

Work from Home
Moms'
Devotions to Go



**Leigh
DeLozier**

**Balancing
Work, Family
and
Community
without Losing
Yourself**

Moms' Devotions to Go Series

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Without Losing Yourself

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Dedication

For my Lord, who has blessed me in so many ways;

For Scott, Jonathan and Callie, who are the lights of my life;

In memory of Aunt Elizabeth, whose words of encouragement meant more than she ever knew.

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Introduction

Every mom is a working mom, whether she spends the day in power suits at corporate meetings, in her sweats while running errands all day with children in tow or in her pajamas at the computer long after her children are sleeping. All these women are special, but an important group exists in this collection of motherhood that's often overlooked: the moms who work from home.

I became one of these moms soon after the birth of our son in 1999. My husband and I didn't really plan for it; I had the opportunity to try being a freelance writer and God blessed us by making it work. Since then, I've experienced many good and not-so-good things associated with working from home – good things like having a flexible schedule and being available for the children, and not-so-good things like living on much less sleep than I'd like and struggling to balance work, home and family under the same roof.

If you find yourself facing some of these same challenges, I'm glad you picked up this book. God has taught me so much about myself, my family and my relationship with Him since I began working from home – and I believe He can do the same for you. All you need is a few minutes each day between the deadlines, laundry and toys to enjoy time with God. My prayer is that as you find that time for Him, He'll find a way to touch your heart and make you an even better work-from-home mom.

Constant Reminders

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

2 Peter 1:12, 15

I've never been a particularly coordinated or graceful person, and unfortunately, that hasn't improved very much with age. I've never broken any bones, but even as an adult I seem to always have bumps and bruises, and have several scars to show for various accidents.

One scar actually is special to me – a small raised white area almost in the middle of my right kneecap. As it stretches when I bend my knee, it looks a bit like a small cross, tilted slightly to the side. Most people will never notice that fact and will probably never pay much attention to the scar itself. But to me it's a constant reminder of God working in our lives as a family.

I'll never forget the day I acquired this addition to my scar inventory. It was Monday, May 3, 1999.

Earlier that spring I learned that our parent company was consolidating positions in some of its area hospitals. The marketing and public relations departments were the next target, which meant my job was on the line. Each of the four affected hospitals currently had one marketing representative; the consolidation meant that two people would be responsible for all four hospitals, and two people would no longer have jobs.

After considering the new job descriptions, going through interviews and waiting a month to hear the final decision, I learned on May 3 that I did not get one of the new positions.

That same morning, the lady who coordinated our hospital's senior activity group asked if I could do her a favor. She was scheduled to take the group to a museum exhibit that day, but had an emergency to handle. I sometimes helped with the group, so she asked if I could take the group instead.

So, less than two hours after learning I no longer had a job, I hit the road with a van full of senior citizens. The time away from the office was good – it helped me stay busy and focus on some things other than myself for a while.

The trip itself was basically uneventful. While my group finished lunch in the museum's café, I left to retrieve the hospital van. As I hurried down the museum's pebble-paved ramp, I slipped and fell. My clothes were still intact, but my right knee was a skinned-up bloody mess. I stood up, brushed myself off, walked several blocks to the van and returned for my group.

Once back at the hospital, closer inspection of the mess didn't show too much damage. I've had plenty of skinned knees in my life, and this one didn't look any worse than most of the others. But time has shown that this skinned knee was different after all. Because now I actually have a scar from it, a raised white ridge similar to a cross that reminds me every day of the turning point in my life when God led me to become a work-from-home mom.

Lord, please put constant reminders in my path to show me how blessed I am to be working at home while I care for my family.

Home Work Assignment

Think back to the time you became a work-from-home mom. How do you see God's hand leading you there?

Proud of Where I Am

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:18

I worked full-time for 11 years before our son Jonathan was born and I began my life as a work-from-home mom. I always enjoyed working, and missed some things about it once that phase of my life had passed. No, I didn't miss driving 40-plus miles to the office every day, but I did miss the friendships and the professional pride associated with my jobs.

It wasn't something I dwelt on, mainly because caring for Jonathan had become my number one job, and I was working on paying jobs whenever I could find them.

But one thing that did sometimes irritate me was the fact that I actually had more housework to do now than I'd had before. Once I began working from home, it was if a mysterious and silent shift took place that moved all the home responsibilities to me. The jobs my husband had been helping with for years were now mine as well.

I struggled with this periodically, and my husband and I talked about it. I prayed for God to help me be happy with where I was and to not get irritated or try to make myself into a martyr over the issue. After all, handling housework was a small price to pay for the chance to stay at home with Jonathan!

Then one day my attitude suddenly changed because of an incredibly simple thing. My husband had gotten home from work and changed into shorts and a t-shirt. He gave me a hug, and I got a full whiff of that wonderful clean smell that only comes from fresh laundry. I thought, "Mmm that smells good." That thought was immediately followed by, "I did that. He smells good because I washed his clothes for him."

It may sound silly, but that quick thought changed my perspective on “the housework” thing. At that moment I was proud to be the mom and wife, helping keep things together in our home. God has blessed me with the tremendous gift of working from home, and each and every thing associated with that gift – even the mundane things like laundry and dusting – are the little things He wants me to focus on right now. And I can be proud of myself and my work at home just as if I were on the job somewhere else.

Help me to remember that I'm where I am because that's where you want me to be. Open my heart and mind to be faithful and happy no matter where that may be.

Home Work Assignment

List three “little” things you don’t always enjoy about working from home. Thank God for them and ask Him to show you ways to accept them more.

Filling the Time

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

John 1:16

A relative called one beautiful fall afternoon to say that another family member was visiting for a few days. “We don’t have much going on tomorrow,” she said. “Why don’t you bring Jonathan for a visit?”

The words were well intentioned but still made me seethe inwardly at the moment. I had work to do – projects and deadlines for clients, not just the ever-present laundry pile, grocery shopping and house cleaning. A visit with the family would be nice, but would take up most of the day and keep me from getting any work done.

We agreed on a meeting time and place for the next morning. But once I hung up the phone I was in a huff, muttering to myself about how everyone seemed to assume that just because I was at home with Jonathan I could drop everything at a moment’s notice. They didn’t seem to understand that I wasn’t simply staying at home caring for Jonathan – I was working, too, which was why I was able to stay at home in the first place. They thought I rested when he napped and still took time to cross stitch each night before bedtime. They didn’t understand about the time I spent cranking out articles and such before he woke each morning, the many calls to clients and article sources during nap-times and the number of nights I’d spent editing articles or proofing brochures into the wee hours.

My self-righteous venting continued until I started listening to myself and realized how selfish I sounded. No, they didn’t understand what my usual day was like. No, they didn’t know about the challenges of shuffling work around a baby’s schedule. No, they didn’t realize how often I went through yet another day with less than 4 hours of sleep because I’d been trying to meet a deadline. But did that matter?

No, it didn't. What mattered was that I had a wonderful child who brought joy to so many people. What mattered was that I had friends and family who loved us and wanted to spend time with us. What mattered was that I was fortunate to be able to work from home, whatever the hour may be.

What mattered was I have a Father who lets me vent when I need it, but then gently reminds me how incredibly blessed I am.

Open my eyes to see what's really important on those days when I think the world doesn't understand the challenges that come with working from home. Thank you for blessing me with work that allows me to help provide for our family while spending more time with them.

Home Work Assignment

Look at your calendar today in terms of family instead of work. Call a friend or family member who would love to see your child and arrange for a time to see them.

Praying for the Smallest Things

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18

It was two weeks after the annual “fall back” time change, and I was about to go nuts. Gaining that extra hour of time had thrown Jonathan off his schedule more than I’d ever imagined and we were both getting tired of it.

