The Law of Unintended Consequences

When we make choices, we often fail to consider all the effects. We usually focus on what’s the most important thing at the time: what’s easiest; what we want; what is least painful; what calms our fears; what keeps people we love from hurting; what keeps us from experiencing loss; what keeps the peace.

Our intentions are good. They come from love, wanting to make someone happy or comfortable, wanting to make someone love or like us, wanting to decrease stress and conflict, or wanting to make ourselves happy or comfortable. But good intentions often have unintended consequences.

God set the universe up in an orderly way. God’s law of natural consequences means that people reap what they sow: if they invest in good things, they get good things; if they invest in bad things, they get bad things (Galatians 6:7-8). This doesn’t always happen right away, but it does happen—eventually. The law of unintended consequences is simply that it isn’t only our intention that matters; it’s the effect of our actions that matters even more. Human nature is predictable; therefore, our choices have predictable effects. Here are some of the things that happen even when our intentions are good:

- If you reinforce something, you get more of it.
- If you allow something, you get more of it.
- If you do things for people, they will do less for themselves.
- If you take care of everything, other people won’t have to do what is already done.
- If you push too hard, others push back harder and resist more.
- If you allow people to treat you disrespectfully, they won’t respect you.
- If you don’t have boundaries, people will walk all over you.
- If you please people, you won’t be happy with yourself.
- If you let people take advantage of you, they will.
When you are making decisions in your life and relationships, consider your motive, your immediate need, and the unintended consequences. That way you will be making decisions that take not only the short-term effect but also the long-term effect into consideration. The unintended consequences are often the opposite of what you really want.

By Karla Downing

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**Relationship Prayer**

God,

Help me recognize the short-term and long-term effects of my decisions.

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**Relationship Challenge**

❖ Pay attention to the short-term and long-term effects of your choices.

❖ Decide which one you truly want for your life and relationships.

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**Scripture Meditation**

*Proverbs 28:23*

“He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.”

*Galatians 6:7-9*

“Do not deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”
Proverbs 14:12

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

If you have any questions you would like to ask Karla, please feel free to email her at karla@changemyrelationship.com.

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