

New York Times Best-selling Author

BALANCING IT ALL

My Story of Juggling Priorities and Purpose

CANDACE CAMERON BURE

WITH DANA WILKERSON



Nashville, Tennessee

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Introduction

So you think I've got it all figured out? If you read anything about me or from me online, it may seem like I have no trouble balancing family life, work, my social life, church, and everything else I do. I realize it could seem perfectly joyful and balanced when you read my tweets or see my Facebook updates. "Candace, you're my role model," women respond. Or, "Your faithfulness is so inspiring!" I also get a lot of, "You're such a great mom." And then there's, "I want to be just like you!" The compliments may feel good, but many days I feel like all I'm really good at is fooling everybody!

If you were to see me on the street and ask, "What are your top priorities?" my immediate response would be, "God and family." In fact, many people say their priorities are, in order: (1) God, (2) family, (3) work. That sounds great, but it's not really a hierarchy, and priorities are more complicated than that. As a Christian, my love for and obedience to

God should permeate all else. So He's not the top priority, He's the ultimate priority and is a part of everything I do. Throughout this book if it seems that I'm not repeating the fact that God is or should be my "top priority," it's because that's a given for me as a Christian. In all that I do, I strive to do what God would have me do.

I also find that my family is—or can be—an aspect of many of the other priorities in my life. For instance, I work to help financially support my family. And my choice to live a healthy life directly impacts everyone in my home—both because it also causes them to live in a healthy manner and because when I'm healthy it helps me to better take care of my kids and husband.

With the exception of God and family, I find that the expression of most of my other priorities will change in importance from day to day, from week to week, and throughout the different stages of my life. When I think about this, I am reminded of Ecclesiastes 3:1–8:

For everything there is a season, and a time for
every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is
planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

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a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather
stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from
embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

No two days, weeks, years, or seasons of anyone's life look exactly the same. Some things stay the same, but our lives are constantly changing. We need to be open to those changes and be willing to reorder and balance our lives as necessary.

If you're like me, sometimes it seems as if life isn't so much a balancing act as a juggling act. There are so many things going on that I just can't manage to hold onto all of them at once. When this happens, I just remember that I need to reprioritize and reevaluate every single day. I also remind myself that I can't do it on my own—I need God's help, as well as the help of my husband, kids, and other people in my life to make it all happen and pick up the slack.

As you think about how to balance your life and prioritize the many parts of it, I want you to remember that your

priorities are *your* priorities—no one else’s. You are unique and your situation is unique. So while it’s wise to look at others’ choices, don’t copy them exactly or compare yourself to them. They have different people in their lives, different situations, and different resources. Along that same vein, don’t expect others to prioritize their lives the same way you do.

Before we get started, I want to acknowledge that some people might say that the easiest way to create balance in our lives is to strip our commitments down to the bare minimum. You’re going to see that is definitely not my message. Instead, I think balance is achieved when we are well rounded and focusing on all the things God has created us to be and do. That is when our priorities will most clearly overlap and it is through that overlap that balance is most natural. So, yes, this is a book about balance, but you’ll see that it’s about understanding principles that help identify what I’ve learned to prioritize in life. And through those priorities, I’ve learned the value of balance—even though I don’t always master it!

As you read this book, consider the principles found among the pages, but don’t try to model your life exactly after mine. At the same time, try not to discount the things I say or do simply because you think I can’t relate to you due to our different lives and experiences. Remember that you

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are unique. Your life is different than mine, so the precise way you balance and prioritize the parts of your life will be different than the way I do it, but we can all learn from the principles we see in each other's choices.

I hope you'll learn from my stories, the good and the bad. I'm not superwoman. I'm just another working mom and wife trying to balance, juggle, and maintain this twenty-first-century life, living it to the fullest, with conviction and morals, trying to live it well. Warning: There will be some spilled milk and broken smart phones along the way, but if we're in it together, we will find our joy!

