

The Elements Of Motivation (Part Six): Eternal Life

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Forerunner, "Personal," December 2002

The last element of motivation encompasses all of the previous five, which will become obvious once we understand what it is. This final element contains a term with which we are quite familiar because we hear it so often in conversations regarding religious issues. However, do we really know what it means when we read it in the Bible or hear it in a sermon? The Bible frequently uses some of its most prominent terms in unfamiliar ways. For example, it uses "spirit" in eight different ways, "soul" in four. Thus, it is important to consider the contexts in which these terms appear so we understand more thoroughly.

To us, the word *know* simply means "to be acquainted with" or "to have knowledge of." However, in biblical usage it can also have intimate sexual connotations. Likewise, the term *eternal life* has a more definitive usage. An English-speaker's first impulse is to think of it in terms of living without ever dying, having an endless existence. This is certainly correct—but incomplete because its biblical usage encompasses far more! By not understanding this, we deny ourselves a great deal of motivation that arises from having a better working knowledge of God's wonderful purpose as we prepare for His Kingdom.

This term contains significant understanding of why we go through trials. Its more complete usage is not difficult to understand. However, since it is rarely explained, we need to bolster our understanding of it to sharpen our focus in using the other six motivators.

A Shade of Difference

Romans 2:5-7 introduces an interesting thought:

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality. . . .

Notice that Paul separates "immortality" from "eternal life" as though they are different. The words assuredly share a common idea, that is, both indicate a long, enduring period. *Immortality* simply means "unending existence" because the being does not corrupt, decay, and die.

However, "eternal life," as used by the Bible's writers, includes something "immortality" does not, introducing a shade of difference between the two words. Unfortunately, in many minds, "immortality" corresponds exactly with "eternal life." They are not the same.

Perhaps a good way to illustrate this is to refer to the Greek myths with their pantheon of gods. In these myths, the gods had immortality but—by biblical definition—not eternal life. This is because immortality speaks only of endless life, not its quality. The Greek gods acted, reacted, and had passions and attitudes just like human beings, mere mortals, whereas eternal life in the biblical sense

is *life lived the way the true God lives it*. It indicates the totality of life, which, as we will see, we already possess in principle. To put it into a more human setting, eternal life is to live life endlessly according to the will of God.

John 5:24 helps us to begin to understand when Jesus says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." Notice that he who believes has already passed from death to everlasting life. We can connect this to Ephesians 2:1: "And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins." Before repentance and conversion, God views us as dead even though we are physically alive.

Though we possess animal life, before God's calling we are totally unaware of the spiritual life of God, even as those who are physically dead are unaware of the pleasures, cares, and amusements of the living. They hear no music, enjoy no food, can see neither beauty nor ugliness—they are unaware even of people trampling on their graves! Before conversion, we are likewise unaware of the spiritual life of God, the beauty of holiness, and the joy, power, abundance, peace, honor, and glory of that life. Conversion is a life slowly expanding into a new dimension that we never knew existed before—everlasting or eternal life.

We catch a sense of this in Jesus' brief biblical definition of eternal life found in John 17:3. "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." He does not use the term "immortal" or "endless," but He describes a kind and quality of life in terms of knowledge and a relationship with the Father and Son, a very intimate relationship, as we shall see.

Do not be misled by the limited *Strong's* definition of the word translated "eternal" in this verse. A more complete lexicon like Spiros Zodhiates' *Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament* gives a more precise usage—how the word is used in the Bible rather than merely in classical Greek. Zodhiates says that the word refers to the "life which is God's" (p. 107). The life of God is more than endless, and that is what is important here. He adds, "It is to be understood as referring not only to duration, but more so to quality. That is, it is not merely life that is eternal in duration, but is primarily something different from the natural life of man, i.e., the life of God."

The Daily Bible Study Commentary: John (Volume 2) by William Barclay contains this comment:

There is another important thought in this passage, for it contains the great New Testament definition of eternal life. It is eternal life to know God and to know Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Let us remind ourselves of what eternal means. In Greek, it is *aiōnis*. This word has to do, not so much with duration of life, for life which went on forever would not necessarily be a boon. Its main meaning is *quality* of life. There is only one person to whom the *aiōnis* can properly be applied, and that is God. Eternal life is, therefore, nothing other than the life of God. To possess it, to enter into it, is to experience here and now something of the splendor and the majesty, and the joy, and the peace, and the holiness, which are characteristic of the life of God. (p. 207)

Knowing God and Christ

John 17:3 also contains the word "know." To understand eternal life, we must also understand how this word is used here. It undoubtedly contains elements of intellectual knowledge, understanding, discernment, information, and familiarity. However, this word suggests more than this because the

Old Testament regularly uses "know" to describe sexual knowledge. Sexual knowledge between a husband and wife is the most intimate of knowledge. Husband and wife are no longer two but one flesh. In this regard, in John 17:3, the important thing is not the sexual act but the intimacy of heart and mind that in true love precedes the act. To know God, therefore, is not merely to have intellectual knowledge of Him, but it is having an intimate, personal relationship with Him like the nearest and dearest relationship between two people.