My usual morning schedule included getting up soon after my husband, getting ready for the day and having at least an hour of work time before Jonathan ever woke up. But once the time changed, Jonathan began waking up at 6 a.m. – a big adjustment for a mom who’s used to being able to work until 7:30 or 8 instead. And the early rising time wasn’t the only thing – he’d also entered a no-napping phase.

This all hit during a couple of weeks when I had lots of projects with overlapping deadlines and was spending more nights than I’d like seeing the computer clock reach 2 a.m. or worse while I worked. By the end of the second week I was a stressed-out basket case.

During my prayer time that morning, I finally let go of my frustrations. “Lord, I’m so tired and stressed and frustrated because of all my deadlines,” I said. “Please help Jonathan sleep a little later this morning so I can get some work done. If you could just let him sleep until 8 or 8:30 and help him get a decent nap later, I would be so grateful. It’s such a little thing in the big scheme of things, but, Lord, it would help me so much.”

Did God hear my prayer? Of course He did. Did He answer it? Better than I’d ever hoped!

Jonathan roused up a couple of times, but then drifted back off and didn’t officially greet the day until 10:30. I was so incredibly grateful for all the work I’d been able to get done, I didn’t mind the fact that he probably

wouldn't take a nap after sleeping in so late. But God had heard my prayer, and decided to answer both parts of it for me.

After breakfast, Jonathan and I ran a couple of errands in town. He began looking a little sleepy in the store, and drifted off on the way back home. He slept through the ride home, the shift from his car seat, the removal of coat and shoes and the transition into bed. He kept on sleeping for almost three hours, so I was able to finish all the work I'd been worried about – and get a head start on the next week's projects.

Sometimes we tend to think we should only ask God for the big things – that He doesn't care about or doesn't have time for the minutia of our lives. How wrong we are to think that way! The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing, to pray for everything and to ask God for anything we need. He does hear, and He does answer. My prayer for Jonathan's sleep was absolutely nothing compared to the prayers of millions of other people in the world who needed God's care that day. But if He cared enough to answer my prayer in the midst of all those others, I know He'll always hear and answer my requests in His own time – even if it's just for a little boy to take a decent nap.

Thank you for always hearing my prayers – the big and the small, the important and the mundane. Just the thought of you hearing me in the midst of everything else in this world overwhelms me with gratitude.

Home Work Assignment

Spend some time in prayer with God today, and tell Him everything that's on your mind. Don't just bring Him the big stuff – talk with Him about the little things, too, and see what a difference it makes.

Out Give God? No Way!

One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Proverbs 11:24-25

I've always heard that no matter what your circumstance is, you can't out give God. That has become more and more clear to me since I began the journey of a work-from-home mom who is reminded every day that my financial resources are more a gift from God than ever before.

During the first several months that I was at home, I searched high and low for jobs and for clients that could help pay our bills. I had a few projects here and there, but was a long way from finding checks in our mailbox on a regular basis. Things were tight, and we cut corners wherever we could in order to keep me at home.

Though I'm ashamed to say so now, one area where we made cuts during that time was our church giving. But some weeks it seemed like we were doing well to buy diapers and baby food and pay the bills, let alone have extra for church. So church contributions went by the wayside, and we continued to struggle.

We began to hit a turning point seven or eight months after I'd come home. We made the conscious decision to begin giving to church again, even if it seemed like there wasn't money there to do it. We started writing checks every two weeks after my husband was paid, and began to see some changes.

Projects with my primary client became more established, so I had a check coming from them every month. I hooked up with several other clients who began sending me work on a fairly regular basis. A former neighbor helped me land a weekly assignment with the local section of the Atlanta newspaper.

None of this happened overnight, but it began to look like the work-from-home scenario was going to work after all. We continued to give to church, and I continued to get work on a regular basis. Why? Some people would probably say that I'd paid my dues – that I'd networked enough to find good work possibilities or that I'd finally just gotten lucky on the job front. That may be partly true, but I don't think those are the real reasons behind my work success.

I believe God used our situation to teach us a lesson about His generosity and kindness. He teaches that all gifts come from Him, and that we should return a portion of those gifts to Him in thanks for what He's done. He also teaches that He'll look after us and will provide us with whatever we need, no matter how dire the circumstances. Once we got our priorities back in order and began "finding" the income to give to God, He was quick to remind us that no matter how much we give Him, He'll always give us more.

*I've learned, Lord, that you are true to your word and always give us more than we could ever hope to give you.
Remind us of that always, especially when financial times are tough.*

Home Work Assignment

Think about how you supported the church financially before beginning to work from home and then think about your current contributions. How do the two lists compare? If you've had to make some financial adjustments, are there other ways you can contribute instead?

Christmas Cutbacks

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

James 1:17

I'm usually an early-season Christmas shopper – always have been, and probably always will be. By the time our first Christmas rolled around after I'd begun working from home, we'd been through some pretty tight times while I built up enough clients to get work on a regular basis. We'd adjusted to our new financial situation by cutting corners in quite a few areas, but I hadn't thought much about how our situation affected others until it was time to shop for the holidays.

That's not to say that we spent tons of money on gifts during previous years. But once my husband became the only regular source of income in the family, we had to acknowledge it and face the reality that we didn't need to spend as much money as we had before.

I didn't mind the thought of not having many gifts for myself, but I did wonder how some people on our recipient list would feel about getting smaller gifts than in the past.

Fortunately, the Lord didn't let me worry about this too long before He reminded me that what's under the tree is really the least important part of Christmas. Much more important things – like spending time with family and friends, enjoying the small pleasures in life like Jonathan's first curious introduction to our Christmas tree and Nativity scene, and realigning our priorities to focus on the reason we celebrate Christmas in the first place – are really what matter. And no matter how much money we spend on gifts for those we love, the greatest Gift by far has already been given to each of us by the most generous Giver of all.

Thank you, Lord, for the wonderful Gift of Jesus. Help me appreciate that Gift more by seeing Christmas through my child's eyes and experiencing the wonder of your love for me.

Home Work Assignment

How has your gift-giving throughout the year (not just at the holidays) changed since you began working from home? How do you teach your children to appreciate the meaning behind the gifts rather than the packages themselves?

Spinning Out of Control

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

When Jonathan was born, my husband and I were the only couple in our church choir with an infant. Since I sang and my husband directed, that meant Jonathan came to practice with us every Wednesday night.

As an infant, he naturally slept most of the time – and he certainly wasn't lacking for arms to sleep in. Soprano, alto, tenor, bass – he hung out with all the sections at one time or another.

When he was a few months older and was able to sit up on his own really well, we began bringing his Exersaucer with us every week. He initially would bang around and play with the toys some, but not move too much. Then he learned how to spin himself around in the seat, and choir practice became much more entertaining. He would clasp his hands behind his head, look up at the ceiling and spin around and around as fast as he could, laughing all the time. You can bet he had a few other people laughing with him, too – sometimes more than they were singing.

How many times have you been stuck spinning in your own version of life's Exersaucer, but were there because someone else threw you in the seat, not because you wanted to be there? It's so easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of it all – cooking, cleaning, family, deadlines, clients, church ... you know the list all too well. If you're lucky you're at least strapped in the seat most days instead of being flung around like a rag doll.

The trick is to find a few minutes for yourself amid the craziness – that quiet place for God to speak to you and remind you of His presence. Take a deep breath, close your eyes and try to hear His still, small voice as a steady

force supporting everything else around you. Maybe if you can find His voice nearby you'll even be able to look up at the ceiling and laugh as you spin around one more time.

It's so easy to get caught up in the crazy things of life and feel like everything is spinning out of our control. Help me remember that you are the Master, even in the madness, and help me to hear your voice and feel your presence helping me deal with it all.

Home Work Assignment

Write down the things that feel totally out of your control this week, and how you wish they were different. Take them to God and ask Him to help you feel His presence in each situation.

Fighting Mad

I will lead the blind along ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. I will not forsake them.

