-giving practice. They take planning, monetary commitment, and the assistance of other caregivers in the children's lives. The resulting vitality is worth all the effort a sabbatical requires.

Practically, a mothering sabbatical could include hiring a weekly cleaning service, signing the children up for daily aftercare, preparing a large supply of frozen meals, and establishing a simple rotation of 7–14 favorite dishes—paired with a recurring grocery pickup service—to lighten the household load for a season. Children could be challenged to take on more responsibilities than usual, thereby gifting their mother with additional time. Laundry services or other household support could also be employed, and assistance from nearby family or friends could be enlisted to chauffeur children to sports practices or music lessons for a semester.

Time away gives space for mothers to disconnect from being the default parent and allows them to enjoy their own thoughts for more than thirty minutes at a time without interruption. A series of long weekends could be planned away from home at a borrowed cottage or inexpensive hotel to have extended and concentrated time for reading, writing, or an artistic craft. Day retreats could be planned in town at a local library or university.

To ensure that a sabbatical yields its intended outcomes, it should be guided by a coach or mentor who can structure clear objectives, integrate evidence-based best practices, and lead a process of reflection and debriefing at its conclusion. Guided coaching increases the efficacy of the sabbatical and creates intentional space to discern and celebrate the ways God has worked through the season of rest. A skilled guide also helps participants avoid common misuses of sabbatical time—such as overinvesting in home renovation projects, launching new academic programs, or substituting one form of productivity for another—so the season remains oriented toward genuine rest, rather than merely a reconfiguration of labor. Many industries intentionally provide writing, research, or continuing-education leaves of absence; however, these should be carefully distinguished from a true sabbatical, whose primary aim is not productivity or professional advancement but the restoration of health and wholeness.

Solitude

Audio books, podcasts, vodcasts, playlists, streaming videos, game apps, news sites, WhatsApp, Voxer, and Marco Polo messages could fill our every waking moment. Experts agree we must carve out quiet moments in our lives, but omnipresent noise and

sensory overload is inescapable.⁶²⁶ Our city has a local non-profit which hosts half-day prayer retreats, and our church coordinates a yearly weekend silent retreat at a local monastery, but you don't have to go without talking for days at a time to find moments of solitude with God. Nature walks without a phone, a quiet drive with the windows down, a silent lunch while watching a tree branch active with birds are just a few practical ways to embrace stillness and provide space to hear God's voice. Mothers are surrounded technological noise and that which is emanating from their children. Electronic toys, videos, and the constant refrain, "watch me," and "he hit me," and "I need a snack." Our brains can only process so much data each day. To bring a sense of rest to our brains, we have to limit the input we allow into our lives.

Mothers are often culturally conditioned to remain perpetually "on call" for their children, a posture that places an unsustainable burden on a single person. Historically, childcare was distributed across a network of adults and older children; brief physical or emotional absence was a feature of communal life. When someone walked into town to purchase something from the general store, other adults or older children were left in charge of the younger children. By contrast, today's motherhood is increasingly mediated through a digital tether. The ever-present smartphone keeps mothers in a state of continuous alertness, responding to texts, calls, and minor disruptions in real time, often at the cost of sustained internal attention.

This fragmentation carries spiritual consequences. The Christian tradition has long recognized that God most often speaks in stillness and quiet. When a mother's nervous system is perpetually oriented toward interruption, the conditions for listening to

⁶²⁶ Maslach, *Burnout*, 95–97; Ziegler, *Mommy Burnout*, 208–9.

God are eroded. Intentional practices of temporary disconnection are not indulgent or neglectful, but spiritually formative. I suggest mothers experiment with leaving their phones at home while taking a quiet walk, trusting that those caring for their children can handle ordinary needs and that true emergencies will be addressed by calling emergency services and notifying her once she returns. This practice may feel uncomfortable at first, and people might find themselves unconsciously reaching for their phones. Yet, precisely because it is challenging, it is all the more necessary. Running an errand or going to the gym without a phone can become a meaningful act of cultivated stillness, retraining both the mother and the household to tolerate brief periods of absence.

Like many practices that foster health, this discipline of cultivating stillness as a woman and a mother can feel uncomfortable, particularly in a relational context where children desire constant proximity. Yet, with thoughtful planning and shared household responsibility, children's needs can be met while mothers are given the space necessary to pray, reflect, and meditate. Over time, such practices cultivate not only maternal well-being, but a household culture that honors both relational interconnectedness and contemplative attentiveness.

Support

Deep Friendships

Finding kindred souls is no simple task in a culture defined by constant mobility. Most adults do not live in the town they were raised. We move for college and jobs and to be in the best school district for our children. While technology has given us the ability

to stay in contact with long distance friends who have known us forever, nothing compares to seeing someone every week and sharing a hug or a cup of coffee and a walk. For many working women, they have memories of college days filled with abundant time spent with friends—eating together, studying, playing games, running errands, spending breaks with one another’s families, and building deep friendships through shared life.

As adults living in a transient society, it can be difficult to build these same kinds of friendships in the cities where we settle and build our own homes. Friendships rarely happen overnight. In college we had endless hours to deepen relationships. As adults we don’t have as much time to invest in one another and friendships can be harder to cultivate. I experienced this personally when we welcomed our first child as new residents of Colorado. I spent many lonely hours pushing a stroller through the zoo or sitting in library story times wondering if anyone else was longing for friendship as much as I was.

Women need friendships. They need deep friendships. While college friendships are precious and technology allows us to stay connected across distance, nothing can fully replace a close female friend who lives in the same city. It is one thing to run into someone at the grocery store and another to plan six months in advance for a short visit in a city equidistant between your homes. This does not mean long-distance friendships should be abandoned. They matter and deserve care. However, many women also need friendships that are local—women in the same stage of life, facing similar work and family tensions.

While it has been relatively easy for me to maintain my college friendships and form sympathetic acquaintances, deep friendships with other working mothers did not

come quickly. Those relationships took years to form. I would tell my past self that deep friendships require perseverance and intentionality. Even in small increments, you must consistently show up for others and seek to connect. Attend the library events and women's events at church even when you are tired and would rather rest. Continue initiating and inviting others along on errands, meals, community groups, or play dates. Remember people's birthdays and celebrate their children's successes. Seek out those who share your quirks, cheer for the same sports teams, or volunteer in similar places. These are often the shortcuts to transforming acquaintances into deep friendships. Another element is investing in rootedness. Relocating for a career opportunity or further education can be exciting, but each move resets the clock on developing deep meaningful in-person connections.