Hosea 4:6 provides an interesting example of the practical effect of "knowing": "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." God's implication is clear. If they had possessed knowledge of God, they would have had the power to avoid being destroyed. Nobody in his right mind wants to be destroyed. Ignorance might be bliss, but this verse shows it can be dangerously life-threatening.

Consider the implications of a lack of knowledge in the area of physical law. A person who does not know the power of electricity, nitroglycerin, carbon monoxide, drugs, or certain medications could pay for his ignorance with his life. Or, even if a person's ignorance of these things does not kill him, he might have the quality of his life severely impaired through a maiming, debilitating injury. However, when they are used with knowledge, they can do worthwhile things. Similarly, knowing God opens to men the freest and most rewarding expressions of an abundant life.

Proverbs 3:13-22 reveals that knowledge yields a rich harvest of reward that adds immeasurable enjoyment to the quality of one's life:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens; by His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew. My son, let them not depart from your eyes—keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck.

What if a person does not know of God's righteousness? Proverbs 11:6 says, "The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the unfaithful will be caught by their own lust." What a person does not have cannot deliver them, thus they are injured or destroyed. Isaiah 11:9 shows that during the Millennium, the knowledge of God will cover the earth like a vast ocean. This is what will make the Millennium so wonderful!

Eternal life is more than just endless life. The biblical eternal life includes power to produce quality living superabundantly far beyond merely existing forever.

We should touch briefly on its sexual aspect. Genesis 4:1, 17, 25 each contain the Hebrew word *yada'*. It has a wide variety of possible applications, one of which is "to lie by man." In each case in Genesis 4, it is translated as "knew," since that is its basic meaning. The Hebrews used it to describe the sexual part of the relationship between husband and wife; thus, it suggests intimacy. When

applied to God, it highlights not merely being acquainted with Him but, as we would say today, being "inside His head." The corresponding Greek word, *ginosko*, translated "know" in John 17:3, can be and is used in the same way as *yada'* in Hebrew (see Luke 1:34).

To know God thus includes a wide range of mental, emotional, and experiential knowledge. The fruit of this intimacy includes love, reverence, obedience, honor, gratitude, and deep affection. We come to know Him as sovereign Ruler, Master, parent, brother, friend, Savior, and Lawgiver. We would never know this mixture of admirable qualities and authority without getting close to Him. They compel us to yield to Him with all of our heart while we strive to obey and glorify Him.

Living Like God

In sum, this points to Jesus' indicating that eternal life is not merely endless, though that is its dominant sense, but that those who have it live intimately with God and conduct their lives as God does—otherwise, there would be no close intimacy with Him.

Is there a scripture that is broad enough to give us an overall idea of the kind of life God wants us to live in order to be in His Kingdom, yet narrow enough to help us see a direct tie among the resurrection, the Kingdom of God, and eternal life? John 12:20-26 may fill the bill:

Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus. But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

This catches the essence of what Christian life and overcoming are all about. We have often heard that, if God repeats something twice, we need to pay the strictest of attention. How important is it if He repeats it six times? Though the same wording is not used in all six passages, the same sense appears in each.

Notice the setting here. A small group of Gentiles ask Philip for an audience with Jesus. John does not record one word of what they said, and the context distinctly suggests that Jesus speaks before they ever say a word. He responds to the fact that they want to see Him.

Two thoughts must have exploded into His mind simultaneously. He first recognized that the people who wanted to see Him were Gentiles. He must have envisioned across the expanse of time the huge multitudes of their populations being converted, growing, overcoming, and entering the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, He anticipated their questions. "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to have eternal life? What must I do to be in Your Kingdom?" How does He answer them? He tells them, "You must quit living your life the way you do." He was not, on this occasion, concerned about

specific behaviors but rather the overall principle—the force that drives carnal human life: self-centeredness. So important is what Jesus says that God's voice thunders in agreement out of the heavens:

Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have glorified [My name] and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake." (verses 28-30)

Notice, beginning in verse 24, how Jesus' response unfolds. He uses a simple, understandable illustration: Unless a seed is planted in the ground and dies, it bears no fruit. Only when its life is sacrificed does it bear any fruit. This applies both to Jesus and to any of His followers. He sacrificed His life, and its fruit until now is the church, but multitudes more will be added as God's plan unfolds.