Isaiah 42:16

One of Jonathan's favorite toys from an early age was a foam baseball with vinyl covering. He would throw it, suck on it and pass it from hand to hand. Some days he would crawl to his toy basket and dump everything out in the floor just to get to it.

When he began teething, the baseball came in handy for gnawing on. My husband and I didn't think much about it until one night when Jonathan seemed to be continually smacking on something. I checked in his mouth, but didn't find anything unusual. A while later I realized that he wasn't just sucking on the baseball like he usually did. He was putting it to his mouth, biting down and tugging it back out. And since he now had top and bottom teeth, he was able to clamp down on it harder than before.

When I saw what he was doing, I did the unthinkable in his mind – I took the favorite baseball away from him. A quick check showed that he had ripped the vinyl off in two spots, which is what he seemed to be chewing on so intently.

Once again I probed Jonathan's mouth, with my husband helping hold him still. He screamed as if we were skinning him alive. But this time I hit pay dirt, pulling out two circles of blue and red vinyl.

Of course, Jonathan was too small to understand that we were doing something for his own good. All he knew was that we were doing something he didn't like, and he wasn't at all shy about letting us know.

How many times are we like that in our own lives? Something doesn't go our way, and suddenly we're fighting mad, focusing on our own desires and oblivious to everything around us. Maybe I'm angry or resentful because I didn't get a job I'd hoped for. Maybe I did get the job, but now it's driving me crazy in some way. Maybe I've planned everything out and know exactly what I want to do and how to get there – but God knows that the path I'm on isn't what I need.

But just like I knew that Jonathan couldn't be left alone to choke on pieces from his ball, God knows we don't always need to be left alone to our own devices, either. He's always keeping an eye on us, taking away things that could hurt us and steering us along the path we should take, even if it makes us angry in the meantime.

Thank you for watching out for me and for steering me away from harm. Help me be open to the changes and remember that you truly want what is best for me, no matter what I think at the moment.

Home Work Assignment

Write a note to God about something you've been fighting with Him (or someone else) about. Ask Him to forgive your stubbornness and help you give the situation to Him.

Always Trusting

For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, "Do not fear; I will help you."

Isaiah 41:13

One of the most wonderful aspects of a baby's personality is his implicit trust in everyone and everything around him, especially his parents. Of course, that automatic trust begins to fade with experience, but wouldn't it be great if you could recapture that feeling of ultimate trust on command?

When Jonathan first began rolling, then crawling and then walking, he seemed to have no fear whatsoever. If he saw something he wanted, he moved toward it however he could and didn't know to anticipate consequences like whacking his head on the table corner or being swatted at by a cat who'd had too much "baby love" for one day.

When he did start having a few reservations about being adventurous, he would automatically turn to my husband or me and reach for our hand before taking the big step toward his goal. It was as if holding our hand was the magic charm that would help him be brave and not get hurt.

Unfortunately, we drop that hand to hold on to as we get older and are determined to be self-sufficient. But those of us who are Christians have another, more powerful hand that never lets go, even when we aren't thinking about it.

God promises that He will uphold us in His glorious hand, and I know that is true. There have been times in my life when I've focused too much on trying to do things on my own and forget to put my complete trust in Him. This can be especially true with work, considering how unpredictable a freelance writer's income can be. And then I wonder why I'm stressed, tired and can't seem to be moving anywhere near where I'd hoped to be! Once I catch myself trying to run the show and realize I need to hand things back to the One who's really in control –

and I mean really hand it off, not just say I will and then continue to fret – situations begin to smooth themselves out.

After all the times I've seen it happen, I shouldn't be so stubborn about trying to handle things myself. I'm not sure if I'm extra slow or just extra human, but it seems I continue to learn that lesson. Even if things don't fall into place overnight, just the sense of overwhelming peace that comes with truly trusting Him should be enough to help me renew my commitment to it every day.

Thank you for always holding my hand and helping me along, even on the days I tend to forget about it.

Strengthen my faith in knowing that you're there with me, no matter what.

Home Work Assignment

Think of at least three ways you can hold your child's hand today, whether it's literally or figuratively. Look for opportunities to follow through with it and show your support.

Time Away from It All

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.

Mark 1:35

I spent what I consider to be my first “real” time away from Jonathan as a weekend in the north Georgia mountains with several girl friends from our Sunday school class. It was early spring, and Jonathan was almost 14 months old.

It was a big weekend for several reasons. First, it was the first time my husband had Jonathan all to himself for more than a stretch of a few hours – the guys were about to have their first stint of mealtime, playtime, bath time and bedtime all to themselves.

Second, it was the first time I had ever taken a weekend trip with the girls. My husband frequently enjoyed fishing or other activities with his friends, and usually had several overnights during the year. But this was the first time I was “running off with the girls” in almost ten years of marriage, and I could hardly wait.

Third, it was the first time I would be away from Jonathan for more than one night, and the first time I would be away from him when my husband wasn’t with me. I knew that part would probably be hard, and I did feel a little guilty about it.

But then I reminded myself that my time away was as much for my family as for myself. I wasn’t being selfish – I was taking care of myself and taking time to truly relax with no laundry, deadlines or early-morning risings to worry about.

It's easy to get caught up in the everyday whirl of being the resident laundress, cook, maid, playmate and more. The challenge becomes even greater when you add work to the "home front" equation and don't have an easy separation between work and home. But Jesus Himself understood the need to step away from the world's craziness and renew Himself spiritually and physically. He knew that you need to give time to yourself before you can keep giving to those around you.

Otherwise, you'll just become a tired, cranky mess who's no good to anyone.

Jesus wasn't ignoring His followers on His trips to the mountains or across the lake, just like I wasn't ignoring my family. And, just like I'm sure the time away helped Him get focused on His work and gather strength to keep moving toward His inevitable goal, my weekend in the mountains was a wonderful experience.

No more guilty feelings about taking quick trips for myself now. As a matter of fact, the more I take them, the more we all appreciate them.

Help me know that no matter how much I love being with my family, sometimes I need time just for myself. Bless me with opportunities to renew myself for you and for my family, and help me see those opportunities as the gifts that they are.

Home Work Assignment

If you had an entire day all to yourself, how would you spend it? Talk with your husband about it tonight and begin to figure out a way to make it happen.

From 1 to 2

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3:18

When I began working from home, getting projects done around Jonathan's schedule wasn't too difficult. He was a good sleeper from day one, so I was often able to work in the morning before he woke, then during his morning and afternoon naps. I stayed up late some nights to finish things, but it wasn't an every-night ordeal.

Then Callie was born, and everything changed. She didn't settle into a set napping pattern until she was almost a year old. Instead, she preferred to catnap – 10 minutes here, 15 minutes there – throughout the day. She spent a lot of time snoozing in her bouncy seat beside my computer desk so I could work while Jonathan napped after lunch. I felt guilty about it, but didn't know what else to do.

When she did begin to nap on a regular basis, trying to get her nap to coincide with Jonathan's was a major feat. I was thrilled if I had even an hour of time when they were both asleep.

As my window for work-time during naps shrank, I began squeezing in bits of work throughout the day. It was easy to check email or send a fax because my "office" was in the den where we were playing. I would try to make quick phone calls to clients who would understand about the unpredictable background noise of children. Staying up late to get the job done became the rule more often than the exception.

I admit there were times when I longed for the days of babies who slept until mid-morning and then snoozed away half the afternoon. But does the stress of getting everything done with a revamped work schedule mean I'd rather go back to having only one child because it was easier? Of course not! Just as I can't imagine life today without Jonathan and his action heroes and astronauts, I can't imagine it without Callie and her Disney princesses and polished toenails.

God loves each of us in our own special way and has more than enough love and care to reach everyone, just like we do with our own children. And just as I always managed to get all my work done with only one child to care for, God is helping me do the same with two.

Thank you for your never-ending love and for the attention you give each of us. Help me follow your example and do the same with my own children.

Home Work Assignment

It can be easy to find ways to fit in work around children. Today, look for ways you can fit in children around your work.

