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What Motivates Christians? Surprising Lessons from Jesus

Pastor Paul stepped up to the platform with intensity in his eyes. “We’ve got to stop playing church,” he said. “We’ve got to get serious about reaching people for Jesus.”

Pausing for a scan over his aging and dwindling congregation, Paul continued his message: “You may not realize it, but over fifty percent of the people in this area are self-declared non-Christians.” Taking a deep breath, Paul let the message sink in.

“We, as Christians, have a duty. Are we going to obey the Great Commission of our Lord...or not? Jesus commands us to make disciples. It’s in the Bible, in Matthew 28:19-20.”

He cranked up the energy: “Look, we at Crestview have a mission from the Lord. You have neighbors who don’t know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. If you won’t tell them about Jesus, and they die and go to hell, how are you going to live with that?”

Down the road from Crestview, just five miles away, Reverend Matt Peterson was giving the announcements. “As you all know, our vacation Bible school starts in just three weeks. Mary is heading up VBS again this year and has asked that I put out a plea for teachers. We need a teacher for first grade and one for the fourth.”

He looked around the sanctuary, focusing a little longer on three members he thought could fill the spots. He leaned forward to make his point: “You know, if we don’t get teachers for those grades, we’re going to leave those kids out of VBS this year. And we don’t want to have to turn



Kent Hunter, Founder of Church Doctor Ministries, is the architect of the *Healthy Churches Thrive!* Spiritual Adventure that God uses for spiritual breakthrough in congregations. Hunter says he is motivated by the challenge and the fun of helping Christians and churches become more effective in reaching the world for Jesus Christ: “Discipling, like raising kids, is the toughest work—and most rewarding. Working for, and with, the King of the universe is energizing.”

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MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

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away any of these children, because we don't have teachers. So give it some thought and prayer and get with Mary after the service."

The Law

Many scholars believe that the whole of Scripture can be divided into two areas: the law and the gospel. The law is not just the Ten Commandments, but any direction God gives us about how we're supposed to live. The law reflects where we fall short and why we need a savior.

The gospel means "good news." This good news is that God, in His love and mercy, sent His son Jesus to suffer and die in our place. It is the ultimate act of God's love and forgiveness. Jesus literally pays the price for our sins and by "grace" provides new life for those who believe in Him. That really is good news.

What do you think motivates best? For Pastor Paul and Reverend Peterson, their use of the law was an attempt to motivate the Christians in their churches. This is a common approach. You may know that, because you've heard it—perhaps a lot.

However, the law does not motivate. It has an important role in the church and in the life of believers. It shows the need for forgiveness. It drives you to repentance, being genuinely sorry for those areas where you fall short. It shows the need for Jesus.

Does the law motivate you to serve? Does it cause you to want to give generously of your finances? Does the decline of your church energize you to reach out to your social network and witness your faith?

What Motivates

Most of the world operates through motivation by law. It's the system of the carrot and the stick. You speed and get caught, you get a ticket. That's the law. That's the stick. If you recite a Bible verse in Sunday school, you get a sticker. That's the carrot. All of this begins early in life: "If you're good, you can play with your iPad." "If you don't stop messing around, you're going to get a 'time-out.'"

This system continues as you get older. If you study hard and do all the assignments, you can get an A grade. If you don't know the material and you can't pass the test, you fail—grade F.

The world of work operates in two opposite dynamics: threat, punishment, and loss of work, or, achievement, reward, and advancement. The carrot and the stick. In some work environments, if you perform exceptionally well, you get a bonus. Sometimes you get a promise: You can advance to a higher level. If you underperform, you lose your job.

In recent years, social scientists have begun to question this reward and punishment, carrot and stick scheme of motivation. Numerous social research studies have been conducted throughout the world in various cultures. These researchers are discovering what motivates best. Their findings are closer

TEN JESUS MOTIVATION INSIGHTS

1. The joy in your church translates directly to the production of those involved in service.
2. Serving God is a joyful experience when you are in your "sweet spot."
3. Your "sweet spot" is determined by the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts given uniquely to you.
4. Divine motivation powers Christians when their efforts make an eternal impact. That power comes only from God.
5. Messages on law, fear, and threat get attention, but messages on grace, love and forgiveness get results.
6. Add more fun to worship, outreach, service, financial giving, and Bible study, and people will be increasingly motivated to participate.
7. Put increased emphasis on celebration when there are baptisms, new members join, and prayers are answered, and people will be more enthusiastic about their faith and involvement.
8. Spend more time laughing at church meetings, and they will become more productive.
9. Train the preacher, and worship team, and/or choir to smile while they speak and sing.
10. When confronting a wayward believer, begin and end with a positive, and put your correction in the middle.

to Jesus than most would ever believe.

