

## **The Elements Of Motivation (Part One): Fear**

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The gospel's sure promise of an endless life in glory in the Kingdom of God as the Father's spirit-composed children and Jesus Christ's brothers and companions seems so appealing and captivating that one wonders why we would need more motivation than the anticipation of its fulfillment. History and even our own reflections on our personal experiences prove that we need additional stimulation.

The Israelites' forty-year trek through the wilderness after their release from Egyptian slavery also provides a persuasive record. Of the over two million or so Israelites age twenty and above who left Egypt, only two men, Joshua and Caleb, are named as entering into the Promised Land! The Israelites were burying the bodies of those who failed until the time they crossed the Jordan River. Hebrews 4:1-2 admonishes us not to fall into the same manner of living:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

The struggle to achieve some noteworthy goal is a popular theme for many inspirational biographies, novels, articles, and movies. In the late 1800s, Horatio Alger became famous by authoring a string of "rags to riches" stories that featured characters who, through pluck, grit, ingenuity, and seemingly tireless energy, overcame multitudes of problems to achieve success in the end. The characters in his stories never resorted to deceit or thievery, even though they confronted such vices. They always made their way in a righteous manner. Many inspired readers used them as role models for what they hoped to achieve.

Not much has changed in the intervening time. People still find hope and inspiration in hearing the success stories of others, especially if they are dealing with true-to-life issues. One can buy "success" manuals in virtually any bookstore. Lecture circuits teem with those who are willing to sell their formulas to those who want to hear their testimonies. Many of these people are known as "motivational" speakers. Twenty-five years ago, my wife and I attended a "Positive Thinking Rally," during which one nationally known speaker after another supplied us with their perspectives for twelve straight hours on how to be motivated to produce success.

Obviously, motivation is a very common human problem, one that the Bible also addresses. The Bible contains many passages intended to prod us to keep moving in the proper direction. Nevertheless, the condition posed at the beginning of this article remains unresolved. If what God offers is so awesome, why do we need to be prodded with exhortation, encouragement, and correction?

It is because God has demanded that we live by faith (Hebrews 10:38-39). Thus, the "out of sight, out of mind" principle provides an almost constant resistance, testing whether we have a proper and purposeful direction to our life.

It is also because human nature is so attracted to the cultures it has created that it loves them almost desperately. Sometimes it is only with great difficulty that one can turn from them (I John 2:15-16). Even though we know intellectually that these cultures are evil, we are attracted to them and diverted away from the path of godly success (Galatians 1:4).

Moreover, the unseen spirit world lures us through lying persuasions away from the right goal (Ephesians 6:10-12). Sometimes we need motivation because of traits such as apathy and procrastination that dwell to some degree in all of us (Hebrews 2:1-3; 12:12-13). Finally, sometimes our pride self-righteously and presumptuously persuades us into thinking that we already have it made (Revelation 3:16-18).

Overall, a great many factors work against us. When we seriously consider the example of the extremely high failure rate of the Israelites in the wilderness, it may seem as though far more of these factors work against us than work to insure our success. The Israelites, however, operated with little faith. In addition, the Scriptures indicate that God gave very few of them His Holy Spirit, and therefore the love of God was not working in them. God gives His Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32), and the record of the Israelites is one of almost constant disobedience.

Since Jesus Christ was not in them, they did not have the faith of Christ, but our God is able to "supply all [our] need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ" (Philippians 4:19). The reality is that we have far more working in our behalf than they. We have no valid reason to fail.

### **To Whom Much Is Given**

During our pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God, we are required to meet many responsibilities. Fulfilling those responsibilities does not save us, but they nonetheless play a part in preparing us for life in God's Kingdom. We must always remember Jesus' admonition that "to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). God has given us a great deal to help us along the way, but we must somehow find the motivation to use His gifts to drive ourselves to live by faith—or all the graciously given knowledge and understanding goes to waste.