Always Right Behind Us

The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simple-hearted; when I was in great need, He saved me.

Psalm 116:5 – 6

When the children discovered the joy of viewing the world from an upright position instead of just lying flat on their backs, it was an exciting transition. No more happy staring at the ceiling – they wanted to check out the world from a much more interesting angle! They were still pretty wobbly about it, but loved nothing more than to sit up for as long as possible before the inevitable swaying and toppling over began. Then it was a look or sound directed to me that said, “I want back up!”, and we did it again to their great satisfaction.

As they got better at it, I didn’t sit quite as close to them as before. But I was still nearby, keeping a watchful eye and ready to catch them if the inevitable fall looked to be particularly bumpy.

Isn’t God with us in just the same way? Whether we realize it or not, He’s always right behind us.

He blesses us with the intelligence and desire to try new things, but even as He gives us the space to be ourselves He’s also always watching over our shoulder, ready to catch us whenever we fall, make the bumps a little easier to bear, and help us back on our way.

That’s a comforting thought to me, especially where my work is concerned. My husband and I didn’t map out a plan to prepare for me working from home. The opportunity created itself when my job was eliminated, and we decided to give it a try. I love working from home and believe this is where God wants me to be right now – otherwise, I don’t think He would keep blessing me with work. Some weeks are easy and others aren’t, but at least I know God is ready to give whatever help I might need along the way.

Thank you for the gifts of independence and discovery, and the freedom you give me to try new things. Thank you, too, that you're always watching over my shoulder, ready to catch me when some of those new adventures are too much for me to handle on my own.

Home Work Assignment

Pay attention today to ways God is right behind you whether it's with family, friends and work. Write them down before bedtime as reminders on the days it's hard to see Him near.

Going for the Fringe

You need to persevere, so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:36

Neither of our children went through much of a crawling stage. Once they began to be mobile, Callie wiggled and scooted everywhere and Jonathan rolled.

Watching him get from one place to another entertained us time and time again. He would lay on his stomach or back, looking around for the next thing to explore. Once he found it, he would begin rolling over and over in that general direction. He would stop after a few rolls and look around to reassess the situation. Then he would sigh, grunt or smile and begin rolling again. He would repeat the entire process as many times as necessary to finally reach his goal.

One of his favorite things to check out at my parents' home was the fringe on their den rug. He would sometimes get a bit confused since fringe was in every direction, but he never seemed to tire of trying to reach it. Once there, he would twist it around his fingers or just lay there patting it and being proud of himself. He was a great study in determination without even realizing it.

How many times do we set goals or see things we're interested in, only to get distracted or frustrated along the way and give up? Or worse yet, how many times do we believe God has a goal for us but we never reach it because we're afraid to start moving in that direction?

It's so easy to get excited about a goal and begin to work toward it with all the best intentions – whether it's something personal or something for work. But it's also easy to get lost somewhere along the way and never make it to the end. That can happen for many different reasons, but I believe one of the primary ones is because

we somehow allow the world to get in our way instead of keeping focused on God and asking for His help along the way.

We all know it's not easy, but Paul reminds us that we should keep going despite the obstacles. "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me," he wrote the Philippians. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12b, 13b).

Just as Paul was convinced that God had called him to certain tasks, He has also called you and me. May we have Paul's conviction and Jonathan's determination as we set out toward that goal.

Thank you for the goals you have set for me and the privilege of being used for your kingdom. Help me remember that you're with me and will do whatever it takes to help me fulfill your plan.

Home Work Assignment

Divide a sheet of paper into 3 columns – family, work and personal. Think about goals you have for each area and ask God to show you which things He wants you to focus on. Post the list where you'll see it often and ask God to help keep you on track.

Morning Babbles

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.

Deuteronomy 4:39

One of my favorite things to hear every morning when Jonathan was a baby was the way he woke up. My husband is one of those people who wakes up and gets out of bed almost immediately; Callie usually is the same way. But not me, and not Jonathan, either.

We'd rather greet the world slowly. Let the eyes close again for a few minutes of light snoozing. Stretch slowly and fully, usually with a little satisfying "aaaahhh." Then decide whether it's time to think about greeting the day.

I could tell when Jonathan had reached that point each morning because he began to talk. It would be quiet at first, usually directed at the toys in his crib. Then the babbling grew a little louder and more animated, punctuated with little boy laughs. When the babbling reached his normal voice level and I heard him moving around in the crib, I knew he was fully awake and definitely ready to play. The whole process usually only took a few minutes, but it made a difference in how his day began. I learned that if I went to pick him up as soon as I heard him, he was confused and sometimes a little upset because he wasn't fully awake. If I waited, he was awake and agreeable.

I hope both the children find other ways to start their days on the right foot as they get older. One of my devotions many years ago said, "My day's always better when I start it with God." How very true! I try to have some devotional time each morning before the children get up, but sometimes it just doesn't happen. It might be because they get up early, it might be because I've overslept, it might be because I'm trying to cram in a bit of

deadline work while I have a few minutes. Whatever the excuse might be, it doesn't sound like a valid reason when I stop to think about it.

As a baby, Jonathan started his days by chatting with his stuffed animals. I pray that he'll learn – and that I'll continue to remember – that the days in later life will always be better when he starts them out by chatting with God.

The first few minutes after I wake up often set the tone for my whole day. Help one of my first thoughts each day to be of you and your love for me, and how I need your strength and your help to get through each day.

Home Work Assignment

Make a card for yourself that reads, “My day’s always better when I start it with God.” Stick it on your nightstand, bathroom mirror or other place you’ll be sure to see it as a reminder each morning.

Turf Battles

Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:12b

When I first began working from home, our extra bedroom served as my office as well as the catch-all room for lots of other things. I had my computer and desk in there, plus two small filing cabinets, my fax machine and everything else that comes with running a business from home. This worked fine until I became pregnant with Callie, which meant my “office” would need to become the baby’s room.

Finding new places for everything in that room proved quite challenging, considering we didn’t have a bonus room or basement. The ironing board took up permanent residence in our bedroom. One tall bookcase moved to Jonathan’s room; the other ended up in the hall. I covered one file cabinet with a cloth and used it as a makeshift table in the corner of Callie’s room. The other file cabinet, desk and computer hutch had to go in the den.

Adjusting to this loss of “my” space wasn’t easy. The computer I’d bought for work became more entrenched as the family computer, with new games and programs seeming to be installed on it overnight. Remote controls, phone books and mail cluttered what used to be my relatively clean computer workspace. Pages for work got buried under Internet printouts, making me dig frantically through piles in a deadline-induced frenzy.

Learning to live with the new setup was an exercise in patience and sharing. I still have days when the battle between space for my work versus space for home drives me crazy, but I try to be more flexible about it. God has a great way of continually reminding us of the lessons we need to learn. Right now He’s helping me remember the importance of working together to deal with situations – and that working from home is a blessing no matter what. And if I’m ever able to have space for “my” office again, He sure is helping me prepare to appreciate it.

Bless me with patience as I deal with the confusion and clutter that sometimes go with working from home. Help me not be so territorial about my things and help my family respect my need for some designated work space.

Home Work Assignment

Don't let the combined clutter of work projects, school calendars and bills to pay take over your work space! Sort through everything and then get some colorful folders, baskets or letter trays to help keep things in their places. The children can even help you decorate them with stickers or artwork.

Up in the Night

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.

Isaiah 66:13

The cry woke me from a dead sleep. The row of lights on Callie's monitor flashed bright green, then red as her cry intensified. With eyes half opened, I raised up on one elbow to see what time it was. 2:13 a.m. Ugh. It had been another late night at the computer and I'd been in bed for less than an hour.

I thumped back on my pillow, feeling bone weary and wishing she'd go back to sleep. A long, pitiful sounding "Maaaaaamaaaa" let me know that she probably wouldn't.

