FamilyLife This Week®

The Life of a Working Mom

Guest: Shannon Simmons
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Michelle: Every mom works. Some of you have one job, some have two jobs, and some even have three jobs; but no matter how many jobs you have, Shannon Simmons says that you all have something in common.

Shannon: Behind every great kid, there's a mom just praying, “God, please don't let me mess him up!” Even the Betty Crocker ones; even the Pinterest ones; even the ones that may seem to have it all together. No one is perfect and, as mothers, we're all just doing the best we can.

Michelle: Shannon Simmons joins me to talk about motherhood and the complexities of having two jobs, one of which is outside the home. We're going to talk about that and more on this edition of FamilyLife This Week®.

Welcome to FamilyLife This Week. I'm Michelle Hill. It was a while ago that we received a comment from a mom who works outside the home. She has two jobs: taking care of her children and, then, her job outside the home. And she asked us for more programs that would help her understand how she could better juggle life.

Because, as we all know, and as we've said before, every mom works, whether you stay at home or whether you work outside the home; but our friend Kim, she shared some struggles and some complexities that she's facing and these are complexities that I don't happen to have in my own life.

So I went to a friend of mine, Shannon Simmons. Shannon is married to Roosevelt. They have five kids, and she's also one of my co-workers here at FamilyLife; and I asked her to help me understand the issues that she faces, so that I could better understand Kim and also you, if you happen to be a working mom.

So I sat down with Shannon, and I asked her what her day-to-day activities look like? Here's my conversation with Shannon.

I just wanted to share a story of a young mom at church yesterday. She has a five year old and a one year old, and she works outside the home two to three days a week; and she's got a pretty stressful job; and she wants to be home, and she enjoys those days, but she feels like even being home those two or three days a week, she's not getting everything done.
And she finished the whole conversation with, “I'm being pulled in so many directions. I'm not doing anything at a hundred percent anymore.” And there was the guilt.

Shannon, I brought you into our conversation today, because you've spoken about “mom guilt.” And you have five children. You work outside the home. You've also been a mom who works inside the home—

Shannon: Yes.

Michelle: —but you now currently work outside the home. So what do your days look like? First of all, I think that, for people who are not working moms outside the home, we don't understand, because we only have ourselves to get ready to go to work in the morning. What do your days look like?

Shannon: So my day starts even as I lie in bed, and I slam that snooze button a few times, I'm praying, “God, help me to get out of the bed. Give me strength to get up!” I'm seriously praying that. I'm thanking God for the day, but, because physically, I'm tired. I'm usually not rested when I wake in the morning, I'm praying, “God, please help me to get out of bed. Help me get out of bed.”

And so then I have some time in the Word, whether I'm in my YouVersion app, or read my Psalm, or whatever I'm in. I'm reading something, and then I'll say a quick prayer. And then I'm knocking on doors, saying, “Okay, good morning! Time to get up.” “Good morning! Time to get up.”

I go into the kitchen and plug up the iron. And then I go back to my room, and I've noticed one kid has gotten up and is in the bathroom, and then I'm doing something else. So trying to get out of the house by a certain time is crazy. And let me just tell you, a working mom, her brain does not go off.

I heard someone say to think about the tabs you have on your laptop—the tabs where you’re on certain sites. Imagine having like twenty of those open at the same time. That's our brains. We always have a tab open—

Michelle: Right.

Shannon: Of, “Okay, what are we going to do next?”; and, “The kids have this”; and, “Oh, there's a field trip, and I better make sure she has that permission slip”; and “Oh, but he has tutoring, so I better make sure he has this.” There are a lot of details related to child rearing, and then you have a job. [Laughter]

So think about your job duties—

Michelle: Right.
Shannon: —that kind of crowd upon you. Even when you go home, you have to make yourself turn that off. And now I’m home. I call it Second Shift, because when I leave work at 5:00 or 5:30, and when I am pulling into my garage, I usually say a prayer: “Okay, God, help me do well on second shift. Help me perform well on second shift.”

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: And sometimes I don’t do well. [Laughter] I really don't.

