

# The Extra Job in My Head

How to take a mental break when your mind is filled with reminders of your to-do list



I was sitting in a meeting with my team when I found myself drifting off to my to-do list located smack dab in my head: the sheets need changing, the dog needs groomed, the chicken's been thawed for two days and needs to be cooked before it goes bad. On and on and on. This wasn't a random occurrence of my mind wandering. This happens daily. It's as if I'm doing two jobs concurrently—one in my head and one real, "hands-on" job right in front of me. I sometimes wonder, after I've come back to the present from my to-do list, if the men sitting around the table think about these same things—or if this is unique to women. I don't know the definitive answer, but I do know after being married for 33 years that I do this more than my husband.

As a woman in full-time ministry, I'm constantly trying to integrate, juggle, keep up, and balance my roles as pastor, wife, mom, grandmother, and writer. Then add on to that keeping everything in my family's world running. I've heard this described a million ways in women's blogs and at women's conferences. Whatever you call it, this invisible job takes up a huge amount of precious mental real estate and can be draining and anxiety producing, mostly because I don't know *how* or *if* everything on the to-do list in my head is going to get done. I hold the list in my head through the work day, but it can explode when I get home, often driving me to bark orders at my family. The list must be accomplished!

My husband definitely helps. He takes care of our taxes, the insurance, and booking flights for our vacations. If I didn't do the grocery shopping, sheet changing, or social planning, he'd pick up the slack. But would he think about it and add it to the list in his head? Do men even keep lists in their heads?

I remember when our children were little. I would be the one to think about the amount of diapers we had, or the shampoo levels in the bottles, or the amount of toothpaste left before the final squeeze, or when the kids needed their shots. I could keep this stuff in my head while working on projects or running the kids from school to soccer to piano lessons. But when I would ask my husband to pick up something from the grocery store on his way home from the office he would forget. How does that happen? How can he forget something that is constantly taking up so much space in my brain? His heart was to help me, and he certainly didn't forget to stop by the grocery store on the way home on purpose.

Lisa Wade wrote in her article in Time, “[The Invisible Workload that Drags Women Down](#),” “[W]omen do more of the intellectual, mental, and emotional work of childcare and household maintenance. They do more of the learning and information processing (like researching pediatricians). They do more worrying (like wondering if their child is hitting his developmental milestones). And they do more organizing and delegating (like deciding when the mattress needs to be flipped or what to cook for dinner). Even when their male partners ‘helped out’ by doing their fair share of chores and errands, it was the women who noticed what needed to be done.” I’ve definitely experienced this in my own life.

But rather than complain about this additional job, I’ve come to the conclusion that the built-in to-do list is a spiritual gift that got left out of the Bible! It is a gift because it keeps everything going and running relatively smoothly, but it also has its disadvantages. It’s difficult to disconnect from this invisible job; however, you have to learn to take a break or you will become completely exhausted. After all, we were never made to work seven days a week, but this invisible work is especially hard to set down on our days off. How can we clock out of this invisible job and take a real mental break?

### **Being Mindful**

Mindfulness is a buzzword that’s popular in today’s media circles whether in “Oprahland” or the latest self-help online workshop. But mindfulness for a Christ-follower is not a new concept. Scripture says in Philippians 4:8, “And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (NLT). But when our minds are racing, how do we stop and fix our thoughts? I’ve found the following steps to be helpful for slowing my thoughts, resting my soul, and taking a mental vacation. And all of these action steps you can do whether at home with a house full of little ones or at the office. It’s amazing how being in God’s presence transforms your mind and heart, quieting your thoughts and reminding you that you can trust him with your lists. As you do this, you’ll find your thoughts and heart rate slowing down.

- Find a quiet spot.
- Position yourself in front of a window.
- Focus on the clouds.
- Begin to talk to God, worship him, tell him how much you love him.
- Bask in his love and presence.
- Picture his love washing over you, and his arms holding you.
- Speak out loud what you’re grateful for. (It’s hard for anxiety producing thoughts to co-exist with thoughts of gratitude.)

When I do these things, I’m aware of God’s presence and reminded of his love for me. The loudness of my thoughts quiets, and my soul settles down. I feel refreshed and ready for the rest of my day. It’s amazing how his presence changes everything. Psalm 131:2 says, “Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother’s milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me” (NLT). As Christ-followers we can access his presence at any time. He is with us always and desires to commune with us. And when I’m in the midst of “working my invisible job” and the list in my head is on high speed, sitting in his presence refreshes me and reminds me that I can cast my cares upon him because he loves me. What a loving God we serve!

Julia Mateer is a writer, speaker, therapist, director of women’s small groups at [Bayside Community Church](#), and author of [Life-Giving Leadership](#). You can connect with Julia on [her website](#).