Over time, through prayer, intentionality, and investment in a particular location, God brings the friendships that sustain us. I pray these relationships come quickly for you, and I hope to cultivate church cultures where women can connect more deeply and easily with one another.

Reject Intensive Parenting by Accepting a Communal Mindset

We are not meant to do life alone. Children thrive when cared for by multiple loving adults, and mothers flourish when supported by a robust support network. Research consistently shows that the absence of social support takes a serious toll on a

mother's mental and emotional health.⁶²⁷ The prevailing cultural idea of intensive parenting must be rejected. It is isolating.

Humanity was created for interdependence and communal nurturing. We are not called to raise our children within the protective bubble of our homes. Rather, we are invited into the rhythm of collective care, surrounding our families with the love and presence of others.

Shared parenting with like-minded friends provides a framework for this kind of community. Some parents found such networks during the Covid-19 pandemic in the educational “bubbles” they created. Others cultivated them through neighbors with children similar ages, sharing responsibilities like meeting children when they walk home from school and keeping them entertained until the other adults finish their workday. Families may rotate hosting pizza and movie nights, allowing other parents to enjoy a free date night. Friends can also volunteer to teach a short class to their friends' children, teaching them valuable skills like sourdough baking, fishing, or toddler music lessons, giving the children a chance to learn from additional adults without financial exchange. These practices remind us that human connection and support need not be purchased, but are shared gifts of time and care. Another idea is shared meal preparation. If three families double or triple one meal a week and share it with one another by dropping it off on the front porch, the labor and monotony of preparing dinner every evening are lightened.

⁶²⁷ Gammage, Mouron, and Sultana, *The Hidden Costs of Unpaid Childcare: The Public and Private Sectors Need to Work Together to Promote Gender Equality*.

Rejecting intensive parenting can also look like accepting offers for free babysitting from people without guilt, or offering to provide transportation to youth group or other activities for other families. Many church traditions recognize this principle in vows taken during a baby baptism or dedication, pleading to assist parents with the nurturing of their children. This commitment must extend beyond teaching Sunday school and into the everyday life of families. In my own experience, dear friends have willingly become “aunties” to my children, trusted adults they can approach with questions or concerns they feel uncomfortable discussing with us as parents. This thrills my heart! My parenting role is not threatened; rather, I feel supported, knowing other adults who are not related to me care deeply enough to stand in as a loving adult presence in my children’s life. Another example of this are the older members of our community group who have contributed financially to group childcare costs, even though their children are already grown, as a way to support all the families in the group.

Ask for What Is Needed

Research shows that in spite of improvements; women still carry a disproportionate share of the second shift at home. One of the most practical ways women can free up time for unicorn space and intentional days of rest is to outsource unfavorable chores, either to a family member or paid help. People who prioritize time over money tend to be happier, making it worthwhile, whenever possible, to pay someone to handle tasks you would rather not do.⁶²⁸ In my experience, it is not helpful to simply ask husbands to “help more” at home. Rather, it is better to be bold and clear with what

⁶²⁸ Rucker, *The Fun Habit*, 27–30.

the task entails and hand it over completely to them. Do not ask them to take care of the pile of laundry sometime this weekend. Instead, communicate your need to hand over the laundry chore entirely so that it no longer takes up mental space. Clearly communicate what it means for him to completely be in charge of the entire process: gather the laundry, stain treat, wash, dry, fold, and put it away. Instead of asking a parent/grandparent if they can occasionally watch the children, come to them with a proposal. Ask them to meet the children at the school bus once a week and oversee homework and put a frozen lasagna in the oven to get a start on dinner. Or maybe they can agree to pick up kids from school and transport them to their three different afterschool sports three afternoons a week and then join the rest of your family for a crockpot meal you set up before you left for work. Honest, gracious, and specific requests will accomplish a lot more than hoping and wishing you had more help.

Another area where working mothers should ask for what they need is with their bosses. Most employers are deeply concerned about employee retention and morale, and many are far more willing to offer flexibility than mothers assume. When mothers advocate for themselves by requesting flexible hours, remote work options, or adjusted workloads during demanding seasons, they are not asking for special treatment. They are inviting their workplace to invest in their long-term health and effectiveness. Too often women fear appearing uncommitted, yet burnout and replacement costs are far more expensive to a company than accommodation. Honest conversations with bosses can open the door to fuller flourishing.

Churches

Every church, regardless of size or structure, can affirm the goodness and dignity of all forms of work, paid or unpaid, and the gift and necessity of rest in all its delight as meaningful participation in God's redemptive purposes. Every church can proclaim that both women and men are designed by God to live within rhythms of work and rest, and that these rhythms will look different across seasons of life and across families. In doing so, the church offers a shared theological imagination in which flourishing becomes possible.

I do not believe every local church must implement all of the recommendations that follow. Many of these ideas belong properly to the Church universal, alongside the particular work of individual congregations. Some churches have small staffs and limited resources and simply are not positioned to carry out every initiative described here. Others recommendations are better suited to be implemented through city-wide nonprofit ministries such as Chattanooga Faith Co-Op or the Denver Institute for Faith and Work, which exist to bridge gaps between faith, work, and community.

Listen to Women's Stories

Pastors and staff should not assume they fully understand the lived experiences of working mothers. To love and serve all women well, churches must listen before leading. One way to do this is forming sermon study teams that include women in the study and preparation of the message for the church, allowing a broader perspective and range of experiences to shape how Scripture is interpreted and communicated to the congregation. Churches can also implement mixed-gender study groups to help leaders think carefully

how programs and discipleship structures can better integrate faith, work, and family life. In addition, leaders can take the powerful step of visiting working mothers at their place of employment - hospitals, schools, home, restaurants, offices, jails - seeking to understand the burdens and joys of their callings. This embodied listening affirms their daily work and provides further understanding into their lived realities in the primary places their faith is expressed.

Offer Training

Seminars on burnout prevention for all working adults, but especially working women, could be deeply formative. These gatherings can normalize the God-given limits of the human body and the cost of overwork, while offering practical tools for sustaining meaningful work over a lifetime. Including a breakout section for husbands of working women would further underscore the centrality of their support for their wife's flourishing.

Likewise, premarital classes should include working mothers as mentors and integrate teaching that supports a collaborate, team-based approach to both parenting and household responsibilities. Preparing couples for marriage without acknowledging the reality of shared responsibilities of domestic labor leaves them ill-equipped for marriage.

Finally, all teaching on vocation must also include a larger biblical vision of the rhythms of sabbath and rest as part of God's good design for creation. Rest is not indulgent; it is a necessary practice for living faithfully within our God-given human limitations.

