

# Family Priorities

from Dr. Paul A. Kienel, Founder & President Emeritus, ACSI

I begin with a fascinating illustration given by an expert on time management. To a group of high achiever business students, he said:

*"Okay, time for a quiz." He pulled out a one gallon, wide-mouthed Mason jar and set it on a table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?" Everyone in the class said, "Yes." Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was onto him. "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied.*

*He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the questions, "Is this jar full?"*

*"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"*

*One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!"*

*"No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."<sup>1</sup>*

At the risk of oversimplification, permit me to suggest how this illustration can be used to help clarify family priorities. For our purposes let's assume the contents of the Mason jar are the priorities you and I establish for our families.

## **PRIORITY ONE-Love God.**

You may have seen the Ford Motor Company commercial, "Quality is job one." The Ford people want us to believe that "quality" is priority one in the production of Ford cars. What do the inevitable "family watchers" see as priority one in your family? A theme Bible verse in the Kienel family these past forty years has been Proverbs 3:5-6 "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.*" What a comfort those two verses have been! Our three daughters and their families trust God today because they watched Annie and me trust God. I pray that trusting God, pleasing God, and loving God is priority one in your family.

## **PRIORITY TWO-Love your children.**

It is no secret that a lack of parental love often leads to long lasting emotional problems that extend on into adulthood. Psychologist Jay Littlefield recounts the following about the famous psychiatrist Karl Menninger:

*The late Dr. Karl Menninger of the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, added that most of his patients were there because they had not loved or been loved, or both. As a result, he called in his staff and told them that above all else they were to love. Every contact with patients was to be a love contact. From the top psychiatrists down to the electricians and window-cleaners, all must manifest love. They did so. Six months later he discovered that the expected hospitalization time of his patients had been cut by 50 percent!*

Children need to hear the words "I love you" from their parents virtually every day. Dr. Armand M. Nicholi II, a member of the faculty of Harvard Medical Schools, said:

*If any one factor influences the character development and emotional stability of an individual, it is the quality of the relationship he or she experiences as a child with BOTH parents. Conversely, if people suffering from severe emotional illness have one experience in common, it is the absence of a parent through death, divorce, a time-demanding job, or other reasons. A parents inaccessibility, either physically, emotionally, or both, can profoundly influence a child's emotional health. What has been shown to contribute most to the emotional development of the child is a close, warm, sustained, and continuous relationship with both parents.<sup>2</sup>*

Parents who are raising their children alone are forced to be both mother and father to them. I understand the problem. My father died when I was seven. My mother, Velma Grace Kienel, who is now 92, raised my two younger sisters and me alone. My two sisters and I regard our mother as a hero. It was difficult for her, but she proved it can be done and done well. There is no question, however, that a home environment with two loving parents is the ideal for children.

### **PRIORITY THREE-Focus on your family.**

My long-time friend, Dr. James Dobson, is the founder and president of one of the world's foremost family ministry organizations, "Focus on the Family." His beautiful campus-like headquarters is located one block from the headquarters of the Association of Christian Schools International in Colorado Springs, Colorado. James Dobson has done what the name of his organization implies. He has focused the attention of the world-especially the Christian world-on the family. It grieves me deeply when I see parents so preoccupied with work and other interests that they lose their focus on their family. Children suffer when that occurs. In the foreword of my book *Love in the Family*, James Dobson wrote:

*In one of his chapters Dr. Kienel suggests the phrase "Think Family" as good copy for a bumper sticker. If your car has room for one more bumper sticker, I think that would be a good one.<sup>3</sup>*

### **PRIORITY FOUR-Insist on Bible-centered learning for your children.**

You are not surprised, of course, that I advocate solid Christian school education as a fundamental family priority. In a video address for ACSI Christian school teachers. Ronald Reagan said:

*If we fail to instruct our children in justice, religion, and liberty, we will be condemning them to a world without virtue, a life in the twilight of a civilization where the great truths have been forgotten.*

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), one of the great early Christian school leaders of Europe, wrote:

*Our schools, therefore, will then at length be Christian schools when they make us as like to Christ as is possible. How wretched is the teaching that does not lead to virtue and to piety.* <sup>4</sup>

Christian school education is essential to the spiritual, academic, and social well-being of your children. I, along with the 35,000 teachers and administrators who faithfully serve God in ACSI member schools around the world, am praying earnestly for your children as we begin a new school year.

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<sup>1</sup> An Internet message from John C. Homes.

<sup>2</sup> Annand M. Nicholi II. quoted by Paul A. Kienel, *Love in the Family* (La Habra, California: P.K. Books, 1980), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Paul A. Keinel, *Love in the Family*, Foreword by James Dobson.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Eby, *The Development of Modern Education*, (revised) p. 184. Eby cites M.W. Keatinge, *The Great Didactic of John Amos Comenius* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1896), p. 418..



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