

The Elements Of Motivation (Part Five): Who We Are

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Sometimes it seems as though all of life's time is divided between just two general activities, work and play. One we look forward to eagerly, but very frequently, the same cannot be said of the other. We often perceive the expending of time and energy in work as drudgery, a necessary duty, or even an evil one must do before one can do something more pleasurable. When viewed this way, the major difference between the two is attitude.

We generally view work in a much less favorable light than play, and as a result, work leaves us feeling drained, sometimes cross, and itching to get away from it. On the other hand, we may expend far more energy playing than we would ever think to spend working, finishing tired but exhilarated and wishing it could continue.

A story is told about a general contractor who sought to advance one of his workers into a supervisory position. He asked two bricklayers the same question, receiving two very different replies, revealing which man had the greater vision and perceived work in an attitude more likely to produce more and better results. The question he asked was, "What are you doing?" The first bricklayer replied, "I am laying bricks." The second, however, replied, "I am building a beautiful building." The first man saw only what was immediately before him. The second saw not only his immediate work but also its relationship to the result.

What Really Reinvigorated Jesus?

John 4:3-4, 6, 31-34 records an incident that shows the difference attitude can make:

He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria. . . . Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. . . . In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But He said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."

At this point in His ministry, Jesus was gaining attention, and to avoid arousing even more attention and directly clashing with the Pharisees, He moved His work north into Galilee. The shortest route there was through Samaria, the land of the Samaritans. Verse 4 says He *needed* to go that way. He had a choice of two roads to get to Galilee. One went around Samaria, the other through it. The latter was obviously the shorter route. Most Jews took the longer route to avoid having to deal with the Samaritans. The Greek indicates that Jesus was led to choose the shorter route: He *had* to go that way.

By the time the group reached Jacob's well, Jesus was exhausted. Most of the modern versions fail to give the force of His tiredness because it takes a great number of English words to parallel it. They may say He sat down, "just as He was." It indicates He wearily flopped down, as if it was more than

just being tired from traveling. We can easily think of Jesus as the all-conquering and mighty Messiah who swept aside every obstacle in His path as if they did not exist. John, however, shows us a Jesus who had to struggle against His humanity.

It is good for us to remember that the Word became flesh (John 1:14). Hebrews 4:15 says He was tested in all things as we are. Yet, even when He was bone weary, He did not allow his weariness to justify sin or failure to carry out His God-assigned obligations in serving and setting an example for mankind. Experiencing the kinds of obstacles we must overcome fully prepared Him to function as our High Priest. When Jesus speaks, we need to be confident that He has every right to speak, not merely because He is God but also because He has experienced the limitations and weaknesses of humanity. Jesus' manhood was not something that was merely apparent but a real participation in humanity's frailties. His work was just as fatiguing to Him as it would be to us.

This story of the woman at the well begins with a bone-weary, physically worn out Jesus. The disciples leave Him to go into the city to buy some food. When they return, they find Him in an entirely different state: His hunger is gone, His exhaustion ended, and He is full of fresh vigor, ready to go on doing His work.

Their first thought is that someone else had supplied Him with food and reinvigorated Him, but this is not the case at all. Jesus' reply is that something entirely different reenergized Him. Commentators commonly conclude that Jesus said doing God's work stimulated him. It is true that involvement in work produces further stimulation. From our own experience, we know that a job we dread doing seems to erect a barrier that keeps us from even starting, leading to procrastination. Finally, we drag ourselves into beginning, but once we get going, the work produces its own energy in us, our attitude changes, and we really get into the job.

Yet, that is not quite what Christ said. *McClaren's Commentary* on this verse makes an interesting observation, one worth mentioning because it more accurately reflects what He said: "Notice that the language of the original is so constructed as to give prominence to the idea that the *aim* of the Christ's life was the doing of the Father's will; and that it is the *aim* rather than the actual performance and realization of the *aim* which is pointed at by our Lord."

His words, then, are better rendered, "My food is that I *may* do the will of Him that sent Me and finish His work." His reinvigoration derived from making the accomplishment of the Father's will His every impelling motive. In this case, it was not the actual doing of the work but the motive for doing it that was so energizing and stimulating.

