

Matthew Fry

.....
\$5,000 WINNER
Walmart Customer
Lebanon, TN

I was a youth pastor working 60 hours a week. The job doesn't pay a lot so I was working a second job teaching English as a second language (ESL) remotely to kids in China. As a pastor, I was saying family comes first, but that wasn't what I was doing. I didn't spend enough time with my wife, Jacklynn, and our kids: Norah, who's now 11; nine-year-old Wesley; and six-year-old Spencer. I was missing my son's baseball games and didn't want to be that dad who was always absent. I was struggling, I wasn't taking care of myself, and I was eating fast food non-stop.

Both my parents have worked for Walmart for 20-plus years.

My mom suggested I start the Thrive Challenge for support, because we were thinking of making a big life change, and I began my journey in 2019. I quit my job and we sold our house, bought an RV, and decided to set off on an adventure. For the next two years we traveled around the country and saw 49 states. My wife and I were teaching ESL. I've always loved writing so I started ghostwriting for people, doing their travel blogs. The purpose of the adventure was to really connect with our kids, and I have zero regrets about taking such a major risk — it truly paid off for our family.

We did a lot of hiking and visited 33 national parks.

Every single one was incredible and unique. Capitol Reef in Southern Utah was really beautiful. We felt so small walking through the dried riverbed. We loved Niagara Falls, and Yosemite was amazing — it was like being on another planet. One highlight was Glacier National Park in Montana which was just beautiful. We hiked to Hidden Lake and climbed back up. I was carrying my youngest, Spencer, in a baby carrier. Another incredible experience was flying to Hawaii to the Big Island, where we actually saw the Kilauea volcano erupting.

Being on the road was wonderful for our family.

It felt great to be outdoors and constantly moving. And I was present with my kids. They developed confidence in themselves and the travels fostered a sense of adventure in them. Our family ended up bonding through all the challenging hikes. Spending those times together helped us so much and we'll always have those priceless memories.



We cooked great meals like pasta, or burgers outside on our grill.

And we didn't buy fast food. We'd take wraps and granola bars on our hikes. And after dinner we'd walk around the campsites and meet other families. It was such a healthy way of life and I lost 70 pounds.

We connected with friends in different states who we hadn't seen forever.

We met up with friends from college in Oregon and got to know their kids, and we stayed with friends in California.

We stopped traveling in January this year and rented a house outside Nashville.

It's good having a stable home base and our travels brought us closer as a family. Our goal is to buy a house and travel again every summer. I'm still doing my freelance writing and loving being at home with the kids. Jacklynn and I feel like we're dating again — we're excited to see each other at the end of the day and spend time together. We're open and honest with each other and share how we are feeling. And I try to be more thoughtful. Every now and then I'll write a note in a dry erase marker on the bathroom mirror like "I love you," or "Hey Cutie." My daughter was in an acting class and we'd write little encouragement notes about how proud we are of her and put them in her lunch box.

My Thrive Challenge has given me confidence in myself.

At 37, I've become the man and husband I want to be and the dad my kids deserve. I'm more appreciative of the time I get to spend with my family. I don't take anything for granted, whether we're playing a board game, watching T.V., or throwing the ball in the yard. As cheesy as it sounds, we're not just living, we're thriving.



THRIVE