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**Values**  
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It was a cool spring day, but the forecast had been for afternoon storms. And sure enough, as I drove from the funeral home to the cemetery, the clouds were beginning to pile up. In a matter of minutes, the sky had gone from overcast to threatening. And as the casket was brought to the grave, a light rain started to fall.

Now the truth is that I try not to pay attention to the weather at funerals. But as the wind picked up, I couldn't help increasing my tempo just a bit. It wasn't that I was concerned about getting wet, and I also wasn't worried about the family, because we were all standing under a tent. So if need be, if the rain started coming down in buckets, then we could always wait it out; sit a few minutes until it let up. So really, I wasn't all that concerned about us. But I was concerned.

You see, the man who had passed away was a veteran of the Second World War. His casket was draped with an American Flag, and standing at attention out in the middle of the cemetery was a three-man Honor Guard waiting to fire a 21-gun salute, as well as a bugler. And as I conducted the service from the safety of the tent, I knew that those four old veterans, in their thick wool uniforms were going to get soaked. So, as I said, I sped up my reading a bit, and I was pleased that I was able to conclude my words before any significant rain had fallen.

But before the honor guard could offer a salute to their fallen comrade, the Officer who was standing with me in the tent had to give his spiel. So I watched, as he slowly, deliberately recited his speech from memory. I watched as the wind gusted. And I quickly became angry as those four men standing out in the rain got soaked to the bone.

Here was this man, telling his story, one word at a time, leaving his companions out in the rain. He seemed not to have a care in the world. He was going to say his piece, just as he always did. Standing there, I could tell that the weather never bothered him. It never made any difference. Whether it was ninety degrees and humid, or ten below zero, he was going to have his say. He'd do just what he always did, in his own slow, deliberate style.

But as I stood there, watching those old men get wet, and listening to the Officer's words, something struck me, something important. You see, those men standing at attention out there in the rain; they were not perturbed. They never got angry. They simply stood there, waiting their turn. They listened as their comrade played taps. They fired their guns, seven times each. They bent down, unhurriedly, and collected the empty shells and presented them, along with the flag, to the family. These four men acted as if the gusting wind and the pouring rain were not there. And in truth, I think that for them it wasn't.

These men had fought in World War II. They had crossed the ocean in ships, landed on beaches, and walked through bullets, landmines, and bombs. They had fought against an enemy who was trying to kill them. They had seen their lives flash before their eyes. They had conceived of what it might mean to **sacrifice their life** for the sake of their country. And here I was, worrying that they might get wet??!

Those men had a job to do. And they were going to do it with honor, dignity and respect. No little inconvenience, like the weather, was going to stand in their way. They had a job to do, and they carried it out with pride. **They respected themselves and the deceased enough to do what was right, regardless of the circumstances of the day.**

Let me say that again. They respected themselves enough to do what was right, regardless of the circumstances of the day. What an amazing concept.

I have thought about the events of that day many times in the year and a half since then. I have wondered: Were those men special, were they different? I've wondered how it is that they came to practice those values. And I've wondered why our nation drifted so far away from their example?

You know as well as I, that there was a time when the behavior those men exemplified was the expectation for how everyone should act. There was a time in America, when men and women respected themselves enough to do what was right, regardless of the circumstances of the day.

But if there is any question if those days are still with us, the events of these last six months have demonstrated just how far our nation has fallen from the standards of earlier generations. With the collapse of Arthur Anderson, Enron and World Com; with the scandals at Adelphia and Tyco, we've seen captains of industry, business icons, and pillars of the community fail to live up to the minimum standards of ethical behavior. We've seen men who were considered role models cheat their companies, rob their employees, steal from their shareholders, and funnel profits into untouchable holdings. During this same time, we've been disappointed by our government's leaders and by members of the clergy who failed to make difficult decisions in matters dealing with their own integrity and responsibility.

Considering what we've witnessed these last six months, can you imagine those CEO's, politicians, and clergy; can you imagine them following the example of our World War II Honor Guard, and standing out there in the pouring rain? Would these men and women have ignored their own discomfort to do what was right?

This past week, we've all spent time thinking back to the pain and anguish that terrorists caused our country one year ago. We've read articles, seen news reports, attended community events, held moments of silence to honor the memory of those who were slain, and to pledge to protect and defend our country from attacks in the future.

But as I reflect on the lasting damage that the 9/11 terrorists will have on our country, despite the terrible pain and anguish they caused, I believe that the long-term damage that is being done by leaders of business, the government and the clergy is worse. For in the long run, whatever the terrorists destroyed, we can rebuild. The ultimate result of their terror will be to bring our country closer together. But the men and women, who perpetrated crimes in the business world and in government, those who've destroyed the credibility of the clergy, they're leaving our nation bereft; they're leaving us rudderless.