I climbed from bed and blearily stumbled through the house to Callie's room. There she was, standing in her crib with tears rolling down her face as she clutched the railing. Her cry shifted to a whimpering sob when she saw me, then faded away almost as soon as I picked her up. She wrapped her chubby arms around my neck and nestled her head on my shoulder. She snuffled, then sighed contentedly as she prepared to drift back to sleep. I stood there with her for a few minutes, murmuring and swaying gently back and forth while stroking her hair. My own heavy eyelids dropped and I half-dozed while standing with her.

She was ready to get back in her crib after a few minutes. I put her down and was rewarded with a sleepy half-smile as I tucked her back in. I closed the door softly behind me and half smiled to myself on the way back to my own bed.

How many times have I gotten up during the night with Callie in her short life? I have no idea, but it seems like a lot. How many times has my Heavenly Father been there for me when I've cried in the middle of the night? I have no idea about that either, but know that His monitor is always tuned to me just as mine is to Callie's and He hears my every cry, whether it's a soft whimper or a deep-seated wail. It's comforting to know that even

though we outgrow baby monitors and moms who stumble through the dark to find us, the One who neither slumbers nor sleeps is always ready to lift us in His arms for a few minutes of comfort.

Thank you for always being ready to hold us and love us, no matter what time of day or night we need you. Give me patience when my children rouse me from sleep and fill me with the same compassion that you feel for me.

Home Work Assignment

Think about the last time you had to fulfill your children's demands following a night of very little sleep. What was your gut reaction, and how did you actually treat them? Write a promise to yourself of how you want to act in these situations.

Why, Why, Why???

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ephesians 3:12

Jonathan and Callie both hit the infamous “why?” stage that every child goes through when they were almost 3. And they hit it with a vengeance, with no warning at all – one day things were rocking along like normal, and the next they were asking “Why?” about anything and everything in sight. If I’d had a nickel for every time they asked “Why?” in those early days, we would have had quite a collection by the end of the first week.

The questions would start out easily enough, but get more complicated to answer as they went along. And I soon learned that I had to give some sort of answer – however silly it may have been – in order to satisfy them. Otherwise, the chant of “Why, Mama? Why, Mama? Why, Mama?” would continue indefinitely.

I’d heard many parents say that this was the most frustrating phase they went through with their children, and I soon could see why. But as frustrating as it was, I reminded myself that they were just trying to learn, and I attempted to give legitimate answers whenever I could.

Then one day I realized that children in this phase are doing the same thing to us that we do to God on a regular basis – asking why, why, why. “Why haven’t you answered my prayer, Lord?” “Why didn’t I get that new job that would’ve helped make ends meet easier?” “Why can’t I understand what you want me to do?” “Why do I have such a hard time dealing with this client?” “Why is my friend who has gone through so much already having even more problems now?” The list goes on and on.

And yet, no matter how long my list of “whys” is for God, He’s always there to hear them. The Bible shows time and again that many of God’s people had no qualms about asking Him why, whether it was Moses doubting his ability to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt or the Psalmist asking why his enemies seemed to be at

every turn. I think this shows that God doesn't mind when we ask Him why. Instead, I think He wants us to think through and question things so we can learn for ourselves and communicate with Him instead of never questioning anything.

That's not to say that there aren't plenty of things for us to accept in blind faith, because there are. But I think God is like any parent or teacher among us – He enjoys having a curious student who isn't afraid to ask why things are the way they are. And, fortunately for those of us who find ourselves constantly asking Him "Why?" He has a lot more patience and much better answers than I sometimes did with Jonathan and Callie. All I have to do is stop asking "Why?" long enough to hear some of His answers.

I get frustrated with constantly answering my children's questions about why things are a certain way, and yet I don't give a second thought to barraging you with the same type of questions every day. Thank you for your infinite patience and the loving ways you always answer my questions, if only I'll take the time to listen for you.

Home Work Assignment

Write a list of “Why?” questions your children have asked you lately, then write a list of your own “Why?” questions for God. Which list is longer? Are there any similarities? Ask God to give you patience as you answer your children’s questions and as you wait for His answers to your own.

Guilty as Charged

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

“Mama, can you help me with this?”

“Yes, sweetie, just a minute – let me check email right quick.”

“But, Mama, I need help now.”

“I know, sweetie. I’ll be right there.”

“Mama, pleeeeeeease...”

Those types of exchanges happen in our home more often than I’d like, and represent one of my biggest challenges with working from home – truly balancing family and work. Working from home brings so many blessings and advantages. The “good” list includes things like the flexibility to help with the children’s school activities, being able to watch every amazing change as they grow, and being able to attend Bible study most weeks.

But there’s a “bad” list, too – things like rarely having “down” time because of fitting in work around every nook and cranny of the day, routinely going on less sleep than when the children were babies, and feeling like I don’t have enough time to relax and play with the children despite being at home with them.

That lack of time with the children is what I feel most guilty about. It seems like there are always articles to write, emails to send, faxes to expect, deadlines to meet. And while those are good because they keep me at

home, they're bad because they take time away from the children – which is why I want to be home in the first place.

Every mom is a working mom, whether she drops the kids off and heads to the office every day, runs errands all day with children in tow, or works at the computer in her pajamas while everyone else sleeps. And I think every mom feels guilty sometimes about not spending as much time with her children as she'd like.

There's always work to be done, but there's also always fun to be had. May the One who always has time for everything – and everyone – help us to always find ways to spend special time with the ones we love.

I'm so blessed to work from home, and I thank you for that with all my heart. But my heart is also torn because I feel guilty about the amount of time my work seems to take away from my family. Help me find a balance between work, family and friends that will enrich all our lives.

Home Work Assignment

Find two or three times today when you can spend time with your family and forget about work. Even if it's only for a few minutes, turn off your email, take the phone off the hook and soak up the blessing of being with people you love.

The Lonely Life

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 18:24

Anyone who works from home will probably agree that it has many advantages. I love taking occasional holidays from makeup and curling irons and can't argue about the relaxed dress code. I love having the time with my children, even if I don't always get to actually play with them as much as I'd like. I love being able to go on their school trips and help with holiday parties without asking a boss' approval. And I certainly love the "commute" from the bedroom to the den a lot more than I ever liked the 40-plus mile drive to my old office every day.

But even so, there are some things from my previous career that I still miss, no matter how long I work from home. I miss sitting around a break room table sharing warm bagels and laughs with coworkers on a Friday morning. I miss feeding off other people's adrenaline and sharing the excitement as we completed big projects together. I miss the adult conversation and companionship that came from working with people I enjoyed.

These things don't bother me on most days, but sometimes they make me a bit sad. I'm envious of the stories my husband comes home telling about friends at work. I'm disappointed when people don't seem to put much stock in my career because it's based from home rather than a big office downtown. I'm lonely without the face-to-face time I used to have with customers and coworkers.

Fortunately, God knows when I begin to feel this way and He's right there to help bolster my spirits and put things in perspective. Sometimes it's through a song I hear on the radio or a tune that unexpectedly pops in my mind. Sometimes it's through an email or phone call from a friend I haven't talked with in a long time. Sometimes it's a special smile from the children or a "thank you" from my husband that melts my heart all over again.

However the message comes, its bottom line is always the same – God blessed me with the opportunity to work from home, and He’s with me each step of the way. Whether I’m tired, frustrated or lonely, He understands how I feel because He’s been there Himself. What a joy it is to have the most understanding friend of all to keep me company during the ups and downs.

Thank you for always keeping me company as I work from home. Thank you for reminding me how blessed I am to be here, even on the days when I’m lonely.

Home Work Assignment

Think of people in your life you haven't talked with lately or who might be lonely. Take time today to call, send an email or write a note that says you're thinking about them.

Amid the Chaos

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

Isaiah 59:1

The phone is pinned in place on my shoulder as I talk to my husband. I'm talking with him, but he's far from having all my attention.

