

## The Elements Of Motivation (Part Two): Vision

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Last month, the "Personal" focused on the power of fear to motivate. It can motivate us to cringe in stark terror, paralyzing us into a sluggish lassitude—or, it can conversely stir us into vital and directed action against or in behalf of a cause, project, or enemy. Fear can range from sheer terror to a knowledgeable, deep, abiding, and reverential awe of God. In respect of God, fear produces a strong drive to please Him, which itself ranges from self-preservation to the unbridled willingness to sacrifice all to serve our Beloved.

Proverbs 8:13 defines the fear of the Lord as "to hate evil." This definition suggests the kind of conduct the proper fear of God produces in practical application. If we hate something, do we not take steps to avoid it? Perhaps one of our major problems is that we do not hate and fear sin and its penalty strongly enough. The fear of God, along with the other elements of motivation, strongly induces us to be non-conformists to this world's ways. This is vital to our continued growth, as the apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:2, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould" (Phillips' translation). It will be impossible to grow if we are conforming to this world.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:21-24:

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. . . .

Most assuredly, neither Jesus' teaching nor His manner of living conformed to this world. His warning is that *many* will use His name and authority to do marvelous works, but in their personal lives they will not submit to the very instructions that would develop their relationship with God and work to produce His image in them! The only conclusion we can draw is that, despite receiving the instruction, they nonetheless conformed to the world.

Clearly, if we do not know God because we are not really walking in His shoes, as it were, if He does not recognize us or see in us any family resemblance to Him because we are not at one with Him, He will command us to depart, to leave the Marriage Supper! We will not spend eternity with Him. We will have built our house on sandy ground despite all the privileges and warnings given to us!

Psalms 50:16-23 contains a particularly dramatic warning:

But to the wicked God says: "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers. You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will reprove you, and set them in

order before your eyes. Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God."

Verse 5 makes it clear to whom this psalm is addressed: "My saints . . . those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." This warning is aimed at the church in general but specifically at those who fellowship with the church but are "wicked" by God's own judgment! Their wickedness identifies them as having departed from the way of God, even though they still give the outward appearance that they are "saints" by virtue of attending services. They are living in hypocrisy.

Human nature deceives us into thinking that God's patience with us—which gives us time to repent and change (Ecclesiastes 8:11; Romans 2:4)—is tacit approval of our conduct. Not so! He is testing us to see how serious our devotion and loyalty to Him and His purpose are. In reality, these wicked "saints" are not like Him, but human nature deceives them into ignoring this fact. They, like those of Matthew 7:23, will receive a devastating surprise in the judgment. They were warned! They may have even initially liked what they heard, but they were not motivated enough to depart from sin and correct their relationship with and witness of Him.

### **Revelation, Vision, Foresight, and Discernment**

The world is an ever-present burden, always exerting its will from every side. It constantly appeals through the senses, not merely to satisfy, but to satiate. At times, it seems to bludgeon us into accepting its ways, and at other times, it makes subtle appeals. Nevertheless, it is always a distraction, blurring our vision and clouding moral and spiritual issues, making them indistinct and imprecise. God's ways, though true and righteous, are frequently abstract, requiring sharp reasoning and clear understanding. Sometimes reaching a correct answer requires some deep and persistent digging.

Notice Proverbs 2:1-6:

My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

For a person to follow this course of action, he must have strong reasons to drive himself to this extent. This is not a path for the weakly motivated, wandering around wondering where he is going. This is a road for one who has a vision of where he is headed, or he will become discouraged and not follow it to its end.

According to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, vision is "the mode of seeing or conceiving; unusual discernment or foresight; the act or power of imagination." *The Reader's Digest Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines it as "the ability to anticipate and make provision for future events; foresight; insight; imagination." The word, as this article will use it, deals primarily with foresight and the ability to discern and anticipate future events and results. Vision enables one to plan ahead.

Its definitions derive from the verb "to see." However, rather than being an object one literally sees with the eyes, vision involves objects, events, or results conceived or perceived in the mind. Thus, it is discerning foresight.