Childcare and Practical Support

Many mothers function as the default parent for most of the week, even when they are also working full-time. This means that, on Sunday mornings, they are often the person most frequently leaving the service to escort children to the bathroom, mediate sibling conflicts, and distribute snacks. These small but constant interruptions make it difficult to be attentive to Scripture readings, prayer, and preaching. For women who arrive already exhausted and in need of spiritual renewal, the simple ability to sit, listen, and be formed by the Word of God is essential.

Well-staffed, developmentally appropriate nurseries and children's churches are therefore necessary for congregational worship. Clear safety procedures, along with warm and joyful environments, help parents and children feel secure and comfortable. In this way, the church communicates that the spiritual formation of children and their parents are shared priorities rather than competing ones.

The same is true beyond Sunday mornings. Regular and affordable parents' nights out hosted by the church give couples space to tend their marriages, whether through a quiet dinner or the simple freedom to run errands together without children in tow. Providing childcare for new members' classes, community groups, and other discipleship opportunities enables mothers to participate without the added mental and logistical burden of finding a sitter.

Ideally, the cost of this childcare would be shared across the congregation. In most churches, members vow to nurture one another's children in the faith. Treating childcare as a collective responsibility embodies that promise. This approach differs from offering scholarships for those in financial crisis, which many families are reluctant to use unless their need is extreme. Childcare which is built into the church's common life

becomes a gracious gift of mutual belonging. For these reasons, mothers should be released from the unspoken expectation and resulting guilt of volunteering in the children's ministry. This is a chance for the college students, childless adults, parents of older children, and empty nesters to love and serve the parents of young children, supporting their round the clock work of raising the next generation of the church. In doing so, the church lives out a deep truth - parenting is not an individualistic vocation but a communal one carried by the whole body.

Many working mothers experience extremely busy weekday evenings. Homework, meal preparation, cleanup, bedtime routines, and story time can easily consume an entire evening, only to be followed by another hour or more of unfinished emails, school permission slips, or work projects before the whole cycle begins again the next morning. By the time a Tuesday evening Bible study comes, many working mothers are out of margin. For this reason, a monthly Saturday morning women's bible study could be a gift to the women. For mothers with older children, scheduling a group during youth group hours provides a thoughtful alternative. When churches struggle to get working moms with young children to engage in Bible studies, the obstacle is hardly a lack of interest, rather it is logistics.

Anytime a meal is offered as part of a church event, it creates space for deeper connection over shared food and can relieve some of a mother's mental load. Removing the burden of planning and executing another family meal, a responsibility that though not always, often, falls upon them. Meals can be a deeply hospitable way we minister to all people, especially to working mothers.

Meal trains following the arrival of a new baby, welcoming a foster care child, experiencing a medical injury or death in the family is a long tradition in many churches. These meals are tangible acts of love and service to families in times of vulnerability. It is a kindness when these meals are planned by a church staff member, officers, community group leaders, rather than defaulting to mothers who are already overextended in their care of others. Some churches have gone even further by inviting people to not only provide a meal, but also fold laundry, empty the dishwasher, vacuum, doing a light dusting, or take the children to the park for a few hours. These small acts of service remind each other that we are not alone; it and is a beautiful expression of the body of Christ working together to carry one another's heavy loads.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused on the lived experiences of married Christian women with young children at home who worked in professional careers. As with any study, the extent of research is limited. Therefore, the following variations could be highly valuable: participants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds – such as in Latino, African American, and Middle Eastern homes – as well as single mothers, blended families, those in homosexual partnerships, those in heterosexual non-married partnerships, mothers of only one child, those with adopted children, those with special needs children, mothers of teenagers, and mothers with more five or more children. This study did not include women pursuing work because of family pressures or financial need, nor was it researching women in blue collar careers. Due to travel limitations, the women do not represent a cross-section of all regions in the US. The participants of this study are from the South, Southeast, and the West. Consequently, a study in other regions could be

helpful. During this study, it became clear that the husbands played a significant role in supporting their wives' flourishing. Investigating the experiences and practices of such husbands would be a valuable complement to this research. Several authors recommended motherhood sabbaticals, and, as a relatively unexplored idea, qualitative research on that topic would be beneficial.

Appendix

Email to Possible Research Participants

Dear _____,

I'm C. JoAnna Schlecht, a doctoral student at Covenant Theological Seminary. My research examines working American motherhood, with a focus on how working mothers can achieve joy, fulfillment, and flourishing in their various roles. I'll be in Denver Sept 10th and 11th to interview working mothers. If you have ever read Brené Brown, you're familiar with the kind of work I'm doing, qualitative research. This research involves listening deeply to people's stories in order to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences.

I'm looking to interview professional working women in Denver who are thriving as married Christian mothers of two or more children ages 0-13. The interviews are conducted in person, last approximately 90 minutes, and will be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. All identifying information will remain confidential, and both recordings and transcripts will be securely destroyed upon completion of my dissertation. Participation is wholly voluntary, and participants are free to withdraw at any time.

We will need a private, distraction-free room for the interview. I will be recording it using my laptop. I'm happy to come to your office at work, or I can arrange for us to use a room at a local church, whatever is most convenient for you.

I am asking all interview participants to do the following:

- Complete a consent form. (I will print one and bring it with me to our interview.)
- Discuss working motherhood with me for an hour and a half during a recorded interview. (You may spend a few minutes before our meeting recalling a few specific instances of tension between motherhood and your profession, as well as the things you have done to encourage your flourishing despite these challenges.)
- Allow me to email or call you, if needed, to clarify something you said during the interview.

I am grateful for your time and interest in this project and I'm excited to learn from you. This is a link to a brief Participant Selection Questionnaire. Please take two minutes to complete it at your earliest convenience. Once I have received the necessary number of responses, I will follow up to let you know if you've been selected for an interview.

Once I have completed my research, I will be eager to share my results and conclusions with you. Thank you so much for your interest in this important topic.

Warmly,

C. JoAnna Schlecht, MDiv

Email to Selected Research Participants

Hello _____,

I received the results of the survey. Thank you. I'd love to interview you. I'm attaching the Informed Consent Form in case you want to look it over ahead of time. It explains that the risk to you for participating in this research is minimal and that you may stop at any time. I'll bring along printed copies for us both to sign before we begin recording.

[Details about scheduling interview.]

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Grace and Peace,

C. JoAnna Schlecht, MDiv.

Participant Selection Questionnaire

Note: Please take a few minutes to complete it at your earliest convenience. Once I have received the necessary number of responses, I will follow up to let you know if you've been selected for an in-person interview. I'm grateful for your time and interest in this project.