I'm sitting at the computer, answering a client's email as he talks about his day. Fragments of an article I've been working on float in the back of my mind. Callie stands at my knee repeating, "My talk Daddy? My talk Daddy?" to show she wants her turn with the phone. "Mama, check this out!" Jonathan calls from across the room, where he proudly displays his latest Lego creation. And behind it all, the radio plays in the background.

Total chaos? Three-ring circus? You could say so. But that's how many days are around our house and – I'd think – the homes of any families with young children. Everything is go, go, go from the time we get up until the time we fall asleep rocking the children at night (yes, there are plenty of naptimes and nighttimes when my husband or I doze off in the chair before the children do). The moments of silence – or even single-level conversations – are few. Yet somehow we manage to keep up with the bulk of what's going on around us.

Moments like mine at the computer make me wonder how in the world God keeps up with everything. If the children are being too loud for me to hear something my husband said, I can always ask him to repeat it. But God hears everything from everyone all the time – the first time. While I might just catch the highlights of the three simultaneous conversations at home, God hears every word. Millions of people might be praying to Him at the same time I am, yet He hears my voice as if I'm the only one with Him.

What a wonderful gift to know that He hears us clearly and understands the feelings behind our words, even amid the noise and chaos of everyday life.

Thank you that even when the world around me is loud and crazy, you hear my every thought and prayer. It's a privilege to know that you hear me as if I was the only one in your presence.

Home Work Assignment

Set a goal today to only focus on one conversation at a time. When the phone rings or when your children talk to you, stop what you're doing and really pay attention. Write a note to yourself at bedtime about how the "experiment" went and what you learned from it.

Leave the Laundry

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

Luke 10:40a

I believe that discipline is one of the most important characteristics you need if you want to work from home. People may think it's easy to get sidetracked in an office because of coworkers and coffee breaks, but many days I have a harder time buckling down at home.

No, I don't have someone beside me to chat with, but I can do that just as easily online. I don't have hours-long lunches at fancy restaurants, but it's easy to forget the clock if I flip on the TV while I eat my sandwich. And I have potential derailers everywhere at home that I never had in the office – the house itself, where toys need picking up, toilets need cleaning, dishes need washing and laundry needs sorting. It's an ever-present temptation to pull me away from the work I need to do.

But it also sometimes pulls me away from the children. When I have one of those rare days of no real work to worry about, the things around the house that need doing seem to jump at me from everywhere. The children want to go outside or play a game, but the mountain of laundry covering the bed is driving me crazy. The children want to hang out and read books, but I can hardly find the kitchen counter underneath the dirty dishes.

How I handle these situations depends on the day. My goal is to always have time for the children – after all, they're why I want to work from home in the first place. But as they grow older they understand that sometimes I have to put work first instead even though none of us may like it.

The housework usually ends up at the bottom of the priority list, as unexpected visitors can see. But there are other days when “to do's” around the house bug me so much that I have to take care of some of them before I can focus on my work. Balancing the “big three” – work, home and family – is sure to be an ongoing challenge

for me as long as I work from home. I just pray that God helps me keep it all in perspective so I can give the care and attention to all three that they deserve.

I'm so blessed to work from home, but sometimes it's hard to focus on the very work that you bless me with.

Please help me prioritize everything in my work, family and home lives so I can bring glory to you.

Home Work Assignment

Read the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Divide a page into three columns: Mary, Martha and Changes. Write ways you tend to be like Mary or Martha, and how you would like to change. Pick one of those changes and look for ways today that you can improve in that area.

Hearing Myself

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

Callie wandered around the house talking to imaginary friends on her toy phone. She made it into the kitchen – still chattering – where my husband and I were talking as we finished cooking dinner.

“Be quiet – I’m on the phone,” Callie ordered us. She didn’t say it in an ugly way, but she sounded pretty serious.

My husband raised his eyebrows and gave me a wonder-where-that-came-from look. I didn’t have to wonder. I’ve said some variation of those words many times, either while I was on the phone or as I was preparing to answer it – especially when a client was involved.

Children are like little sponges from day one, soaking up anything and everything around them. Our gestures, our expressions, our words – nothing is off limits as they learn and grow. That’s why I believe it’s especially important for us to be aware of what we say and do around children – we really are shaping every aspect of their lives.

The question I ask myself is, “Who’s shaping my life?” Whose words, thoughts and attitudes do I imitate? Am I falling into the trap of gossiping with my coworkers or friends, or am I trying to find nice things to say instead? Are those not-so-nice words that I hear all around me slipping into my thoughts, or am I working to keep my thoughts pure? Am I saying ugly things and making faces at the driver who cuts me off, or am I practicing patience?

I've learned that whatever I surround myself with becomes a "normal" part of my life. I won't say that I never listen to pop radio or watch junk on TV. But I try not to get too carried away with it because I know how quickly it begins to permeate my thoughts and actions and how that can take me away from where I want to be.

God created us in His image and wants us to be a reflection of Him. Don't you think it makes Him happy when we work to keep that image clean, pure and focused on Him?

Thank you for honoring us by creating us in your image. Take over my heart, mind and soul so that I'm a shining reflection of you.

Home Work Assignment

What kinds of attitudes do your children see you have about work, family or church? Talk with them about how much our attitudes and actions influence the people around us. Write “PMA” (Positive Mental Attitude) on stickers or sticky notes for your family to place as constant reminders – in the house, the car, school lockers, desk drawers, calendars – throughout their day.

Bible Study or Work?

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

One of my biggest “pros” to working from home is that I’m able to attend Bible study each week with friends at church. Our group has expanded and changed over the years just as our individual faiths have. We have retirees, middle-agers and twenty- or thirty-somethings who share, learn and love together week in and week out. These times have become very special for me, and some of my clients know they’ll rarely reach me at home on a Tuesday morning.

But there can be exceptions to my “standing meeting” time, especially when projects pile up and deadlines loom. A little voice nags at me, trying to convince me that the hours spent at Bible study are better spent at my computer, planting doubts that I’ll be able to finish the work if I go to church. “What if Callie doesn’t nap this afternoon?” the voice asks. “If you miss working this morning while she’s at preschool and then she doesn’t nap, you’re a goner.”

It’s easy to let that voice convince me that I should stay at home and plug away at the work instead of taking the time for myself – and God. Sometimes the deadline is so close or the time is so important that I do stay home and work. The project may get done, but part of me feels empty because of the time missed with friends.

As I’ve fought this battle over the years, I’ve learned to anticipate things as much as possible and to work around my Bible study time. Just as I make time to exercise in the mornings, I need to make time for study and fellowship. Some weeks it means I stay up extra late on Monday night to get the work done. Some weeks it means I go to Bible study without completing all of my homework because my other work has kept me so busy. Some weeks it means I’m a few minutes late because I have to fax or email something to a client before leaving

home. But in our group that's OK – we're just glad to see each other whenever we can get there and with whatever amount of journaling we've completed.

Just like my friends love and accept me just because I'm there, I think it also pleases God that I put Him first on those mornings. And more often than not, Callie seems to have wonderful naps on Tuesday afternoons that allow me to get every bit of work done that I might have worried about. I see it as one of the many ways that God reminds me that whenever I put Him first, He steps in to take care of everything else.

It's easy to get so wrapped up in work and so stressed about deadlines that I feel like I can't afford to take time for you. Thank you for reminding me that there should always be time for you, and that once I get my priorities in line you'll be glad to work out everything else.

Home Work Assignment

Make a list of the things that try to steal your time from God. Pray over each of them and ask God to show you ways to put Him first. If you can think of a time when you put God first and He helped everything work out around it, write it down as encouragement for the next time you're faced with the same situation.

"This Way!"

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

Psalm 25:4-5

Soon after Callie turned 2, she went through a phase where she tried to become the family's navigator. We would be riding along talking or singing with Jonathan as usual, when she would suddenly shout out, "This way! This way!" and start pointing in a different direction from where we were going. The pointing quickly changed to waving both arms wildly about and the shouts became shrieks with tears pouring down her cheeks when she realized we weren't changing directions.

