

How to Tell What's Most Important to You

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When the captain of Flight 1549, Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger, said, "Brace for impact," Ric Elias realized that his flight was on its way down. He also understood, instantly, what was important in his life as the Miracle of the Hudson unfolded.

"There are three things I learned at that moment," he said:

- 1. "That it all changes in an instant. I no longer wanted to postpone anything important in my life. That urgency, that purpose, has really changed my life."**
- 2. "I learned that I regret the time I wasted in things that didn't matter with people that mattered."**
- 3. "I learned that dying is not scary. But it was very sad. I didn't want to go. That sadness framed the thought – and I only wished for one thing – that I could see my kids grow up. The only thing that mattered in my life was to be a great dad."**

Elias concluded, "I was given a gift of not dying that day, and to see into the future and to come back, and to live differently."

Chances are you won't find yourself plummeting toward earth on a doomed airliner. We sincerely hope that you don't, but there are times when what's really important becomes crystal clear. Our whole world doesn't have to come crashing down to gain a little insight. So here are five other ways to tell what's really important and what matters most to you:

1. What keeps you up at night?:

I know we don't all worry ourselves out of sleep. But, once in a while, something works its way to the front of our minds and won't go away. Typically, it's going to be something related to the security, wellbeing, and happiness of our family. Pay attention. Chances are your car, your golf game, or Monday Night Football isn't on your mind at 2:00 AM. So why do we give those things (and others) so much attention when our family needs us more?

2. Take "hurricane inventory":

Imagine your car is in the driveway. You have just 30 minutes to pack before the roads close and a Category 5 hurricane comes ashore to level your home. You make sure the kids are on board, and that your wife has what she needs, and you've taken care of the pets. Then you stop and think...other than a couple of boxes of family photographs, everything else is all pretty-much just "stuff," isn't it?

3. Outline your story:

Imagine a television special is featuring your life. Imagine that you're asked to help outline the content of the show. What would you want to see highlighted? Your work? Your possessions? Your character? The way you love your family? Your children? Your choice of recreational activities? Your commitment to the community? What things would you insist the documentary addressed?

4. Stay up late one night and watch:

Wait for the entire family to go to sleep. Then, make yourself a cup of tea and walk around the inside of the house, slowly. Look at everything that occupies your space. Now pay attention to your heart, and listen to what it says when you watch your wife sleep...and your children.

5. Attend a reunion and listen to yourself talk:

What did you share with that table full of people you haven't seen in 20 years? Chances are, if you want your old high-school friends to know about it, then it matters a lot to you. Don't think about what you should say, but think about what you did (or would) say. Do the right things matter?