The familiar Proverbs 29:18 is a good place to begin understanding vision's place in terms of motivation: "Where there is no revelation (*vision*, KJV) the people cast of restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law." Modern versions replace "vision" with "revelation," but the choice is negligible because God's revelation is the true and most important vision (foresight, discernment, insight) for our lives. *The Living Bible* paraphrases this verse as, "Where there is ignorance of God, the people run wild, but what a wonderful thing it is for a nation to know and keep His laws!" An old English version based on the Latin *Vulgate* provides a fascinating rendering in light of what happened in the Worldwide Church of God: "When prophecy shall fail, the people shall be scattered." Adam Clarke comments, "Where divine revelation, and the faithful preaching of the sacred testimonies, are neither revered nor attended, the ruin of that land [or church] is at no great distance."

All these renderings show a measure of cause and effect. The vision a person has is the cause, and the effect is the way he then conducts his life. Where there is a true vision, or revelation of God, it motivates those who reverence it to conduct their lives in a way that produces good fruit—happiness. If the vision that guides is not from God, the people are motivated to "run wild" or "cast off restraint." That is, they will not discipline themselves to take proper responsibility, and the result is they perish—quite a contrast to the satisfying result of keeping God's laws!

There can be no doubt about what vision produces. It enhances our perception of what will occur or be produced if a certain course is followed. Thus, it increases our discernment and sharpens our judgment about which way we should go. If the vision, the foreseen result, seems good to a person, he is motivated to go in that direction. When vision and the fear of God combine, they produce a strong stimulus to obey Him. Vision gives a mental picture of results, and the deep and abiding respect for God produces a compelling inclination to please Him.

## **Enter Prudence**

Proverbs 22:3 poses an intriguing question. "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself; but the simple pass on and are punished." This maxim gives every appearance of involving a moral choice. Could it also involve the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum? To produce the good result, which came first, the prudence or the vision? In light of the cause-and-effect principle gleaned from Proverbs 29:18, from the Bible's point of view, God first gives revelation (true vision), and prudence is vision's fruit. Vision motivates carefulness in conducting our affairs.

*Prudence* means "the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason; sagacity or shrewdness in the management of one's affairs; marked by circumspection, discreet." In other words, it enables us to exercise more control over the direction of our lives. It is a much-desired quality. Vision gives us a sensibility or carefulness that enables us to avoid dangerous pitfalls. The foolish are unwary and uncritical and naively blunder into trouble—even death. As mentioned previously, a major task of life is to learn what to respect highly. The Bible shows that most fear the wrong things. Above all, we should fear God, but most fear the world and other people.

Matthew 14:23-31 presents us with an example containing both vision and fear:

And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. And when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Where is the foresight? In this situation, Peter foresaw an unpleasant death by drowning. This is an example of how foresight, for good or ill, can come instantly to a person in an emergency. It is not always necessary for foresight to be thoroughly considered and dissected to be understood. In this case, Peter's foolhardy presumption, coupled with lack of faith, drove him to great fear, and he then foresaw the imminence of his death. Urgency pressed in on him because both fear and foresight were actively working. In this case, he both voiced his need and reached out to Christ for help, the overall lesson of the experience. These motivators should drive us to Christ for help, whether in an emergency or in the normal course of life.

## **Vision and Faith**

Even though we are to walk by faith, Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, plays on forms of the verb "to see." Seeing, of course, involves both literal vision as well as mental apprehension. In II Corinthians 5, Paul contrasts two different modes of living. The lives of those in the world are directed by confidence and conviction in things physically seen. In contrast, those whose lives are directed by faith in God have assurance and conviction in things, not literally seen with the eyes, but every bit as real though spiritually discerned. These convictions seen in the mind's eye are even more real than the physical because they are eternal. Faith is extremely important to all of the elements that motivate because it provides the spiritual platform that anchors them.

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In the second phrase, faith is what others see in the conduct of a faithful person's life. Evidence of the unseen things gives a person conviction.

"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). Faith operates within the mental processes. It enables understanding of events that occurred in times past, providing a perspective that we would otherwise lack.

