

Motivation

If you were to consider a time in your life when you were incredibly motivated, what would come to mind? Perhaps it was something terrifying, like a doctor telling you that if you don't lower that weight, or your cholesterol, you'll be dead within a year. Perhaps it was something wonderful, like a beautiful woman agreeing to go out on a date with you. A famous motivational speaker named Zig Ziglar once said, *"People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing – that's why we recommend it daily."* Are you daily motivated to live the life God wants you to be living?

With regards to Christians living out their faith, sadly, too many are unmotivated until something critical (negative) or spectacular (positive) happens to them. This however shouldn't be the case. The motivation of the Christian shouldn't be dependent on outward circumstances compelling them forward. In this essay we'll explore Biblical examples of motivating factors and see why truth ought to be what motivates us daily.

Looking at the ministry of the Apostle Peter, we pick up his travels in the book of Acts, chapter 9. Peter's headquarters were in Jerusalem, but he finds himself traveling throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria as he's visiting newly planted churches. These churches were formed in part by the disciples that were dispersed from Jerusalem. Peter is confirming doctrine and conferring the ministry of offices onto those believers who the Lord had appointed to be clergy within the church. Moving west toward the coast, Peter arrives in a place called Lydda, near a town named Sharon, and finds a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden with paralysis for eight years.

Peter said to him, **"Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed,"** Acts 9:34. Immediately Aeneas got up. It's interesting to note that God chooses patients whose diseases are incurable, symbolizing the critical nature of man's fallen condition and highlighting that the healing couldn't have come about through time or medicine. By declaring, **"Jesus Christ heals you,"** Peter doesn't pretend it's by his own power. Peter talks as one having authority from Jesus; showing that in this circumstance he knew Jesus' mind and saw fit to speak a healing over the man. By declaring, **"get up and make your bed,"** we see that God's healing makes one fit for work. This was no longer to be a bed for sickness, but only a bed for sleeping.

Here's the motivating part, **"And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord,"** Acts 9:35. Everyone who bore witness to this miracle submitted to the convincing proof; turning themselves over to Jesus to be ruled by Him. Yes, miracles ought to turn people to the Lord! However, too many people say that if they just saw a miracle themselves, then they'd be convinced, believe, and motivated to act. God however wants us to be motivated by truth; not by another wow-moment. Truth ought to compel my choices today.

Sometimes when I attend church on a Sunday morning, the worship pastor will start off the service by saying, *"How's everybody feeling this morning? Are you ready to worship the Lord?"* Those are the wrong questions to ask. I'm not at church because of how I feel. If I was motivated by feelings I'd probably still be home in bed. Instead, I'm at church because of what I believe. I'm ready to worship the Lord because of the belief in my heart, not based on any feelings I'm leaning on.

Moving on in Acts 9, we see a great example of Peter refusing to be motivated by the will of others, but instead being motivated by obedience to the Lord. Nearby in the city of Joppa there was a righteous disciple of the Lord's named Tabitha. Tabitha's life was notable in that she abounded with acts of kindness and

charity. As it happened though, Tabitha fell sick and died. This goes to show that sickness and death are impartial; not punishments aimed at certain people. Some of the ladies who had benefitted by her ministry took Tabitha's body and washed it, as was a practice of the Jews to honor the dead. They laid her body in the upper room of a house. Once word got around that Peter was nearby in the town of Lydda, some believers from Joppa sent for Peter, "**Do not delay in coming to us,**" Acts 9:38. It was too late to call a doctor, but not too late to call an apostle of Jesus Christ.

After Peter arrived in Joppa, he went to the upper room where many were mourning Tabitha's passing. Those who were there were begging Peter to work a miracle and bring Tabitha back to life. They implored Peter and showed him what beautiful and helpful things Tabitha had made with her hands; articles of clothing to help the needy. Through tears they tried to motivate Peter into action. They were sincere in their cries, but Peter knew that he was not to dispense miracles on demand, especially to satisfy the pleas of others.