We have all heard the cliché, "Nothing is certain in life except death and taxes." Surely, the person who coined this intended to inspire a cynical smile in those who reflect on its truth, for it succinctly grasps an element of life that everybody wearily experiences. In a similar manner, when a person is called into the church and converted, he begins to learn that this way of life contains certain features that everybody experiences. Certain common events and characteristics bind us into a social group, family, or church. It is this commonality, this sharing of particular elements, that forms these groupings.

Families usually share a common blood. In Acts 17, Paul drew on this truth when preaching in Athens, saying that the whole human family has at least one element in common: We all descend from Adam and Eve. In God's Family, we must all repent, have faith to submit to His governance, and share the same Spirit. If we do not, it is certain we are not of the same spiritual family. We also experience the same general problems along the way, and the same general counsel helps everyone.

The world shares a common problem that sometimes greatly affects us, creating circumstances that may require intense motivation for us to overcome. Even though an unconverted person may seem nice and possess moral character, their human spirit, of and by itself, is at war against God, and sooner rather than later, it will break out against Him and all who share His Spirit.

Jesus says in John 15:20, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." He warns in Luke 6:26, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." The unconverted world cannot help itself in this regard because of its slavery to human nature. The actions of worldly people can produce quite painful and discouraging obstacles for the converted to surmount. Somehow, the converted must find the resources to move through or around the tests thrown in their path by those who are unwittingly arrayed against them and being used to stop the heirs of salvation from completing their journey.

Herbert Armstrong's *The Seven Laws of Success* has helped many through difficult circumstances because, taken together, those laws describe a basic pattern for success. Each is essential to success in virtually every endeavor. However, the most vital laws of success we need are *spiritual* in nature because the goal for which we strive is spiritual, as are the difficulties along the way.

We should also understand that the purpose of this series of articles on motivation is to create a focus for growth in our relationship with God, not to produce salvation, for salvation is clearly by grace through faith. Growth, however, produces fruit here and now and reward in the future, in God's Kingdom. We are able to enjoy the abundant life through the fruit we produce (John 10:10), and by it, take comfort and encouragement in God's calling.

This list of the elements of motivation makes no claims to being complete or being the only valid one. None of these elements stands alone; they overlap and interlock, and in many cases, depend on each other.

## We Must Fear God

To begin, notice the importance of the fear of God to our success in His purpose:

- » **Proverbs 1:7:** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- » **Proverbs 9:10:** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
- » **Proverbs 15:33:** The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility.
- » **Job 28:20, 28:** From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? . . . Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.
- » **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14:** Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.

A few more passages provide a contrast:

» **Psalm 36:1-4:** An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil.

» **Hebrews 10:26-27, 30-31:** For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. . . . For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The biblical fear of God runs the gamut from a mild respect through a deep, abiding, and reverential awe to sheer terror—a terror that causes the skin to crawl, the hair to stand on end, the throat to release a scream, the bowels to move, or the body to faint or collapse, groveling on the ground in a vain attempt to disappear, as Isaiah did (Isaiah 6:5). Fear can be an extremely effective motivator. Many of us have seen, heard, or experienced something so fearsome that the "fight or flight" response kicked in. The terror moved us to take immediate steps to defend ourselves physically or seek protection by running from the danger.

However, fear can also be a two-edged sword. Though it undoubtedly motivates, it can also paralyze us into doing nothing but rolling ourselves into a fetal position. In relation to God, a most subtle and deceptive problem is that, because we cannot literally see Him, we do not feel that responding to Him is of immediate concern. In this way, fearing God is not like our reaction to a lion suddenly jumping out of the jungle and confronting us on the path.

The result, though, can be just as deadly! The major difference is timing. Because of God's patience, the end comes more slowly if our reaction is not correct and no repentance occurs. Nonetheless, our relationship with God may die because not having the proper fear invites apathy and procrastination. Our fear must have enough of an "edge" that we are motivated to act correctly—but not so much that we are paralyzed into inaction. That "edge" grows as true knowledge of Him increases.