The Revised English Bible translates this verse as, "But Jesus said, 'For Me it is meat and drink to do the will of Him who sent me until I have finished His work.'" "Until" properly indicates He was being sustained and energized from the motivation to see the work done. The apostle Paul expresses a similar motivation in I Corinthians 9:16, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" These men felt driven to do the work God had appointed for them.

If our lives are going to be at all worthy, it will be because of two factors: What we aim for in life and recognizing who we are. The first may be simply described by saying, "You gotta have high hopes," and we can have no higher aim in life than to do the will of the Father. The second can be understood by grasping why psychologists keep trying to persuade parents to work to build their children's self-esteem. They have observed that, if children do not think they are anything or can do

anything, are of no value and unloved, or have absolutely no skills, they will not do anything. They will spend their lives cowering in self-pity and spinning their wheels in ineffective, low-level activity.

Anything connected to doing the will of the Father supercedes all other ambitions in life. Jesus Himself says in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Are We Important?

Understanding I Corinthians 10:11 helps us realize the significant position we maintain because of God's calling: "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come." "All these things" refers to God's experiences with Old Testament Israel. These events took place over a span of more than a thousand years and involved millions of people being moved about as God worked out His purpose. As the context shows, His purpose included recording these things for our spiritual benefit. God made massive preparations far in advance of our arrival to provide us witnesses of how to do or not to do things to please Him and prepare us for His Kingdom. Paul's powerful admonition tells us how important we are and why we must flee idolatry (verse 14)!

II Peter 3:11-14 adds further encouragement to the called of God to take every advantage of their unique position:

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. . . .

Luke 12:35-40 adds yet more incentive to get ourselves moving:

Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

These strong warnings and encouragements apply only to one small and unique group of very special people who are blessed and valuable to God above all on earth (Malachi 3:16-17). They are special and valuable not because they are great, talented, and accomplished in this world, but because God has called them, covered them with the priceless blood of Jesus Christ, and made them His regenerated children.

Called to Be Saints

An interesting sidelight on this appears in Romans 1:1, 7: "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God. . . . To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints. . . ." Notice that in both verses the verb form "to be" appears: in verse 1, "called to be an apostle," and in verse 7, "called to be saints." Neither "to be" is in the Greek text. While their insertion by the translators is not entirely wrong, they tend to give a misleading impression that can easily result in misunderstanding.

"To be" can give a person the impression of something resulting in the future or of something that must be earned. The Greek, however, does not imply either. In verse 1, Paul is clearly saying that his apostleship coincided with or was simultaneous with his calling! Acts 9:15-16 emphatically proves this. God had already determined what Paul would do at the time He called him. The same is true of our sainthood. The beloved of God are saints, and He loved us when He called us. He did not wait until later to begin loving us. In the same way, our sainthood began at our calling because God was already setting us apart.

The word translated "called" more specifically means "summoned." It does not imply "named" or "designated." It does not describe a name by which we are known but the thing we are summoned to be. The calling is our vocation, our work, and our work is to keep God's commandments and to witness for Him (Isaiah 43:11-12).

"Saint" and "holy" express the same general concept, though they entered the English from different languages. Both imply separation, consecration, or dedication. The common idea is "belonging to God." A saint, then, is one who has been summoned to be dedicated or consecrated as belonging to God.

Therefore, we are not our own but have been placed into an exclusive group. God has summoned us to glorify Him with our lives, and it is from this that the witness of Him shines forth. The glory of the witness arises entirely from a saint's striving for a purity of life that matches our Savior's. Without striving, the consecration derived from God's summons would not amount to a thing. What we see here is our tremendous privilege of being the called of God.

Amos 3:1-2 declares, "Hear this word that the Lord, has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'" The Israelites failed in their calling, but ours is exceedingly higher! Virtue, goodness, purity, righteousness, mercy, joy, and peace all express noble things we love to embrace, but they all go to naught unless we see who we are. For at the foundation of what we need to produce these wonderful qualities is holiness—what God has summoned us to be and do.

