
Lesson Thirteen

What's Your Price Tag?

READING ACTIVITY

“The Three Hundred Dollar Mountain Bike”

A teenager named Rob loved bike riding in the paths near his home which went for miles and miles. He worked several after-school jobs to save up three hundred dollars to buy a new mountain bike that was hanging in the window of a local bicycle shop. Every day after school he went to look at the bike.

Finally, he had enough to buy the bike. From that day on, he spent many hours riding the bike, in sun or rain, and sometimes even storm. He became one of the best cyclists in the area and his bike was like a best friend, that he took with him everywhere he went. The hours when he wasn't riding the bike he spent taking care of it. He bought brand new tires for it as well.

But during the year, he grew several inches and the bike was no longer big enough for his long legs. Rob decided to sell his bike and told his friends that it was for sale. He told them that he might be willing to sell it for \$150.

A friend, Rich, at school came to him one day and said, “I heard you're selling your mountain bike for \$150.”

Rob said, “maybe.”

Rich said, “well, I've got \$75 in my pocket right now. It's yours if you'll let the bike go for \$75.”

Rob said, “no way. I just put new tires on it.”

Rich said, “but it's got scratches on it.”

Rob said, “every mountain bike has some scratches. This isn't a bike for riding down the sidewalk in front of your house. It's a *mountain bike*.”

Rich said, “I'll have to touch up the scratches on it.”

Rob said, “You don't know how many hours I put into taking care of this bike!”

Rich said, “Look, if you'll change the price, I'll take the bike off your hands.”

“You've convinced me. The price is changed,” Rob said with a smile.

“Great, here's your \$75,” Rich said, taking the money out of his pocket.

“Sorry, Rich, the price is changed, but not to \$75. The price is now \$300. That's what I paid for it and that's what it's worth.”

“You can't do that!” Rich protested.

“It's my bike. I can sell it for whatever I want. This bike has special alloys in it. This bike won several races. It has new tires. \$300 is cheap.”

Rich said with a smile, “Look, you're a good salesman. OK, I'll give you \$150 for it. You convinced me.”

Rob countered, “I mean what I said. This bike is worth more than \$300. The more I talked with you the more I realized how much I love this bike. \$300 is a bargain, take it or leave it!”

Rich protested and grumbled for a long time, but in the end, he paid the \$300 and knew it was worth it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If Rob had decided to accept the \$75 offer from Rich, instead of insisting on a higher price, how would he have felt afterwards? Why?

2. Have you ever saved up to buy something you really wanted? How did you feel when you saved up enough to purchase it? Would you let just anyone borrow your valuable, new possession?

3. It's amazing how people selling something valuable will wait for the full price of what a bike, a car, or a house is worth, but when it comes to our own self-worth, we seem to be unsure of our own value. For instance, many teenage girls feel they have to give sex in order to keep a boy interested in them and many teenage boys think they have to "get" sex or people will think there's something wrong with them. Do you know teens who fall into this trap? Describe. What's wrong with their thinking?

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4. If you were a bicycle, how much would you be worth? Would you be a \$75 bike, \$150 bike, a \$300 bike or less? Why?
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DISCUSSION

Rick Stedman, author of *Pure Joy*, tells a story similar to the one above to many single men and women he's counseled to help them think about the way they relate to others and their own sense of value. People tend to treat us the way we let them. The way we let others treat us reflects how much value we put on ourselves.¹

There are many analogies between sexuality and money. Of course, some people prostitute themselves by providing sexual gratification to others in return for money. Even though this can be a fast way to make money, most people reject this line of "work" as personally degrading. They intuitively feel that sharing sexual intimacy should be reserved for someone who really loves and is committed to you and vice versa, not just to make a buck.

The truth is that sexuality, like anything else that people find desirable, *can* be treated like a commodity, something that can be used to get what you want. The mass culture tends to promote this point of view. The media keeps on telling us that a girl who is pretty or sexually attractive can get what she wants.

If a girl gets involved in sexual dating relationships, she may, indeed, find that guys are very interested to take her out on dates, but are they really interested in *her* or as someone to have sex with? Sex can make her powerful and desirable in the short term, and she may think that she is in control, but it can distort the relationships and even herself in a way that may not become clear until later.

