



Values over Valuables: Daring to Live the Life Money Can't Buy

Harmon Kong

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Taking an individualized approach to proffering financial advice, the wealth management guide Values Over Valuables argues that “money matters immensely; it’s just that you matter more.”

Wealth manager Harmon Kong’s financial guide *Values Over Valuables* takes a purpose-driven, family-first approach to money.

Exemplifying “prosperity with perspective” and arguing that financial planning should be faith based, family focused, and about aligning money with one’s core values, this book takes an individualized approach to proffering financial advice. It acknowledges pitfalls to wealth accumulation and extant planning challenges, including struggles to determine how to support one’s family after death and how to leave one’s mark. And it names ways in which dysfunctional family dynamics can affect money management, including by stunting parental bonding and the development of a keen work ethic in children. With this in mind, it notes that one’s financial strategies should be tailored to one’s own circumstances and desires.

Beyond the book’s portfolio-related advice are encouragements to invest in relationships, including by having open discussions about money and about handling inherited wealth with wisdom and responsibility. It recommends clear communication on both money and values through scheduled family meetings, too. And its work is made more personable by its references to Kong’s own conversations with clients, his Hawaiian upbringing (which instilled in him a sense of *ohana*, or family), and biblical teachings, all supporting the idea that “money matters immensely; it’s just that you matter more.”

The book is persuasive thanks to its references to clients who provided for their children but missed their childhoods in the process, clients whose adult children wasted their nest eggs on drugs and frivolities, and clients more concerned about leaving an inheritance than enjoying their families in the present. Kong’s adult children’s stories are mined for examples as well, with the eldest two praised for having chosen nonlucrative careers that nonetheless aligned with their values. Discussions of how women have been excluded from financial decisions broaden the book’s scope, including keen warnings to wives who are kept in the dark regarding their family finances. However, related advice is somewhat undermined by the book’s focus on the “family leader,” often depicted as a hardworking man, and by its continuous references to “Mom and Dad,” which reinforce traditional family structures, leaving some audiences out.

The book ends with a series of interactive worksheets to help apply its principles to one’s own financial planning. However, its general persuasiveness is undermined by its frequent self-promoting references to Kong’s company, as with the advertorial note “Since our founding, [we have] taken a holistic view of wealth, helping families to find balance in their lives.” In addition, some anecdotes repeat without need.

The illuminating financial guide *Values Over Variables* approaches money as a means rather than an end.

HANNAH PEARSON (September 19, 2024)

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