



Choosing To Be a Stay-At-Home Mom... Over and Over Again

Guest: Karen Stapley

Shelley Hunter: You're listening to the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. I'm your host, Shelley Hunter, and this is the place where we talk to people who recognize the Lord's hand in their lives, and specifically in their careers.

Thank you for joining me in episode three of the *Faithful Career Moves* podcast. In the first two episodes, I interviewed former stay-at-home moms who returned to the workforce after being home with their kids for a time.

Today I'm interviewing a dear friend of mine whose career went the opposite direction. After getting her education, pursuing a career she had planned for her whole life, and finding her passion professionally, Karen Stapley decided to stay home with her children, even through some very difficult financial times. Now, I believe that leaving a job and a life you'd plan for is just as much a faithful career move as embarking on a professional journey. In fact, I could argue that putting a pause on your career takes even more faith because it can feel like an even bigger risk, and maybe even something that you leave behind forever.

As Karen demonstrates, the Lord often has his own plans for how we spend our time. Now, two things you need to know before listening to this. One, if you're not of my faith, which is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, that's okay. This is a story about faith and following God's plan for your life. When we talk about callings, well, that just means different opportunities to serve within our church congregation. Karen spent most of her adult life serving in what we call the young women's program, which includes girls ages 12 to 18. She is amazing.

Which brings me to number two, is that you need to know Karen is amazing. She's creative, she's funny. She's a little bit crazy, I don't mind saying that to her. She pulls off the most incredible things. I honestly didn't know where she got her inspiration until this interview, but I can see that this is a job Karen has been preparing for her whole life.

This is Karen Stapley, talking about her professional journey.

Karen Stapley: Ever since I was little, from the time I was probably in kindergarten, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. Then I went to BYU. I started studying elementary education. I had the opportunity to go teach English in Korea, South Korea. My brother had been on a mission there, he and his wife were living there. He just kept

saying, "You've got to come out here. There's all these young people that are teaching, and it's really this awesome experience."

When I was 19, I took off six months from school and went to teach English, which was a total life-changing experience for me. Then I came back to BYU, and I don't know if it's still the same way, but it was also this, I don't know, this stigma. If you're an elementary education major, then really all you wanted to do was get married and have kids. I don't know. It always kind of bugged me because I wanted to see the world and I wanted to do things, but I was really drawn spiritually. I had experiences previously where I knew I wanted a teacher. I decided to add on this teaching English as a second language minor.

I did that. I also went to study abroad to the Dominican Republic. I went to a Spanish speaking University there, lived with a family, which was also an incredible experience. Then I got married. I had one more semester, and I did my student teaching. I also did a graduate program and teaching English as a second language. Then we moved back to California, and I got my masters in curriculum and instruction. I was a public school teacher at the time. Am I boring you?

Shelley: No. I'm just shocked. I honestly had no idea. Keep going.

Karen: I taught in the public schools. I started off in high school, and it was a terrifying experience. I'm not going to lie. It was really stressful. Then I ended up moving down to middle school, which I loved, and did a little bit itinerant work in elementary schools, but I loved, loved teaching English as a second language. It was mostly newcomers to the country. Day one in the country, they come and they're terrified in my classroom because it was all newcomers to the country. It was like their safe place, and it was really awesome. Then I got pregnant. When I got pregnant, I knew for me that I really, really wanted to stay home.

Shelley: Was it a hard transition then to leave that behind and to be a stay-at-home mom?

Karen: At the time, it wasn't really. I did very much miss the connection with my students, and I still actually keep very close contact with a lot of them, but I did love, I'm not going to lie, I love staying more with my kids.

Shelley: What are some of the things that you did professionally, I would say, that influence how you mother your children?

Karen: I'm a pretty laid back person, you know that, but there's also a planner in me. When my kids were younger, we used to have Stapley summer camp, and there were a lot of times because I chose not to go back to work that we were totally strapped financially. I couldn't always take my kids to do awesome summer camps, or have really great birthday parties where you go someplace else. I used my background in working with kids to try to provide the best childhood we could on a budget, which has actually ended up being a really great blessing to me.

Shelley: Give me an example of a low budget family adventure you guys do that you maybe wouldn't have done otherwise?