If we do not grasp the awesome privilege and purpose of this high calling, we will not aim high enough with our lives. We will not make the effort to produce because we will not see that this *is* our life. I Peter 4:17 admonishes us, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" Brethren, this is it for us! We will have no second chance to grab the brass ring!

Every branch of our armed forces has a special elite group like the Army Rangers or Navy Seals to which is given both honor and weighty responsibility. A similar civilian group would be the SWAT Team of a municipal police force. To be chosen as a member is an exceedingly great privilege. The implications of the Marine Corp's former advertising motto is appropriate if altered somewhat to

apply to the called. About the Marines, it proclaims, "The few, the proud, the Marines." For us, it might say, "The few, the humbled, the called."

Far too many in the church of God have been deluded into believing in some slightly modified form of the worldly notion that all one has to do is to accept Christ. However, God is creating, and He has called us for the express purpose of giving us the opportunity to yield to His creative efforts. Yielding is the work of submitting to His will. This is how purity of life is produced; this is how character is built and how the witness is made.

Recall that in John 4:34 Jesus draws attention to the fact that His *desire* to do the will of God and finish His work motivated Him to lay Himself out for God and mankind. John 17:3-4 shows His success: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."

Summoned to Be Sent

Jesus not only accomplished what He set out to do, but He also glorified God in the way He did it. In His statement, He draws attention to the fact that He knew God had sent Him to do what He did. Later, He expands this divine commission to those He called and appointed as apostles: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you" (John 20:21). It is well known that *apostle* means "one sent."

This principle of sending does not end there. As we see in Isaiah 43:11-12, all Israel was intended by God to witness in His behalf, so also is the entire church of God. In effect, God sent them into the world to be His witnesses.

Notice Paul's expansion of this principle in I Corinthians 3:6-17:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

This passage begins by seeming to say that God sends only the ministry to labor in His behalf. However, as Paul proceeds, the context reaches out to embrace all the called of God by admonishing us to take heed how we build the Temple, the church of God. I Corinthians 12 leaves no doubt that

we are all members of the Body of Christ, and it is the Body of Christ that is sent forth to witness for God in the world. The Body of Jesus Christ is the Israel of God in this New Testament period (Galatians 6:16).

All of us are considered sent by God even as He sent Jesus and the apostles. John 4:35-38 includes us in the same work God has been doing since the beginning:

Do you not say, "There are still four months and then comes the harvest?" Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.

Perhaps this section has been somewhat circuitous in its thought, but the operation God has summoned and sent us forth to labor within should impress us in its massiveness—in terms of time—and magnificence—in terms of purpose. We are among the very few who have ever been accorded this privilege! Jesus said His desire to see God's will done completely invigorated Him because He realized how great, good, magnificent, and beneficial in purpose it is to all. In addition, He wanted to ensure that He did His part to make its completion possible. His complete surrender to God's will was His way of loving all mankind and serves as the example to all of us employed in the same labors.

Anybody who can bridge the connection between the Sender and His purpose and the called being sent to labor for Him will view his life in an entirely different way than the rest of mankind. His life will no longer be trivial, small, ignoble, and insignificant. He will live every day to see that God's will is done in it. He will be like a soldier on a forced march or an athlete training to break a record, driving himself on until he accomplishes his goal. That is how Jesus lived. He recognized that God sent Him, and He yielded Himself to accomplishing His will.

Summoned to Be Worthy

Notice a common thread that flows through these verses.

» **I Corinthians 1:26:** For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

» **Ephesians 4:1-3:** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

» **Philippians 3:14:** I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

» **II Thessalonians 1:11-12:** Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

» **Hebrews 3:1:** Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus.

» **II Peter 1:2-3:** Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.

This article has used "summons" rather than "calling" from time to time because it is a more technically correct usage of the Greek word *klesis*. Translated as "calling," it suggests generality, as though many people over a wide area simultaneously hear a voice inviting them to do something. "Summons," however, implies a personal invitation directed specifically to certain individuals just as a person is summoned to serve on a jury or give evidence at a trial.

