

Living

The Maximum Life With Power and Purpose

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What Are My Values?

In his book, *Ordering Your Private World*, Gordon MacDonald tells about a friend that was the duty officer on a nuclear submarine in the Mediterranean. On one occasion while the captain was in his quarters, the duty officer was in the very bowels of the submarine. There was a lot of naval traffic overhead so he was forced to make some rather abrupt and sudden maneuvers to avoid any potential collisions.

Within a matter of moments the captain came down to the bridge, the control room. He looked at the duty officer and asked "Is everything all right?" "Yes sir," replied the duty officer. The captain took a quick look around and began to go back up the ladder while muttering under his breath, "Everything looks all right to me, too."

When I read that little illustration, it reminded me so much of life. All around danger is lurking—above us, around us and below us. There are things that would wreck our lives. The alert captain, rather trying to necessarily handle every distraction that might come their way, immediately went to the control room and looked around and asked "Is everything all right down here?"

I want you to temporarily forget all that's going on around you. Try your best to forget the distractions, the frustrations and the dangers that go way down deep inside, all the way down to your control room. The place the Scripture calls the heart. Look around and see if everything looks all right there to you, too.

See, the key to building the maximum life is not so much of taking care of what's out there but taking care of what's in here, the heart, mind or intellect. Like that submarine, it's what steers.

Way down deep inside that determines either the success or the failure of the journey. In the human life, those things are called values. Those core things that you cherish and live for are in the very bowels of your soul. They are the essence of life. Let's go down and look at our values.

What are your values?

a. Your values determine your direction.

Have you ever noticed how many people are directionless in life? People like your neighbors or co-workers go with the flow and roll with the punch. If a fad comes up, they chase the fad. They just toss to and fro. James said "A double-minded man is unstable in all he does." (James 1:8) A couple of verses earlier, he compares that double-minded man to a cork or a buoy on the sea that is tossed back and forth by the waves.

Now we don't use that terminology often today. We don't talk about double-minded people. Well, what is James talking about there? A double-minded man or a woman is simply someone who is unsure of his or her values. There is a whole generation of people who are nowhere close to living the maximum life because they have no idea what their values are.

George Gallup did a poll not long ago concluding the number one stress factor, problem or issue facing the Baby Boomer generation is not a lack of money, a lack of time or relational conflict, and it is what he calls, "incongruent values." In other words, he says, we say we believe one thing and then we live in a totally different way.

For example, we Baby Boomers say, "We believe in family. We think that's the most important thing;" however, the average father spends an uninterrupted interaction with each child of less than two minutes a day. He worships his career. We say that good health is important. But, we admit when asked, "Do you eat

right?" "Well no, not really." You ask, "Do you exercise?" "Well no, we don't really exercise, but good health is important to me." We say things like, "Materialism is bad." Then go deep in debt trying to keep up with the Joneses.

When you have competing values, you're a ship dead in the water. You are going nowhere. That's why Solomon said in Proverbs 4:23, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." He is saying: What you value directs your life. If you were to honestly tell me what you value in life, I could predict where your life is going to go. Every decision you make is based upon your values; they direct your life.

b. Your values end up determining your destiny.

Doesn't that make sense? If my values chart the course I'm going to follow then they pretty well assure where I'm going to end up. Jesus said in Mark 8, verses 36 and 37, "'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?'" What you value is what you give your life to, and ultimately it's what you are going to give your soul to. So values are extremely important, they're the axle that turns the wheel.

Where do I get my values?

You get them from a lot of places, but ultimately there are two basic sources. You get them from Christ or culture. To put it another way, you get your values from the Word or from the world. Now it's pretty easy to determine what Christ's values are if you get to know His Book, the Bible and you'll have a real good handle on what His value system is all about.

Somebody said, "What about the world's value system, our culture? What are the values that they propose?" I suggest that the surest place to get a little synopsis of the world's values is commercials. In 15 seconds, you can find out what the world thinks you value because that's the button they're trying to push. They're appealing to your basic motivation. You can pretty well wrap it up in three words. We've talked about these before.

a. Pleasure.

Our culture values pleasure. It's the number one industry in America right now—the entertainment industry. It grosses more money than any other single industry. We are a very sensual society. We just want to have fun, so if it feels good we do it. That's a value that the world proposes.

b. Possessions.

You know Americans believe in life, liberty and purchase of happiness, don't we? We are consumed with consuming. We kind of live by the motto that the one with the most toys is going to win. The world is silently, but very forcefully giving us the message: Your self worth is equal to your net worth.

c. Power – Prestige – Position.