Michelle: What does second shift look like then? We've taken a look at the morning. What does second shift look like?

Shannon: Second shift could be I’m going to come in, and those clothes I started that morning, I'm going to take them out and I’m going to put them in the dryer. I may turn the oven on and start on dinner. There may be leftovers, so I may be able to just go straight into the dining room and say, “Okay, kids, let's work on homework. Come on!”

Or I may have a meeting. My husband is a pastor as well. He's a bi-vocational pastor, so sometimes I have a meeting. And sometimes I say, “Okay, y'all have got pizza in there. We're about to leave. We'll be back in about an hour and a half.” So it just depends; every day is different, and it’s kind of chaotic.

Michelle: I mean, just as you’re talking about it, I'm like thinking, “When is she going to take a breath? When does she get to shut all the lights off, and, you know, her head hit the pillow?”

Shannon: Right.

Michelle: And “so she can just rest!” Because it sounds like a lot.

Shannon: It is a lot, and it can be very overwhelming, particularly if you don't necessarily have a choice. There are some women who have to work. They have to be working moms. It's not necessarily a choice; they need that extra income. And they have that mommy guilt. Whether they're dropping the baby off at the daycare, and the baby is not doing well; the baby is crying. It is hard to leave your child at the daycare when the child is crying and wanting Mommy.

Michelle: Right.

Shannon: That is the most heart-wrenching thing to do. And, of course, you're going to be crying on the way to work. You're going to be crying as well. And then you’ve got to get yourself together, because you don't want to be the working mom that just cries in the middle of the meeting [Laughter], because, “I dropped my baby off!” And all the men are like, “What?!"
Michelle: Right. “So what! You’re free!”

Shannon: You can't do that. You can't be the crying woman at work. You can't do that.

Michelle: So explain more of this guilt.

Shannon: Yes.

Michelle: What does it—because I'm not a working mom, so what exactly does that feel like?

Shannon: The guilt feels like you're not giving your best to your children and to your family, because you're outside of the home making income for the family. So there's also this—I don't know why we do it, but as women we have this—us versus them mentality as relates to stay-at-home moms and working moms. And let me just say we need to kill that!

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: Because if you're a stay-at-home mom, you are a working mom. That is a twenty-four/seven job. You don't clock out.

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: And when you're a working mom, yeah, you detach and you're punching a clock eight to five or whatever, and then you come home, and you're on second shift. It just makes it a little bit harder, because you may not have the flexibility as a stay-at-home mom.

For me, when I was a stay-at-home mom for five years, I had a schedule of cleaning, and it worked pretty well of doing laundry, because it is so much to do. And if I didn't have a schedule or guide, I was like, “What am I supposed to do right now? I don't even know what I need to be doing right now!” So I worked out a schedule of certain chores, and rooms, and things of that nature.

When I went back to work after my youngest child was born, I didn't adjust that. So I still tried to keep the same schedule, plus working an eight to five job.

Michelle: Oh, no!

Shannon: I struggled.

Michelle: You were lucky if you found some clean clothes in the morning.
Shannon: Right; Right. So I've learned a few things; a lot of practical things to help me to try to keep the main thing together. And even with paying bills, I remember one time I completely forgot to pay a bill. I completely forgot. And the water was off the next day.

Michelle: Oh, no!

Shannon: Yes! And my husband was like, “Okay, what happened?” I said, “Oh, it was due yesterday.” I was like, “Okay!” So I had to get that done. I mean, you know, you have bad days, and you have good days. But the guilt—I just know that I am fully known and deeply loved by God, and even though I'm a hot mess, Jesus loves me, and I can't keep that guilt. I can't just carry that guilt around. I have to wrestle with it.

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: I really do. On a daily basis, I have to put it in this place, because I am not perfect. And I never want to project that onto another mom, whether she's a stay-at-home mom or a working mom.

So I do the best that I can. Behind every great kid, there's a mom just praying, “God, please don't let me mess him up!”

Michelle: Right.

Shannon: Even the Betty Crocker ones; even the Pinterest ones; even the ones that may seem to have it all together. No one is perfect and, as mothers, we're all just doing the best we can to raise good young men and women, right? We're just doing the best we can with what we have, so I try to put that guilt in its place.

