

Wholehearted Living at Its Core: Discerning Your Personal Core Values

Section I - Overview of Personal Core Values

Before we can discern and define our personal core values, we need to answer a few questions.

- What are core values?
- Why are they important?
- What benefits do they offer?

What are core values?

Core values themselves are qualities or traits that speak most powerfully to what we believe. They reflect our highest priorities. They serve as inspiration as we set our goals,

follow our dreams, and live our lives. They also serve as barometers - letting us know when we might want to re-think a decision, change directions, or modify a habit or behavior.

When we are firmly grounded in our core values, others around us easily see them being modeled and expressed. They become an integral part of our interactions with others in every realm of relationship we have. Living our core values provides a powerful expression of who we are, what we believe, and who we would like to be as our lives continue to unfold.

Why are core values important?

The importance of core values could very well rest in one very important question: 'What do you stand for?'

If asked that question right now, could you answer it? And do so in less than 60 seconds? Imagine standing in the express checkout aisle at the grocery store and being asked that question. Could you provide a clear and concise answer before the 10th item in your shopping cart cleared the scanner?

If so, congratulations! If not, it would serve you well to spend time considering what it is you do stand for, and why. This is especially true if your life doesn't seem to be moving along as smoothly as you would like or turning out the way you thought it would.

What benefits do core values bring?

As for the benefits core values can offer, an online consulting program, Decision-Making-Solutions.com, perhaps says it best:

'We derive a sense of fulfillment when living our personal values because our motivations

and actions are aligned with the aspirations of who we want to be.'

(https://www.decision-making-solutions.com/personal_core_values.html)

Who **DO** we want to be? How **DO** we want to live? These are important life questions, ones that remind us that our lives can be of our own choosing and not dictated by those around us.

We live in a fast-paced and technology-laden world. Sometimes it can seem as if everyone has the perfect answer for us, which in truth is usually more their 'expectation of us'.

It is not always easy to find our personal identity, continually nurture it, and remain true to it. Our lifeline to doing so rests in knowing our core values. According to Decision-Making-Solutions.com, choosing and

knowing your core values can provide a number of benefits that include:

- Reducing stress
- Making better decisions
- Finding environments and people that support your aspirations
- Increasing joy and happiness
- Supporting your growth and development
- Helping in times of conflict or confusion
- Growing contribution and value
- Providing motivation

In the end, perhaps the most powerful benefit our core values bring to us is personal awareness and conscious living at the highest levels possible.

Section II - Sources of Personal Core Values

What sources exist for personal core values?

There are a variety of sources from which we can discern our core values. Of course, in Unity, we believe that God is the source of all things good in our lives. Turning within through prayer, meditation, and silent reflection - understanding our faith and core beliefs - is a powerful source for discerning and choosing the values by which we want to live our lives.

Of course, there are many other influences that come into our lives that can help bring to light our core values. Throughout our lives we will come into relationship with parents and family, friends, mentors, counselors and therapists, professional colleagues, clergy, and even perfect strangers - all of whom can

have a major influence on what we choose to value.

It is important to note that this very same collection of relationships can also come into our lives in order to help us see all that we would choose not to value or emulate in any way. Every person and every life experience bring with them lessons for us to learn.

One last source for our core values rests in our individual behaviors. This can be a challenging one at times. Consistent behaviors and habits can begin to feel so natural that we can be blinded from looking at ourselves with objectivity and clarity. One way to do a little ‘awareness test’ would be to write down what you believe to be your core values. Then, without revealing them, ask someone you trust what they think to be your core values.

The answers received from others will be based on the behaviors they witness from you. If their list of core values closely matches your list, it is a good sign that you are living in alignment with values you have chosen. If disparity exists between the two lists, it may be possible that you are not living in alignment with values you would more intentionally choose, given the chance to do so.