Some may think that God does not require of us this level of fear. However, for "trembles" in Isaiah 66:2, the Septuagint uses a Greek word that means a reverential awe that has an "edge" to it. God will "look on" a person who has this kind of fear. Without the proper fear of God in us, there will be precious little reciprocation of His love shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

Romans 12:1 makes it clear that overcoming in this way of life requires sacrifice. We all know how costly sacrifice is sometimes. Our apprehension of making sacrifices required to submit to God's will stops us on occasions, motivating us to draw back from obeying. In this case, the problem is fearing the wrong thing! Sometimes, the degree of the fear of God we need comes close to sheer terror because we are often so difficult to convince!

However, what is necessary as a matter of course is an abiding reverential awe.

**Merely Following or Truly Fearing?**

We all understand that sheep have a strong inclination to follow, to go along with what other sheep in the flock are doing. I once read that, if a shepherd is herding his flock into a pen, and he places a bar a foot or so off the ground across the gate so that the first sheep has to jump over it to get in, then he removes the bar, the following sheep will continue jumping as they pass through the gate based on what the leading sheep did!

Years ago, my wife and I owned a small flock of lambs in partnership with our neighbor. They escaped from our pasture one Sabbath morning by "worrying" a fence until they were able to push out through the hole. Once one lamb went through, the others followed. We did not know they were gone until a neighbor about a half-mile away called to let us know our sheep were on her property. They had followed a railroad track cut into the side of a steep embankment until the land leveled off in a wooded area. They were scattered in the wooded area.

As I approached, I began to speak to them. They turned and began walking toward our pasture. Soon, they had regrouped and begun following me. Although I was certainly concerned that a train might come along, my major worry was how I was going to get them up that steep ten-foot-high embankment, back through that narrow opening, and into the pasture.

When I arrived at that point, they were too timid to follow my voice and I up the embankment. The only thing I could do was wrestle and drag the sheep up and shove them through the opening. I thought I was going to have to repeat that same procedure with all of them, but to my delighted surprise, once I shoved the first one through the hole and into the pasture, the rest came on their own! What I feared actually turned out to be very easy because of this strong instinct to follow.

Human beings tend to share this proclivity. We even call it the "sheep instinct" or "running with the herd." This influence moves people to buy and wear the same clothing because "everybody" is wearing whatever happens to be popular. It also motivates "keeping up with the Joneses." We are nervous about standing out from the crowd and perhaps becoming the objects of scorn and derision.

However, this proclivity works against us as Christians because it can easily influence us into going the way of this world. In this case, it takes a strong willingness not to conform to what everybody around us is thinking, doing, and perhaps even wearing. Such a circumstance will reveal who we really fear.

### **Nehemiah, the Non-Conformist**

Nehemiah 5:14-15 introduces this aspect of Nehemiah's character.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. But the former governors who had been before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver; yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

Few of us know much about Nehemiah or the times he lived in. Our mental picture of him is that he was austere, harsh, and perhaps even pharisaical. From what the Bible presents of him, he was

undoubtedly serious about his responsibilities, brave, and circumspect, and he loved and feared God. His character displays a lofty nobleness. Regardless of our estimation, God thinks highly of him, and his life was so remarkable He included a few vignettes of it in His Word for our instruction.

When the Persian king appointed him governor of the Jewish exiles who had returned to Palestine from Babylon, Nehemiah discovered that the governors before him were in the habit of "squeezing" the people for their own gain. Nobody would have wondered if Nehemiah had done the same. Is that not the way people in government operate? Everybody does it! The people would have simply shrugged their shoulders, fully expecting it as the way things are done. It was the custom. Nehemiah's standard, however, was exceedingly higher: His hands must be absolutely clean.

Why did he do it? He feared God! Nehemiah's way of living reached down into the nitty-gritty of everyday life and may have involved considerable sacrifice. He would not operate the way the world does. Certainly, the laborer is worthy of his hire, but sometimes sacrifices must be made, and Nehemiah determined this was one of them. He would not conform to what everyone else did. Several other vignettes from the same book confirm this was not a one-time occurrence. Unless we are willing to say, "No," to what everybody else is doing, and do it often, our Christian life will be static from its outset.