I feel it. I feel that if I miss something; I feel it particularly if I'm thinking about home stuff, but then I'm trying to work, because you want to be a good steward of time that you give to your workplace. So you get it on both ends, you know? You don't want to take advantage of grace. I have a great boss, and so he works with me and allows me some flex time, but I don't want to take advantage of that. So I try to work hard there, but then I’ve got to go home to the second shift, and I do my best to work hard there.

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: So it gets taxing.

Michelle: Do you feel torn?

Shannon: Of course!

Michelle: I have a good friend of mine who's a single, working mom, and I got a text from her a couple of weeks ago that said that her third child was going to be heading
home with the flu, and she had to take her baby home; and the boss wasn't all that happy. And then she ended up—my friend ended up—getting the flu, of course.

**Shannon:** Yes, yes.

**Michelle:** And more days off. So she was feeling so torn. She's like, “My babies need me at home, and my boss expects me to be at work.”

**Shannon:** Right.

**Michelle:** She was like, “What do I do?”

**Shannon:** You know, you pray for that boss. You pray for favor. You pray for grace and understanding, and you pray that if you're in the wrong position right now, that God opens up the door for another one. I don't know why employers think that parents can just detach and stop being parents during the workday. It's an unrealistic expectation. I hate it for working moms. There is a double standard. [Laughter] But we're expected, you know, to work hard and provide, but keep that at home.

**Michelle:** And are your kids always on your mind? Like when it hits lunchtime, are you thinking, “My kids are eating lunch right now”?

**Shannon:** Sometimes. When they were younger, I did, because you're hoping someone is caring for them just as you would; and that was my prayer. That's still my prayer, but I would pray, “God, please be with the teachers. Please allow them to care for my child just as I would, if not better.”

**Michelle:** Yes.

**Shannon:** That's what I would pray.

**Michelle:** Shannon, you're helping open my eyes to a lot of what working moms—and I think, you know, I have a co-worker who is a working mom and just some of the stresses that she goes through when I see her come in on a Monday morning and all of that. I have a lot more questions for you, but we have to take a break. So we'll be back in two minutes, and I'll talk further with Shannon.

[Radio Station Spot Break]

**Michelle:** Welcome back to *FamilyLife This Week*. This week we are talking about working moms; moms who work outside the home. And I have Shannon Simmons with me; she's a friend and co-worker. And Shannon, even getting our time together scheduled with you; when I first asked you, you were like, “Sure, I'd love to talk with you!”
And then, getting it scheduled, I asked for. I think it was a Tuesday or a Thursday afternoon, and you were like, “No, I've got to drop one kid off to gymnastics and another kid here. That afternoon won't work.” And so, we finally did settle on one; but when you say that the kids are on your mind, you have a grid that you have to see life through, even while you're at work.

**Shannon:** Right, right.

**Michelle:** How do you balance all of that?

**Shannon:** Google calendar. I know! I do put everything on my calendar. I'll put reminders on my calendar. “When you get home, you need to look for this book for Reese.” I do that because everything is, of course, connected to my phone, and it will remind me. But I have to be careful of scheduling things.

When you get so much on your plate—you know, when you're just frantic—think about when you wake up late, and you have that that anxiety that you wake up with, like it's five minutes 'til eight and you were supposed to be at work at eight. So think about having that feeling all the time.

**Michelle:** Ohhh.

**Shannon:** Okay? If a working mom, who has children of multiple ages, different activities, babies, meal planning, you're in ministry, you have a job; all of these things, they're on one plate. And if you're walking around, and you're just having that anxiety in your heart about your life, something is going to fall. I've always feared, “God, please don't let me forget a child somewhere.”

Seriously, it can happen. I have forgotten my child one time. I forget which one it was!

[Laughter]

**Michelle:** They'll probably gladly tell you!

**Shannon:** Right! But I forgot a child one day. I think I forgot; I think my husband and I had our wires crossed. I was supposed to pick one up from aftercare. I think it was a year or so ago. And the lady on the other end said, “Mrs. Simmons, we have Rachel and Reese here. Is someone going to pick them up?” I was like, “I am soo sorry!”