I didn't know what in the world was going on the first time this happened. Lots of children go through some of the same developmental phases, but this was one Jonathan had missed. I don't know what started it in Callie or what triggered it each time – I was just glad that the episodes usually were over fairly quickly when they hit.

One day as she tried her best to direct me off the road into some trees, I realized how the situation paralleled life. "This way! This way!" How many times has someone said that to you as they tried to pull you from the path you were on? Sometimes it might be a well-meant invitation to help with something at church when your plate's too full and you're too tired. Sometimes it might be a job offer that would pay really well but take time away from other things that are important to you. Sometimes it might be the opportunity to do something that's not in line with where God wants you to be, whether you realize it or not.

But those calls can come from God, too. Sometimes He might be calling "This way!" to get you back on the right path after you've strayed. And sometimes He might be calling you to step off that familiar path and take a chance on something new that He wants you to do.

What road are you on today? Where's it going? When you hear someone calling, "This way!" do you know who it is? Listen for those voices today and ask God to help you hear His calls most clearly so you can follow His path for your life.

You are the best navigator of all, but sometimes it's hard to center on your directions through all the other noise. Sharpen my ears to hear your voice and my heart to know that it's you. Give me the faith to follow your voice wherever it might lead.

Home Work Assignment

What things have tried to distract you lately from the path you're on, whether they were related to work, home or church? Write about each one, and whether you think the distractions were there for good or bad reasons. Pray about them with an open heart and write what you believe God's message is with each one.

Shades in the Morning

If I say, "I will forget my complaint, I will change my expression, and smile."

Job 9:27

I was in the bathroom putting on makeup when I heard the first signals that Jonathan was up – shuffling footsteps, quiet clicks as he flipped light switches off. Then the sound I call the whiney moan when he reached our bedroom and came to find me.

“Mommmy, the light’s too bright for my eyes,” he said in his I-sound-like-I’m-crying-but-have-no-tears voice. “Turn it offfffff.”

It was the fourth morning this week that he’d greeted me this way. It was also the fourth morning this week he’d gotten up incredibly early after I’ve been up working incredibly late to meet a deadline. My patience with his whining time (known in our family as being a whiney cat) was growing thin. But I tried to dredge up some patience and took a minute to cuddle with him. After a little more grumbling he decided that he could face the day after all.

That night at bedtime, I decided it was time to talk about it again and try to put a stop to this new habit. “You’ve been getting up awfully early every day this week,” I said, “and you’ve been really whiney about it. You know we can’t turn off every light in the house while we’re trying to get ready in the mornings.” I went on to explain that part of the reason the lights bothered him so much was because he was up too early, and that while I’d tried to be patient with him, the early morning whining needed to stop.

The next morning I heard him padding through the house – early again – but this time I didn’t notice lights being turned off. “Hi, Mama,” he greeted me with a smile in his voice.

I turned to give him a hug, and had to laugh when I saw him. There he stood in the middle of my bedroom with his rumpled pajamas and lopsided morning hair, a huge grin on his face – and his Spider-Man sunglasses. “I put on my shades so the lights wouldn’t bother me,” he announced, quite proud of himself.

I was proud of him, too, for finding a way to deal with the early-morning problem that made us both happy – I didn’t listen to any whining and he didn’t get another lecture. And later that day when I caught myself starting to whine about a project, I remembered Jonathan’s attitude and tried to find a better way to deal with my situation than being a “whiney cat.”

You blessed us with creativity and a wonderful mind to figure things out. Please remind me of that the next time I’m whining about a situation and help me find a better way to deal with it.

Home Work Assignment

Find a picture of a cat and post it near your computer. The next time you find yourself whining about work or home, let the cat remind you to take a deep breath and deal with the situation without being whiney.

Showing Our Toys

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:10

Jonathan's first play date was with a little girl in his preschool class. I'm not sure who was more excited at the prospect of having a friend to play with that afternoon – Jonathan or Callie. Actually, all three children were quite wound up as I buckled them in car seats for the ride home.

Jonathan and Callie seemed intent on showing his friend every toy that they owned in the few minutes it took me to make their lunches.

“Look at this!” “Do you want to see?” “Do you have one of these?” Their friend good naturedly went along with it, just as eager to see their toys as they were to show them to her.

I could tell from the bits of conversation floating to the kitchen that Jonathan was showing her his “coolest” or “best” toys. Whether he realized it or not, he was trying to impress her or get some level of her approval.

Don't we get caught up in the same thing, even as adults? We want people to notice and like our things, whether it's a new purse or laptop or the house we've been dreaming of. We like to let people know that working from home doesn't mean we're way behind the curve or that we don't have a “real” job.

But we have something much more important that we should hope people notice instead – an inner peace, a loving manner, an attitude that says Christ is in our hearts and is a part of our lives. I don't believe there's anything wrong with wanting nice clothes to wear or a nice home to live in. Let's just try to keep it in

perspective and hope people are drawn to us because of our inner beauty and possessions instead of the car we drive.

The world is so focused on material things that it's hard not to be that way myself. Thank you for all the blessings you've given me, especially the blessing of Christ. Help others see that I'm special, not because of the things I own but because of Who owns me.

Home Work Assignment

If your home was destroyed and you could only salvage three things from the wreckage, what would you want them to be? What do you think those three things say about you in terms of family, work and God?

Want to Do vs. Need to Do

Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

2 Corinthians 8:11

Even on days when I know I must buckle down and work, I sometimes have trouble doing what I should. The kids are napping, I've thrown in a load of laundry and now it's time to sit down at the computer and work. I know that and am OK with sitting down to work. It's just that I don't always want to do the work I know I need to do.

At this point in my career, I work on two different types of writing – the writing for clients that brings in regular paychecks and therefore feeds my family, and the writing I feel God calling me to do that feeds my soul. The two are in a constant battle for my time and attention.

How I deal with the battle depends partly on the projects at hand and partly on my conscience. I obviously can't spend the day working on "God writing" if I have a client deadline to meet. That means the writing I'm drawn to do often gets relegated to the wee hours after everyone else is asleep and my other projects are finished for the day. But there are times when the call to write those things is so strong that I'll put off "real" work for a bit in order to satisfy that need and get some things off my mind and on to paper.

Is it OK for me to do this? I can't say for sure, but I believe that God wouldn't keep calling me to do this work if He didn't intend for me to do it. At the same time, I believe He expects me to appreciate the blessing of working from home and to fulfill the responsibilities that come with it. As long as I keep in constant communication with Him and strive to honor Him in whatever work I do, He helps me walk the fine line between "want to do" and "need to do" so that everything gets done as it should.

It can be so easy to get hung up on what I want to do versus what I know I need to do for work. Help me recognize that conflict and bring it to you so you can help me get everything done.

Home Work Assignment

Make two “to do” lists for this week: what you need to do and what you want to do. Are there any cross-overs on the lists? Pray about both lists and ask God to help you prioritize things – and to show you if some of the things don’t belong on the lists at all.

Whose Agenda?

All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.

Proverbs 16:2

“Mama, can I have a snack?”

“No, sweetie, you’ve already had a snack. You can wait until supper.”

“Callie hasn’t had a snack.”

“I know, sweetie, but you already have.”

Jonathan left the room with a slight pout, not very happy with my answer. I heard him talking quietly with Callie in the next room, trying to convince her to come ask me for a snack. I knew he didn’t care whether she had a snack – he just hoped she could wheedle one out of me so he could eat it instead.

He managed to convince her, so she wandered into the room a few minutes later. “Mama, I want snack,” she demanded in her bossy toddler voice.

We normally make the children ask nicely when they want something rather than demand things from us. But since it was too close to dinner time and I didn’t plan to let her have a snack anyway, I saved her the lesson in manners.

