

The Price of Happiness

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Have you ever heard, “The best things in life are free?” My question would be, “Is there anything in life that is truly free, or does everything come with a price?” There is a book I use in therapy entitled “Ten Days to Self-Esteem by David D. Burns, MD.” The first chapter is titled “The Price of Happiness.” I found this title curious as I had often heard that happiness was free. If happiness does have a price, what is that price? They say “Money can’t buy happiness”, so that obviously isn’t it. I would like to share some of the thoughts as to what “The Price of Happiness” may be referring to.

When you go to the store to buy things, everything has a price. It is the same with life – life comes with a price tag. There is a price tag for everything including happiness, dishonesty, success, credit card debt, hard work, drugs, and commitment, just to name a few. Each price tag may be different, with some things costing more than others. Through our choices, we choose which price we are willing to pay.

You may ask, “But what about those people that seem to always get what they want regardless?” I would answer, “Do they really get away with things, or does it just appear that they do, according to what you see?” In a talk by James E. Faust, he stated, “If you’re not willing to pay the price of success, you will pay the price of failure.” Simply stated, people may appear to be getting away with it, but, somehow it seems, that your actions always tend to catch up with you.

I’ve found that the price of success is often passed up by many able-bodied people who, instead, travel the road of failure. Why would this be? It seems that if any of us were given the choice, success or failure, we would quickly say, “I want success!” So why do so many end up choosing failure? I believe it has a lot to do with timing. Success demands an up-front fee, where as failure allows you to live on credit for a time. The costs up front for success are high and might look something like being responsible, admitting mistakes, apologizing, getting an education, telling the truth, making changes, repairing relationships, etc.. Despite the high up-front fees, it seems that over time, the price of success decreases significantly and becomes quite easy to bear, particularly when you see all the many benefits that come down the road such as peace, happiness, good relationships, respect, trust, freedom, better paying job, etc..

The reverse seems to be true for the price of failure. Failure allows you a grace period before you are required to begin paying. For instance, with failure, you can put off change, be dishonest when you want, avoid facing your mistakes, not make the car payment while still driving the car, blame others when things go wrong, or skip school or work in order to do what you want. The initial benefits are great, but what happens when the hammer falls (which it will)? The costs increase dramatically to a much higher level than the price of success. Another thing, it seems that the longer you ride the wave of failure, the greater the costs are in the end. You can always choose to change the path your on, but the price tag will likely go up the longer you remain on failure’s path. For

some, they wait until the price is very painful such as a divorce, lost job, car repossessed, house foreclosure, jail, or even death.

So how do we avoid getting sucked into the lure of immediate payoffs that the road of failure can bring? I suggest developing what I call a “Long-Term Vision.” Imagine driving on a dark, windy dirt road with poor headlights. You could easily miss a curve, get stuck, or crash. Wouldn’t you rather have your ‘brights’ on? Long-Term Vision is like turning on the ‘brights’ and seeing what the results of your actions might be ‘down the road.’ When you begin to see down the road further, it is much easier to see that the price of success, in the long-run, is a much smaller price to pay than the price of failure. Once again, when the price of failure is demanded, most of the time you don’t have a choice. You must pay the price, whether you get what you want or not. They will take the car, the house, your spouse will leave, your job will be given to someone else, or any number of other consequences that you may have thought you could put off forever. I believe that one way or another, the price will be paid. It is up to you whether you want to choose a better, yet more difficult result now, or end up with an even more uncomfortable situation later.

One of the things that have really struck me in working with many of the people I have seen in therapy is their willingness to pay “the up front price-tag.” It has got to be very hard to make a decision to surrender pride, admit that you can’t do it yourself, and turn to a professional for help. I know of numerous families who have followed this course and reaped the rewards of their efforts and changes. Some families, who were unwilling to pay a price upfront to make needed changes, whether it is money, time, effort, etc., end up paying a much greater price later in life as their marriage remains troubled, their children suffer from unhealthy family structure or interactions, or the family ends up in divorce. The faith and confidence of couples and families who have sought out appropriate help from community resources, family, churches, or professional counseling has really impressed me over the years in how they seem to truly understand the price of happiness. Although I have found that the cost of happiness is not free, the up-front fee that is required is well worth it in the end.