[Laughter]

So, yeah, you've got to do your best to balance what you can and just do what you can.

**Michelle:** What happens? So you've got this plate going that needs to be balanced just so.
Shannon: Yes.

Michelle: What happens when it tilts a little bit and something does come crashing down? How do you pick up from that?

Shannon: Well, of course, you have a crying mommy fit when you need to.

Michelle: Just hopefully not in a board meeting.

Shannon: Right, right; but there have been plenty of times when I’ve dropped something, when I’ve forgotten something, and I’ve had to apologize to my kids. I remember, maybe a few weeks ago, the kids both were doing math. So I have one child who’s advanced, and one child who really struggles. And so, trying to help them both in math at the same time after an eight-hour day of work is crazy, right?

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: And so I had to take a time-out. Sometimes working moms, you can take a time out. I know you think you have to put your kids in time-out. You can put yourself in time-out. I said, “Okay, Mommy’s going to take about five or ten minutes, okay? I want you guys to read or relax for a moment, but I need about ten minutes, okay?”

And I went in my room, had a few tears, prayed, calmed my heart, and did some deep breathing; but I had to regroup before I blew up. And I’m not perfect. I’ve yelled at my kids; of course I have! But in that moment, I could feel the tension rising. I could feel a mommy temper tantrum coming about it, so I had to calm myself down.

And we need to show our kids that we can self-regulate. We want them to self-regulate.

Michelle: Right.

Shannon: And so I needed to have a little moment to regroup. So when things crash down, prayerfully, there are things that we can we can sweep up and put back together again or find something else. Usually, it’s laundry for me, [Laughter] so someone can’t find socks or, you know, something like that.

Michelle: Yeah.

Shannon: Maybe it’s not too major, like the water being cut off, but those are the types of things.

Michelle: How do you forgive yourself during those times? How do you move past it? Because I don’t—I don’t know that I would wallow.

Shannon: Yes.
Michelle: I haven't been in those situations, but there's a part of me that would probably beat myself up for a while.

Shannon: Right. Well, I used to do that, early in our marriage and early in motherhood. I would beat myself up. I would like [think], “Man! Why did I let that happen?!” And the thing is, I had this expectation of myself and how I wanted my life to be as a mother. And it was an expectation that wasn't from God, right? It wasn't from God, and so I had to keep the main thing the main thing. Do my children know Jesus? Do they know how to talk to Him? Do they know how to call upon His name when they need Him the most?

Am I showing them how to be kind and caring? Maybe they don't know how to load the dishwasher the way I want them to, because definitely they do not do that right!

[Laughter]

But keep the main thing the main thing, you know what I mean? And my expectation used to be that way. I used to want to keep my home a certain way, and I've just had to accept that, with children in the home, that means my home is not going to look the way that I would want it to look. And I look forward to the empty nest, right?

Michelle: Right.

Shannon: I look forward to the empty nest, because then I know it'll be me or my husband, and I can just fuss at him if it's not the way I want it to be!

[Laughter]

But right now, with kids, my home is just not going to be the way that I would desire it to be, and things aren't—I don't have to control everything. You know what I mean?

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: Everything doesn't have to be “my way or the highway.” Okay? So I've had to let that go. When I've messed up and I've made mistakes, and I haven't done things the way that I've wanted to do them, I've had to let it go.

Michelle: That's hard!

Shannon: It is very hard, but I also know I don't want to be the mean mom in that way. Like I'm the “mean mom,” because I could not care less that my kids like me. I really do not care. And they think I care! [Laughter] I don't care.

You don't have to like me, right? But I do hope I show them Jesus. I hope I show them that I'm not perfect, and that I cast my cares on Him, and that I confess my sins and they know how to do that. That is my hope; that is my desire. I don't want them to think
that, “Mom is so perfect, and we can’t do this; and things have to be neat and tidy,” and all of that. I don’t want them to not want to be around me, because I’m that control freak. You know what I mean?