“It’s too late for a snack, sweetie,” I told her. “We’ll eat supper in a little bit.”

She tried a few more times, but then decided I wasn't changing my mind. She returned to Jonathan empty-handed but not very upset since she didn't really care about the snack anyway. "Mama didn't give me snack," I heard her explain. "We eat supper soon."

I half expected Jonathan to make another attempt, but he didn't. The little scene did make me stop and think about what had happened beneath the surface. Jonathan didn't get what he wanted, so he tried to trick it out of me through Callie. He had his own agenda in mind.

How many times do I also have my own agenda with personal or work things, whether I realize it or not? Do I want to work with clients because of the actual work or their ethics, or do I hope to work with them because of the paychecks involved or the prestige of having their names on my client list? Do I sign up to help with a project at church because I believe God is calling me to do it or because I think it will look good to be involved?

Even if we start with our own agenda in mind instead of God's, I believe He can turn it into something good for Him. My prayer is that He helps me get in the habit of thinking about such things beforehand so I can always enter the situation with a pure heart and motives.

My motives may look fine to everyone else – and maybe even to myself – but you know how things truly are. Help me seek your wisdom and guidance so that the decisions I make and the things I do are in line with your agenda rather than my own.

Home Work Assignment

Examine your client list, work projects and church responsibilities. Are you involved with each of them because you want to be, because you feel obligated, or because God directed you there? Ask God to help you hand them all to Him so He can write your agenda in each area.

No Dreams for Me

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

It was the week before Christmas, and Jonathan and I were delivering homemade ornaments and cookies to the teenagers who kept him and Callie each week during choir practice. We made our way from one house to the next, singing Christmas songs with the radio and talking about all sorts of things.

“I didn’t have any Christmas dreams last night,” he suddenly announced. I assured him that was OK and said there were many nights when I didn’t remember my dreams either.

“Mama, you can’t have any dreams,” he shot back, “because you never sleep!”

His answer surprised me, but his perspective made perfect sense. I’m always up – and sometimes working – when he gets up in the morning. I’m up when he and Callie nap, ready to knock out as much work as possible while they snooze. I’m always up – and usually getting ready to work some more – when he goes to bed at night. And he’s seen for himself that I often work quite late if he gets up to use the bathroom or because he has trouble sleeping. It’s no wonder he thinks I never sleep.

That constant lack of sleep is one of the biggest drawbacks to working from home, at least for me. I have permanent circles under my eyes, fight to stay awake when I’m reading with the children before naptime and live on 4 hours’ sleep (or less) more days than I’d like to count. I certainly enjoy life with the children while they’re young, but part of me longs for the day when they’re both in school so I can hopefully get more work done during the day instead of cranking out so many manuscripts in the middle of the night.

In the meantime, I'll continue to keep a diet Coke in the fridge for those nights when I need a caffeine boost to get through the work. Christ never said that being a Christian was easy, and no one ever promised that working from home would be either. At least I can find consolation in knowing that I'm doing what God wants me to do at this point in my life, and that He's always awake with me even when everyone else in my house is snoring.

No one has an easy job, and everyone has late nights and gets tired. But there are times when I'm so overwhelmed with exhaustion that I wonder how I'll be able to function. Please help every moment of sleep I get rejuvenate me so I can do the work you call me to do.

Home Work Assignment

Treat yourself to some extra sleep tonight or at least one night this week. Go to bed right after you put the children down for the night and savor the extra rest when you get up tomorrow morning!

Turning Down Work

And if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 2:3-5

During my years as a freelance writer, several job possibilities surfaced that I briefly considered. The decision to stay at home rather than pursue fulltime employment again was easy in most cases. But then I got an offer while Jonathan was in 4-year-old kindergarten that really made me stop and think.

Two of the teachers in his class wanted to begin job-sharing the next year. The initial plan was for their third staff member to become the new lead teacher, which meant they would need one more teacher to round out the staff. The new person would do art projects with the children as well as other teacher assistant-type things. They asked if I wanted to be that person.

The offer took me completely by surprise. Teaching preschool had never crossed my mind, but I liked the idea. Jonathan would begin kindergarten that fall, but Callie would still be in preschool three mornings a week. I enjoyed being with the children in Jonathan's class, and they seemed to have fun with me. And I've always loved art, so that part of the job would be right up my alley.

But there were lots of other things to consider, too. How would it meld with our newly-rearranged life when Jonathan began kindergarten? Would I still be able to go on Callie's field trips and enjoy parties like I had with Jonathan? Would I still be able to get my other work done?

I spent a lot of time praying about it, thinking about it, and asking friends to do the same. The struggle went on for a few weeks as I seemed to get conflicting answers from God about what He wanted me to do.

Then one day something from a Bible study lesson came back to me. It was a study about John, and the author, Beth Moore, wrote of how the difficult times following Christ's crucifixion must have cemented his assurance that he was called to be a disciple. When I had completed the lesson several months earlier, her observation had made me stop and think: What do I know – beyond a shadow of a doubt – that I'm called to do? My immediate answer was: I'm called to write.

I reread the lesson and again felt the same belief deep within myself – for whatever reason He might have, God is calling me to write. A part of me felt sad at knowing I wouldn't be spending the next school year with a room full of precious 4- and 5-year-olds. But a greater part of me felt excited, peaceful and reassured that I would be following God's plan instead.

You call each of us to do special things for you and for others. Thank you for all the opportunities you set before me and for your guidance when I need to know which path to take. Most of all, thank you for filling me with your peace when I follow your way.

Home Work Assignment

Think about some of the sacrifices you've made in order to work from home. Write a letter to God thanking Him for His direction when you're making decisions and for the lessons you've learned from the sacrifices.

Mommy, Mama, Mom

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Exodus 3:14

One of my favorite things to hear is my children calling for me – I never imagined that being called “Mama” would bring such joy.

“Mama” is their everyday, stand-by name for me – the one we all seem to return to as the most fitting. But that sometimes changes depending on the circumstances or their moods. “Mom” pops up occasionally, primarily when we’ve been reading stories with characters who call their parents Mom and Dad. “Mommy” usually surfaces when they want extra comfort because they’re tired or sick, but it also seems to be their top choice when they’re trying to sweet-talk me into something. We haven’t reached the stage of rolling eyes and exasperated “Mother!” yet, but I know it’s only a matter of time.

God gives us many names for Himself as well – a name to fit every occasion. Father. Abba, daddy. El Shaddai, God Almighty. Adonai, Lord and Master. Yahweh.

And as if those names aren’t wonderful enough, he also gives us plenty of choices that tell of His character. Shepherd. Comforter. Bread of life. Living water. Prince of peace.

Why does He give us so many names to choose from? I wonder if it’s partly to help make sure we know He’s there for us in every situation.

When I’m scared or lonely, He’s my shepherd and comforter, keeping me on track and encouraging me to go on. When the deadlines pile up and the world around me is crazy and out of control, He’s my prince of peace that calms my heart and mind. When I’m excited to land a new client or am happy that a job turns out well, He’s my

Abba that I can share everyday joys with. When I'm so overwhelmed with His presence and power that tears come to my eyes and the words catch in my throat, He's my all-powerful Yahweh.

Whatever name you call Him today, the common thread running through all the choices is His never ending love, patience and understanding. Call for Him in whatever capacity you need, and He'll be sure to answer.

Thank you for meeting me at whatever level I need on any given day. You're my Abba I can laugh and play with, my heavenly Comforter when things seem to fall apart, and my Alpha and Omega who knew and loved me before time began. Thank you for sharing a glimpse of your awesomeness with me.

Home Work Assignment

Write as many of God's names on index cards that you can think of (Father, Daddy, Prince of peace, Shepherd, Rock, Mighty fortress, Comforter, etc.). Keep the cards on your desk or in a drawer close by. Pick the card that seems to fit what you need to help you meet each day's challenges or joys. Put it where you'll see it throughout the day.