

“Momma look! I am strong!” Jacob, (my 2 ½ year old) says, as he deadlifts a 10lb free weight, off our living room floor.

“Yes, you are strong!” I say, as I take the weight out of his hands.

“You are strong Momma?” He asks.

“Yes...Mommy is strong *and* Jacob is strong.” I reply.

We have been going through this same conversation almost daily, and it warms my heart. My main goal for both of our lives is to be mentally, physically, and spiritually strong, so we can best serve God and others. My son already knows he is strong... it looks like my plan is working.

“What is the most important thing to you in your life RIGHT NOW... TODAY?” A member at my current gym asks. (Just yesterday.)

I pause briefly and then reply, “Jacob, my son.”

“Oh really? That is interesting...” he replies. He likes to ask questions like this regularly, as if he is taking a survey. He is in his 70’s and a college professor. He goes on to give me some stories that refer to other answers he is noticing. He asked a friend his age the same question, and she said, “My grandchildren.”

I had been planning my next blog post when he walked in. I knew what I wanted to say in my post. But I just couldn’t figure out how I was going explain my position. I walked away from our brief exchange thinking about how different my answer would have been just 5 years ago. I realized (as I was folding gym towels), that my answer was truly “Jacob, my son.”, but my answer automatically included myself. I am his mother. I want for him to be strong and healthy, so he can excel at whatever he chooses to do. However, I have been convinced that I cannot give my son what I do not have. My actions will always speak louder than my words.

Just a year ago, I had a much needed conversation with a close friend. That conversation set off a permanent shift in my thinking. I have always fought busyness and overworking. As a newly single mother, I was headed down that path again...

“What do you have going on tomorrow?” My friend asked.

My day started with waking up at 6 am, dropping of my son at daycare, several appointments at 2 different gyms, my own workout, multiple things for my business I was trying to launch, & household chores. I then had my regular club manager shift from 2pm to 9pm. I was proud of my my plans for a very productive day.

I could tell before they spoke, that they did not approve. “That sounds like too much for you. Can you take a nap?”, they asked.

I started laughing, “No way! I can’t take a nap.” I then started naming off all the reasons I had to do everything I had just listed. The look of concern on their face (as I laughed them off), said more than their words. They didn’t argue with me. But that look of concern has stuck with me this entire year.

The next day I was still haunted by that exchange. I was tired, stressed, and there had been a tightness in my chest for weeks. I thought if I worked really hard, I could overcome this mess my personal life had become, after my second marriage had ended 10 months earlier. I thought I was handling it well. I hadn't had anyone else tell me that my plans were "too much" for me. In fact, I hadn't really told anyone how much I was working, how little I was sleeping, and how far away I felt from any sense of inner peace. Jacob had also started to become increasingly grumpy and clingy.

I decided I needed to take their advice. I did my personal training appointments for the morning, went home, ate lunch, took a nap, and read a book...and then went to my manager shift. It felt great. I felt refreshed.

Why was I placing work first? How could I put work in front of my own health and time with my baby, when I would never want my clients to do the same? Why was I proud of my plans and expecting others to co-sign on my behavior?

In my case it was fear. Fear that if I relaxed and took time for myself, that my world would collapse. Intellectually I knew that any sense of control I had was false. I had always advised clients to take care of themselves first. For the next 2 months I made it my mission to reclaim the basics of a healthy life. I changed my entire schedule. My life was worth more to me (and to my son) than a paycheck.

There are only 24 hours in a day, and only 168 hours a week. I decided I had to schedule everything related to my health and wellness first. This is my current list/schedule of priorities for my health and well-being. The time is assigned to each weekly.

- Sleeping at least 7 hours a night = 49 hours
- Eating 3 healthy(pre-prepared) meals and 2 snacks @1 hour a day = 7 hours
- Shopping for healthy foods (including travel time and putting away items)= 1 hour
- Prepping and cooking healthy foods (including washing dishes)= 4 hours
- Exercising (including travel time and dressing) = 8 hours
- Church on Sunday (including travel time and chatting with friends)= 2 ½ hours
- Personal time in prayer/writing/reading @ 1 hour a day = 7 hours

I have claimed 78 ½ hours a week for my own physical, spiritual, and mental health. Which leaves me with only 89 ½ more hours.

I have decided my allowance for any work (including travel time, studying for exams, and household chores) is 60 hours.

I am now left with 29 ½ hours of quality time for my son, my family, my friends, or any other recreational activities I'd like to enjoy. This averages out to over 4 hours a day.

My work productivity and job satisfaction has never been higher. I am more present with my son, my family, and my friends. I have had doors open for me in my career that I never would have imagined a year ago. I thought more work would set me free... but when I put myself first and set boundaries, my work-life immediately improved. I have also grown very close with my son, and have cherished the new found time I get to spend with my extended family and friends.

Your own health and well-being is more valuable than your paycheck. My story is just one example of what can happen if you reclaim your life. God, family, or work may seem more important than time for your health. But I know from experience, if you give yourself what you need to be healthy, you will serve God even better. You will be an even better parent. You will get much more done in the time you have left for work.

What are you doing with your 168 hours a week? Are you so busy that you have forgotten yourself? Have you let your health and well-being slide to the back burner? I want to challenge you to schedule hours for yourself first. Protect your health and well-being, so that your life can have the fullest impact on those close to you.

There is only one you. There is no amount of money worth more than your life. There is no greater gift to others than the strongest version of you.

You only have 24 hours a day. How do you want to use them? Get out your calendar and reserve the time you need... for YOU.