

RISING GENERATIONS

THE UPPER ROOM

Your Attention Please!

Jackie Clark & Jim Still-Pepper

Imagine driving in rush hour traffic. Your radio is blaring, your cell phone is ringing, your friend in the passenger seat is talking incessantly, and rain is pounding the windshield. How well will you drive? Driving well requires us to focus. So does life. Eighty percent of auto accidents occur because of driver inattention. Think how many “life accidents” happen because our lives are filled with so many distractions that make paying attention difficult. If we are going to navigate life successfully, we need to be able to pay attention.

Paying Attention in Real Life

These are the tools we have for paying attention:

- **our senses**—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, tasting
- **our heart**—sadness, anger, frustration, happiness
- **our soul**—inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prayer, God’s word

What’s tricky is that sometimes the tools for paying attention also become sources of distraction. Fatigue or boredom can be distractions as well. So how do we pay attention using our senses, our heart, and our soul? Try these steps:

- **Notice.** Be aware of what is going on. Identify all the components of your life.
List your values and priorities.
- **Filter.** Decide what aspects of your life are not important and let them go. Also, determine what aspects need less attention than you have been giving them.
- **Focus.** Decide what parts of your life are important and which ones need more attention.
Choose to invest in these.

Practice Paying Attention

Paying attention takes practice. Here are some exercises to help you get started:

>> Time Log

List everything you have done in the last three days (include sleeping and eating). What do you spend most of your time and energy doing? Does the way you spend time align with your priorities? If you answer “yes,” you are probably paying attention to what you need to focus on. If your answer is “no,” you may need to notice, filter, or focus better.

>> Rock Jar

Collect a large jar, three large rocks, three medium rocks, three small rocks, some sand, and a marker. Label the large rocks with your top three priorities. Label the medium rocks with your next three priorities. Label the small rocks with the next three priorities. The sand represents the rest of the activities in your life. Place the three large rocks in the jar, and put the jar where you will see it on a regular basis. Plan out each day of the

week ahead so that you will pay attention to your top priorities. At the end of the week, evaluate how well you did. You may need to try this again before moving on. When you feel ready, add the three medium rocks to the jar. Plan out your next week. Focus on giving time and attention to your top six priorities. Continue to evaluate and to move on, adding the small rocks and finally pouring the sand into your jar. Keep the jar of rocks and sand as a reminder to pay attention well in life.

Dig Deeper

In the next ten years, you will sort through 12,000,000,000 to 247,000,000,000 emails and 400,000,000,000 texts. That's a lot of distraction!

Read Matthew 6:33 slowly several times.

Reflect: What does the verse tell you about the importance of paying attention? What happens when you pay attention well?

Jackie Clark is a counselor, a volunteer youth worker, and a mom, who pays attention to her son because he loves getting into everything. Jim Still-Pepper is a volunteer youth minister, a motivational speaker, and a therapist, who pays attention to kids at a counseling center in Zanesville, Ohio.