1. Name:
2. Phone Number:
3. Email:
4. City and State:
5. What is your race or ethnicity?

6. Age:
7. How old were you when your first child was born?
8. How many children do you have? Please list their genders and ages.
9. Are you married? If so, for how long?
10. What is your profession? And how many hours a week do you work?
11. What is your husband's profession? And how many hours a week does he work?
12. What is your highest degree achieved?
13. Are you a member or regular attender of a church? If you answer yes, please list the church.
14. Author Andy Crouch states that every human is meant to feel peace, delight, and be fully alive. "We are meant to flourish – not just to survive, but to thrive; not just to exist, but to explore and expand." To what extent do you feel that this statement is reflective of your experience?
 - A great deal
 - A moderate amount
 - A little
 - Not at all
15. Would you say you are working in your current profession predominately out of:
 - Obligation and necessity
 - A sense of calling and delight
16. I would describe myself as a disciple/follower of Christ.

- Yes
- No

17. To what extent does your faith influence your decisions about family, work, or relationships?

- A great deal
- A moderate amount
- A little
- Not at all

Bibliography

- Ali, Rasha. "U.S. Mothers Have It the Worst When It Comes to Work-Life Balance, Research Says." *USA TODAY*, March 18, 2019.
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/allthemoms/2019/03/18/work-life-balance-stress-worst-us-caitlyn-collins-making-motherhood-work-book-says/3200808002/>.
- Allender, Dan B. *Sabbath: The Ancient Practices*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010.
- Allison, Gregg R. *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021.
- American Association of University Women (AAUW). "At Work, Dads Get a Bonus, but Moms Get a Penalty. What Gives?" *Workplace & Economic Equity*. May 6, 2016.
<https://www.aauw.org/2016/05/06/dads-get-a-bonus-but-moms-get-a-penalty>.
- . "The Motherhood Penalty." *Workplace & Economic Equity*. August 31, 2023.
<https://www.aauw.org/issues/economic-security/motherhood/>.
- Augustine of Hippo. *On Christian Doctrine*. Philadelphia, PA: Aeterna Press, 2014.
- Baktash, Mehrzad B., and Lisa Pütz. "Detach to Thrive: Psychological Detachment from Work and Employee Well-Being." *Journal of Happiness Studies* 26, no. 4 (March 2025): 54. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-025-00883-7>.
- Barna Group, and Kate Harris. *Wonder Women, Paperback (Frames Series): Navigating the Challenges of Motherhood, Career, and Identity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- Barroso, Amanda, and Anna Brown. *Gender Pay Gap in the U.S. Held Steady in 2020*. Pew Research Center. May 25, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/25/gender-pay-gap-facts>.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest: From Sabbath to Sabbatical and Back Again*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022.
- . *Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018.
- Bazon, Lara. *Ambitious Like a Mother: Why Prioritizing Your Career Is Good for Your Kids*. New York, NY: Little Brown Spark, 2022.
- . "The End of Mom Guilt: Why a Mother's Ambition Is Good for Her Family." *Atlantic* 329, no. 4 (May 2022): 14–17.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/working-mom-career-women-guilt/629364/>.

- Beatty, Katelyn. *A Woman's Place: A Christian Vision for Your Calling in the Office, the Home, and the World*. New York, NY: Howard Books, 2017.
- Bloom, Tina, Nancy Glass, Mary Ann Curry, Rebecca Hernandez, and Gayle Houck. "Maternal Stress Exposures, Reactions, and Priorities for Stress Reduction Among Low-Income Urban Women." *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health* 58, no. 2 (2013): 167–74. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-2011.2012.00197.x>.
- Borelli, Jessica L., S. Katherine Nelson, Laura M. River, Sarah A. Birken, and Corinne Moss-Racusin. "Gender Differences in Work-Family Guilt in Parents of Young Children." *Sex Roles* 76, no. 5 (March 2017): 356–68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0579-0>.
- Brody, Lauren Smith. *How to Be Mostly O.K. (and Occasionally Fantastic) at the Whole Working Mom Thing*. New York Times. n.d. Accessed August 9, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/working-womans-handbook/how-to-be-a-working-mom>.
- . *The Fifth Trimester: The Working Mom's Guide to Style, Sanity, and Big Success After Baby*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2017.
- Brown, Brené. *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*. New York, NY: Random House, 2018.
- . *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012.
- . *Rising Strong: How the Ability to Reset Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. New York, NY: Random House, 2015.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.
- Buchanan, Mark. *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Buehler, Cheryl, and Marion O'Brien. "Mothers' Part-Time Employment: Associations with Mother and Family Well-Being." *Journal of Family Psychology* 25, no. 6 (2011): 895–906. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025993>.
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Average Hours per Day Parents Spent Caring for and Helping Household Children as Their Main Activity." August 11, 2023. <https://www.bls.gov/charts/american-time-use/activity-by-parent.htm>.
- . "How Parents Used Their Time in 2021." July 22, 2022. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/how-parents-used-their-time-in-2021.htm>.

- Burns, Bob, Tasha D. Chapman, and Donald C. Guthrie. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us About Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Invitations from God: Accepting God's Offer to Rest, Weep, Forgive, Wait, Remember and More*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.
- Camp, Lee, host. Subtext. *Is Social Media A Calling*. April 1, 2026. <https://www.iheart.com/podcast/269-the-subtext-290318829/episode/is-social-media-a-calling-328722901>.
- Caza, Brianna, Lakshmi Ramarajan, Erin Reid, and Stephanie Creary. "Make Room in Your Work Life for the Rest of Your Self." *Harvard Business Review Digital Articles*, May 30, 2018. <https://hbr.org/2018/05/how-to-make-room-in-your-work-life-for-the-rest-of-your-self>.
- Chapman, Ross, and Ryan Tafilowski. *Faithful Work: In the Daily Grind with God and for Others*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024.
- Clauss, Elisa, Annekatrin Hoppe, Vivian Schachler, and Deirdre O'Shea. "Occupational Self-Efficacy and Work Engagement as Moderators in the Stressor-Detachment Model." *Work & Stress* 35, no. 1 (January 2021): 74–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2020.1743790>.
- Collins, Caitlyn. *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Collins, Gail. *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*. New York, NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2007.
- . *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women From 1960 to The Present*. New York, NY: Little Brown Company, 1976.
- Collins, Portia. "Don't Waste Your Gifts." In *Women & Work: Bearing God's Image and Joining in His Mission through Our Work*, edited by Courtney Moore, 99–114. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2023.
- Comer, John Mark. *Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017.
- . *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019.
- Connolly, Jess. *Tired of Being Tired: Receive God's Realistic Rest for Your Soul-Deep Exhaustion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2024.

