

It was one of those terrible summertime scenarios you read about from time to time. It was early September in San Antonio, Texas. The thermometer stood at 99 degrees. A woman accidentally locked her 10-month-old niece inside a parked car. Quite frantically she and her sister, the baby's mother, ran around the auto in near hysteria. A by-stander tried to help. He attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant was turning purple and had foam on her mouth. It was becoming a life-or-death situation. At this point a wrecker driver named Fred, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to save the small child from a certain death. He was successful. **Now, let me ask you a question: Was Fred proclaimed a hero?** Not by the aunt who accidentally locked the doors. Fred reports, **"The lady was mad at me because I broke her window.** That is when Fred thought, **"What's more important--the baby or the window?"**

Our theme for today is this: It's time for each of us to decide what is IMPORTANT IN OUR LIVES.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field," said Jesus. "When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

What Jesus is saying to us is that a fulfilling life only comes to those who have determined what really matters in this world and then give everything they have to pursuing that one thing.

That makes sense, doesn't it? **If there is one thing in life that matters more than anything else, it would make sense to lock in on that one thing and make it the single most important priority in your life.** That's the way to have a successful life.

Of course, some people have difficulty deciding what is most important.

A man went to the sheriff's department to report that his wife was missing. "My wife is missing," he reported to the desk sergeant. "She went shopping yesterday and has not come home." The sergeant asked: "What is her height?" The man said, "Gee, I'm not sure. A little over five feet tall, I suppose." The sergeant asked, "What about her weight?" The man looked helpless. "Don't know," he said. "Not slim, not really fat." The sergeant asked, "What's the color of her eyes?" The man answered, "Never noticed." "The color of her hair?" the sergeant asked. "It changes a couple times a year," said the man. "Maybe dark brown." "What was she wearing?" the sergeant asked. "Could have been a skirt or shorts," said the man. "I don't remember exactly." The sergeant asked, "What kind of car did she go in?" The man said, "She went in my truck." "What kind of truck is it?" the sergeant asked.

The man glowed and said, "It's a brand new 2017 Ford F150 King Ranch 4X4. It has custom leather seats and 'Bubba' floor mats. It has a heavy duty towing package with gold hitch, a DVD with navigation, a 21-channel CB radio, six cup holders, and four power outlets . . ." Then he paused for a moment. "My wife put a small scratch on the driver's door," he said. **At this point the husband started choking up. "Don't worry," the sergeant reassured him sympathetically. "We'll find your truck."**

Everybody has their own set of priorities, their own set of what's important in life.

Storyteller Bill Harley tells about a children's T-ball game he witnessed several years ago. On one of the T-ball teams was a young girl with special needs named Tracy. Tracy limped and she couldn't hit the ball at all. But everyone cheered for her anyway. It was her team's last game and Tracy came up to bat. She swung at the ball and quite miraculously hit it. Her coach yelled for her to run to first base. Then he yelled for her to keep going toward second, then toward third. By this time the fans in the stands were all on the feet cheering Tracy went on toward home plate. But as she neared home plate, something wondrous happened. An old dog loped onto the field and parked itself just off the line between third place and home. Moments away from her first home run, Tracy stopped dead, knelt in the dirt beside the dog, and gave it a big hug. **She never made it to home plate, but the crowd cheered her anyway. She had showed them what was really important to her . . . and it wasn't winning at T-ball.**

WHAT IS IT THAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT TO YOU? WHAT IS IT THAT YOU CARE ABOUT MOST?? Most of us would say --OUR FAMILIES-- are important to us, those of us who have families. And that's good. We were created for relationships and the family is the most basic of all relationships. That is not to say that family life is easy. Especially families with children have many challenges.

Pardon another corny joke, but it reminds me of the Census Taker who stopped at a suburban home. "How many children do you have?" he asked the lady of the house. The woman answered, "Four." The Census Taker asked: "May I have their names, please?" The woman answered wearily, "*Eenee, Meenee, Minee and Frank.*"

The Census Taker was somewhat amused by this said, "Okay, that's fine. But may I ask why you named your fourth child Frank?" The woman answered, "Because we didn't want any Moe."

I warned you it was corny, but even in the best of situations, living together as families is difficult. Nevertheless, our families should be one of our highest priorities. This is where we learn that we are loved, and this is where we develop our values.

Our children need our time and our guidance. Of course, the most important guidance we can give our children is OUR OWN EXAMPLE.

