

The Day I Stopped Saying Hurry Up by Rachel Macy Stafford

When you're living a distracted life, every minute must be accounted for. You feel like you must be checking something off the list, staring at a screen, or rushing off to the next destination. And no matter how many ways you divide your time and attention, no matter how many duties you try and multi-task, there's never enough time in a day to ever catch up.

That was my life for two frantic years. My thoughts and actions were controlled by electronic notifications, ring tones, and jam-packed agendas. And although every fiber of my inner drill sergeant wanted to be on time to every activity on my overcommitted schedule, I wasn't.

You see, six years ago I was blessed with a laid-back, carefree, stop-and-smell-the roses type of child.

When I needed to be out the door, she was taking her sweet time picking out a purse and a glittery crown.

When I needed to be somewhere five minutes ago, she insisted on buckling her stuffed animal into a car seat.

When I needed to grab a quick lunch at Subway, she'd stop to speak to the elderly woman who looked like her grandma.

When I had thirty minutes to get in a run, she wanted me to stop the stroller and pet every dog we passed.

When I had a full agenda that started at 6 a.m., she asked to crack the eggs and stir them ever so gently.

My carefree child was a gift to my Type A, task-driven nature—but I didn't see it. Oh no, when you live life distracted, you have tunnel vision—only looking ahead to what's next on the agenda. And anything that cannot be checked off the list is a waste of time.

Whenever my child caused me to deviate from my master schedule, I thought to myself, "We don't have time for this." Consequently, the two words I most commonly spoke to my

little lover of life were: “Hurry up.”

I started my sentences with it.
Hurry up, we’re gonna be late.

I ended sentences with it.
We’re going to miss everything if you don’t hurry up.

I started my day with it.
Hurry up and eat your breakfast.
Hurry up and get dressed.

I ended my day with it.
Hurry up and brush your teeth.
Hurry up and get in bed.

And although the words “hurry up” did little if nothing to increase my child’s speed, I said them anyway. Maybe even more than the words, “I love you.”

The truth hurts, but the truth heals ... and brings me closer to the parent I want to be.

Then one fateful day, things changed. We’d just picked my older daughter up from kindergarten and were getting out of the car. Not going fast enough for her liking, my older daughter said to her little sister, “You are so slow.” And when she crossed her arms and let out an exasperated sigh, I saw myself—and it was a gut-wrenching sight.

I was a bully who pushed and pressured and hurried a small child who simply wanted to enjoy life.

My eyes were opened; I saw with clarity the damage my hurried existence was doing to both of my children.

Although my voice trembled, I looked into my small child’s eyes and said, “I am so sorry I have been making you hurry. I love that you take your time, and I want to be more like you.”

Both my daughters looked equally surprised by my painful admission, but my younger daughter’s face held the unmistakable glow of validation and acceptance.

“I promise to be more patient from now on,” I said as I hugged my curly-haired child who was now beaming at her mother’s newfound promise.

It was pretty easy to banish “hurry up” from my vocabulary. What was not so easy was acquiring the patience to wait on my leisurely child. To help us both, I began giving her a little more time to prepare if we had to go somewhere. And sometimes, even then, we were still late. Those were the times I assured myself that I will be late only for a few years, if that, while she is young.

When my daughter and I took walks or went to the store, I allowed her to set the pace. And when she stopped to admire something, I would push thoughts of my agenda out of my head and simply observe her. I witnessed expressions on her face that I’d never seen before. I studied dimples on her hands and the way her eyes crinkled up when she smiled. I saw the way other people responded to her stopping to take time to talk to them. I saw

the way she spotted the interesting bugs and pretty flowers. She was a Noticer, and I quickly learned that The Noticers of the world are rare and beautiful gifts. That's when I finally realized she was a gift to my frenzied soul.

My promise to slow down was made almost three years ago, at the same time I began my journey to let go of daily distraction and grasp what matters in life. Living at a slower pace still takes a concerted effort. But my younger daughter is my living reminder of why I must keep trying. In fact, the other day, she reminded me once again.

The two of us had taken a bike ride to a sno-cone shack while on vacation. After purchasing a cool treat for my daughter, she sat down at a picnic table delightedly admiring the icy tower she held in her hand.

Suddenly a look of worry came across her face. "Do I have to rush, Mama?"

I could have cried. Perhaps the scars of a hurried life don't ever completely disappear, I thought sadly.

As my child looked up at me waiting to know if she could take her time, I knew I had a choice. I could sit there in sorrow thinking about the number of times I rushed my child through life ... or I could celebrate the fact that today I'm trying to do things differently.

I chose to live in today.

"You don't have to rush. Just take your time," I said gently. Her whole face instantly brightened and her shoulders relaxed.

And so we sat side-by-side talking about things that ukulele-playing-6-year-olds talk about. There were even moments when we sat in silence just smiling at each other and admiring the sights and sounds around us.

I thought my child was going to eat the whole darn thing—but when she got to the last bite, she held out a spoonful of ice crystals and sweet juice for me. "I saved the last bite for you, Mama," my daughter said proudly.

As I let the icy goodness quench my thirst, I realized I just got the deal of a lifetime.

I gave my child a little time ... and in return, she gave me her last bite and reminded me that things taste sweeter and love comes easier when you stop rushing through life.

Whether it's ...

Sno-cone eating

Flower picking

Seatbelt buckling

Egg cracking

Seashell finding

Ladybug watching

Sidewalk strolling

I will not say, "We don't have time for this." Because that is basically saying, "We don't have time to live."

Pausing to delight in the simple joys of everyday life is the only way to truly live.

(Trust me, I learned from the world's leading expert on joyful living.)