Blessings,
Candace

CHAPTER 1

Monkey See, Monkey Do

*Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

—PROVERBS 22:6



What would you like for your birthday, Maks?” Val and I asked our youngest before his seventh birthday. His response: “All I want to do is play hockey. Please, Papa? Please? I wanna be a hockey player just like you!” Ugh, three years of skirting the issue finally came to a sudden halt. How could we resist those big, blue, hopeful eyes? How could we resist the one and only request for his birthday? Maks had been begging to play hockey since he was four years old and Val had been pushing his hardest to turn our kids into tennis players. Players

can get injured in any sport, but hockey can be extremely brutal. After six concussions and multiple knee, shoulder, elbow, hip, and back surgeries, Val would do everything in his power to steer our boys clear of hockey life. I mean, come on, tennis could be played in the sunshine, outdoors, on clay and grass—surfaces not nearly as hard and cold as rock-solid ice. But as life would have it, our boys were destined to play hockey, and not without Dad as their head coach.

“Do what I say, not what I do.” How many times have you heard parents say that to their kids? Probably a lot. And how many times do the kids do what the parents say instead of what they do? Likely none. The truth is, when it comes to children, “monkey see, monkey do” is the name of the game. Even from a young age, kids will do what they see their parents doing, and without some form of intervention they’ll likely continue those patterns throughout their lives.

As a parent, I have to remember that I am constantly teaching my children, whether I want to—or realize I’m doing it—or not. Though I believe it is important to tell my kids how their dad and I want them to live and behave, the primary means of teaching is through action. If we live the way we want our kids to live, there’s a good chance they’ll pick up on it. When we purposefully live balanced lives and strive to prioritize in the ways God wants us to, our kids will

see, experience, and emulate that without even knowing it's happening.

One of the reasons I am able to balance my life and keep my priorities in line is because of the example my parents set for me. Thinking back to what I learned from them, I consider how important it is to create balanced lives for my own children. I am so grateful for my parents' influence in my life and the lives of my three siblings. Were they perfect parents? No. No one is. But for the most part they strove to do what they believed was right, and I believe I am a better person for it.

Cameron Family Beginnings

Robert Cameron and Barbara Bausmith were married on June 22, 1969 (exactly twenty-seven years before my husband Val and I got married). Mom was barely out of high school, and Dad was a junior high math teacher. My brother Kirk was born in the fall of 1970, followed by my sister Bridgette eleven months later. Three years passed and my sister Melissa was born, and then on April 6, 1976, I rounded out the Cameron clan. Not long after my birth, my parents bought a modest home in Canoga Park, California, where they lived until November of 2012.

When Mom was growing up, her family went to church, but they were more focused on living a moral life than on living life for God. When Mom married Dad, she figured they'd raise their kids the same way. She was wrong . . . partly. Dad was very concerned with morality, but he wanted nothing to do with church or religion and didn't want his family involved. So my brother, sisters, and I did not grow up in a Christian home, but we were still taught biblical principles, though my dad wouldn't have called them that. My parents wanted us to be kind, respectful, responsible, and honest, and to treat others as we would want to be treated. They taught us that it was important to give to others who were less fortunate than us and to be aware of the "real" world outside our family. We were expected to know right from wrong and to be good, upstanding, moral citizens who worked hard at whatever we did.

My parents tell me that even as a young child I had a strong sense of right and wrong, even though I didn't always *do* what I knew was right. I also wanted to do things just the way Mom did, so I purposely picked up many of her traits, both good and bad. (Yet another reminder that our kids will do what we do!) One of the traits she sometimes regrets passing on to me is a love of carrot cake, apple fritters, and mint chocolate chip ice cream. I'll have to admit, that love of

decadent foods has gotten both of us into some trouble over the years!

Though my parents weren't on the same page when it came to church attendance, they were in agreement on many of their child-rearing practices. They wanted us to be well-rounded kids with balanced lives. They encouraged after-school activities such as soccer and ballet, but they didn't overextend us in those activities. Mom and Dad were both determined that family was—and always would be—a top priority. Along with spending time together as a nuclear family, we also spent a lot of time with our grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. During my childhood, my sisters were my best friends, and they remain some of my best friends to this day. During the first twelve years of my marriage I lived thousands of miles away from my family, and one of the best things about being back in California is that I have been able to see my parents, grandparents, siblings, nieces, and nephews on a regular basis, and my kids get to spend time with their extended family just like I did as a child.