Research has increasingly demonstrated that the greatest motivation is not reward and punishment. It is what is called *intrinsic motivation*. Some people do what they do almost entirely because they love it. They find it fun. Even more interesting, those with intrinsic motivation produce more, they produce best. Secondarily, (by the way), they get paid. Money is not the motivation for them.

As a result of research breakthrough about intrinsic motivation, many cutting-edge businesses are re-shaping the system. Much of the culture of Google, for example, is structured around intrinsic motivation: have fun at work, freedom to invent, an atmosphere that is low control, with high encouragement for creativity. The results are amazing. However, the results, and the concept, are not new.

Calling Vs. Job

At Church Doctor Ministries, we help many churches through what is called a Staffing Consultation. In the mix of diagnostic surveys and group exercises, we ask individuals, on a scale of one to ten, to rate what they do in church work as a “job” (1) or a “calling” (10)... or some number in between. Staff members are sometimes quite surprised by the wide range of responses. The group discussion that follows is enlightening to everyone, no matter how they described their position.

This is not limited to the world of the church. Have you ever seen a flight attendant on an airplane who clearly was either having a terrible day or, more likely, viewed her work as a job? Or another flight attendant who, by performance, looked at work as more than a job—a calling? What about a waiter or a waitress? A physician? A teacher? Can you see the joy factor? That is intrinsic motivation.

Christian history is filled with phenomenal stories of Christian missionaries who lived in horrible conditions, sacrificing almost beyond belief, under significant persecution. Who would ever want to be a missionary for Jesus Christ? The answer: hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, over the centuries.

What about the disciples and the Apostle Paul? In what we know from Scripture, and early church history, these and many other followers of Jesus suffered greatly—and gladly. Many experienced jail time for the faith, beatings, and unspeakable deaths. Many are living in this situation even to-

KEY RESOURCES

- Church Doctor Ministries. *Church Government Consultation* (service). www.churchdoctor.org.
- Church Doctor Ministries. *SEND North America, a ten month experience for young adults to discover God's plan for your life* (training). www.sendnorthamerica.com.
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day, all over the world.

Many Christians who have the brilliance and energy to earn huge salaries and gain significant notoriety have chosen to serve in Christian ministries with far lesser rewards. Are they, are we, crazy?

Jesus Motivation

As a fundamental point for understanding, you'll remember that Jesus told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). In His thorough teaching to His disciples, Jesus made it clear, on so many levels, that the Kingdom of God was not like the kingdom of the world. When it came to motivation, Jesus had a whole different plan, long before social scientists discovered intrinsic motivation. Jesus was a genius motivator—the best ever!

In Hebrews 12:2, Jesus is identified as a model for motivation. What would motivate Him to go to the cross? "Because of the joy that was waiting for Him, He endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). *The miracle of motivation is divine joy*. This is gospel motivation. It doesn't get any better.

The Scripture says, "All heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7). So should everyone in church. And when we do, it provides motivational power. The Apostle Paul, from prison, says, "Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). Really? Do you think Paul was motivated?

When Jesus told His followers they were like branches connected to Him, the Vine, He told them they should produce. In this metaphor, Jesus called it "fruit"—eternal fruit, the kind that lasts (forever). They may have been scratching their heads, wondering why Jesus was saying this, because He continued: "I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (John 15:11). Joy motivates. Joy produces much fruit—results.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached on many different angles of what it was like to be a part of His Kingdom. He repeatedly said, "Blessed are the...." (Matthew 5:3-12). To be blessed is to be "happy". This is not just an earthy, party happy, but a peace that passes all human understanding happy (Philippians 4:7).

This Jesus-calling motivates. It's not a duty. The Apostle Paul says that we are "ambassadors for Christ," we represent the King of the universe (2 Corinthians 5:20). That is motivating. It is intrinsic motivation and it outperforms any scheme the world has ever seen.

Are you called? Are you motivated? Does your church celebrate and express joy? Or, when you worship, does it look like the whole crowd was baptized in vinegar?

How do **you** motivate other Christians? Is being an ambassador for the King of the Universe a privilege or a duty?

If you want to motivate Christians to produce results, quit nagging. Stop pleading. Live the joy. It's contagious!

To schedule a phone appointment to discuss this topic further with Kent, call Terry Atz at 1-800-626-8515.



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