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## FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME MOTHER?

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Like many mothers, I had a problem—and the Sermon on the Mount helped me solve it.

I had a difficult decision: whether to stay at home with my boys, as they so desperately wanted me to do, or go back to work, which was my only way of providing them with anything beyond mere subsistence. Whatever I decided would result in some unhappiness for us all.

Since there is no father in our home, and I have only a small fixed income, I knew that unless I went back to work there would be no money for the extra things which would come along as the children grew up: camp, music lessons, dental bills, clothes, college.

And if I did go back to work, it would have to be in spite of the boys' constant begging me to "please, please stay at home with us, Mom."

About this time I was offered a job managing a dress shop for a friend. Because it seemed clear that the financial demands of the future outweighed everything else, I accepted the job.

The boys were co-operative. They understood as well as eight and eleven could be expected to understand why I had to work. I found a dependable high-school girl who came in afternoons to stay with them until I got home—which was often quite late in the evening, after the boys had gone to bed. The arrangement, I thought, was going to work out satisfactorily.

But it was not very long before they began asking at breakfast, "How much longer are you going to work Mom?" or "Can't we please stay up tonight 'til you come home? You never read us a story any more."

Then Jimmy, the younger, fell into the habit of phoning me at the shop every afternoon when he reached home from school. "Hi, Mom. I'm home. What time'll you be home?" "Probably late," I would say. Then he would answer, "It's lonesome around here without you. Can't I come down there?"

It got so that every afternoon, along about a quarter of three, I would become tense with waiting for the jingle of the telephone. I began to dread it. The same wistful questions; the same feeling of guilt at having to give the same answers every day. Childishly I began to wish I could run away and not answer the phone—not even hear it.

After several months, the older boy, Joe, began to bring notes home from school. He was falling behind in his work, seemed to have lost interest, and was becoming a serious behaviour problem for his teacher. A conference with her revealed the fact that, in her opinion, at least, he was an emotionally disturbed, unhappy boy.

Then Jimmy became ill; a bad cold developed into bronchial pneumonia. Each morning, although I left him in the capable hands of his grandmother, I felt a deeper and deeper sense of guilt.

How expect a very sick boy to understand why his mother had to be away from him all day? And how expect a mother to keep her mind on a job, when all she could

think of was a sick little son at home, calling for her?

It was shortly after Jimmy recovered that I realized I was doing something wrong, that this course I had chosen was not the right one for us. The constant nagging of my conscience, the persistent feeling of guilt, was God's way of answering my prayers for His guidance. I had just been paying no attention.

I sat down with pencil and paper and spent a long evening with my accounts—income and outgo. An amazing thing became obvious: I was paying out for services (laundry, cleaning-woman, gardener, sitter) an amount just a few dollars short of my salary! And all these services were things I had always done for myself before I went back to work. What was I gaining?

Nothing! I was actually losing a great deal. For my job was so demanding that when I was at home I was too completely exhausted to enjoy what time I had with my boys. And for some time I had been sensing a change in the easy, close relationship there had always been among the three of us.

It was not, I saw now, that the boys were growing older; it was that they felt (perhaps subconsciously) that I had rejected them in favor of a weekly pay check!

School was out about that time. Since the girl who stayed with the boys would not be available for the summer, I gave up my job. I determined to devote my full time to my sons for the three vacation months; at the end of that time I would make up my mind whether I was to be a full-time or only a half-time mother.

I had previously discussed my problem with professional friends: a psychiatrist, a business executive (father of two sons), a high-school teacher and our family doctor. Their consensus showed that I owed it to myself to get back into the business world, to make new and stimulating contacts, to make use of the college education which I had heretofore "wasted," to give my own personality a chance to develop. They maintained stoutly that I would be a far better mother than if I devoted the next ten years or so of my life exclusively to my children.

But I rejected the whole theory. Maybe the trouble was with me; maybe I wasn't "normal." But I was sure my job wasn't working out as they had said it would.

I went to another friend whom I was sure would view the problem solely from the standpoint of the boys: a probation officer who dealt with juvenile offenders. Dramatically, instead of offering his advice, he took me with him to hear a case before the juvenile court.

The boy was 13, good-looking, and scared to death. He had made friends with an undesirable gang, and had become involved in an armed robbery. His mother worked, not because the family needed her income, but because her salary meant that they could have a much nicer house, a new car and all the other things that her husband's income would not provide.

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