

# Values

## Guidelines for Living?

By G. Raymond McCullough

Over the years and especially during the last presidential campaign we heard a lot about values. It seems it always takes a crisis (real or perceived) before people start talking about reassessing or reacquainting themselves with their values.

What are values? Values can be described in many ways. Values are beliefs, ideas, morals, things that are important to us or standards that serve as the guiding principles for our lives. They are the essence of our being. Values differentiate us from others and define groups. Values serve as the foundation for our self image and identity.

Some traditional American values are: freedom, family, religion, education, humanitarianism, material wealth, and yes gratification. As Americans we all share many common values. However, we have different values as well because we come from different backgrounds with distinctly different cultural influences. This becomes more apparent as our country and communities become more culturally and ethnically diverse. Also, there is the importance we assign to our personal values. The values we have today have evolved over a lifetime of experience. They were shaped in our very early years of

development and continue to be influenced by our life experiences to the present, even as you read this article.

Behaviorist believe that our very basic values were ingrained during ages 1 to 7 (imprinting period) and ages 8 to 12 (modeling period) and these two periods set the foundation for rest of our lives.



Values change only slightly over time because of external influences.

However, there are significant emotional events (e.g. death of a loved one, joining the military, divorce, birth of a child, alcoholism and drug addiction) that can throw are value system into major shifts and result in value readjustment or replacement. Let me give you a personal example: I was raised in the church. I was taught that God would answer our prayers. My grandfather was ill with cancer. We became very close during his illness. I prayed tirelessly for God to cure my grandfather from his cancer. After a short battle, my grandfather succumbed to his cancer. I was devastated and felt betrayed by God. The emotional pain was debilitating. In my anger and grief I turned

away from God and my faith. This decision led to disastrous consequences with long-term consequences. I went against and abandoned an important value—a belief in God.

Probably all of us have been guilty of going against our values at some point and time in our life. How do we know when we do this? The clearest sign is when we experience guilt. This powerful emotion lets us know when we are not being true to ourselves...when we are going against our values...when we are embroiled in a values conflict. A couple of examples of values conflicts are: An individual who values education but finds themselves going out every night to indulge in the allures of night life (chasing immediate gratification). Engaging in this behavior repeatedly will eventually result in the neglect of educational pursuits and the compromising of a very important value. This describes a conflict between education and gratification. I am not suggesting that gratification is a bad thing. Gratification can be accomplished through achievements in educational pursuits—it's just not immediate. Another example would be the individual that values their family but compromises this by trying to hold onto a single lifestyle—that may involve staying out late, heavy drinking, drug use, and marital infidelity. The conflict is obvious and the consequences for spouse and children are monumental. In both cases guilt will arise unless the individual remains so medicated with alcohol/other drugs or they rationalize their actions so they don't have to acknowledge their feelings of guilt.

Many of us have ignored this feeling time and time and time again! The key is to refrain from the behavior that causes us to feel guilty—often this is not an easy situation to identify and then resolve. Our failure to do so will create a sense of shame and can potentially lead to the extinction of the value we are compromising. Unfortunately when we ignore these conflicts we erode the very foundation of our being, which are our values. Repeated unresolved values conflicts lead to value deterioration and in extreme case we become virtually valueless (loss, depressed, and anxious).

In American society we are inundated by the powerful influences of television, movies, pop culture, and other media. This in conjunction with the absence of appropriate role models can create a generation that has no resemblance to the traditional American values of our parents or grandparents. Thus, there is the potential for a generation to evolve that views immediate gratification and wealth as the most important values in the universe. Has this already happened?

Unclear values have led many to become escapists, victims, pleasure seekers, and/or addicts. Many people will do anything they can to avoid reality and the responsibility that comes with making good choices. Living life fully and responsibly is the reality of being true to ourselves and our value system. It means living our lives within the scheme of a society and community that is greater than us singularly. Simply it comes down to mutual respect. When we abuse alcohol and other drugs we deal with an

altered reality and we don't respect ourselves and others.

When it comes to being true to ourselves and our values there is no place for the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Alcohol and other drug abuse often causes or is the cause of value readjustment or replacement. The gratification associated with alcohol and drug abuse takes on greater importance as our values are compromised. Many times the person that is using alcohol and other drugs will engage in inappropriate behavior while violating or completely ignoring their value system. Alcohol and other drugs becomes the central mechanism for escape because the effects cloud judgment, thinking, and feeling.

#### **ADDICTION AND VALUES**

The Addictive Lifestyle is incompatible with a healthy way of living. This lifestyle is synonymous with Negativity (lying, cheating, stealing, neglect, egocentrism, living in fear, destruction of relationships, etc). The Addictive Lifestyle is Life-Draining. Most of us would never have intentionally/ consciously chosen this lifestyle for ourselves or for our loved ones.

Unfortunately, many individuals will not listen to that voice (conscience) inside that alerts them that their life is going awry. These are the people that will eventually find their lives compromised by their alcohol and other drug use. The evidence

will be shattered careers, families, dreams,

#### **PONDER THIS THOUGHT**

Our values guide us down many paths. Clarifying values is an integral part of personal growth. In the process of clarification, we have the opportunity to strengthen our values and integrity—to integrate ourselves into wholeness. Values only have value when they are acted upon.

Our life is guided by the values we act upon. Many of us have never taken the time to truly explore and identify our values. Behind our choices and actions are the values that take us into living fully, while other values diminish the quality of our life. We have an opportunity to base our lives on the values that are consistent with how we want our lives to be.

Taking foolish/thoughtless risks may run counter to LIVING a healthy responsible life. In order to be healthier, it is important to live out of the values that are consistent with your Purpose.

and communities.

My hope is that this article will inspire the reader: to take the time to reacquaint themselves and their families with the common values they share; to take the time to compassionately guide those toward help that need help.