An author for *Reader's Digest* writes how he studied the Amish people in preparation for an article on them. In his observation at an Amish school yard, he noted that the children never screamed or yelled. This amazed him. He spoke to the schoolmaster. **He remarked how he had not once heard an Amish child yell** and asked why the schoolmaster thought that was so. The schoolmaster replied, "*Well, have you ever heard an Amish adult yell?*"

Good question. **A child's behavior is sometimes the best gauge of what that child observes in the home.**

Most of us, if we were asked what is really important to us... WOULD RESPOND, "FAMILIES."

AND TRUTH BE KNOWN, RESEARCH SHOWS, THE CARE OF YOUR FAMILY WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG, PLAYS INTO The 2nd thing that is of most importance priority on your list. What would that priority be? OUR HEALTH. It's interesting, don't you think? Most of us agree that our health is very, very important to us. After all, you could have a billion dollars in the bank, but, if you don't have good health--as well as someone to enjoy it with you--what good would it do you? Not much, would it?

Now some people are really conscious of their health. You see them out running or jogging or simply walking briskly for hours each week. You see them at the gym on the exercise machines. At the check-out at the supermarket you see their cart filled with only healthy choices in foods. They visit their doctor on a regular basis and they enjoy none of the vices that shorten the lives of less careful folk. And they are to be celebrated. ***I believe God wants us to take as good a care for our bodies as we can. They are one of His most wonderful gifts to us.***

Nevertheless, life sometimes plays cruel tricks on US, WHEN IT COMES TO OUR HEALTH. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that receiving loving attention in childhood leads to better emotional health in adulthood. But in a new study of 2,905 women and women ages 25 to 74, researchers at the State University at Albany School of Public Health found that it can help beat the odds of getting any number of diseases, too.

People who said their parents were nurturing had fewer incidents of many chronic physical conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and arthritis, the study found. In contrast, those who gave their parents low marks on such questions as "How much did your mother understand your problems and worries?" or "How much time and attention did your father give to you when you needed it?" reported more illness.

Life is tricky. Family and health are vitally important to us. But our families can turn their back on us and our health will someday fail us, no matter how disciplined we might be. **The mortality rate for US is still 100%.**

There is only one priority that can be at the top of the list of the things that are really, really important to us and that is: OUR FAITH IN GOD.

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In other words, we are to give our first priority to seeking the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God (the terms are interchangeable in the Bible). The kingdom of God is God’s rule in human life. Everything else in this world is perishable. Everything else in this world has an expiration date, a “sell by” date. Only one thing is eternal; that is God’s kingdom. And you know what? **When you seek after His kingdom above all things, the other things that are important to us have a tendency to fall in place.**

WANT A GREAT FAMILY? “SEEK FIRST GOD’S KINGDOM.” Then you will be more aware of how you walk this earth, how you live your life. Yes, you will choose to set a good example. The more committed you are to God, the more committed you will be to your family and the world around you.

Martin Copenhaver tells about a rabbi in Newton, Massachusetts who made quite a stir in his community by challenging the members of his congregation to hold the line on not playing sports on the Sabbath. Now, this wasn’t a fundamentalist preacher in the deep South. This was a modern Jewish rabbi in New England telling his congregation not to let their children play sports on Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath). To a gathering of parents in his congregation he simply asked this question, *“How many of you want and expect your children to grow up to become professional soccer players?”* No one raised a hand. Then he asked a second question, *“How many want and expect your children to become good Jews?”*

I don’t know how many hands went up, but there were some parents who were deeply aroused by his question. The truth is, I doubt that many Christian pastors are brave enough to ask that question in our sports-crazed society.

WE ALL NEED TO BE ASKING OURSELVES THE QUESTION...What is our priority?

The same thing is true of our HEALTH. DO YOU WANT GOOD HEALTH? Seek first His kingdom. Studies show that religious people are healthier than non-religious people and have longer life spans. One reason is because most of us do live more disciplined lives than our less religious neighbors. We’re less prone to indulge in such destructive behavior as drug abuse or excessive drinking, etc. **AND WHEN WE DO FACE HEALTH CHALLENGES, we are more likely to overcome them, because we draw strength from God Himself.**

IT IS ALL A PACKAGE. Seek God’s Kingdom first and you’ll be a better spouse, a better partner, a better parent, a better friend, a better member of the community. Your health will be better, your attitude about the future will be better, you will love your neighbor and wish for a better world for all of humanity.

What is it that really, really matters to you? What is your treasure in a field, your pearl of great price?

As Jesus said in another place, *“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).*

AMEN.