They're all linked together. It's the third leg of the cultural value system. Look at the commercials. Have you ever noticed how they insidiously want you? The guy puts on his racing gloves, those dark glasses, gets inside that sport coupe and the announcer says, "Own the road." That's power right there. One of the ones that's so ironic is the advertiser and the credit card which says, "Get control of your life!" Do you see the appeal to that perceived value of power?

Understand this. Contrary to the devil's propaganda, God is not against all those things. There are so many people who believe the lie that God is some prude who says, "If you're a Christian, you can't have any pleasure, no fun. If you're a Christian, you can't have very many possessions. You've got to almost be a pauper. If you're a Christian, you've got to be a meek, weak, little worm. Don't you ever have any power?" That is contrary to what God says. No! No! God never says that. He never says you cannot have pleasure,

He never says you can't have possessions. He never says you can't have some power. What God says is those can't be your values. Those cannot be the core desires of your heart, or you'll miss the maximum life.

John, who was in his nineties and an aged apostle, said "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world; the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world." (NIV) The New King James Version states "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." (1 John 2:15-16)

Do you know what those are? Those are the three things we just talked about. The lust of the flesh—pleasure, the lust of the eyes—possessions and the pride of life—power. What God says through John is, don't love those things, they are not from the Father, they come from the world.

Proverbs 21:21 states, "He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity, and honor." We neglect this to our own downfall. Did you notice those benefits? If you will value the right things, God will give you the things the world craves. God will give you life. He'll give you prosperity. He'll give you honor. Those are roughly equivalent to pleasure, possessions, and power. If you value righteousness and love God says, "I'll take care of the rest, and I'll give them to you in proper measure to make your life all it can be." Don't praise the value system of culture. Praise the value system of Christ.

How can I build my life on right and lasting values?

How do I go about doing that?

a. Assess what's important.

"Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good." (Job 34:4) See, before we can do what is good we've got to discern what is good. Deciding what's important in one's life is one of the basic problems in America.

As stated earlier, this generation is characterized by incongruent values. That's because we seldom take the time to ask: What do I value? What is really important to me? Several of you I am sure saw the recent study which showed that television shapes children's values more than parents. Now that's sad! But we all knew that was true. A child watches television five hours a day. A child seldom spends that much time with a parent. Television shapes children's values in America today more than parents. But here's the other thing, it's not just the children. We, adults begin to assemble TV, videos, and movies present values. What we first may see, we may roll our eyes, or we may even gasp, and then we just kind of keep watching and time passes. We may laugh about it and after a while, we subconsciously embrace it.

This is key. Most Americans are basing their lives, their futures, and their children's futures on values we didn't even choose. That's not too smart, is it? We're basing our whole destinies on values we're not even thinking about. Stop and decide WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT IN LIFE! Then you need to write out your definition of success in your life.

If you these lessons to really mean something to your life, you'll write your own definition of success. Then don't you let anyone or anything move you off-center to cause you to buy into their definition of success.

Do you know what success is? It is not making lots of money. It is not having a powerful position. It's not having pleasure every minute. SUCCESS IS LIVING OUT YOUR VALUES. That's what it is. It's not a destination; it's the journey you travel as you live out the values that you believe are important. Don't let anyone else determine that for you. Success is living out your values.

Now incidentally, teens, singles, young marrieds, middle-agers or senior saints, you can be successful at any stage of your life because again, success is not some point down the road based on how you feel, what you have or what you do. Success is living out your values day by day. You can enjoy success right now if you're living out your values. Now obviously if those values are based upon Christ and His Word and His promises, then the success you enjoy is God-given and is eternal.

Let me ask you a question: Have you taken the time to analyze what you really value? Better yet, have you written them down so that you can review them ever so often? The foundation to the maximum life is to first assess what's important.

I think one of the best ways to know what you value is to answer a couple of simple questions. Imagine that you're 90 years old, some of you may be, but most of you aren't. a) Look back on your life and write down the five things you will have most wanted to do in your life. b) Write down what are the five ways or things that you most want people to remember about you. Those 10 things, the five things you most want to have done and the five things you want people most to remember, are your core values. Why don't you do that?

The problem is we rarely take the time to examine our values until we have a crisis. When things are going great and you're having fun, you don't stop and ask if that is what life is really all about? Are you focusing on what's important? No, you just go through life and have fun. But, when your life gets jolted by some crisis i.e., the death of a loved one, a divorce, bankruptcy, lay-off, major illness or the kids mess up, then in your pain, you start asking: What does it really matter? Hear me; don't wait for the valleys to clarify your values. Set them now, and if you do, you will avoid a great deal of pain and you will minimize the rest. Set those anchors deep within the very control room of your ship, and assess what's important.

b. Bail-Out of what's unimportant.

I know. You don't have time to do everything. Frankly, most things in life aren't worth doing even if we did have the time. We should pass on it. The key premise to the maximum life is that life is too important to waste. Don't fill your time with junk. Look at Psalm 119:37, "Turn my eyes away from worthless things."