"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7). Noah was motivated by a deep and abiding respect for the divine warning about the impending crisis. He surely formed a strong mental picture of what was coming. Have we not been warned through biblical prophecy of the holocaust

coming upon the whole world? Have we not formed a mental picture that gives us a kind of vision of its horror? Some, because of their experience in warfare, ought to have a clearer picture than others do, but we all have seen movies and read of the horrors of war, famine, and disease epidemics.

"For he waited (*looked*, KJV) for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham envisioned the coming of the Kingdom of God to earth and his place in it. This verse is clearly saying that an element that motivated him to do whatever God required was his vision of what lies ahead. In this case, it was a vivid and wonderful contrast to his unsettled circumstance.

In Hebrews 11:13, vision again surfaces: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." A pilgrim is a person on the move, traveling from one place to another. It is usually used in a religious sense of one who may have no settled habitation but knows where he is going. Here, it is especially clear that all of these people were motivated by their vision of what lies at the end of the journey.

Hebrews 11:19 offers another example of a significant event in which vision played a major role: ". . . accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." When confronted with God's command to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham "received him in a figurative sense." Abraham "added up" the evidence of God's promises, and in his mind's eye, he foresaw that God would either have to provide a substitute sacrifice or resurrect Isaac. Otherwise, God would have to renege on His promises, and Abraham knew God would not lie.

Finally, from Hebrews 11:27, is the example of Moses: "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Notice that in these illustrations the people were moved to do something, and in each case, they did it in response to God. We can safely say that God's Word shows that vision motivates.

Acts 26:16, 19 presents us with an example of a person having a literal vision: "'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.' . . . Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." The vision motivated Paul to follow through. This kind of vision is especially vivid and motivating, and God has given very few the blessing and responsibility of having one. However, He has given the ability to have the other kind to many, and it, too, can be very motivating.

### **How Does It Come To Us?**

Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:9-10, "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all thing, yes, the deep things of God." The source of the vision most of us receive is through the Spirit by our calling. God gives it just as surely as He gave Paul's, but it is a gradually accumulating one in which the pieces that complete the picture are added through the normal processes of study, comparing, analyzing, and applying what we learn.

Consider how the revelation of God changes the course of a person's life. If those who killed Christ had the vision to know who He was, they never would have killed Him. Why? They would have had

an entirely different perspective of the consequences of their actions. That foresight would have generated prudence in them, and they would not have permitted themselves to kill Him. Notice also how verse 9 shows us that what God has done gives us a perspective involving things not literally seen, yet in verse 10 they are nonetheless revealed.

Through the entire section concluding in verse 16, Paul tells us that, because of God's gracious action in giving us His Holy Spirit, He has predisposed, enabled, or granted us the foresight or vision to make right choices in spiritual matters. God's Holy Spirit gives us discernment as to where spiritual and moral choices will lead. This is wonderful, but something further must be understood. This quality, ability, or skill must be developed. It must grow. It does not instantly and miraculously appear upon conversion.

I Corinthians 3:1-4 provides an example of a group making little progress in this regard:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Obviously, Paul expected much better of them. When he calls them "carnal," he does not mean they are unconverted but acting as if they were unconverted. He is strongly implying they had either regressed from earlier maturity or barely left the starting blocks in growing into mature Christians. Paul uses "carnal" as a synonym of "immature" or "incomplete." Their conduct and attitude were consistent with spiritual babes. From other parts of the epistle, we know they did not have their emotions under control and went pell-mell from one trouble to another, creating division in the congregation through their lack of knowledge, experience, and character. Giving them the benefit of the doubt, they, in their almost complete self-centeredness, apparently did not know how to do things the right way.

## **Vision and Wisdom**

We might say they had no common sense or wisdom. Their discernment of situations and their evaluation of what to do did not originate in a godly perspective. Consequently, they were motivated to conduct themselves in ways unbecoming of God, Christianity, and the Kingdom of God. *The American Heritage College Dictionary* defines *wisdom* as "understanding of what is true, right or lasting; insight." God's revelation provides us these very qualities and more if we follow His counsel.

Proverbs 1:2-4, 7 tells us why the book was written: "To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion." Proverbs 4:4-7 adds:

He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom and in all your getting, get understanding."