Many young people buy into this approach, but find out that the sexual marketplace can become pretty empty after a while. The sex drive is not just arousal-oriented; it is person-oriented; sexual

release per se is not fulfilling ultimately.

If love and real commitment aren't there, the sex act feels empty. The purpose of sex is not just pleasure, as many people think, it's to communicate *value*. Just as you don't lend a valuable bicycle to a stranger or someone you don't know well, you don't want to lend the precious gift of your sexuality to someone who may just use and throw it away like a worthless piece of trash.

In Rick Stedman's story, the object being sold is not a mountain bike, it's an old antique table that was on sale for \$300, but its owner decides that it's more valuable than that. She demands \$600 for it and gets it instead of letting it go for less. After he tells them the story, many single adults realize that it is their view of themselves that determines how others will treat them. At that point, he asks them, "if you were a table, how much would you be worth? Would you be a \$300 table, a \$400 table, or a \$600 table?"

Some say, "I feel like a \$10 table. I have given myself away so cheaply and have been treated so poorly that I feel worthless." Others say, "I guess about \$300. I'm not going to end up in a thrift store, but I will never receive full price either. I will never be treated the way I would like to be." Still others smile and say, "I'm a \$600 table, and I have been waiting a long time for someone to discover and treat me like that."²

People won't usually treat us poorly because they view us as cheap. It may be a surprise, but the way others treat us is often a product of our own choosing. If we do not value ourselves, we will probably allow others to treat us poorly. On the other hand, if we truly value ourselves, we will not settle for poor treatment. The "prices" others will pay for us are not set by others—we fill in the price tags ourselves.

What can you do if you feel your price tag would fit in better at a garage sale than at a high-end store? As discussed in chapter seven, you can practice HEALS. Remember, the H is for Healing of your wounded self. The E of the word is to Explain to yourself, the lowest core hurts you are feeling, perhaps a feeling of being disregarded, unimportant, guilty, devalued, powerless or unlovable.

A is to Access your core values, the deepest part of you, your value as a human being. L is to remember to Love yourself. The trick is to feel compassion first for yourself, and then for the person who may be (trying to) misuse you. S is to Solve the problem.

JUST FOLLOW FEELINGS?

Some people say they will just follow their feelings and if sharing sex with someone feels good and they don't feel any guilt about it, why not do it? But there are many things people do which may seem problem-free and even enjoyable at the time which have unpleasant and even disastrous results later.

For instance, once a young person gets his or her first credit card, he/she may be tempted to go on a shopping spree with the credit card. In the moment the excitement of buying new clothes and shoes might be very enjoyable, but when the bill comes in the mail a month later, one has to pay them off or have the burden of debt hanging over one's head.

There are many actions people do the consequences of which don't become evident until later. Drinking alcohol or using drugs can seem very enjoyable in the short run, but the very real risks of addiction or alcoholism come sooner or later. Many people spend themselves in pursuit of fun,

living "over their heads" morally and feeling no regrets until "their bills come due." Their own moral bankruptcy, inner emptiness and sense of being used and exploited may not hit them until years later.

The Sexual Revolution that took place in the U.S. and in many countries around the world in the 60s, 70s, and 80s led people to believe that sex could and should be enjoyed without consequences. Instead of investing into a single committed relationship, many people spread their affection, hearts and bodies among many different partners. It's like someone who receives a large inheritance or wins the lottery and spends it partying with different friends and acquaintances. As long as he has money, everyone wants to be with him, but when the money is gone, all the "friends" no longer find him attractive.

On the other hand, if the person invests the inheritance so that it grows into a larger amount he/she may not have a lot of partyseekers hanging around, but people of value will be attracted to that person as someone who has a promising future.

Are you throwing away your precious sexual inheritance on different partners who won't stay for that long? Or are you saving and investing it as something valuable you want to share with a lifelong partner? Don't throw the inheritance of sexuality away! Invest it for the long run! Not trusting people with your self until you have determined that they and the relationship are trustworthy is part of valuing yourself.