Karen: One summer we went to the Grand Canyon and all the national parks around there. We seriously did all Groupons, and it was like nasty breakfast buffets. It's gross. We've had some really gross hotel rooms. We went to Canada, super cheap, but that's honestly some of our favorite memories. We always laugh about the Dam Travelodge. It was the most disgusting hotel. We do things as cheap as possible, but we do as much as we can.

Shelley: You're underplaying this because I know that you also do road trip games. Most people go on Amazon and they buy car bingo and stuff, but I've seen some of the stuff you do.

Karen: I do like Pinterest. My mom actually, I like to say I was raised in a craft store because my mom actually owned a store when I was growing up in the '80s, in the height of the craft craze. Before they were like Jo-Ann and these big-named stores, but it was a fabric store and it taught craft classes. I worked the register when I was in elementary school. I was surrounded by a lot of creativity, and my mom was very creative. That's kind of influenced me.

Shelley: Give me an example on those road trips, there's some things you bring.

Karen: We would put a little string across the top of the car with little destination spots along the way. Then a family favorite was skipped veto. We have different musical tastes, and everyone gets to skip their laminated card and a veto card. If your favorite song comes on and everybody else hates it, you can play your veto card. If you really hate someone else's, you can play your skip card. [laughs]

Shelley: The first time we met, we were doing the archery range at Young Women's Camp. The camp directors brought us together, and we were now going to take over the archery range. I think we talked for all of five minutes, and basically came up with, "I will do all the sports part of it. I'll do all the archery." You wanted to decorate. [laughs] I was like, "How about it?" I know that we didn't hardly talk until we got to camp. Then I'm setting up the range and you don't just decorate something, you transform things. Prior to that, the archery range had actually been a destination for archery. Then it became a place that the girls like to hangout. Even if they didn't have any desire to shoot a bow and arrow, they wanted to hangout with you. This is part of who Karen Stapley is. If you bring her into something, she creates an environment that is fun and crafty and creative, and people want to hangout there because they feel good about themselves when they're with you.

One of the things that I think is important to get across is, the Lord wants us to use our talents and abilities to help each other. How have you seen those talents and abilities bless the lives of the people you serve?

Karen: It's been interesting. I've been thinking recently since I haven't had a paid professional long time, but I've actually thought that my skill set and my leadership capabilities, everything that is who I am now is basically been a result of serving in

the church. Whether it's just event planning or teaching. I was a teacher professionally before but I've had opportunities to teach Young Women's and Relief Society. I got to speak all those years on High Council Sundays. Everything that I really like about myself now really is as a direct result of serving in my callings.

Shelley: Maybe those are things you wouldn't have developed were it not for that?

Karen: Yes, absolutely. My husband, Matt, is in the home development industry, home building, and my dad was a land developer, and we got hit really hard in the recession of 2008. We had a lovely home that we loved in our neighborhood, and it was much bigger than the house we have now. I was like, "We just wanted to keep our house." I prayed and tried so many things, I was ready to go back to work. We didn't really want to, but I felt like, "Here we are, we can't pay our bills." Over and over again, as I tried to apply for things or pray about it, nothing ever worked out. What I realized over and over and over again, is that this is not my season for that. Had I not been at home, I probably wouldn't have had opportunities to serve in the capacity that I did. I have greatly blessed my life and the life of my kids and my family. God does have a plan for everybody. It's just really listening to him and finding out what that is.

Shelley: There were certainly times in my family as well where we were struggling. There were times that I thought, "I could go back to work right now and this whole charade."

Karen: Right. And we did lose our house. We lost our house. We had to move in with Matt's parents, who were very gracious. It was really hard. If I was working, and for some, that would have been the answer, and that's great. It would have been easier actually, but I just know after trying. One time I went to apply for something that I saw earlier in the day and it was just completely gone. The listing was completely gone, and things like that happened all the time. I just realized this isn't my timing.

Shelley: I think that's such a powerful lesson, because the reverse is often true. If you feel like this is something you're supposed to do and you start walking down that path and doors start opening, then you, okay, I know that the Lord is guiding me. He's pushing me along this path. It's going too easy. I can't turn back on this, but it's just as important to recognize when the door just keeps being shut, that's also a sign.

What advice would you give to somebody who is wrestling with that decision to pursue a career or stay home with your children?

