

Get Your Priorities Straight

By Stephanie Marston

Stephanie Marston is an acclaimed speaker and author. She speaks from experience. Stephanie is the "go to" expert for those who seek to create quality driven lives. Stephanie is America's foremost life balance expert. Her new CD program, 30 Days to Sanity contains powerful, innovative, practical tools to reduce stress, balance work and family and make time for what truly matters. Stephanie is the author of Chicken Soup for the Soul's, Life Lessons for Women: 7 Essential Ingredients for a Balanced Life, If Not Now, When?, Reclaiming Ourselves at Midlife, and Life Coaching for Parents: Six Weeks to Sanity. For more information and a free Sanity Saving Solution visit www.30daystosanity.com

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So you say you want your life to be different, better, more fulfilling? Who doesn't? How many times have you heard yourself say, "I wish I had more time for myself"? "This stress is killing me." "I have to start to exercise and get in better shape." "I feel like my kids are getting the short end of the stick." "My husband/boyfriend says that my side of the bed looks more like a command center than a place to relax." "I feel like I'm moving at warp speed and I still can't get through my "to do" list." "I want my life to be more fun. I need to be more playful." Sound familiar?

But as a career woman who is balancing work and family, a single mom who is trying to fill in all the gaps or a woman who's simply tired of feeling like she's living a "treadmill existence" you have a choice-you *can* reduce your stress, regain your sanity and create a life you love. However this means slowing down to reevaluate your values and priorities and making considered choices about how you're going to invest your time and energy.

The French philosopher Rene Descartes said, "I think therefore I am." Our modern day version of this has become "I do therefore I am." So many of us live by the mantra "I have to keep up," "I am what I do," "I have to push myself," "I have to prove my worth," "I have to keep going." While many of you thought that you left peer pressure back in the halls of high school I have a surprise for you. It's still very much in operation in our adult lives.

Most of us have one clear priority-get through the day. Sure, no one's going to deny the importance of that, but it's simply not enough. Most of us sleep walk through our lives. We rarely stop long enough to consider how we spend our time and energy. Yet, without determining whether your priorities match your picture of yourself and your values you will continually be out of sync with yourself.

No matter how frantic life gets, no matter how much frenzy seems to be present, the truly successful people are able to rise above the pandemonium and maintain their perspective. They can do this because they know what's important. Their values are their compass--they keep them on course regardless of the chaos and confusion of life. These people maintain a vision of what truly matters, what their life is about and what they want it to be.

Think of a typical day and a typical week. As you reflect on an average day, make a list of how you spend your time. Ask yourself how much time do you devote to career, family, health, yourself, spiritual life, home, social life, finances, friendships, etc? Make a list in order of what gets the most to the least amount of your time. How you spend your time will make known your priorities.

Now ask yourself the question, what matters? What have you found yourself saying to the world over and over throughout your life? Now please write in order of importance what you value, what you consider most important in your life. Is it your family, your children, your health, your religious or spiritual practices? Your friendships, your social life?

Now compare your lists. If you're like most people you may be surprised to discover that there's a discrepancy between what you consider most important in your life and how you spend your time. As you read over your list how do you feel? What did you learn about yourself? Where you surprised by anything? Now ask yourself, how are these values reflected in your current life? Which values are you neglecting? In what ways would your life be different if you honored these values? Are there any adjustments I need to make so that my life more closely reflects my values? If your outer life doesn't match what you cherish it's great that you now know that.

Awareness is the first step in making changes in your life.

Now that you have a clearer picture of what you consider important there's a good probability that you'll begin to think about what you need to change in order to have your values expressed more visibly in your everyday life. Is there anything you need to add to your life? Are there activities or commitments you need to eliminate? These kinds of questions will not only help you to understand yourself on a deeper level, but ultimately to refocus your life around what's truly meaningful. As strange as this may seem, it's actually less important to understand the meaning of life itself than it is to understand the meaning of your life.

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