Wherever you may be at the current time, know that you can always make the conscious choice to stop and spend quality and prayerful time with these sources. You can tap into them as often as you wish in order to be assured that you are living your life in ways that align with what you believe to be the highest and greatest expression of who you have come into this world to be.

Section III - Discerning Your Core Values

How can personal core values be discerned?

There are so many different means through which your personal core values can be discerned. The Internet is filled with literally thousands of articles and links to individuals and organizations which provide different processes, classes, or bare bones guidance on the topic.

We will outline a few of these for you as a means of support as you continue into the six-weeks of this year's fall series. Before we do that, there are a few common characteristics you can keep in mind once you find the process that feels most comfortable for you.

- First and foremost, we encourage you to always ground your core value discernment process in prayer. As you

likely already know, Unity was founded and built upon a foundation of prayer. When we surrender to Spirit in us, we find our greatest strength and deepest wisdom coming forth. Give yourself that blessing and you are sure to uncover your life-directing values with ease.

- Keep in mind that the core values that are true for you will rest deep within you, not at the surface level of awareness. If you picture an iceberg as it is seen on the surface of the water, a moment more of thought will remind you that the largest and strongest part of that iceberg rests below the surface. You will find your core values by taking the time to look deeply into your own heart and soul.

- No matter how many or how few core values you decide to create for yourself, they should not be in contradiction with each other. For example, if you feel that you value family and adventure, too much time spent with one could easily stand in the way of your ability to be present to the other.
- Although core values are not rigid and set in stone once chosen, they should not be changing every few weeks. Your values need to be lived and experienced. And, that takes time.

If you find a value changing in a short period of time, give consideration as to whether it was truly meant to be a priority in your life. Otherwise, it is a good idea to review your core values at

least every year, and especially when there are significant life changes or when life feels out of balance without a clear reason as to why.

- No matter which process you decide to follow, once you have chosen your core values, be sure to define them. Write a brief sentence that clearly states what each value means to you. We have done this with the core values at the ministry (See Appendix D) and you can easily use them as a reference by changing the defining word of ‘We’ to ‘I’.

For example, personalizing the definition of Unity of Traverse City’s core value of Spirit-Led would read,

*‘I turn within to Spirit for wisdom,
clarity, and guidance.’*

- And lastly, spend time with each of your definitions. Once you feel certain of the meanings your core values have for you, write two or three steps you can take in your everyday life that would bring those meanings to life in ways that others could not possibly miss.

At the ministry, we call them ‘behavioral statements’, and again, you can use the outline of the ministry’s core values in Appendix D as a reference guide for you own.

In Appendix A, you will find four sample processes that you can follow in order to begin discerning your set of personal core values. (Or, feel free to find

another you might prefer to use.) We encourage you to work with one of your choosing in conjunction with the weekly curriculum provided.

The curriculum will expand upon the Sunday lessons and explore more deeply some of the underlying themes contained in the ministry's values to support you as you apply them to your individual discernment process.

Section IV - Walking Your Talk

Core values must be placed into expression

Unity holds as its fifth basic principle the tenet that we must put into action all that we believe. This holds true for our personal core values. What good is a value if it is not embodied, modeled, and expressed? How can we make a positive difference in the world if we keep our values hidden under that proverbial ‘scriptural bushel basket’?

Perhaps that is why so many have found the ministry’s monthly ‘passing of the core values’ to be so meaningful. This beautiful ritual would not be possible if you were not already demonstrable expressions of the core values which guide the church. Remember, **you** are the church and **you** are what breathes life into our core values. You can do the same in

your personal life. In fact, it is a sacred call to action residing within each of us.

Make your core values the foundation for your life. Let them support you as you build relationships and make decisions. Allow them to guide you into behaviors that are healthy and for your overall empowerment and growth. Call upon them to provide the perseverance and discipline needed to remain in integrity with your commitments and goals, or to respectfully move through times of conflict.

Use them as your own personal and spiritual GPS, guiding you more deeply into your oneness with God and your unique and wondrous expression of Its love in our world.