Low commitment relationships are like renting something that you'll never own. You get some immediate use or joy out of it, but there's nothing built up that you can call your own. High commitment relationships are like investing something that you will own when the payments are done. You'll be able to enjoy it for your whole life.

Forget about finding the perfect mate who will "make me whole;" the key is to become a complete person with high self-value who will be a good mate for another and who will attract quality friends and others. Stedman points out that "1 x 1 = 1" but "1 x 1/2 = 1/2." Even if an incomplete person finds a whole person, the incomplete person is still incomplete and the relationship is also incomplete.³

DATING VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse and dating violence are a sad reality for too many teens and young adults. One study of more than 17,000 adults found that 16% of the males and 25% of the females reported childhood sexual abuse.⁴

Dating an older partner also puts girls at risk for being forced to have sex (rape). Girls with older partners are more likely to become pregnant than girls with partners closer to their own age. One study showed that girls with a partner six or more years older were 3.7 times more likely to become pregnant than girls with an age differential of only two years. The study also showed that young women who had previously been forced to have sex were twice as likely to have a partner who was three to five years older than those with no history of forced sex.⁵

Twelve percent of high school students who date reported experiencing a form of dating violence. About one in four dating relationships among college students involve pushing, slapping, shoving, or more serious aggression.

MY NAME IS JERICA...

I have recently been to your website looking for answers...I haven't always been this depressed, I have been sexually abused for 7 years and no matter what my family and I do someone always does it. I haven't looked into a sexual relationship for "love." I have all the love I need at home. How many of your volunteers have been through what [almost] half of the world has been through...how many know what it's like to hate the opposite sex? If you don't know what it's like how can you help prevent what happens every day? (email sent to freeteensusa.org)

I NEVER THOUGHT IT COULD HAPPEN TO ME..

I met my bf Bryan through one of my friends on Myspace. She told me he was a really good guy, and that he lived 2 towns away from me. We

emailed each other and talked on the phone for about 4 months. I knew he was going through a break up with his gf, and I wasn't looking for a relationship, just someone to hang out with. I was attracted to him from the start. He was tall, dark, and very handsome. He was very intelligent and when he spoke I was in awe. He had his own car and apartment, and was working at a job where people would call in from businesses for help with their computers.

I was wondering why his gf would leave him when in my eyes, he was perfect. I would question him and he would say, trust me, she had reasons, but never really thought much about it. He started to want to hang out everyday, and was always texting and calling me throughout the night. He began to start getting mad if I didn't do what he wanted. It got to the point where I wouldn't hang out with my friends or family. If I told him I had plans he told me that I didn't tell him and that I couldn't go now, if I was at his house. If I said I was having dinner with my family he would start a fight with me on purpose and then say you are not leaving now, and make me stay at his house. He would take my keys and phone away.

Sometimes when we argued he would shove me against the wall or slap my face. Later on he would apologize and take me out to a good restaurant and buy me flowers or some other gift. He would talk about how he was abused growing up and watched his father beating up his mother. I felt sympathy for him and thought I could help him to change. Also, for a few weeks I thought I might be pregnant with his baby.

One night he said he needed to see me and came over to my house. I decided to tell him that I wasn't happy in the relationship, but that made him angrier. I told him my parents didn't want me even being friends with him, which they thought that's all we were, because of his temper. He was mad that they knew how he was treating me. He shoved me hard and my head hit the corner of the bookcase, cutting a deep gash in my scalp. My head began to bleed a lot. My parents heard me crying. They told Bryan to leave and took me to the hospital emergency room where they gave me ten stitches. I got a restraining order on him. I feel that if my parents didn't step in I probably would have stayed with him longer due to fear, and still having feelings for him.
Darlene

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are the costs of uncommitted sex? Can all of these be immediately seen or do some of these costs show up years later? Explain. (For help, see Appendix B.)

2. What do you think of the analogy between your sexual value and the way someone uses a large amount won in the lottery or received as an inheritance? Do you know people who have squandered their sexuality in a similar way? Describe. Do you know people who have wisely “invested” their sexuality in a lifelong commitment? Describe.

3. Do you know or have you heard about people who have been sexually abused or victims of incest (which refers to sexual abuse by a family member or relative)? How do you think that affected them?

4. What advice would you give to Jerica?