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: I’m not nice when I have to have things my way. I had to let that perfectionism go. That’s what it is. That’s really what it is.

Michelle: It’s perfectionism.

Shannon: It is, and I am a recovering perfectionist. I really am. I wish—I think there’s a group for that, right? You think there is?

Michelle: There’s got to be a group for that!

Shannon: There isn’t like a twelve-step for it or something?

Michelle: But I’m just thinking about you as a perfectionist. You add on a husband—

Shannon: Yes.

Michelle: —you add on children—

Shannon: Yes.

Michelle: —you add on work; and not only does it stop there, but you have a husband who’s bi-vocational; he’s a bi-vocational pastor. So you’re a pastor’s wife.

Shannon: Right.

Michelle: And that perfectionism is pretty much blown to bits!

Shannon: Yeah! Bless their hearts, they know I’m not the typical pastor’s wife in our church. I am pretty real. I try to be really down-to-earth, and I am not perfect; but I’ve had conversations, and I’ve shared with the women there, in the congregation there, that, “My priority, first of all, is my marriage. I minister to my husband. He is my first ministry; then my children; then y’all.”

Michelle: Right. You know, Shannon, as we’re sitting here, we’re talking about “mom guilt,” and a mom having to work outside the home. I’m sure there are a lot of husbands, one, who might be listening right now, saying, “How can I support my wife? What’s my role in all of this?” What do you see Roosevelt’s role in your role as working?
Shannon: Roosevelt has been very helpful to me in being a working mom. He eases a lot of the load for me; more so now than earlier in our marriage. But a husband can be supportive in just asking, “Hey, babe, how can I help right now?” Roosevelt has decided he would cook one day a week. Now, whether that's really cooking, or if that's just finding something to eat.

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: Whether they're going to get Chinese food or pizza, that's very helpful. I don't know about other moms, but as a working mama, I'm always like, “Okay, what are we doing for dinner?! I don't know. I'm not thinking about it until 4:30. I'm sorry.”

Michelle: So if you receive a text during the day at 4:00 saying, “Hey, I'm picking up pizza.”

Shannon: Yes!

Michelle: You're like, “One thing off my checklist!”

Shannon: Yes, correct. So you could do that, or you can do homework duty or bath duty. Whatever the work, the second shift work, requires, right? That’s second shift. Whatever the case may be, be a partner, right?

Michelle: Yes.

Shannon: Because we're both parents.

Michelle: Right, that's a good word. I am so appreciative of the time that you've spent today just helping me understand. And, before we go, I just want to share with you: Well, first of all, I need to explain to our listeners that Shannon's daughter, Raven, was an intern here at FamilyLife, and she worked directly with me. Shannon, Raven is a product, a product of your household, and she loves her mom and loves her dad.

She may not always tell you guys, but as she and I would do devotions together on Tuesday mornings, it was evident in how she talked about her family, especially Mondays after we would sort of get together and debrief about the weekend. You are instilling God in them, and you're instilling family, and that's important.

Shannon: Thank you. That's good to hear, because you never know if it's sticking or not.

Michelle: That was my conversation with Shannon Simmons, encouraging moms; and we know that all moms work. All moms have one full time job, and some have two, and some have three. And so, no matter how many jobs you have, and are juggling right
now, I hope that you've been encouraged, and I hope that you have felt like we've heard you, and we love you.

Hey, next time we get together, we're going to talk with Ben Stewart. He's going to join me, and he's been working with young people for quite a while. He's going to help parents understand the new culture of dating that our kids are growing up in. It'll be a great conversation, so I hope you can join us for that!

Hey, thanks for listening! I want to thank the President of FamilyLife, David Robbins, along with our station partners around the country. A big “Thank you!” to our engineer today, Keith Lynch. Thanks to our producers, Marques Holt and Bruce Goff. Justin Adams is our mastering engineer, and Megan Martin is our production coordinator.

Our program is a production of FamilyLife Today, and our mission is to effectively develop godly families who change the world one home at a time.

I'm Michelle Hill, inviting you to join us again next time for another edition of FamilyLife This Week.

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