When I was just out of college, probably 22 or 23 years old, the video age dawned. I got hooked on video games. Back then, they only had two, for you old-timers who can remember they had Pac-Man and Asteroids. Now they can do everything. Before long and with a little skill I could play 45 minutes to an hour for a quarter. I would catch myself, silly as it sounds, on my lunch hour going over and seeing if I could beat the other scores. On the way home from work, I'd just stop by and play a little game. Then all of a sudden it dawned on me, I was spending three to four hours a day on NOTHING. NOTHING. Today you have the computer games.

Now folks, a little later on, we're going to talk about scheduling. Don't misunderstand—every life needs some recreation. Every life needs what I call some chill time, but don't let the tail wag the dog. Life is far too important to waste it on worthless books, magazines, TV or worthless games—that's almost redundant, isn't it?—worthless games.

Here's an activity you need to do. Chart how you spend your day for the next seven days. Now you should be doing that anyway. But do it this week. Then lay it along side your values and ask yourself if you're living out what's really important to you. As you look at your activities are there some things that you wish you hadn't done? Are there some things you wish you had just left undone and filled the time with something more valuable.

In Philippians 3:8, Paul said, "Everything else is worthless when compared to the price of gain in knowing Christ." There's a man who knew his values and everything about his life was shaped around what his core values were. I'm not saying you will be a Paul, God made all of us differently. But if we're going to live the maximum life, God wants us to assess what's important and to bail out the unimportant and to concentrate on the eternal—concentrate on what really lasts.

There was a book that came out a few years ago by Tony Campolla called, *Who Switched the Price Tag?* In preparing for that book, Campolla asked a large number of 90 year olds, "If you could go back and live your life again, what would you do differently that you didn't do last time?" The number one answer those 90 year olds gave was "I would invest more time in things that would outlast me." Isn't that a great answer? I would invest more of my time in things that I know would endure.

When you write out your core values this week and analyze them, close that analysis with this question: How long is this value going to last? If one of your values is pleasure, do you know what your honest answer will be—a few seconds—because that is all pleasure is designed for. It's like cotton candy—POOF—it's gone. It will last a few seconds and it's over. If one of your values is possessions, I'll tell you how long it will last, it will last until it rots, tears up, breaks, or gets stolen. If your value is power, position or authority, how long is it going to last? It is either going to last until somebody smarter, brighter or faster comes along and takes it away from you, or until you die. That's how long it's going to last. But, what does last? That's what the whole Bible is about. It's about what really lasts.

"We focus not on the things which are seen, but on the things which are unseen. For that which is seen is temporary, and what is unseen is eternal." I've given you two or three things there. But Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." I think a fair synonym for the kingdom of God is His value system, letting Him be the Lord of our heart. The rest of that verse says, "everything else will be added to you that you need." (2 Corinthians 4:18)

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul talks about all things eventually fading or passing away, but in verse 13 he states "But these three remain:" and he goes on to say, "faith, hope, and love." You know those are the things that are going to remain when everything else fades away. They should be represented in my value system somewhere. Would you agree with that? If I want values that last, then faith, hope, and love are the only things that are going to remain. I sure want those. By the way, the verse concludes by saying, the greatest of these is LOVE.

"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love." (Galatians 5:6) When you write out your values will you see if those values reflect those clear teachings we're studying? Lasting success is built on values that last; Faith, hope, love, God's Word and Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, "What would it profit a man if he were to gain the whole world, yet he were to lose his own soul." Your soul is going to last forever, and this world isn't. It's not worth being a top value.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is." What? "Gain." To live is Christ, and to die is gain. Paul's value was Christ and the outcome is eternity, it's the future of heaven. It's great. You plug in any other value in that and see what answer you get. For me to live is MONEY, and to die is - *I will lose it all*. For me to live is PLEASURE, and to die is - *I will never have anymore*. For me to live is POWER, and to die is - *it's over*. When you make your values list, I want to assure you that there is really only one that should take the chief seat. It's the only one that you can fit into the blank, Paul's little sentence, "For me to live is _____"

and to die is _____. It's the only one you can fit in that makes it work. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is (actually) gain." The foundation for successful, significant powerful living is to embrace right values; consciousness, to analyze them regularly and to never ever let them go.

This week, go down in the control room of your life and look around. Will you honestly be able to say, "Everything looks all right here, too." It will be the greatest thing that you can ever do this week.

Is *Christ* at the head of the list? Is he the real captain of your ship? Now a lot say yes, but many of us don't live that way. That's the incongruent value thing. But is He your Lord as well as your Savior? Success is only possible with Christ because He is the only real value in life. Lesson # January 19, 1997