Conroy, Teal. “‘Surface Pressure’ from ‘Encanto’ Is the Mom Anthem of 2022.” *Medium*, January 26, 2022. <https://medium.com/@tealconroy/surface-pressure-from-encanto-is-the-mom-anthem-of-2022-1af938b64602>.

Cosden, Darrell. *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*. Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.

Crittenden, Ann. *If You’ve Raised Kids, You Can Manage Anything: Leadership Begins at Home*. New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2004.

———. *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued*. New York, NY: Picador, 2010.

Crouch, Andy. “As For Me and My Household, We’ll Resist Mammon.” *Christianity Today* 66, no. 4 (May 2022): 68–74. https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/may-june/crouch-money-home-me-my-household-resist-mammon-community.html?share=xwiOcf1oT5HITboK2lsz/IZXlgUS3hYQ&utm_medium=widgetsocial.

———. *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

———. *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.

———. *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017.

Dalton-Smith, Dr. Sandra. *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*. New York, NY: FaithWords, 2019.

Dawn, Marva J. *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.

Day, Jennifer Cheeseman. “Among the Educated, Women Earn 74 Cents for Every Dollar Men Make.” *Government. US Census Bureau*, May 29, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/05/college-degree-widens-gender-earnings-gap.html>.

Demerouti, Evangelia, Arnold B. Bakker, Maria C.W. Peeters, and Kimberley Breevaart. “New Directions in Burnout Research.” *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 30, no. 5 (2021): 686–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2021.1979962>.

Demos, John Putnam. *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family and the Life Course in American History*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1986.

- Department of Labor. "Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)." Accessed February 15, 2024. <http://www.dol.gov/general/topic/benefits-leave/fmla>.
- Desmond, Kate. "How Disney's Encanto Perfectly Captures My Pandemic Mom Brain." *Life According to Kate Blog*, January 1, 2022. <https://www.katedesmond.com/single-post/how-disney-s-encanto-perfectly-captures-my-pandemic-mom-brain>.
- Doriani, Daniel M. *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity, and Transformation*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2019.
- Dowling, Daisy Wademan. "Balance Parenting and Work Stress." In *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance*, 161–68. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019.
- Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2018.
- Dunn, Megan. *Who Chooses Part-Time Work and Why?* U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2018. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/who-chooses-part-time-work-and-why.htm>.
- Elliot, Elisabeth. *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes to My Daughter on the Meaning of Womanhood*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976.
- Faris, Paula. *You Don't Have to Carry It All: Ditch the Mom Guilt and Find a Better Way Forward*. New York, NY: Worthy Books, 2023.
- Ferrante, Mary Beth. "Thousands of Mothers Have Spoken. Are We Going to Listen?" *Forbes*, May 3, 2023. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marybethferrante/2023/05/03/thousands-of-mothers-have-spoken-are-we-going-to-listen/>.
- Fielding-Singh, Priya, and Marianne Cooper. "The Emotional Management of Motherhood: Foodwork, Maternal Guilt, and Emotion Work." *Journal of Marriage & Family* 85, no. 2 (April 2023): 436–57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12878>.
- Fisher, Gwenith, Carrie Bulger, and Carlla Smith. "Beyond Work and Family: A Measure of Work/Nonwork Interference and Enhancement." *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 14 (October 2009): 441–56. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016737>.
- Fitzpatrick, Elyse. "The Creation Mandate, Great Commission, and Your Work." In *Women & Work: Bearing God's Image and Joining in His Mission through Our Work*, edited by Courtney Moore, 11–26. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2023.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008.

- Fry, Richard, and Carolina Aragão. "Gender Pay Gap in U.S. Hasn't Changed Much in Two Decades." *Pew Research Center*, March 1, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/03/01/gender-pay-gap-facts/>.
- Gabriel, Allison S., Tammy D. Allen, Cynthia E. Devers, Lillian T. Eby, Lucy L. Gilson, Mikki Hebl, Rebecca R. Kehoe, et al. "A Call to Action: Taking the Untenable out of Women Professors' Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Caregiving Demands." *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 16, no. 2 (June 2023): 187–210. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2022.111>.
- Galanakis, Michael D., and Elli Tsitouri. "Positive Psychology in the Working Environment. Job Demands-Resources Theory, Work Engagement and Burnout: A Systematic Literature Review." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (September 2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1022102>.
- Gammage, Sarah, Manon Mouron, and Naziha Sultana. *The Hidden Costs of Unpaid Childcare: The Public and Private Sectors Need to Work Together to Promote Gender Equality*. IMF Finance & Development Magazine: International Monetary Fund, 2019. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2019/03/gender-equality-and-costs-of-unpaid-caregiving-gammage>.
- Garber, Steven. *The Seamless Life: A Tapestry of Love and Learning, Worship and Work*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- Gawlik, Kate Sustersic, Bernadette Mazurek Melnyk, Jinjian Mu, and Alai Tan. "Psychometric Properties of the New Working Parent Burnout Scale." *Journal of Pediatric Health Care: Official Publication of National Association of Pediatric Nurse Associates & Practitioners* 36, no. 6 (July 2022): 540–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2022.05.020>.
- Gee, Tracey. *The Magic of Knowing What You Want: A Practical Guide to Unearthing the Wisdom of Your Desires*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2025.
- Glass, Jennifer, Robin W. Simon, and Matthew A Andersson. "Parenthood and Happiness: Effects of Work-Family Reconciliation Policies in 22 OECD Countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 122, no. 3 (November 2016): 886–929. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688892>.
- Goldberg, Abbie E., and Maureen Perry-Jenkins. "Division of Labor and Working-Class Women's Well-Being Across the Transition to Parenthood." *Journal of Family Psychology* 18, no. 1 (March 2004): 225–36. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.18.1.225>.
- Goleman, Daniel, and Cary Cherniss. *Optimal: How to Perform at Your Best and Create Emotionally Intelligent Organizations and Teams*. New York, NY: Penguin Business, 2024.