Hollywood Hopefuls

For a short time after Bridgette was born, my parents lived in a little apartment where they had a neighbor named

Fran Rich. Mom and Fran really hit it off, and though Mom didn't know it at the time, that relationship would eventually change our lives in a drastic way. Some of you may have heard of Fran's son, Adam, who played Nicholas Bradford, the youngest son on the TV show *Eight Is Enough* in the late 1970s and early '80s. During the time when my parents lived by the Rich family in the early '70s, Adam appeared in many commercials. Fran thought Kirk and Bridgette would be perfect for commercials too, and tried to get Mom to take them to meet Adam's agent, but Mom wasn't interested. Her life was full enough as it was. She simply wanted to be with her children and raise them to be happy, respectful, and healthy individuals. She enjoyed being a stay-at-home mom and didn't want to complicate her life or her kids' lives. Considering her family was not yet complete, I believe she made a wise choice.

Fast-forward to my aunt's wedding when I was four years old. My siblings and I were all there and Mom took a lot of photos of us, as moms are prone to do. Mom showed some of the pictures to Fran, who once again told Mom she should talk to Adam's agent. Since the other kids were all in school and I was in preschool a few days a week, Mom wasn't as busy as she had been, so she agreed to let Fran send the photos to Iris Burton, who was then the biggest name in children's agents. Mom wasn't all that sure she was doing the

right thing. It had never been her dream for us to be in show business, but since we lived in the right place, she agreed to give it a shot, as long as we were all willing. Needless to say, we were.

Iris agreed to see all four of us, so one day Mom dressed us all up and she and Dad took us to Iris's house. One at a time, she asked each of us to step forward and say a few lines as she directed. When we had all taken a turn, she agreed to take on Kirk and Melissa for one year. She said I was too young and could come back in a year and my sister Bridgette needed to wait until her braces were off.

So Mom began taking Kirk and Melissa on commercial auditions. She told the two of them—as she told me a year later—that if at any point they wanted to stop, they could. I don't have to tell you that Kirk and I didn't get to that point. But Melissa, after doing one commercial and nearly getting cast in a TV series, decided she no longer wanted to be in the industry. It didn't fit her personality; she wasn't comfortable in front of the camera.

When my siblings started going to auditions, Mom saw it as more of a temporary diversion than anything. It was fun to dream of what might be, but she really didn't think it would happen. After all, the vast majority of kids who try to break into the entertainment industry don't ever book one job, much less become a star.

Dad looked at it simply as an extracurricular activity that also happened to make us a little bit of money. While Mom secretly hoped we'd make it big, he never thought any of us would make a career of it. He wanted more security for his children's futures than what he thought acting would give us. He was determined that no matter what happened, we were all going to college so we would be able to support ourselves with a normal, respectable, well-paying job.

A New Balancing Act

With four kids—two of whom were in the entertainment industry—how did my parents balance it all? The quick answer is that they already had a lifestyle that was conducive to it. If they hadn't, Mom wouldn't have allowed Fran to send Iris our photos. It simply wouldn't have been an option, because my parents wouldn't have been able to make it work.

Dad was a teacher and Mom stayed at home, so they didn't have much money, but they did have time. Mom had the time to take Kirk and me to auditions and shoots, and Dad was able to take us to school and be home after school to take care of whichever kids weren't working that day. Dad also took care of things around the house when Mom was off with one of us in the evenings. He cooked, cleaned,

did laundry, and helped with homework. But no matter what, we all ate dinner together every night. Mom and Dad allowed us to work, but family was still the top priority. They agreed if that ever changed and our work started to interfere with our family life, that would be it. They'd pull us out of the industry.

My mom learned early on that her top priorities when we were working were to protect us and keep us grounded in the midst of what was often chaos. By the time I started auditioning for commercials, Mom was an old pro. She was determined not to be a stage mom, and she was even more determined that we wouldn't become entitled Hollywood brats. She had seen a handful of both varieties and she wanted nothing to do with it. She also didn't want us to experience the dog-eat-dog Hollywood world, so she did all she could to protect us from it.