God and the world do not have the same perspectives on how to live life. Once we have the right standards, God's standards, saying, "No," to ourselves is of paramount importance if we want to put on the image of God and remove the image of this world. The world, combined with our own carnality, keeps pressuring us to conform to its attitudes and ways, and if we are passive, it is easy for us to drift with its way of thinking. We must make choices. Sometimes, they are very difficult because of the sacrifice involved. In them, we will show whether we respect God and His purpose or this world.

The fear of God must become a foundation stone to us, one of the kind of nobility and strength of character Nehemiah possessed. It does not matter whether the issue is losing weight because of gluttony or eliminating debt because of covetousness. The world takes little notice of God until trouble is already upon them. But we must learn to do all things to glorify God, and it takes deeply respecting Him to do this. Honestly, would Jesus allow Himself to drift from His focus on glorifying God to become obese or in debt to the point of bankruptcy? His respect for—fear of—God would not permit Him to do these things.

The Christian has to rip himself from the world's way of thinking and doing. He must be a nonconformist in this regard. He must always understand that the world, though mentioning God frequently, does not fear Him, as its conduct shows. Romans 3:18 asserts, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." A Christian must consciously march to the beat of a different drummer.

Why do we not all conduct our life the way Nehemiah did? Partly because of laziness, to a degree because of cowardice, and sometimes because of ignorance. At times, we are so out of touch with God, we become swept up in sinful activity before we are aware what is going on. Yet, at other times, we fail because of this powerful sheep characteristic to give in to the impulse of the moment because everybody else is doing it. There is no tyranny like the tyranny of the majority. It can be every bit as harsh as the tyranny of a despot. Either can put us into bondage. Unless we are willing to look at things through the eyes of God and stand on our own two feet because we fear Him, we will be just as helplessly enslaved to the opinions of the hour as ever.

It is a historical truism that truth on an issue often lies with the minority. The opinions and ways of the majority are often impulsive, taking the path of least resistance without being concerned about the long-range effects. Those in the minority usually have the advantage of thinking things through because they know their ideas will be unpopular and resisted, and so they prepare themselves better.

God is most concerned about how things end, the conclusion of a matter. He wants us to understand what the fruit of an action will be. Nehemiah was willing to be different, a non-conformist if conforming was wrong. His respect for God and what God thought was greater than his fear of what men would think of him or what he would have to deny himself.

### **Love, Faith, and the Fear of God**

There are direct links between faith, love, and the fear of God. Some commentaries suggest that the Old Testament "fear of God" finds its New Testament equivalent in the expressions "love of Christ" or "love for Christ." It is not an exact match, but they are not all that far apart.

Notice how *The Amplified Bible* translates II Corinthians 5:14-15:

For the love of Christ controls and urges and impels us, because we are of the opinion and conviction that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him who died and was raised again for their sake.

Paul draws our attention to how this quality controls, urges, and impels. It motivates one to live his life in full regard for Him who died for us and was raised for us.

Consider this example from Colin Powell's recent book, *My American Journey*: "A sense of shame is not a bad moral compass. I remember how easy it was for my mother to snap me back into line with a simple rebuke: 'I'm ashamed of you. You embarrassed the family.' I would have preferred a beating to these words." Mr. Powell truly loved and respected his mother. He had faith that she was telling him the truth when she admonished him in that manner. He possessed a family fear in that he in no way wanted to disappoint his mother, make her feel shame, or bring disrepute on the family name because of his actions. In this case, he was not terrified but had a healthy respect for all concerned. This is very close to the biblical fear of God.

A husband and wife who truly love each other are fearful of doing anything that will damage the bond of trust and loyalty that binds them in their marriage. They are thus careful in the way they communicate with each other, speak of each other in the presence of others, and conduct themselves whether with or away from them. The pursuit of godly wisdom begins when we realize that, because of God's calling, our repentance, and the work of Jesus Christ, we have a relationship with God.

