

The Difference Between Values and Practices

Written by Bill Perkins

Values are not practices. A practice is an activity or action. A practice that works in one situation may not work in another because practices apply to specific situations. Because my second son, David, lived to be with people, when he was young sending him to his room when he misbehaved resulted in a transformed attitude on his part.

It Didn't Work With Paul

When I tried that same form of discipline with my third son, Paul, it didn't work at all. Why? Because Paul loved sitting at his desk and playing computer games. Make no mistake about it, we've got to adapt our practices to the various challenges we face.

Values Aren't Principles Either

But let's look a bit deeper. As I've discussed before, values aren't principles either. A principle is an external truth that is as reliable as a physical law. A value is a principle we've internalized and made our own. For instance, a principle of life might say, "Exercise and healthy eating produce a strong body." Everybody would say that principle is true.

But those who watch what they eat and exercise regularly have made that principle a value. When we internalize a principle we demonstrate that we "value" the principle. Ultimately, we want our behavior and decisions to be based on values not circumstances or feelings. We want to internalize God's word and so value its principles that they drive our actions.

Value-Driven in Psalm 15

King David demonstrated value driven behavior in Psalm 15. If you take a few minutes and read the psalm you notice that David said the person who enjoys the presence of God and lives a blameless life is the one who "speaks the truth from his heart" (vv. 1-2). Because he values truth in his heart, his words express truth. Because he values kindness, "he does his neighbor no wrong" (v. 3). Because he values honesty he "keeps his oath even when it hurts" (v. 4). Because he values justice he "does not accept a bribe against the innocent" (v. 5).

Value driven men reap a great benefit from God. David said they "will never be shaken." The more we allow biblical values to drive our practices, regardless of what may happen around us, we can live with the confidence that the right principles have shaped our values and guided our decisions. That confidence will give us emotional and spiritual stability. It will enable us to lead others in a way that honor God and strengthens our influence for his kingdom.