Is biblical wisdom different from the above definition? It is, yet only in the fact that God lays heavy emphasis on right application of His Word and His knowledge and understanding. We could label it as uncommon sense because it is what is true, right, and lasting from His perspective, not merely human experience. Therefore, one of wisdom's primary attributes is foresight, seeing from God's perspective the best way to produce the best results from a given situation.

Ecclesiastes 7:11-14 clearly states that wisdom's insights produce a valuable fruit within God's purpose:

Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it. Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will happen after him.

Solomon is comparing two powers that offer their possessors the ability to defend themselves against many of the vicissitudes of life. On the one hand is money and on the other wisdom. Money can help one avoid and even preserve a person from many of life's difficulties. Wisdom, however, can give him something no amount of money can—life. Wisdom produces things material possessions cannot because it is insurance against willful self-destruction, whether physical or spiritual.

*Consider* in verse 13 literally means "to see." It counsels us to understand that some situations cannot be rectified. No amount of money or wisdom will prevent them from occurring. We can do nothing about them because circumstances are beyond our powers, and we should not fret overmuch about them. An obvious example is the impossibility of a person being able to stop wars, floods, riots, or a hurricane. Each of these can bring devastation and a great deal of personal pain that may be entirely unavoidable. All one can do in such a case is to deal with the aftereffects as wisely as possible.

Verse 14 carries on the thought, counseling us that good and bad times occur in everybody's life. There will be situations that are seemingly unjust, such as the righteous seeming not to be prospered, becoming diseased and dying young, while the evil are prospered with wealth, good health, and long, comfortable lives. These things occur in every culture on earth. We are to consider—to see—that God overrules all and is well aware of what is happening. He may even be directly involved in causing the kinds of circumstances that upset our sense of fairness (Isaiah 45:7). We must never allow our thoughts to wander from the reality of the depths of God's involvement in governing His creation.

The passage concludes by drawing our attention to the future. It is beyond our abilities to know precisely what is going to happen. How long will our present trial last? Will we be drawn into another? Are we pleasing God? Will we be prospered to a greater level? When will Christ come? Solomon is not saying we should not think about the future, but that we will never know precisely what is coming. Thus, we should not be overly concerned about it. We must live our belief that God is on His throne, which allows us to be emotionally stable.

Solomon does not begin to give an answer to the thought he is posing until Ecclesiastes 7:18-19, and even then, it is a very brief answer: "It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand

from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city." The combination of the fear of God and wisdom, which is the fruit of vision, appear together as a solution.

Because the circumstances he posed will affect all, Solomon's advice is to keep on following wisdom. This is a precursor to the climax of the book where he says, "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" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). It also foreshadows Romans 8:28, where Paul writes, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

In his terse statements, Solomon is saying, "Keep on following the revelation of God, for this is wisdom. The vision of His overall purpose is wisdom. It is an unerring guide through good and bad times. Always consider—see, discern—that an unseen Hand is involved in events, even those of our seemingly insignificant lives."

Proverbs 22:3 reveals that foresight and discernment produce prudence in conduct to ensure that a person is preserved, and this is wisdom. If the person is preserved, it greatly increases the chances that he will attain his goals. At the very least, those who take advantage of God's revelation will escape dangers into which others unwittingly fall.

Ecclesiastes 8:11-12 warns us not to be deceived into thinking we have gotten away with doing something foolish—something God's revelation gave us insight into yet we ignored. To do such a thing is not at all prudent! It is not taking advantage of the foresight imparted by the truths of God's Word. Adam and Eve ignored God's warning, and they died just as He said they would. Death seemed a long way off at the time, but it did come, preceded by a great deal of pain!

Foresight, discernment, prudence, and wisdom are linked together as vital to accomplishing God's purpose. Although they are not specifically synonymous, where we find one the others are also likely to be present. All of them are connected to the vision provided by the revelation of God. The person who has them is well on his way to living an abundant life and growing in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ because they motivate a person to follow their lead.

Proverbs 2:6-12 provides us with great incentive to take advantage of the revelation of God's wisdom as a sure guide to life:

For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths. . . .



God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). He delights in giving His children knowledge and understanding that will enable us to make right, wise choices. We could hardly be given a greater gift than the vision of the way we should go.