- Goodman, W. Benjamin, and Ann C. Crouter. "Longitudinal Associations between Maternal Work Stress, Negative Work-Family Spillover, and Depressive Symptoms." *Family Relations* 58, no. 3 (July 2009): 245–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2009.00550.x>.
- Granrose, Cherlyn Skromme. *Women's Employment and Homemaking Careers: A Lifespan Perspective*. Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010.
- Grose, Jessica. "America's Mothers Are in Crisis: Is Anyone Listening to Them?" Parenting. *The New York Times*, February 4, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/04/parenting/working-moms-mental-health-coronavirus.html>.
- . *Screaming on the Inside: The Unsustainability of American Motherhood*. New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2022.
- Haanen, Jeff. *Working from the Inside Out: A Brief Guide to Inner Work That Transforms Our Outer World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023.
- Hanna, Jeremy. "20 Best Disney Songs According to the Billboard Hot 100." Inside the Magic, March 17, 2023. <https://insidethemagic.net/2023/03/greatest-disney-songs-all-time-billboard-hot-100-encanto-lion-king-jh1mmb/>.
- Haun, Verena C., Annika Nübold, and Anna G. Bauer. "Being Mindful at Work and at Home: Buffering Effects in the Stressor–Detachment Model." *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 91, no. 2 (June 2018): 385–410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12200>.
- Hays, Sharon. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Herr, Meryl. *When Work Hurts: Building Resilience When You're Beat Up or Burnt Out*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 202 AD.
- Hidajat, Tarissa J., Elizabeth J. Edwards, Rachel Wood, and Marilyn Campbell. "Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Stress and Burnout in Teachers: A Systematic Review." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 134 (November 2023): 104303. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104303>.
- Hochschild, Arlie, and Anne Machung. *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Huffington, Arianna. *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*. New York, NY: Harmony, 2014.

James, Carolyn Custis. *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

———. *Lost Women of the Bible: The Women We Thought We Knew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

Javed, Uzma. "Combining Career and Care-Giving: The Impact of Family-Friendly Policies on the Well-Being of Working Mothers in the United Kingdom." *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* 38, no. 5 (2019): 44–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joe.21950>.

Johnson, Richard W., Karen E. Smith, and Barbara A. Butrica. *Lifetime Employment-Related Costs to Women of Providing Family Care*. Urban Institute. U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau, 2023. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/Mothers-Families-Work/Lifetime-caregiving-costs_508.pdf.

Kapic, Kelly M. *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022.

Keller, Timothy. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016.

Keswin, Erica. *Bring Your Human to Work: 10 Surefire Ways to Design a Workplace That Is Good for People, Great for Business, and Just Might Change the World*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2018.

———. *The Retention Revolution: 7 Surprising (and Very Human!) Ways to Keep Employees Connected to Your Company*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 2023.

Kibbie, Amelia. "All Moms Are Luisa from 'Encanto' Right Now — and Always." *Mom.Com*, January 18, 2022. <https://mom.com/momlife/all-moms-are-luisa-from-encanto-right-now-and-always>.

Kilroy, Steven, Janine Bosak, Patrick C. Flood, and Riccardo Peccei. "Time to Recover: The Moderating Role of Psychological Detachment in the Link between Perceptions of High-Involvement Work Practices and Burnout." *Journal of Business Research* 108 (January 2020): 52–61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.012>.

Kirsty-Lee, McLellan, and Koos Uys. "Balancing Dual Roles in Self-Employed Women: An Exploratory Study." *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology* 35 (April 2009). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v35i1.416>.

Koessler, John, and Mark Galli. *The Radical Pursuit of Rest: Escaping the Productivity Trap*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.

- Lamar, Margaret, and Lisa Forbes. "A Phenomenological Investigation into the Role of Intensive Mothering in Working Mothers' Career Experiences." *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy* 7 (April 2020): 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2020.1753596>.
- Lamar, Margaret R., Lisa K. Forbes, and Laura A. Capasso. "Helping Working Mothers Face the Challenges of an Intensive Mothering Culture." *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 41, no. 3 (July 2019): 203–20. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.41.3.02>.
- Landivar, Liana Christin, Rose A. Woods, and Gretchen M. Livingston. "Does Part-Time Work Offer Flexibility to Employed Mothers?" *Monthly Labor Review*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 2022. <https://doi.org/10.21916/mlr.2022.7>.
- Lebert-Charron, Astrid, Géraldine Dorard, Emilie Boujut, and Jaqueline Wendland. "Maternal Burnout Syndrome: Contextual and Psychological Associated Factors." *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018). <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00885>.
- Leineweber, Constanze, Helena Falkenberg, and Sophie C. Albrecht. "Parent's Relative Perceived Work Flexibility Compared to Their Partner Is Associated with Emotional Exhaustion." *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00640>.
- Leonhardt, Megan. "9.8 Million Working Mothers in the U.S. Are Suffering from Burnout." *CNBC*, December 3, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/03/millions-of-working-mothers-in-the-us-are-suffering-from-burnout.html>.
- Marianne. *I'm a Luisa: The "Surface Pressure" of Being a Mom*. Indianapolis Moms. February 6, 2022. <https://indianapolismoms.com/parenting-perspectives/im-a-luisa-the-surface-pressure-of-being-a-mom/>.
- Maslach, Christina. *Burnout: The Cost of Caring*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982.
- Maslach, Christina, and Michael P. Leiter. *The Burnout Challenge: Managing People's Relationships with Their Jobs*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2024.
- Maushart, Susan. *The Mask of Motherhood: How Becoming a Mother Changes Our Lives and Why We Never Talk About It*. New York, NY: The New Press, 1999.
- Maven. "Parents at the Best Workplaces: The Largest-Ever Study of Working Parents." *Great Place to Work*. 2020. <https://info.mavenclinic.com/pdf/parents-at-the-best-workplaces>.
- McCulley, Carolyn, and Nora Shank. *The Measure of Success: Uncovering the Biblical Perspective on Women, Work, and the Home*. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2014.

- Meeussen, Loes, and Colette Van Laar. "Feeling Pressure to Be a Perfect Mother Relates to Parental Burnout and Career Ambitions." *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02113>.
- Merriam, Sharan B. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009.
- Meyer, Joanna. *Women, Work, and Calling: Step into Your Place in God's World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023.
- Miller, Claire Cain. "Men Do More at Home, but Not as Much as They Think." *The New York Times*, November 11, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/upshot/men-do-more-at-home-but-not-as-much-as-they-think-they-do.html>.
- Miller, Kevin, and Deborah J. Vagins. *The Simple Truth About the Gender Pay Gap: AAUW Report*. Washington, DC: American Association of University Women (AAUW), 2018. <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/simple-truth/>.
- Molloy, Arianna. *Healthy Calling: From Toxic Burnout to Sustainable Work*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2025.
- Moss, Jennifer. *The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2021.
- Motherly. "Motherly's 2023 State of Motherhood Survey Report." May 1, 2023. <https://www.mother.ly/news/2023-state-of-motherhood-survey/>.
- Muller, Wayne. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*. New York, NY: Random House, 2000.
- Nagoski, Emily, and Amelia Nagoski. *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2020.
- Nelson, Tom. *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Newport, Cal. *Slow Productivity: The Lost Art of Accomplishment Without Burnout*. New York, NY: Portfolio, 2024.
- Nord, Walter, Suzy Fox, Adam Phoenix, and Karrie Viano. "Real-World Reactions to Work-Life Balance Programs: Lessons for Effective Implementation." *Organizational Dynamics* 30 (March 2002): 223–38. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616\(01\)00054-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0090-2616(01)00054-7).
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003.

