

WHAT ARE YOU WORTH?

by

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Now, understand, I'm not interested in your net financial worth, I'm interested in what you think you're worth is as a person, a human being. To clarify this a bit more, I want to know what you think the very minimum is you would have to have in this life in order to feel life is worth living. But let's take this one step further. If you could see through the eyes of other people, what do you believe they think you're worth?

Sometimes, people will tell you what they think your worth, but not usually to your face. I experienced this myself one day as I was on my way through a waiting room to see my pulmonologist. An elderly couple were seated in clear view of me and I heard the woman say, "I wouldn't want to live, if I was like that!" No doubt, all the woman saw was a terribly "crippled" older baldheaded man with acute wrist contractures having to be mobilized in a power wheelchair with a ventilator and accompanied by a young woman who she probably thought was my nurse from some local nursing home. What she did not see was an active married man who graduated from college with a double major in physics and mathematics and is the Founder, CEO and Executive Director of the Kolb Foundation for Disability Education. From the old woman's perspective, my life was not worth living, because she apparently saw no value or worth in my being.

On another occasion, when I was under contract with the State of Nebraska to be the Statewide Consumer Network Coordinator for the Ticket to Work program, I was registering for a wheelchair accessible room at the Holiday Inn Central in Omaha, along with my sister-in-law, Susan who is employed as my care aide. I asked the desk clerk to show us to our room, because the Holiday Inn Central is rather labyrinthine. Before leaving the desk, I gave her my business card to confirm that my registration was for a legitimate business and not just for me personally. As the clerk was taking us to our room, I saw her look at my card periodically and then exclaimed, "You know, I wondered what you could do!" Suddenly, she found worth in me.

Then, a little later the next day, I was waiting for Susan to bring my van around to the motel door so we could leave for the Governors Conference on Employment at the Doubletree Hotel. I could hear a janitorial worker behind me, so I turned my chair around to say hello to her. When she saw me turn her way, her eyes widened with shock and dismay and out of her mouth came, "WHAT HAPPENED!!" I tried to explain that my condition was not a result of an accident, but simply something I was born with. It was obvious my explanation didn't do much for her, because her next words were a mournful "Oh, I'm sorry." Immediately, I tried to convince her that she needn't feel sorry for me, because I had a very good and active life. Nevertheless, her countenance continued to be fallen as she muttered sadly, "Ooooh." Evidently, I remained a tragic figure to her. Mercifully, Susan brought my van to the motel door at that very moment and I was pleased to leave.

Before I go further, let me hasten to say that our worth isn't necessarily the result of the great or the good things we do. It's not about how much education we have or the people we know or the amount of money we have amassed. It has nothing to do with social rank or the kind of cars we drive or the great houses we may have built. Worth or value is much more intrinsic than all those things. In fact, it's my belief that we are born with value, even if we don't have all 10 fingers and all 10 toes. The fact that God has made us alive is sufficient evidence of our worth and a more than adequate reason to sustain and cherish our lives, regardless of what we do or do not have physically or intellectually. Contrary to what Darwinian Survivalism suggests, there is no competition in God's eyes for worthiness to live among human beings. Where is it written, what council has

declared, what government dare establish a criteria to determine whether someone has sufficient worth to be born? Indeed, if competition to survive is all life is about, life would certainly not be worth living! It may be that the smartest, the strongest, the most cunning, the wealthiest, the highest placed are the most likely to physically survive, but that alone doesn't make life worth living. Those things may only make us smart, strong, cunning, wealthy, highly placed, but possibly depressed and lonely individuals, if that's all we have.

I believe that God has ordained that we should be alive and if that were not so, we wouldn't be. It doesn't matter if we are missing limbs or experiencing a mental illness or have cognitive disabilities or experience blindness or deafness, because we are more than those things. In truth, we are not our disabilities, rather we are magnificent creations and precious manifestations of life. This is not to say that we should all yearn to have a disability, but if we have one, we need to understand that we have not become worthless. To believe that we are worthless is to do a great disservice to ourselves and the rest of the world! In fact, if the only thing you can do is live and nothing more, you are potentially the object of love for a mother and father who have been blessed to find a purpose and meaning for their lives they never dreamed possible! So, what is your worth and what is your value? I tell you, it is greater than all the world's technology can calculate! In this worth and in this value, we can find purpose that enables us to live and not just survive.