The same principle holds true in our lives. The fruit that leads to eternal life is produced when the individual sacrifices himself in service to others, God and man. In verse 25, Jesus teaches that the person who attempts to preserve rather than sacrifice will end up losing what he spent his lifetime attempting to preserve. Meanwhile, those who readily sacrifice their lives keep living right on into the Kingdom of God.

Following Christ

It is interesting to note that John uses two different words, both of which are translated as "life." The first is *psuche*, usually translated "soul," which simply means physical life. The second is *zoe*, and John usually attaches it to the adjective "eternal," causing it to mean the spiritual vitality of God.

In verse 26, He reinforces His instruction regarding sacrifice by commanding us to do as He does. In this case, this is what "follow Me" means. It is not merely walking behind on the same general course but completely "aping" or imitating Him—doing exactly what He is doing. In this particular teaching, it points to the sacrifice of our lives. He was already living this way, and He would complete His life of selfless service by sacrificing it in death. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). However, we must understand that laying down one's life is a continuous process. He expects us to follow in His steps, do what He does, bear what He bears, love what He loves.

To most of those who call themselves "Christian," Christianity is a theory to be accepted rather than a life to be actively and daily lived out. Many apparently have the vague idea that what Christ does for us and offers to us enables us, while remaining what we are, to evade the consequences of being what we are and to reap a destiny that is not naturally ours. If we believe this, we must seriously consider II Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." At the end of our lives, we will receive from God what we are living! God wants to see us living like Him, and He will honor those who do.

However, making the sacrifices to live His way is costly to human nature, which resists strongly. Jesus says in Mark 8:34-38:

Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for

My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

Why does Christ have to say things like this? Because human nature is driven by the impulse that the only way to the things a person deeply desires is through self-centered, assertive, competitive concentration on getting what it wants. We all have this drive; however, individuals differ in the strength of human nature in them and the methods they employ to achieve their goals. Jesus says the self must be denied because human nature is driven by pride and covetousness.

Of course, the Bible is not urging us to court martyrdom. It is speaking of a general approach to life, of crucifying the self-centered impulses of human nature. This means subordinating a clamoring ego with its preoccupation with "I," "me," and "mine"; its concern for self-assertion; and its insistence on comfort and prestige. It is denying the self for the sake of embracing Christ's cause. To be ashamed to live this way of life is equivalent to being ashamed of Christ Himself.

The Bible frequently emphasizes the way God lives as exemplified by Christ's life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:15). "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

In addition, God gives His Holy Spirit, forgiveness of sin, mercy, kindness, correction, rain in due season, prosperity, spiritual gifts, healing, protection, and much more. He gave us this earth on which to live, and He daily supplies life to billions of people. The list of things His Word says He gives is long indeed. God lives to give. As Herbert Armstrong often said, there are only two ways of living: We can live the way of human nature, the way of get, or we can change to live God's way of give.

We can never be in God's image until we live as He does. If we understand and believe in the purpose He is working out, we will use our faith to yield to His way in developing His character image. This is what overcoming and growing in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ are all about.

The Ultimate Way of Life

Many who have left the Worldwide Church of God want to make a religion out of technicalities. Paul called it "strivings about the law" (Titus 3:9). Is this where life is? Being technically correct has its place, but it is not as important as being in the image of God in terms of character, morality, and ethics. These are what prepare us for living with God.

In this light, I John 1:1-4 deserves some thought:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we

have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Notice the wording carefully. What is it that John says was manifested, that they experienced with their own senses? Eternal life! Eternal life is something that in the biblical sense can be seen and heard. Indeed, the apostles fellowshiped with it in the flesh! In turn, they reported it to us so we can also fellowship with it—though not to the same extent and in the same manner as they did.

Of course, John is speaking of witnessing and fellowshiping with that kind of life as exemplified in Jesus Christ. Verse 3 is the specific purpose statement of this epistle of I John: to proclaim the reality of God's eternal life as revealed in Jesus Christ.

When John wrote this epistle, the Gnostic heresy was rising in the church. We should note that John's method of countering it is highly subjective, that is, the epistle has many references to the first-person pronouns "I" and "we." The apostle uses the weight of his personal experience witnessing this life to combat the heresies of the Gnostics.

