



WHAT MATTERS MOST IN LIFE?

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I'm going to talk to you about the most important thing you will ever have. Now try to guess what that might be.

For example, is it money? Well it's certainly better to have money than not to, but it's definitely not the most important thing you can have – just ask all the rich people who are very unhappy – or, even better, read about most of the people who have won tens of millions of dollars in a lottery. Most of these people actually became less happy, not more.

So alright, then, what about love – is that the most important thing you could ever have? Well, love sure is important. I can't imagine living without it. I sure treasure the love of my friends and the love of my family, but if you don't have the thing I'm about to tell you, you won't receive much love at all.

So, let's try a third answer: happiness. Well, that, too, is very, very important. Who wants to be unhappy? But again, without the thing I will tell you about, there would be little happiness in the world.

So, here goes – the most important thing you will ever have is – drumroll please – good values. Yes, good values. Now I know that may sound boring and I realize that it's possible that you may have never really thought about values or even know what I'm talking about.

So, let me explain. A value is something you think is more important than anything else – more important than money, more important even than love, and even more important than happiness. And above all, values are what you consider to be more important than your feelings.

This is very hard for a lot of people to believe because we live in a time when people think that how they feel about something is more important than anything else, but that isn't so.

Here's a simple example of the conflict between a feeling and a value. Just about everyone feels like eating junk food, but there's a big problem here. If you eat whatever you feel like eating you will end up obese and unhealthy. So then, what is it that stops people from eating all the food they feel like eating? The answer is a value – that's right, a value. And what is that value? Not getting obese and staying healthy.

There is, in other words, a necessary battle that goes on inside of most people: the battle between what they feel – in this case the desire to eat junk food – and a value that they hold – in this case staying healthy and looking good. Now as important as a healthy body is, this

conflict between what we feel like doing and values, is even more important when it comes to doing what is right, when it comes to how we treat other people, not just ourselves.

Here's one that will make you think. Imagine you're walking on a beach with the dog you love, when all of a sudden you look out at the water and you see your dog drowning. And imagine, too, that at the same time about 100 feet from your dog, a person you don't know -- a stranger -- is also drowning. Now, which would you try to save first?

Just about anyone who loves their pet would feel like saving their pet first. But what if you value human life even more than an animal's life -- and you probably do. After all, you probably eat animals, but you wouldn't eat a human being. Then your value -- the unique preciousness of human life -- is in conflict with your feelings for your dog.

Here's another example. Imagine you are about to take an important test at school. If you cheat on that test, you may be able to avoid failing and maybe even get into a great school. But what if you have a value -- what we call a moral value -- that cheating is wrong? You sure feel like cheating, but if you have moral values, you know it's wrong to. Again, that battle between your feelings and a value.

Almost everything that is wrong with the world comes from people either not having higher moral values, or not living by them, because they feel they want to do something else.

People who murder feel like murdering, and they do what they feel rather than live by the value of preserving human life. People who steal feel that they want the thing that they steal, so they take what they feel like having rather than live by the value of not stealing.

The list is pretty much endless, and that's why good values are the most important thing any of us can ever have. Without them, the world would be a very terrible place.

And finally, know this: the best people you know - -meaning the nicest, kindest, and most honest -- are people who battle their feelings every day of their lives. So should you.

I'm Dennis Prager.