- Novita, Maria Prima, and Arthur Huwae. "Challenges In Tough Times: Portrait of Stress on Housewives and Mother with Dual Role." *Bulletin of Counseling and Psychotherapy* 5 (March 2023): 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.51214/bocp.v5i1.391>.
- Novoa, Consuelo, Félix Cova, Gabriela Nazar, Karen Oliva, and Pablo Vergara-Barra. "Intensive Parenting: The Risks of Overdemanding." *Trends in Psychology*, September 22, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-022-00229-9>.
- O'Donnell, Michaela. *Make Work Matter: Your Guide to Meaningful Work in a Changing World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2021.
- Okimoto, Tyler G., and Madeline E. Heilman. "The 'Bad Parent' Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers." *Journal of Social Issues* 68, no. 4 (December 2012): 704–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2012.01772.x>.
- Orsi, Dora d', Manuela Veríssimo, and Eva Diniz. "Father Involvement and Maternal Stress: The Mediating Role of Coparenting." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 8 (January 2023): 8. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20085457>.
- Otto, Madelon C. B., Nicole Hoefsmit, Joris van Ruysseveldt, and Karen van Dam. "Exploring Proactive Behaviors of Employees in the Prevention of Burnout." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 20 (2019): 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16203849>.
- Palena. "'Serious' Leaders Need Self-Care, Too." *Harvard Business Review*, October 22, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/10/serious-leaders-need-self-care-too>.
- Pang, Alex Soojung-Kim. *Rest: Why You Get More Done When You Work Less*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2018.
- Parmelee, Michele. "Women Continuing to Face Alarming High Levels of Burnout, Stress in the 'New Normal' of Work." Leadership. *Forbes*, April 26, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/deloitte/2022/04/26/women-continuing-to-face-alarming-high-levels-of-burnout-stress-in-the-new-normal-of-work/>.
- Pasricha, Neil. "Why You Need an Untouchable Day Every Week." In *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance*, 89–94. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019.
- Payton, L'Oreal Thompson. "Nearly Half of Working Mothers Have Been Diagnosed with Anxiety or Depression. Here's What Can Help." Well. *Fortune*, March 17, 2023. <https://fortune.com/well/2023/03/17/working-moms-mental-health/>.
- Pearcey, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

- Peshkin, Alan. "In Search of Subjectivity - One's Own." *Educational Researcher* 17, no. 7 (1988): 17–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1174381>.
- Publishers, HarperCollins. "The American Heritage Dictionary." Accessed September 24, 2025. <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=profession>.
- Rabenu, Edna, Daphna Shwartz Asher, and Yahel Kurlander. "The Dual Role of Faculty and Motherhood: Enabling Resources for Successful Coping." *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 16, no. 2 (June 2023): 252–56. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2023.1>.
- Ragsdale, Gillian. "Working Parent Guilt." *Psychology Today*, February 22, 2020. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/kith-and-kin/202002/working-parent-guilt>.
- Råheim, Målfrid, Liv Heide Magnussen, Ragnhild Johanne Tveit Sekse, Åshild Lunde, Torild Jacobsen, and Astrid Blystad. "Researcher–Researched Relationship in Qualitative Research: Shifts in Positions and Researcher Vulnerability." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 11, no. 1 (2016): 30996. <https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v11.30996>.
- Reissig, Courtney. "Motherhood and the Mission of God." In *Women & Work: Bearing God's Image and Joining in His Mission through Our Work*, edited by Courtney Moore, 115–30. Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2023.
- Rodsky, Eve. *Fair Play: A Game-Changing Solution for When You Have Too Much to Do (And More Life to Live)*. New York, NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2021.
- . *Find Your Unicorn Space: Reclaim Your Creative Life in a Too-Busy World*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2021.
- Rosin-Slater, Maya. *Easing the Burden: Why Paid Family Leave Policies Are Gaining Steam*. Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR). February 2018. <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/easing-burden-why-paid-family-leave-policies-are-gaining-steam>.
- Rossetti, Linda. *Women and Transition: Reinventing Work and Life*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- Rubin, Stacey E., and H. Ray Wooten. "Highly Educated Stay-at-Home Mothers: A Study of Commitment and Conflict." *The Family Journal* 15, no. 4 (October 2007): 336–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480707304945>.
- Ruch, Neha. *The Power Pause: How to Plan a Career Break After Kids--and Come Back Stronger Than Ever*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2025.
- Rucker, Mike. *The Fun Habit: How the Pursuit of Joy and Wonder Can Change Your Life*. New York, NY: Atria Books, 2023.

- Ruggeri, Amanda. "The Mums Who Are Ambivalent About Motherhood." *BBC - Family Tree*, November 16, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20221111-what-is-maternal-ambivalence-and-why-it-matters>.
- Ryken, Leland. *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995.
- Salvado, Mafalda, Diogo Luís Marques, Ivan Miguel Pires, and Nádia Mendes Silva. "Mindfulness-Based Interventions to Reduce Burnout in Primary Healthcare Professionals: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Healthcare* 9, no. 10 (October 2021): 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9101342>.
- Sánchez-Rodríguez, Raquel, Stacey Callahan, and Natalène Séjourné. "Development and Preliminary Validation of the Maternal Burnout Scale (MBS) in a French Sample of Mothers: Bifactorial Structure, Reliability, and Validity." *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 23, no. 4 (August 2020): 573–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-019-00993-1>.
- Sánchez-Rodríguez, Raquel, Émilie Orsini, Elodie Laflaquière, Stacey Callahan, and Natalène Séjourné. "Depression, Anxiety, and Guilt in Mothers with Burnout of Preschool and School-Aged Children: Insight from a Cluster Analysis." *Journal of Affective Disorders* 259 (December 2019): 244–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.08.031>.
- Sandberg, Sheryl. *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. London: WH Allen, 2013.
- Sandler, Danielle H., and Nichole Szembrot. "New Mothers Experience Temporary Drop in Earnings." Government. *US Census Bureau*, June 2020. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/06/cost-of-motherhood-on-womens-employment-and-earnings.html>.
- Saunders, Elizabeth Grace. "6 Causes of Burnout, and How to Avoid Them." *Harvard Business Review*, July 6, 2019. <https://hbr.org/2019/07/6-causes-of-burnout-and-how-to-avoid-them>.
- . "How to Get the Most Out of a Day Off." In *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance*, 95–102. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019.
- Schonbrun, Yael. *Work, Parent, Thrive: 12 Science-Backed Strategies to Ditch Guilt, Manage Overwhelm, and Grow Connection*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2022.
- Schultz, Duane P., and Sydney Ellen Schultz. *Psychology and Work Today: An Introduction to Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003058847>.
- Sellers, Tina Schermer, Kris Thomas, Jennifer Batts, and Cami Ostman. "Women Called: A Qualitative Study of Christian Women Dually Called to Motherhood and Career."

