

If your life was plate of food, would it be a sloppy, overflowing plate of spaghetti, or a lovely well-balanced meal? If it's a bit on the messy side, we think you'll enjoy this article by Alicia Bruxvoort and her honest evaluation of her own hurried life.

## The Secret of the *'Pretty' Plate*

By Alicia Bruxvoort



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*I* knew my life had spiraled out of balance when I yelled at my

4-year-old for studying a caterpillar. We'd been heading to swimming lessons when the baby, already buckled in the infant carrier, interrupted our rush with a blow-out diaper. Before returning inside to perform a super-change on my stinky wee one, I'd asked my preschooler to get in the van.

By the time I'd rescued the baby from her mess, we were inarguably late. I raced back to the garage, buckled the infant carrier in the backseat and noticed the empty booster seat. Where was Lizzy? I hollered her name and ran around the house. No sign of a curly-haired 4-year-old. I was headed to the neighbor's yard when I spotted my daughter hunched over the sidewalk half a block down the street.

"We're late for swimming lessons," I warned as I jogged to her side.

Rarely still for anything, Lizzy sat motionless, her expression one of sheer wonder. "But, Mommy, I found this fuzzy caterpillar and I'm watching to see if it's gonna turn into a butterfly!"

"We don't have time for watching caterpillars," I exploded as I swept up my pensive girl and carried her to the van like a football tucked beneath my armpit. I buckled her into her car seat and tore out of the garage with a grumble. A mile later, the face in my rear view mirror

interrupted my mental rant. Silent tears drizzled down Lizzy's cheeks.

I swallowed hard, trying to rid myself of the guilt rising in my throat. "I thought you *liked* swimming lessons," I mumbled as we sped toward the pool.

"I *do like* swimming lessons, Mommy," Lizzy replied. "I just don't like *hurrying*. It makes my heart hurt."

Now mine was the heart that was hurting. When had our days become a sprint? And how could we change the pace?

Over the next few weeks, I analyzed our family's choices and took a long look at how we spent our time. Did my children really need to pursue *every* activity on the planet? Did I? Was there a benefit to being room mom, Sunday school teacher and Bible study leader all at the same time? What if, by choosing to chase after so many *good things*, we were missing some of the *best things*.

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Eventually, I realized what I really longed for wasn't a full calendar, but *life to the full*. I wanted to experience the reality of Jesus' promise in John 10:10 – *I've come to give you life to the full*. And I wanted my children to experience that, too.

So began our family's ongoing quest to balance our desire *to do* with our need

*to be*. After 14 years of parenthood, we still haven't discovered the exact formula that creates a perfect family schedule, but we *are learning* that making the choice to say *no* to a full plate often allows us to say yes to a filled soul.

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One simple suggestion that has helped our family harness our pace comes from Aimee Kollmansberger as quoted in the book, "Not So Fast": "We have all heard the phrase *what do you have on your plate today?*" this wise mom asks. "But I have started envisioning my day as a beautiful plate that can only hold about three portions. What will I put on my *pretty plate* today? Just enough to be healthy! I want to do a few things really well and listen to the

Lord during the open spaces of my day for the goodness He wants to fill my plate with ... an abundance that I can now give to others He places in my path."

.Whether we realize it or not, we, as women, are often responsible for our family's pace of life. When we approach our family's activity load with a *pretty-plate mentality* we

are more likely to leave some wiggle room in our days. Over time, we may even come to realize that *more* is not necessarily *better* when it comes to the master calendar.

Our family's plate doesn't always look *pretty*. Sometimes it just looks *pretty messy*

and absolutely exhausting. But as we prayerfully set our hours before the Lord, we are learning to enjoy *life to the full*. Rather than racing from one activity to the next, we have unscheduled moments for God to fill as He pleases. On some days, He prompts us to use that extra space on our plate to serve a friend in need or to visit an elderly grandparent. But other times, He simply invites us to slow our steps and hunt for caterpillars.

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Alicia Bruxvoort fills her plate in Pella, Iowa, where she writes, speaks, and parents. She serves up hope and inspiration on her blog, The Overflow! at [www.aliciabruxvoort.net](http://www.aliciabruxvoort.net).