John 6:44 states, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." God foreknew us and determined to call us before He ever made His summons known to us. By doing so, He was making a prognosis. We are in this elite group, the called, only because the great God of heaven and earth specifically and personally summoned us by forcibly bringing the good news to our attention so we would be motivated to choose to respond freely to it.

He then led us to repentance, to a personal understanding of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and to an acceptance of it. Then He gave us His Holy Spirit to enable us to obey the obligations of the New Covenant. It is in this combination of factors, plus a few more, that we can begin to understand the possibilities of human life. We see in Christ the pattern of what we ought to be, and the motivation to be in His image begins to arise in us. But this occurs only because God has summoned us to be in this elite group, the firstfruits, to run for this awesome goal.

Thus Paul urges us in Colossians 1:9-10 to walk worthy of this great calling:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Paul says in Romans 11:29, "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." Here, "calling," the same word used in the above series of verses, is connected to an unusual word, *ametameleetos*, translated "without repentance" in the King James, which modern translations correct to read "irrevocable." It means that, on God's part, the invitation to participate in the blessings of His deliverance of us from sin and death is sure. Eventually, none will ever be able to use the excuse that they did not hear the call and so did not repent.

Those who translated Ephesians 4:1 in the King James provide an interesting twist by translating *klesis* as "vocation." They did this only here in the New Testament. A vocation can be a summons or invitation to a particular state or course of action. *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines it as "an inclination, as if in response to a summons, to undertake a certain kind of work, especially a religious career, a calling." A vocation is a life's work.

Where can we find what work we are to do? We could turn to an incredible number of scriptures to receive specific instruction. However, I John 3:1-3 gives a general overview:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Summoned to Be Holy

There are many verses of similar general nature, for instance:

- » **II Corinthians 7:1:** Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.
- » **Ephesians 4:24:** . . . and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.
- » **I Thessalonians 4:7:** For God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness.
- » **I Timothy 2:15:** Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.
- » **I Peter 1:15-16:** But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

When John wrote I John 3:1-3, he did not use the word "motivation." However, he strongly implied that the motivation to purify ourselves arises from knowing who we are. We are now the sons of God, and we shall become like Him as we labor to purify our conduct and attitudes to conform to His image.

I Peter 1:2-5 declares us

elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. . . . Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

We have been summoned to a great cause. The summons is personal and specific. It presents us the challenge of choosing to live a life worthy of the awesome vocation to which God has summoned us. Our calling has become our life's work. God has summoned us to yield to His creative efforts at reproducing Himself, just as II Corinthians 3:18 instructs us: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

II Peter 1:10 urges us, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble." Each passing day reinforces the fact that we live in dangerous times. Surely, the return of Jesus Christ cannot be many years away! When we

consider this along with the greatness of our God-given opportunity, we should be urgently motivated to ensure our calling and election. The very magnitude of the issues involved emphasizes that we must do something now because of who we are—the called—and each person receives only one calling to salvation.

Taking action secures two things. First, it ensures we will not stumble from neglect, forgetfulness, or laziness (verse 9). We live in the age of Laodiceanism. One can easily become lured into and then entrapped in this destructive attitude that produces spiritual blindness.

Second, it ensures that a way will be opened to us into God's Kingdom (verse 11). In the letter to the Sardis church, Jesus clarifies who will be in God's Kingdom:

You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (Revelation 3:4-5)

Our part in salvation is small compared to God's, but vital. Those who are worthy and those who are clothed in white are the same: They are the ones who overcome! It is that simple.

Jesus reinforces this in Luke 20:35-36: "But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, . . . are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." Those who are worthy are those in the resurrection.

He adds yet another factor in Revelation 19:7-8: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." At this time, the bride of Christ, the church, has made herself ready and is clothed in white linen, which represents her righteous acts. The implications are clear: Getting ready, walking worthy, and overcoming are the righteous acts of the saints that prepare her to be His wife in the resurrection to the Kingdom of God.

God's Word makes many appeals to godly living on the basis of who we are. There is great motivation in recognizing who we are: a very special group, not better than others—peculiar but not odd. We have been separated by God's summons to accomplish things others are not yet required to do, that is, to conform our lives to do His will so that we might be in His image.