

“MOTIVATION MEANS EVERYTHING”
Psalm 100, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Acts 4:32-5:11
June 15 & 16, 2024

Charles Swindoll tells this account; “Sometime ago I stayed a couple of nights in the Peabody Hotel in Orlando, Florida. One of the things that makes that hotel famous is that twice a day they have the one-and-only parade of the ducks. While John Phillip Sousa’s march, ‘Stars and Stripes Forever,’ plays in the background, ducks come from everywhere and muster at the fountain on the main floor and a red carpet is unrolled. They march, without a quack as they go from the fountain back to the curtain. I couldn’t believe it. And I thought as I watched it, ‘there has to be a reason.’ These little things waddle on the carpet and they leave while everybody around is applauding this nonsense.

“So I decided one afternoon I would do what no one else in the big group that had gathered was doing. I would follow them behind the curtain. So I did, not on the carpet, obviously, but off to the side. I walked all the way to the curtain and while the march dwindled down to silence and the crowd began to leave, I looked behind the curtain. Now I know why those ducks do that. Back behind the curtain there is no order at all. There is duck food everywhere. There are quacks and sounds and all kinds of other things back there behind the curtain. That’s why they do it! I could tell by looking at them when they were marching that they were doing it, but they didn’t have their heart in it at the time. Their heart, their mind (you could see it in their eyes), was on the food at the end of the parade.”¹

The motivation of getting food caused the ducks to endure the fanfare of a parade, knowing that at the end was a banquet of all kinds of duck food for them to enjoy and rejoice in. But their parade was for selfish gain. The whole motivating factor to being a part of the fanfare was to get rewarded with food. The ducks were being used as an advertising scheme for the hotel. It was all selfish in intent.

This makes me think of people, and to learn what it is that drives us to do what we do. What is our motivation behind the things that we do? What is it that we expect when we do our work or activities throughout our day?

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 402)

Psalm 100 invites us to focus on the Lord every day of our lives so that we can “*shout for joy to the Lord...and worship the Lord with gladness...*” (Ps. 100:1-2). David calls us to be motivated to serve the Lord with gladness, knowing that it is He who made us and gave us life. We are invited to give thanks to the Lord for all His blessings in our lives and to lay honor and praise before Him for His love and faithfulness. Our motivation, then, comes from knowing that we are nothing without the Lord God Almighty in our lives, and that we are to serve the Lord all our lives until we get behind the curtain of Heaven.

Likewise, the apostle Paul helps us to remember that all we have is a gift from the Lord, and our giving is motivated by the attitude we have over the possessions we are blessed with. When we realize that all we have belongs to the Lord, and that He has given it to us to use for His glory, that begins to motivate us to be generous givers just out of appreciation for what God has given to us.

If we give very little to the Lord, it is because we view our possessions as ours, not the Lord’s, and what we have is because of our own hard work and effort to gain those belongings. The mindset of everything being our own motivates us to build, keep and use what we have only for ourselves. Yet, as Paul tells us, “*whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously*” (2 Cor. 9:6).

But when we recognize that all we have is from the Lord our God, we come to appreciate that it is a gift from God, given to us to work for Him so that we might touch the lives of those around us who are struggling and don’t have the blessings we have. Seeing the things that we have as a blessing from God to bless others with, our motivation to give back to the Lord guides our hearts to become generous givers in order that the work of the Lord our God might be done through us.

If God has provided such an abundance to us now, He will continue to bless us even more as we use our abundance to support the lives of those around us. “*...God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work*” ...and... “*He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed*

and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion...” (2 Cor. 9:8-11).

Our motivation to give back to the Lord comes as we know His great love for us, ready to supply us with every need so that we might do His work in the lives of those around us who are in need. Our generosity then, given to the Lord for His work, brings glory to God. We can use our abundance to bless many as we give back to the Lord through our tithes and offerings.

On a larger scale, though, our motivation for doing anything is the key that drives us to do what we do. If our motivation is self-centered, our actions will be focused only on meeting our own needs and desires. If our motivation is God-centered, then we begin looking beyond our own personal interests and we start meeting the needs of others (Philippians 2:4).

Our motivation impacts the relationships we have with others. Our motivation determines how we do our work from day to day. Our motivation effects every part of our lives to the point that all we do and say is guided by those motives that are guiding our lives.

And that is precisely what we see happening in the lives of the early followers of Jesus as they were filled with the Holy Spirit of God after Pentecost. Their lives became no longer all about themselves, but about everyone in their community of faith.