When we would go to auditions, we would enter the waiting area just long enough to pick up our sides (the lines we would have to say) and then we would go to a hallway or a far-off corner to practice. Oftentimes, the rooms were packed with moms combing their kids' hair while the kids rehearsed out loud where others could hear, or they were talking about the commercials and movies their kids had recently booked. Mom tried to stay out of that atmosphere as much as possible so we could enjoy the experience without

feeling like our value lay in whether or not we had as many jobs as the other kids. She wanted us to be confident in ourselves and know that whether or not we booked a job, we walked away knowing we gave it our best effort. She would tell us, “Have lots of energy and be yourself. And remember, if you don’t get the part, it’s not because you weren’t good. They were just looking for someone different than you.”

As Kirk and I were working more and more, there came a time when we needed a manager. It wasn’t difficult for my parents to agree that Mom would be best suited for that job. They could have hired someone, but Mom already had a lot of experience with the industry by this point, and they knew nobody else would have our best interests at heart the way Mom did. Why pay someone else to do what Mom was basically already doing.

I didn’t realize it at the time, because I was so young and didn’t know any different, but when I look back on it now, I’m so glad Mom and Dad made that choice. I have had professional managers since then, and they’re fantastic, but I’m grateful that it was Mom who had the opportunity to shape my character and my career. Nobody else could have done it as well as she did, because nobody else would have put my needs and interests before their own.

When I was in third grade, Kirk was cast in *Growing Pains*. If you ask my mom, I’m sure she’d say that life became

a little more chaotic when that happened. However, for me life didn't seem crazy at all, which is a testament to my parents' ability to balance our lives and keep our priorities where they should be. But even in the chaos, my parents still kept the focus on family. One of my favorite times of the week was Friday night, which was tape night for *Growing Pains*. We'd all head to the studio to be part of the live audience for the show. If the taping didn't go too late, we'd go out to eat afterward with any other friends or family members who had attended the taping with us. It was all about family for us, and the same is true of my family today. Even though our lives are sometimes hectic, we make it a point to spend a lot of quality time together. We do not let the chaos intrude upon the areas of life that are more important.

Train Up a Child

The Bible tells us in Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." I definitely don't consider myself to be "old," but I can honestly say that I have not departed from what my parents taught me through both word and action when I was a child. I have added to what they taught me, through studying God's Word and learning what it means to follow Him, but they created a good foundation.

My parents not only taught me to be a moral person, to treat others the way I want to be treated, and to know right from wrong, but they also taught me how to be a good parent and to guide a child in the direction and way I believe is right. Again, my Christian faith has greatly added to my understanding of parenting, but I often make family and parenting decisions partly based on what I experienced and observed from my own parents as a child. This is a great reminder to me that I need to be the godly parent God wants me to be so that in time, my kids can also be godly parents. They will be much more strongly positioned to parent in the same way I do, and I want that to be a good example, for their sake and the sake of my future grandchildren.

Note that the proverb I quoted says “a child,” not “your child.” Whether you do or don’t have children of your own, I’m sure you have other kids that look up to you. Maybe you have nieces or nephews or friends’ children that you love and spend a lot of time with. Perhaps you coach youth sports or teach kids at school, at church, or as a tutor. Even though you’re not their parent, they’re watching you too. They pick up on how you treat them, how you talk about and interact with others, how you spend your time, what your priorities are, and so on. There’s a chance that you are a more positive role model for those kids than their own parents are. If that’s the case, I want to challenge you to take your relationship

with those children seriously and recognize the influence you can have not just over the way they live their lives now, but also how they will conduct themselves as adults. You can help break negative patterns in their lives and help train them up in the way they should go.

Some of you might be out there thinking, *It's great that your parents were fantastic role models for you and your siblings, but my parents weren't like that. I don't want to parent in the same way mine did.* If that's the case, you can make the decision to change that pattern and be a great role model for your kids. You don't have to perpetuate the cycle. I can tell you that you're already on the right path. The fact that you're reading books like this one means that you desire to make changes in your legacy. You can be a better parent than your own parents were.

Kids are watching, even when we think they're 100 percent focused on their video game. They are listening, even when they roll their adolescent eyes at us. They might not realize it, but we have a huge amount of influence over how they will turn out. Sure, they will make their own choices, which will include mistakes, but the way we train them up plays a great part in the decisions they will make in life.