Our life accelerates in earnest into a truly serious pursuit of wisdom and the Kingdom of God when we respect God and our relationship with Him to the extent that pleasing and glorifying Him is ever on our mind. We become fearful of offending Him and hurting the relationship. This deep respect in no way paralyzes us but energizes us because the fruit of this pursuit is to come to know Him increasingly better.

It is an awesome thought to know that we possess the power to hurt God. We know this is true because of all the expressions of grief God gives in His Word over the conduct of the Israelites. For

instance, notice Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" How often have we read of God lamenting over the stiff-necked stubbornness of Israel? It began with their release from bondage in Egypt and continued to their captivity! One does not find God rejoicing over their hardheartedness. He was pained because of their lack of respect.

Our fear of God sometimes begins in great fright of Him coupled with a deep sense of self-preservation. Over time, it develops into a deep and continuing loving respect for Him personally and for the preservation and growth of the relationship. We will eventually come to the place where we fear to disappoint Him, and this plays a large part in motivating, not only the overall direction of our lives, but also the daily details of life.

### **Not By Nature**

In Psalm 34:11, David makes an interesting statement regarding the fear of God: "Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." We must learn the fear of the Lord; it is not something we have by nature. We find the evidence of this in the conduct of all who have lived since Adam and Eve. Romans 3:18 is just as true now as it always has been. The reason it must be taught becomes obvious once we understand that it arises and grows from one's relationship with God.

The relationship begins with God's calling. Before that, we may have sincerely believed that He exists, but we certainly did not know Him. Respect cannot exist between two parties—especially the quality of respect God desires—when they do not even know each other. Knowing *of* someone is far different from knowing him. This is certainly true of God, as the world has been flooded with misinformation about Him. Psalm 34:8 supports this: "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" David exhorts us to experience a relationship with Him, for only then will we know that He is indeed good.

David adds in verses 12-14: "Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." He urges us to understand that the fear of the Lord grows as the relationship develops. The relationship develops when we follow through in submission to God in conforming to His way of life. As we do this, we begin to get a taste of what it would be like to spend eternity as His companion in marriage.

The desires to please Him, not to disappoint Him, to strive to protect the relationship, grow from abject self-concern to preserve one's life to reverential awe for His great goodness and zealous desire to preserve and glorify His name within an increasingly intimate relationship. We can see how this would motivate what we do with our life and time. It would drive and guide us in how we did things. If we truly respect someone, we try very hard to give him the best possible quality in all we do for him.

Consider this in light of the dating process and the feelings that bring couples together in marriage. As Christians, we are now in the courtship period preceding marriage to our Savior. Access to and fellowship with Him, coupled with submission within the relationship, feeds a growing respect for Him and His way. By this, we come to know Him, and we are motivated to reciprocate His loving respect and to produce growth and the fruit of God's Spirit.



## Fear's Value

Psalm 25:14 is full of wonderful promise: "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." *Secret* is also translated "counsel," but it is closer in meaning to "confide," indicating two people pressing or leaning together in quiet conversation, a posture that friends take when they share a confidence between them. It initially suggests intimate friendship, then that God opens His mind to those who fear Him so that He can more carefully instruct them in His way and will.

Psalm 31:19-20 adds promises of comfort and protection in times of trouble:

Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You, in the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.

These promises to those who fear God are invaluable. In persecution, those who fear Him are aware of His faithful presence. Though He cannot be seen, He is there, watching over His loved ones to spare them being overwhelmed.

David takes His oversight a comforting step farther, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine" (Psalm 33:18-19). The eye of the Lord is on all men, but it is directed with special attention toward those who fear Him. The nations of this world have their security in military power. Our security is in God. It is good to reflect on this regarding the Tribulation and Place of Safety because this not only promises His presence but also His deliverance.

Respect is not a trust we give easily and consistently unless we see qualities that are strong, pure, faithful, and serving. God has these qualities and more. He is the quintessence of every good quality, demonstrating them throughout the history of mankind and lovingly revealing them to us personally. He deserves our eager respect. We have everything to gain by giving it because it will greatly aid our progress in preparing for His Kingdom.