He says the life we witnessed "was from the beginning"; it is the original manner of living. It is the ultimate reality of how to live. This kind of life is not subject to change, whether over time or from culture to culture. The ultimate reality is God—in this case Jesus Christ in the flesh, who is God—and He changes not.

Fellowship With God

What the gospel of the Kingdom of God does is to command, invite, educate, encourage, persuade, inspire, exhort, and motivate people to live the eternal life of the Kingdom of God right now! The gospel is not only what a person hears at his calling but also what he should hear in greatly expanded detail the entirety of his Christian life.

In John's epistles, the term "eternal life" is equivalent to the phrases "entering the Kingdom of heaven," "sitting in heavenly places," "inheriting eternal life," or being "in Christ" used by other biblical writers. In this sense, "eternal" describes, not what is future in terms of time, but what is unending in both directions, as well as the character of the life Christ lived.

Consider what the gospel offers in verse 3. "Our fellowship is with the Father." That means right now. The gospel is offering us life with God—now! I John 5:11-13 adds a reminder that reinforces what John said at the beginning of this epistle:

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Eternal life is more than endless living. It includes fellowship with God and at least beginning to live life as God lives.

When God gave us eternal life, He gave us something unique, a life different from the one we were living before our calling. At that time, we were "dead" in trespasses and sins because we were living a life that produced death. Those still in the world continue to live this kind of life by nature. Do they have fellowship with God? Do they walk with Him as friends because they agree with Him about how to live and to remain at His side endlessly?

Understanding this fellowship aspect is important to understanding eternal life. "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). God created humanity for fellowship, and by nature, we seek it out on many levels. Many find it through hobbies, the arts, politics, intellectual pursuits, social organizations, and sports. The greatest and highest form of fellowship, though, is with God and others who share the common desire to live like God always and whom He is transforming to that very end. This fellowship is reserved for those whom God summons.

This means an independent Christian is a contradiction in terms. The Christian church is a community fellowship comparable to a body of which Christ is the Head (I Corinthians 12:12-31). Hebrews 10:25 commands us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Fellowship is not just friendly conversation and geniality. The Bible's writers show plainly it is a tightly knit relationship marked by self-sacrificial love manifested in mutual service, concern, prayer, labor, and helpfulness.

Belonging to Eternity

John writes, "And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (I John 2:17). The will of God is the driving principle of life—indeed, of all of creation because our Creator is gradually imposing His will on the whole creation as He works His purpose to His ends. Those not in harmony with that will are doomed; they will simply cease to exist! Permanent value, reality, abides only in God's purpose and His will. Everything else is vanity. We belong to eternity only as far as we attach ourselves to His will and conform to it.

If we live according to the lusts of the flesh, we are not living according to God's will. We will pass away and be destroyed. Life beyond the grave is bound up in the life we live here and now (Romans 2:5-10). This is because the blood of Jesus Christ and the way we live prepares us for walking with Him eternally.

I John 2:1-6 says:

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

Eternal life is to know God. Do we want to know God and do His will at the same time? Keep His commandments. Do not sin. Overcome and grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18). To do this, we have to desire to live the eternal life given us by the Father through Jesus

Christ. This does not come easily. Our Savior describes this way as difficult and narrow, for human nature stands ever ready to throw stumbling blocks in our path.

Sin destroys ideals. As we sin, the high standards of eternal life are gradually eroded away, and we become willing to accept just about anything. Sin destroys innocence, and in the process creates fear, cynicism, guilt, and restlessness. Sin destroys the will, gradually removing the barriers to sin more and the incentive to do well.

Sin produces more sin, sickness, pain, slavery, and finally, death. This cycle will never change unless each person, as God summons him, takes it upon himself to allow himself to be motivated to use the gifts God gives. It takes a great deal of effort to do this. Jesus warns it will be difficult.

The fear of God, vision, hope, a deep sense of obligation to Christ, knowing who we are, and a strong desire to live eternal life are all motivators that are needed as we progress on our pilgrimage. Different trials may require one, several, or all of them at once. Always working in conjunction with them are faith and love. Living faith undergirds the entire process and manifests its reality in our lives through love.

John 6:60-68 says:

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured about this, He said to them, "Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" Then Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

From time to time, we need to consider these weighty things, making frequent comparisons between the realities of the way life is under Satan and the realities of God, His will, His way of living, and faith. The choice is ours. Which reality will we choose? The one that is passing away or the one that is permanent and therefore eternal?