We heard last week how Peter and John had gone back to report to the other followers of Jesus all that had taken place after they were arrested for healing a lame man in the Name of Jesus Christ at the Temple. They had prayed with great thanksgiving to the Lord God Almighty and they had asked for boldness to speak the Word of God to everyone, and that God would *“heal and perform signs and wonders through the Name of... Jesus”* (Acts 4:30). And we are told that *“the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly”* (4:31).

Things were going great as long as the people kept their motivation on serving and delighting in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Listen to how that mindset influenced the believers. Here is the first part

of our preaching lesson today. This is Acts 4:32-37 (READ Acts 4:32-37).

The first sentence here tells a mightily important fact that we often overlook. “*All the believers were **one** in heart and mind*” (Acts 4:32). They had all been filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were all focused on doing the work of Jesus in their own community. That focus brought them together in a way that provided strength, encouragement, hope, love, and a unified direction to go in, beyond any one of them individually. Jesus is Lord and they were to be His servants working together so that everyone could come to know Him as Savior. So their being one in heart and mind brought them together as a mighty force for the Lord, to do His work in order to bring Him honor and glory.

Being united together like that, we’re told “*No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had...And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them*” (4:32). Being united in heart and mind, the followers of Jesus opened up their lives to share with each other AS THEY HAD NEED. It wasn’t **forced** upon anyone to share their resources. Nothing was mandatory. As needs arose, folks would generously provide out of their own resources to meet that need.

Now some could easily compare that with communism. Far from it! In the communist leader’s mind, everything belongs to the few in leadership, with those in the upper crust dealing with the needs of the people as they saw fit. **This was** individual people caring for the needs of their neighbors, not a hierarchy dictating how much a person got, or telling what they could do as a job. It wasn’t the Apostles owning everything and them dealing out what they thought was right for those under them. It wasn’t a government forcing equity upon all the people so that everyone made the same, no matter how hard or how little a person worked. It was a genuine caring for the persons around them so that the needs of each family were met and so that everyone could be blessed by the sharing of resources.

I can only imagine the love that was present. Being motivated by the Lord Jesus to care beyond ourselves, there were no folks trying to be better than another, but rather genuinely working together as a community of faith to make sure that everyone had **what they needed** (contrary to all they wanted).

Everyone was of one heart and mind opened up to doing the work of the Lord. “*With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*” (4:33), so the focus was on taking the great Good News of Jesus to everyone, helping them to grow in their relationship with the Lord and giving everyone the chance to know of the Salvation of Jesus Christ.

So, every once in a while, a person who had great possessions would sell something and bring the proceeds to the new church so that they could continue to do ministry in the Name of Jesus. Their motivation wasn't in selfishness or pride, but genuine goodness of heart to make sure that the needs of the folks could be met. That way, the apostles didn't have to go out and get a part-time job to fill in the gap for their needs. The church saw to it that they could continue doing the powerful work of discipleship and evangelism in the Name of Jesus, without having to worry about paying the rent or putting food on the table.

So the Missions Fund was full; the Widows and Orphans Fund was full; the Education Fund was full; the Travel Expenses Fund was full; and all other areas of the expenses of the young church was covered because of the generosity of the followers of Jesus. They saw the need, and they gave proportionally, based upon the motivation of being in one heart and mind to serve the Lord Jesus.

Our account today lifts up one particular person who sold a piece of land and brought all of the proceeds of the sale to the church. It wasn't to make himself look better than anyone else, but to make sure that the needs of the people were met. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, saw all of God's blessings in his life and decided to give the whole sale price of the land to the work of the church. The apostles called him Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement.” Being a Levite, he would have known the demand of resources to help the people in need. So his heart and mind were focused on making sure that the work of the church would continue. His whole heart was set on bringing praise and honor and glory to the Lord who had supplied him with all that he had in the first place. It was a gracious gift, and there is no record of a bell being sounded, or an announcement being made about the marvelous gift, or any kind of special recognition given to him. He simply gave it for the work of the Lord.

Let me say it again; It is the motivation behind our works that drives us to do what we do.

Motivation means everything when it comes to serving the Lord and working as His servants. So in the next 11 verses, we see the danger of acting and working out of compromised motivations. Listen to these verses of Acts 5. (READ Acts 5:1-11)

Now, it was generous for Ananias and Sapphira to consider selling a piece of property to help the church. However, the problem came with their motivation. It seems that having witnessed the joy of the apostles receiving Barnabas' gift to the church, this couple began to become envious of the thankfulness and praise given out to Barnabas. Their motivation to sell the property was not fully on serving the Lord, but more on getting the recognition of doing something for the Lord.