Those men and women – they were people we believed in, people we relied on, people we thought were building a foundation for our nation's success. And while the terrorists certainly bloodied our country's nose, the actions of those who we thought were our leaders eats away at the moral fabric of our country and destroys its integrity.

There was a time in America when people used to trust their neighbors. You could leave your door unlocked, your car unlocked, you could leave your key in the ignition. You weren't afraid. No one would take it. Today, we have lost our sense of security. We worry about our clergy, we wonder about

accountants; we've lost faith in financial advisors and the stock market. And we have precious little faith in the government. In the span of a generation, we've gone from being a country of men and women who would stand out in the rain to do their duty, to a country where everyone is too busy running for cover to even take a moment to think about what their duty might be.

How did this happen? It happened slowly, over time. So slowly that we hardly noticed the changes. You know, if you put a frog in a pan of water, and slowly raise the temperature, the frog will boil. As long as you don't change the temperature too suddenly, as long as it's a slow progression, the frog will stay in the water until it dies. Well friends, we're the frog, and our American culture is the water. The water is boiling, and we haven't even noticed.

Who's to blame for this state of affairs? There's one person, one man. And his name is Bobby McFerrin. I'm sure you remember him. He's the guy who sang that song "Don't worry, be happy." He's the one. He's the person to blame. If it weren't for his toe tapping song, everything would be all right in America today.

Okay, I'm just kidding about Bobby McFerrin. But I'm not kidding about that phrase. That phrase, "Don't worry, be happy." If we were honest, we would probably replace the "In God We Trust" on our currency with "Don't worry, be happy." The fact is, it's our modern-day mantra; it's the basis of our new American liturgy. It sums up our ideology and our perspective. Heck, it's even the driving force for America's economic engine. Don't Worry, Be Happy!

The truth is that we live in a society that is fixated on happiness. We've made it the focus of our lives for the last 30 years – it's our motivational force. Turn on any TV and you'll hear it – Eat a whopper, it'll make you smile. Go to Jamaica, you'll feel great! Buy a Lexus, it'll make you real happy. Happiness has become our national obsession.

Now don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with being happy. In fact, every once and a while I like to be happy myself. But it's not the stuff of life. It's not our focal point. There must be something more.

Some 40 years ago, a great American President challenged us to dream about our higher selves. He called on us, saying: "Ask not what your Country can do for you, ask what you can do for your Country." He called on us to think beyond ourselves, to consider a greater good, to work for a better future for our country and for the world. He asked us to put aside our own self-interests, to even put aside our own happiness, and to make sacrifices for the welfare of others.

John F. Kennedy's words and ideals inspired a generation of men and women to dream big dreams, to reach for new heights, to strive to make something of themselves. His words inspired our country to reach for the moon, and we grasped it. **And the truth is, his words did bring us happiness, because when we dedicated ourselves to a cause, when we worked for good, when we had a job to be responsible for, we felt a sense of pride, a sense of honor, a sense of respect, and a sense of mission, and it was satisfying.**

Even better than happiness was the feeling of satisfaction at having striven for something good, something worthwhile, something of value, and believing that we might actually be making a difference in our world.

Today our country is no longer in that place. We've drifted far away from there. Today's culture values individual success far above communal or national goals. Want an example? Why were baseball players about to strike? Were they going to strike so that a family of four could go to a game, have a hot dog,

and enjoy themselves without taking out a second mortgage? No. This strike would have had nothing to do with the fact that baseball has been gouging the fans. The only reason for the strike would have been to make sure that the player's piece of a billion-dollar pie kept growing larger. The players and the owners could care less about the fans; they're only interested in the money. And the truth is that I was rooting for a strike to end the season. I've really had enough of both of them.

But if I want to be honest here, I really shouldn't just blame baseball. After all, they're simply trying to achieve success according to the standards of modern American life. Standards that judge baseball players not for how they play the game, and not for how they treat the fans, but strictly by the size of their paycheck. If I were the Cubs catcher, Randy Hundley, I'd be embarrassed to put on my uniform and collect my paycheck. But according to the standards of our society, he's got a big contract, so he's a success.

Last year I led a program for the Confirmation class and their parents. We discussed an article by Dennis Prager – a Jewish talk show host out in LA. And I apologize to those of you who've heard me speak of this before.

In the article, Prager talks about one of his favorite shows. His topic was values. He started the show by telling listeners that he wanted to give them a choice of four values; each of which is important and positive. "There's not a bad choice among them," he said. "But what I want you to do is to think about which of these four values your parents would most want you to be? Would your parents want you to be Happy, Smart, Successful or Good?"

Now I know it's a difficult question, because we want our children to be all of these things. But again, if your parents had to pick just one of them for you, which one would it be. I want you to take a minute to think about it now. And I'm going to ask you, if your eyes are not already closed, to close them now and raise your hand to indicate what your parents wanted you to be: Was it: Happy, Smart, Successful or Good?

