

"What is your motivation?"

When I was 20 years old I worked at a Bible camp in Alaska over the summer. The campsite was called "Rainbow Glacier Camp" where there was a big glacier right in front of the campsite. It was a place where there were families of moose roaming around and eagles soaring in the sky above.

There was no electricity running through the campsite so it was my job to turn on the electric generator when the sky started getting dark (around 2 or 3 am). The generator was similar to a lawn mower, and when the rope was pulled a couple of times the machine will start moving and light up. I cannot forget the nights of reading until sunrise in front of the glacier, with the murmur of the generator the only sound in the stillness of the night.

This may sound like an eccentric metaphor, but there is also a generator in our hearts that causes us to move. It is the root of our actions and speech, and we call this generator-motivation. There are different kinds of motives and these vary depending on the person. Let's take a look at a couple of motives. The first is fear.

1) Fear

There is a scenario that I fear I may run into someday. That is the fear of happening to be in a bank when a robbery occurs. Bank robberies happen from time to time, even in San Diego. It is not completely surprising to hear about a robbery at a local bank or convenience store.

I think about the possibility of encountering a robber pressing a gun against the glass as I fill out a form in the bank. The principle thing to do in this situation is to hand over anything the robber asks for. Of course, there's no reason for me to, and I have no desire to. However, I do because a gun is pointed towards me. There are probably not many people who do not feel fear with a gun pointed towards them. Fear motivates us to do things we do not wish for. And of course, the aim of a pistol is not the full extent of fear.

There are people who fear the perception of others, people who fear what others think of them. This fear controls what that person says and does. Even if the person has no desire to, fear drives people to say and do things that are not in their heart. Jesus often said, "do not fear" to people he encountered. No matter how people presented themselves, in God's eyes people always appeared to be fearing something. Fear is certainly a motive in our lives. The second motive is materialism.

2) Materialism

There is no explanation necessary regarding materialism spreading through our society. The United States most likely ranks among top consumer countries. It seems that our country lives in the myth that ownership of many or large things will bring happiness.

Materialism certainly motivates us as well. At times people will try to accomplish this even at the sacrifice of their own health. Some people impair their health in pursuit of wealth, only to spend a majority of what was accumulated to treat the damage done to their body. A man who gave up his holiday to work finds himself in an empty mansion, with no one to talk to. This story could probably be found scattered throughout this country.

When I first came to America I was told not to leave anything in the car. Because even if a quarter was viewable from outside the car, the car would be broken into. This world is full of people who would kill even for ten dollars. The third is Acceptance.

3) Acceptance

We spend our daily lives interacting with various people. These people include parents, spouse, children, boss, coworkers, and friends. It is ideal for us to have healthy relationships with these people but at times we try to respond to people's request to gain their acceptance. It does not matter if the request is worth responding to, especially when we become desperate for acceptance.

There are people whose hearts and minds are worn down from attempting to fulfill every request. If meeting expectations of parents are deeply rooted in a child, that child will try to fulfill this even at old age, and will continue to blame him or herself after their parent's death.

There are people who wear away their souls and lose themselves while trying to gain everyone's acceptance. If there is a secret formula for failure, it would be the trying to impress everyone. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). The fourth is Envy.

4) Envy

Envy is present in every age. Like Adam and Eve's two sons, where the elder brother's envy of the younger brother led to the first murder in humanity. The history of envy traces back to the beginning of mankind, and Israel's third king Solomon wrote an interesting observation about envy.

"I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another" (Ecclesiastes 4:4). Looking back and analyzing how we live, and finding that our accomplishments were motivated by envy is a big surprise that should appall us. However, what Solomon is saying is to the point.

Envy sounds like this. "My classmate and coworker got promoted before me even though we have been doing the same thing. I'm going to do my best from now and try to pass above him". "That company's products are selling better than ours. Their marketing must have been better because our products are similar. We are going to try to develop a better product". Like Solomon said, people accomplish things through envy, and this may be how our economy is developing.

The last one is Feel of Guilty.

5) The feeling of guilty

If guilt exists in our heart, then we are motivated by regret and shame of the past, and the atonement of that guilt.

In other words, to hide past regrets, a person attempts to appear stronger, or becomes conservative because of fear of failure. The thought that "I have to live a life of atonement" rules their heart.

The person who is this way commits their present and future self to past events. From an outside perspective, we see and wonder why people hurt themselves to this extent. However, these people believe that they cannot and are not supposed to succeed or find happiness, and so purposefully destroy their own lives to atone for their guilt.

I just spoke of five motives, but of course there are other things that motivate us as well. The question we want to ask ourselves is "are these motives healthy". Living in control of fear, living in pursuit of the things that pass before us, living to meet people's expectations, living in envy of others, living in guilt of the past. The actions and words that come out of these motives could not be considered as good things.

Saul was the first king of Israel, and he was one who lived in guilt because he did not obey God's words. Saul does and says many things to hide and atone for this guilt, but this leads Saul into further confusion. When Saul was commanded by God to destroy those conquered in war, Saul instead tries to make the livestock his own (1 Samuel 15).