Karen: It sounds so cliché, but really it is such a matter of prayer. Also, just realizing maybe it's not the season right now. There's still things I want to do. I had the chance to go to Africa, at one point, as my sister was adopting. We went to Ethiopia. I gathered some school supplies, and we went and I had an incredible spiritual experience there as we delivered supplies and went to his school there. Someday, it's my goal to start a nonprofit, something to do with literacy and delivering books to developing countries, but when I got home, I was so on fire with that, and my kids

were little. It just over and over again, the doors kept closing, and I had to realize this is not my time. I still aspire to things. Spirit will guide you, and if the answer is no, then just embrace what you have in the moment. Right now, I have one more year with all kids at home, and I'm just trying to love every second of it.

Shelley: What are some unexpected blessings that you have discovered as a result of being home?

Karen: One of the things that I love a lot about being home, is that I actually get to have real relationship with my children's friends. I just want people to feel at home and welcome in our house always. That's been one of my favorite thing, is just getting to know my kids' friends. Not that you can't do that when you're working. I don't want to diminish it by any means, but I have been blessed to be able to have a little more time.

Shelley: I'm assuming you work at the school and do all that stuff too.

Karen: We are members of the National Charity League. We do a lot of service in the community, and that's actually one thing that struck me a few years ago when I realized, Oh my gosh, I only have a few more years at least with my oldest daughter. I didn't know if we were putting our time where it counted. I actually made her pull out of some stuff that I know she wasn't happy about, but I decided for us that I really wanted to invest our time and more in service. That's another thing that's been great about staying home, is that we've had a lot of opportunities, just me and my teenage girls, to be able to support the community, and spending that time together has really been awesome.

Shelley: This is my last question for you. By the way, as I explained before, I feel like leaving a career is just as important as embarking on one. I did look up the definition of career, and it says an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person's life and with opportunities for progress. That is motherhood to me. Being a stay-at-home is seriously an occupation undertaken for a significant period of time in a person's life with opportunities for progress. How have you seen the Lord's hand in your career?

Karen: I went to school, and my chosen career was teaching, and I did happen to get a paycheck for a few years, but I can't tell you that-- I'm getting emotional. The Lord's hand and helping me influence other people and teach and have opportunities to teach whether it's in the church or outside. I definitely see the Lord's hand strengthen me in all things, but really I have had so many opportunities to use my training for teaching outside of a professional teaching job that helped to continue to get better.

Shelley: I know that if you could see yourself from the outside, you would be amazed at what you do, because everybody that knows Karen Stapley knows creativity, fun, laughter is coming, but you also have a really strong spirit about you. I think the combination of that, is it draws people to you. I feel like it's absolutely no mistake, but you being home allows you to serve any time of day, anytime of night, whatever the Lord needs you to be to give somebody a smile and lift their spirits and

give people a laugh and just do the craziest things. During the craziest times, to me, you are excelling in your career, and I wish you could see that from the outside because that is how the rest of us view you.

Karen: That's very generous.

Shelley: It's true. Thank you for doing this with me today.

Karen: It's my pleasure, it has been so fun.

Shelley: Karen, is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have?

Karen: I guess really the one thing that I just want my kids to know is that, when I die, I hope they know that they were the most worthwhile and meaningful thing that I could have done with my time.

Shelley: I told you, she's amazing. I want to thank Karen for joining me today and for her total honesty. Many a stay-at-home moms have struggled financially, myself included. I worked side jobs for years before working full time just to make ends meet. It's hard when friends take off for spring break and they ask your kids to feed the chickens and feed the cats and take care of the dogs. You know that those little things are going to be the most exciting thing you do all week, it can be heartbreaking for a mom. What I learned is that the kids don't remember it, at least mine didn't, and they weren't comparing our fund to others. That was just me losing perspective.

As I listened to Karen, I am certain her group on adventures and road trip games have made their family time as memorable as any fancy trip could have been.

Once again, I'll say it, there's no one way raise a family, and there's no easy way to be a mom. Some of us step off the career ladder, some step on, some are hanging onto the rungs just trying to do it all. As long as you partner with the Lord in making your choice, the faithful career moves always work out. Thank you to Karen for sharing her story. Thank you for listening.

If you like what you've heard today on this podcast, please leave us a review on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts, and share the *Faithful Career Moves* website on social media. I would really appreciate it.