What Dennis Prager discovered on his talk show, was that people of an older generation consistently answered: Good. They knew that their parents wanted them to be good. But children of a younger generation almost always answered: Happy. But if we take a moment now and think about it, I think you'll find that there is only one right answer, and it is the older generation that gave it.

Let's begin by considering the alternatives, starting with Smart. To have survived for as long as he has, Sadaam Hussein must be a very smart man. He has launched wars against his neighbors, fired missiles into Israel, massacred his own people, flouted international agreements; he is seeking to build nuclear weapons to add to his arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, and he has survived political enemies by using whatever means were necessary, even when it meant assassinating his daughter's husbands. He is a very smart man. But Sadaam Hussein is also ruthless, wicked and evil.

When it comes to deciding values, there's nothing wrong with being smart. The problem is that knowledge is value neutral. It doesn't come with a moral compass. Our greatest scientists, researchers, our most advanced technology; they can all be put to evil purposes just as easily as they can be used for good. We need smart people in our world, but first and foremost, they must be good.

How about those of you who raised your hands for Success? Whose parent doesn't want their child to be a success? But here too, success can't be the guiding principle in our lives. Think about those CEO's I spoke about earlier, the heads of Arthur Anderson, World Com, Enron Adelphia, and Tyco. When those men and women were faced with issues that called on them to decide between doing what was right, and

doing what would make them personally successful, they chose success. And the result of their decisions is obvious. Are their parents proud of their children's success today?

Now we come to happiness, which is always the most popular answer. How many times do parents and grandparents tell their kids: "Do whatever you want dear, as long as it \_\_\_\_\_." Happiness is the word that comes so frequently from our parent's lips. It is an idea that gets reinforced every hour of the day from the time a child is old enough to turn on the TV. But shouldn't our parent's want us to be happy? Yes, of course, everyone should be happy, but not all the time, and not at all costs. Making happiness the driving force in life leads to a shallow, soul-less existence.

Life is not always happy. It is an intermingling of experiences and emotions: Life is filled with moments that are happy and sad. It encompasses times of great celebration and tragic mourning. We experience both anguish and delight. Life is not monotone, it is not one color, it is a mixing of experiences and events. This is why, when we feel happy, when we fall in love, when we find joy, we know we are blessed, because we have also experienced the pain and hardship of life, and we know the difference.

The truth is that even if we wanted to, it would be impossible to be happy all of the time. Think of the child, who cries for weeks and weeks for a new toy. How many days does it take before he becomes bored, sets the toy aside, and begins to plead for a new favorite object? This child is not evil; he's simply human. It is a part of his genetic make-up. Throughout our lives, each of us searches, and strives to find new goals. And the fact is, that for many of us it is the searching and striving that is more important than the attainment. For the object of our desire rarely holds our enthusiasm once the newness wears off. And ultimately, when an individual makes happiness their life's mission, it often leads to great despair, because it is impossible to always be happy.

It comes down to Good, friends. This is where we need to be. Nothing else can take its place. Our centering force in life needs to be striving, not to be happy, but to be good.

Not convinced yet? Think about it one last time. Imagine these three situations. Your spouse is out of town on a business trip. Do you want him to be happy, or do you want him to be good? Which one. Or how about your 16-year-old daughter, who is at the mall with a group of friends. The group decides to head over to a party at a house where the parents are out of town. Do you want your daughter to be happy or good? A last scenario: You are old, sick, and dying, and it makes your child really uncomfortable to come and visit. Every time she leaves, she's upset. She's thinking that maybe it's not a good idea to come and visit you anymore. What value should guide her decision? Should she do whatever will make her happy, or should she strive to be good?

If we want our children and grandchildren to be good, we have to tell them. If we don't want them to blindly follow a culture that is obsessed with happiness, if we want them to choose a different path through life, then we have to instruct them. The desire to be happy, like the desire for pleasure, is instinctual; it doesn't need to be taught. **But being good, making choices that go against our own self-interest, standing up for what is right, respecting ourselves enough to do what is right, regardless of the circumstances of the day, this must be taught.**

No one stands in the rain without an umbrella for their health. No one stands out in the rain on a cold fall day because it brings them joy. They stand out in the rain, they do their job with honor, dignity, and respect, and they do what is right, what is good, because that's what they saw their parents do, that's what they were taught, that's what was expected of them.

On this Yom Kippur, this Day of Atonement, let us consider the values WE have been living by. And let us consider the values that WE have been teaching to our children. Our nation's culture has drifted away from the good path, the right path, and the evidence is right before our eyes. We have drifted right along with it.

It is in our hands to make a change. It is in our hands to turn, to turn and follow the right path, and live a better life. A life of honor, dignity, and respect; a life in which we respect ourselves enough to do what is right, regardless of the circumstances of the day. A life that is good, truthful, and honest. A life that is Kadosh – a life that is holy.

May this be God's will. Amen.