When the sale took place a portion of the income was kept in the possession of Ananias and Sapphira. Now, that's not a bad thing. It was theirs to begin with and it was theirs even after the sale. The problem came when Ananias presented the remaining money to the apostles **as if that were the full price for the property!** They wanted the recognition of being generous givers so much that they lied about the total price they had sold the property for. It wasn't that they kept some of the proceeds for themselves that got them into trouble, but rather the lie that what was given to the church was the total price for the sale of the land.

The motivation of receiving recognition for doing a great thing is what their hearts were set upon. It's like they wanted their names put on a plaque showing how good people they were for giving to the church. Their pride was more important to them than serving the Lord. But it was the lie that got them into deep trouble.

So Peter rightfully calls them out. Remember, the Holy Spirit is guiding the hearts and minds of the apostles, so on that day, He spoke to Peter and filled him in on what had just happened. So Peter says to Ananias, "...*how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such*

a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God” (Acts 5:3-4). It wasn’t that they had sold the property and brought some of the money to the church. It was that Ananias presented it as if that was the full price for the land! He lied about it, being selfishly motivated to keep some of it back and still make the presentation as if it was the whole amount received from the sale.

It was the motivation behind the gift that got Ananias into trouble. And when Peter called him out on it in front of the church, it was too much for him to bear, and Ananias died on the spot. But watch this, *“and great fear seized all who heard what had happened” (5:5).* It was now a wakeup call to the new church that the motivation behind their actions was more important than the resulting actions. In order to be of one mind and heart for the Lord God Almighty, even the motivation of the people had to be in line with the work of the Lord.

You see, God wants to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. He doesn’t want second place. He wants to be first in our lives so that everything we say and do comes about from the motivation to be His servant, ready to do His work whenever He calls us to do something for Him. But if our motivation is compromised with selfish ambition and pride, there’s a problem, because we are no longer unified in heart and mind with other believers in the life of the church.

Well, the news of Ananias’ death apparently does not reach Sapphira, so when she arrives to be with the other disciples of Jesus, Peter asks her about the transaction of the sale of the property. Remember, she had full knowledge of the money being kept behind, so when she states that the sale price was what Ananias had presented to the apostles, Peter tells her, *“How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also” (5:9).*

Sapphira is also confronted with the lie being told, and she also is so struck by the truth, that she dies on the spot. Folks, God does not play around with us! He knows our intentions; He knows our motivations; and when we make a bold face lie before the church, there are consequences. God wants the truth from us so that whatever we do and say is testimony to our faith. If we live a lie before the

Lord our God, how can He bless us? If we split our motivation behind our actions between serving Jesus or serving self, or if we have our sole motivation on serving and pleasing ourselves, God does not take that lightly. We are no longer having our hearts and minds focused on Him, but we are rebelliously walking away from Him to satisfy our own personal interests.

So the young men of the church pick up Sapphira's body and take it to be buried right next to her husband, Ananias. What do you suppose they put on their tombstone? I can only imagine what the people of the church did. The church was obviously shaken by the whole experience, because we're told, "*great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events*" (5:11). If Ananias and Sapphira were judged that harshly in their lie, what would come about for the rest of them?

But that is a good question for all of us today. How is God judging us in our motivations? Is there sickness, disaster, even death coming because our hearts and minds are not united in the service of the Lord Jesus? Are our own motivation compromises impacting our lives? And then, how might we change that direction so that we might find God's blessings in our lives?

Confession of our sins is vital when we come to recognize the errors in our motivation. Since motivation behind our words and actions means everything to the Lord, we need to become serious about falling down before the Lord Jesus and asking His forgiveness for our own failure at being unified in heart and mind with Him. If we maintain that we are His people, members of the Christian Church, Jesus calls us to higher standards in all of our life, starting out with our motivation for all that we do.

Let's pray: Father, this is a sober message for each one of us. We claim to be Your people, yet we, like Ananias and Sapphira have compromised our own motivation in serving You. FORGIVE US, LORD! Wipe away all our unrighteousness, and "*create in us a clean heart, O God*" (Psalm 51:10). Give us the courage to face our own motivation behind what we say and do, so that as we turn to You as our Lord and Savior, we transform our motivation to serve You alone. As we ask for Your forgiveness today, heal our hearts, our minds and our bodies so that we might become Your living witnesses of being united with Christ Jesus. This we pray in Jesus' great and powerful Name. Amen.