

1991

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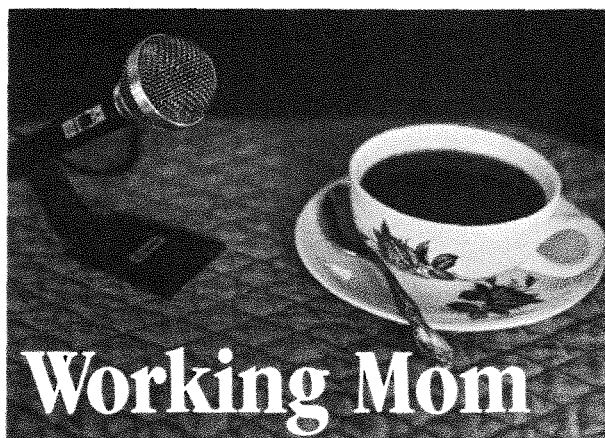
Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N., "An Interview with a Working Mom" (1991). *Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies*. 322.
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An Interview With a



Working Mom

BY PAUL ANDERSON

THE ORGANIZING theme of this issue is the well-being of the Christian family, and one of the acute pressures felt within the family unit today is the plight of the working mother. The fact is that the familiar ideal of the two-parent, single-career family is the exception rather than the norm. With the increase of single-parent families, economic strains, and opportunities for talented women to seek professional careers, new stresses face the home. So how can Christian families manage more effectively, and how can the church alleviate family burdens? Perhaps an interview with a working mom will point the way forward.

What pressures do you feel as a mother?

As a mother, I feel the rhythm and wholeness of a child's life require continuity of relationship. To children their experiences appear to be random. Their moods swing from high to low, and things constantly change around them, so they need a center of gravity to hold their worlds together. The loving care of a mother provides the thread of relationship that in a nurturing way develops the child's security and worldview.

What kinds of pressures do you feel as a professional?

What's really difficult is the fact that the people you work with may not be limited by family responsibilities as you are. Teaching alongside a talented single woman who delights in spending evenings and weekends preparing wonderful lessons can be exciting, but it's also intimidating. The working mom struggles to barely make it to meetings on time without wearing part of her child's breakfast pasted to her suit. I also struggle with the awareness that I always know how to do better, but

rarely have the time to go the extra mile, which is what doing better always takes.

Why do you try to be a parent and a professional at the same time? Why not just do one for now and do the other later?

Well, I'm in my mid-thirties, so it's now or never with respect to having children. Besides, once you've got children that settles one part of the question. Regarding careers, though, choice is more of a factor. As I grew up I felt encouraged to pursue a career. In our typical American home Dad worked, and Mom stayed at home and cared for the children. To me that seemed confining. I saw my mother grow depressed over the endless piles of laundry and the craze of tending to the needs of children, and I believed that a woman need not be limited to such confinement. My parents encouraged me to pursue a career, and I did.

The other reason I work is financial. Without my working our family income would be severely limited, and that would also impact the home adversely. Ironically, life's responsibilities all seem to come due at the same time. Children's nurture, career development, and financial pressures all come due at once, and ordering one's responses requires much prayer and support.

How can others support working moms?

Dads can help by doing some of the obvious things that often get taken for granted; helping with the chores of family maintenance for instance. But even more important is the development of emotional bonds with children and strengthening the nurturing function of the home. If a mother is single the needs are even more pressing, and a loving church home becomes all the more essential.

Where is God in all this?

God gives us what we need to make it from day to day, but God also calls us to evaluate our lives. Career builds healthy pride and self-enhancement. Motherhood travels a path of humility and self-sacrifice.

There was a time that I desired the self-esteem provided by a career, but feeling the significance of the mothering bond causes me to pause. It wasn't until having children that I understood what mothering really is, and I began to see my mother's contribution in a new light. Mothering is exactly what my mother did. It involves self-sacrifice and nurturing the growing lives of children. In raising children, you don't get a dress rehearsal. It may be that God's leading me to prioritize my calling as a mother will cause me to make some difficult choices about finances and careers. I don't know for sure.

Does being a part of a Christian home make any difference?

Prayer helps me through the day-to-day anxiety of wondering how my children will do. God helps us to live the moment while it's here and to be present enough to be loving parents. The church also plays an even more critical role for the working-parent family. You may not be able to select your children's friends at the day care or at school, but church provides a social context for kids to develop Christian values and to receive peer support. Centrally, though, a living faith enables us to make the really tough choices if needed. Downward mobility may not be the wave of the culture, but if required by Love, God provides Light and the ability to walk in it.

Hearing this woman articulate her willingness to forfeit esteem and financial security caused me to swallow hard as I thought about the new home I was building in Newberg. As the interview came to a close, we both had one last cup of coffee before getting our kindergartner and two-month-old baby ready to go the sitter's. This time, however, I packed the diaper bag and selected the school clothes and prayed a little more earnestly that God would help me be more loving as a husband and dad. ■