Journal of Psychology and Theology 33, no. 3 (September 2005): 198–209.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/009164710503300305>.

Sherman, Amy. “The Bible’s Big Story: How the Grand Narrative Informs Our Lives and Directs Our Mission.” In *Whatever You Do: Six Foundations for an Integrated Life*, edited by Luke Bobo. Overland Park, KS: Made to Flourish, 2019.

Sherman, Amy L. *Agents of Flourishing: Pursuing Shalom in Every Corner of Society*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022.

———. *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011.

Shpancer, Noam. “When Parenting Is Too Much: Facing Stressors without the Resources Needed to Handle Them.” *Psychology Today*, February 2024.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/202401/whats-holding-you-back>.

Sirgy, M. Joseph, and Dong-Jin Lee. *Work-Life Balance: HR Training for Employee Personal Interventions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023.

Smit, Brandon W. “Successfully Leaving Work at Work: The Self-Regulatory Underpinnings of Psychological Detachment.” *Journal of Occupational & Organizational Psychology* 89, no. 3 (September 2016): 493–514. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12137>.

Sobolik, Chelsea Patterson. *Called to Cultivate: A Gospel Vision for Women and Work*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2023.

Sonnetag, Sabine, and Charlotte Fritz. “Recovery from Job Stress: The Stressor-Detachment Model as an Integrative Framework.” *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 36, no. S1 (February 2015): S72–103. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1924>.

Stevens, R. Paul. *Work Matters: Lessons from Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012.

Stone, Pamela. *Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Stott, John. *Mission: Rethinking Vocation*. Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2019.

Su, Amy Jen. “Six Ways to Weave Self-Care into Your Workday.” In *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance*, 185–91. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019.

Swoboda, A. J. *Subversive Sabbath: The Surprising Power of Rest in a Nonstop World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018.

- Szasz, George. "Matrescence: A Great Adventure About to Begin." *British Columbia Medical Journal*, April 5, 2023. <https://bcmj.org/blog/matrescence-great-adventure-about-begin>.
- Tan, Siang-Yang. *Rest: Experiencing God's Peace in a Restless World*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000.
- The HBR Editors. *HBR Guide to Beating Burnout*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2020.
- . "Introduction." In *HBR Guide to Work-Life Balance*, 1–4. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2019.
- Thornton, Amber. "Career Satisfaction Matters for Motherhood Well-Being." *Psychology Today*, October 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-balanced-working-mama/202110/career-satisfaction-matters-motherhood-well-being>.
- . "The Myth of 'Doing It All' in Motherhood." *Psychology Today*, November 22, 2021. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-balanced-working-mama/202111/the-myth-doing-it-all-in-motherhood>.
- Tilly, Louise A. "Women, Women's History, and the Industrial Revolution." *Social Research* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 115–35. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40971024>.
- Twenge, Jean M. *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2006.
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. New York, NY: Vintage, 2002.
- UN Women. "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Sustainable Development Monitoring Report. 2018. www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report.
- Uysal Irak, Doruk, Funda Bozkurt, and İrem Burcu Kurşun. "Personality and Resilience: Enhancing Well-Being and Reducing Negative Emotions Among Working Mothers." *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health* 37, no. 4 (October 2022): 267–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2022.2114910>.
- Warner, Judith. *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*. New York, NY: Riverhead Hardcover, 2005.
- Warren, Tish Harrison. *Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

- . *Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021.
- Wattis, Louise, Kay Standing, and Mara A. Yerkes. “Mothers and Work–Life Balance: Exploring the Contradictions and Complexities Involved in Work–Family Negotiation.” *Community, Work & Family* 16, no. 1 (February 2013): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2012.722008>.
- Weisshaar, Katherine. “From Opt Out to Blocked Out: The Challenges for Labor Market Re-Entry After Family-Related Employment Lapses.” *American Sociological Review* 83, no. 1 (February 2018): 34–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122417752355>.
- Westervelt, Amy. *Forget “Having It All”: How America Messed Up Motherhood--and How to Fix It*. New York, NY: Seal Press, 2018.
- Willard, Dallas. *Life Without Lack: Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019.
- Wilson, Marie C. *Closing the Leadership Gap: Add Women, Change Everything*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Wirzba, Norman. *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- World Bank. “Nearly 2.4 Billion Women Globally Don’t Have Same Economic Rights as Men.” March 1, 2022. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/01/nearly-2-4-billion-women-globally-don-t-have-same-economic-rights-as-men>.
- World Health Organization. “Burn-Out An ‘Occupational Phenomenon’: International Classification of Diseases.” Departmental News. May 28, 2019. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>.
- Zagefka, Hanna, Diane Houston, Leonie Duff, and Nali Moftizadeh. “Combining Motherhood and Work: Effects of Dual Identity and Identity Conflict on Well-Being.” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 30, no. 10 (October 2021): 2452–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-02070-7>.
- Ziegler, Sheryl G. “How to Let Go of Working-Mom Guilt.” *Balancing Work and Family*. *Harvard Business Review*, September 4, 2020. <https://hbr.org/2020/09/how-to-let-go-of-working-mom-guilt>.
- . *Mommy Burnout: How to Reclaim Your Life and Raise Healthier Children in the Process*. New York, NY: Dey Street Books, 2018.

Zimmermann, Christian, Heinrich W. Ursprung, and Matthias Krapf. *Parenthood and Productivity of Highly Skilled Labor: Evidence from the Groves of Academe*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.20955/wp.2014.001>.