And because of this Saul loses his throne. Saul also envies David, who is blessed by God, and Saul pursues David to try to kill him. There is no consistency in Saul's words and actions at this time, and you can see his wavering heart. Saul's spirit is broken and he dies in battle. Saul's life was one controlled by unhealthy motives, and it came to a sorrowful end.

Brothers and sisters, our lives are limited. If we had 1000 years to live, and you were not convinced by me, please try living according to each of these motives. But if we think that these motives are not healthy for us, then we are to find the right motives, and live according to them. Because our lives are not long. And that is why the Bible is given to us.

The Bible says that we have a "purpose" that motivates us. And that purpose is not one what we make but purpose that is given to us. I spoke two weeks ago about how the creator decides the purpose of the created thing.

If we think this way, we are created beings who can only receive purpose from God our creator. And we can find this purpose in the Bible. Only people are given this purpose, and our dogs and cats at home do not live according to the same purpose.

Two weeks ago I spoke about how a philosophy professor at an university wrote to 250 philosophers, scientists, authors, and intellectuals asking "what the meaning of life" is.

Some people gave their best insight and answer, some people admitted to having only a vague idea, and others confessed that they had no answer. And many people wrote back asking the professor to tell them what the meaning of life is if he finds one.

Many of us live without knowing the meaning of life. We work hard and live our busy lives without knowing our purpose. Some people rely on fortune tellers to find their purpose in life. However, we cannot find our meaning and purpose in those places. Life's greatest tragedy is not death, because there is no greater suffering than living a life without knowing your purpose.

In Jeremiah 29:10-14, it says this. ¹⁰This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹²Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity.^[b] I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

The book of Jeremiah, as in the name, was written by Jeremiah. He was a prophet who lived in Judah around 600 A.D.. There were several good kings who ruled Judea, but tyrants came to rule, the government became corrupt, and the citizens were in their worst ethically. The nation's recovery appeared impossible, and Jeremiah described the situation this way.

Jeremiah 13:23 "Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil". Jeremiah says that they were accustomed to evil. They lived with evil habits every day, and Jeremiah writes that their ability to change these habits were as impossible as changing an Ethiopian's skin or a leopard's spots.

Jeremiah 2: 23, "Does a young woman forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number". The people completely forgot God and lived according to their heart's desire.

God, seeing their wicked conduct, said, "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people". And he made this prophecy, "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years".

These words become true when Judea was conquered by the Babylonians and the people were taken out of the country as captives. This is shown in world history today.

These citizens of Judah were not those who came from another planet, but humans just like us. Although we live in a different age, the motives in their heart are something we share and possess as well. We must know that this is what caused the Babylonian captivity.

However God said to his people, ""When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"" (10-11).

For 70 years you will reap what you have sown as captives of Babylon. But when the time comes, I will remember you and release you.

I have a plan and purpose for you. I will give this to you. And this purpose is not one that will lead you to destruction. This purpose is not momentary, it does no harm to a neighbor or bring feelings of endless emptiness.

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My purpose for you does not give as the world gives, but gives you peace in your heart, gives you a future, and hope. God says that this is what you are to live by

We are not beings who spurred up by chance. We are given life by God's love. And our creator has a purpose for us. Hearing this we may think that people are like robots controlled by God.

However, that is not what is implied, what it truly means is that God has given us a purpose that allows us to live our best life. We are not to accept God's purpose for us as fate, but we are allowed to choose to do so according to our will.

Paul, who chose to live according to this purpose said, "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Paul was one who lived looking towards one goal. Looking at his life, there were many troubles and trials. However, in his heart was a motive given by God, that was to run the race and achieve the prize given by God. That is what motivated him.

One time I visited the town of Philippi in Greece. It is where Paul ministered as well. In one corner of this town, there is a brick road that was created by the Roman empire. The tour guide told me that this was from Paul's era and Paul also probably walked on this road.

I put my hand on one of the bricks. The town is now an ancient ruin, but when I closed my eyes I felt like I could hear the busy town. And I could hear Paul's rash breathing. He must have passed through this road to Athens and Ephesus. He knew that there would be various trials, but he faced forward to head there. What motivated this was God's purpose for his life.

This morning I want to ask, what motivates you? There may be people who may have never thought of this. Is it fear, envy, wealth, perception of other's, or guilt? If these things are motivating your daily walk, they will probably be the motivating force for the rest of your life. In a way, these motives are what control our lives.

Although, that is not our true purpose. To live according to the purpose of the one who gave us life, that is when we are able to live out a full life.

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To change the motives within our hearts, we need a greater motive that surpasses it. If this greater purpose is laid in our heart, what once motivated our actions will fade away in influence.

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus"

Brothers and sisters, what do you think? Do you have the desire to hold on to the same passion that Paul had, and to finish the race with this desire? Let us pray.

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