Instead of giving in to the peer-pressure, Peter dismisses everyone from the room, so that he can seek the Lord's direction without influence from the crowd. Peter had not yet discerned what God's will be for this occasion. This is different from when Peter had previously healed Aeneas, as Peter knew the mind of Christ in that moment without any apparent need to stop and pray about it first. Here, spectators were clearly pleading for a resurrection, but Peter doesn't want to be prompted by his own vanity by "performing" for the crowds. Peter knew he'd better make God's will the sole reason that he does anything. This ought to nudge us to ask ourselves, "*What's my motivation?*"

Now alone in the room with only the dead body of Tabitha, Peter decides to turn away from her body and pray to the Lord. We can discern two reasons why Peter turned away from Tabitha's corpse as he decides to pray. First, perhaps the sight of the corpse might discourage his faith, tempting Peter to believe that a resurrection might be too much to ask. Or, secondly, perhaps seeing the corpse might tempt Peter to selfishly get ahead of the Lord and try to resurrect the body simply out of compassion, whether he had a clear go-ahead from the Lord or not. To avoid either temptation, Peter puts the matter behind him, literally and figuratively, and focuses upward.

Once Peter had confirmation of the Lord's will in this matter, it was only then that Peter spoke. "**Turning to the body, he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up,**" Acts 9:40. Peter extends his hand to her and she stood to her feet. Peter's hand didn't assist her as if she was weak. Not at all. He simply offered his hand as a gesture of fellowship, welcoming her back to life again. Afterward, the others were called back into the room and, "**It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord,**" Acts 9:42.

Two motivations are in view here. First, Peter's refusal to be motivated by the cries of the people. He remained faithful to the Lord's will. Second, upon hearing about the resurrection of Tabitha, the masses were motivated to turn to the Lord in faith. Amen! Joppa, being a seafaring town, news would soon be carried all over. The Lord chooses this miracle because of its wide-ranging impact.

Acts chapter 9 closes out by saying, "**And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.**" A tanner was one who handled the skins of dead mammals, and this seaside trade implied tanning the hides of porpoise or other sea-mammals. Tanners were disgraceful with Jews, but this shows that Peter's heart was

not motivated by the traditions of men, nor the traditions of his past thinking. Now with a heart motivated by Holy Spirit, Peter puts old Jewish thinking aside.

With regard to spiritual growth, Christians are always moving in one direction or another. There's no such thing as plateauing, or leveling off, in one's faith. You're either spiritually growing or you are spiritually dying. Think of it like this. Imagine being on a raft out at sea. The current will move you in one direction, always, no matter what. If you just sit and do nothing, you'll be moving in the direction that the world wants to take you. Unless you start paddling, you are surely going backwards. The same is true of spiritual growth; unless you're striving forward, you're naturally going backwards and being carried adrift by the world.

We need to make daily intentional choices to study God's Word. Hearing truth and being reminded of who God is and who we are, this is what motivates us. Are you in the Word, daily? You need it for soul care, for spiritual refreshment. You need it to get your marching orders. You need it for truth, replacing the lies of the enemy that you hear throughout the day. Truth should motivate you, not your emotions.

Perhaps you say to yourself, *"I just don't feel like getting into the word today."* If that's your heart, then you need to force-feed yourself. Set your heart to get into the Word of God, today, daily, and do it out of priority, like choosing to get dressed. You don't do it when you feel like it, you do it because it's right and you need it. As you develop a taste for God's Word, your appetite for it will increase. I've found that when I'm absent from the Word, even for one day, I miss it, just like being away from my wife.

Lastly, if you want extra motivation, keep a blessings journal. Record answers to prayer, or ways you see God work in your life or in the life of others. From time to time, pick up the journal and read it. Share stories with others so as to motivate them too. God's Word instructs us to keep memories alive to teach them to the generation after us, Psalm 78:4.

As you stay mission focused you won't need emotionally compelling reasons to keep going. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is our motivation. The hope of eternity in His presence is our motivation. Our love for the lost is our motivation. Our thankfulness in the Lord is our motivation. Press onward, brother!