

Discovering Our True Motivation:

God's Glory or Our Self-Interest?

To a young missionary couple who is unsure whether they should stay on a mission field.



September, 1984

Dear Jim and Anne,

Warm greetings to both of you in the Lord Jesus Christ! You have been much in our prayers over the past two years. Too, you are in our hearts as we have prayed for you during this time of re-examination of your role. . . . I was a bit concerned that you might quickly return without thinking through the issues of your call—or lack of call to that land. But your correspondence to Charles [another pastor who had been mentoring Jim and Anne] has been encouraging to me.

In what way? Mainly in your growth in self-knowledge and honesty. One evidence of the Spirit's presence in our lives is our seeing where we really are and admitting it to others. One cannot make progress in life or ministry without being a forthright and forthcoming person. Probably each one of us has tons of kinky motives and loads of self-deception—or at least we do until we begin to ask the Holy Spirit to search us out. So, I am really pleased at your openness with Charles and encourage you to continue in it. That is of the Holy Spirit, I do believe. I was pleased as I reflected upon it that you made your innermost thoughts known to him. Believe me, we don't love you the less for that. We accept you just as you are, just as we want you to accept us just as we are.

I am in accord with what Charles has written to you. He is a wise brother, and I have full confidence in him. Would I add anything to his advice? Perhaps a thought or two along the lines mentioned above. It's vital that you not stay to please Charles, or me, or anyone else. That would please us, but the crucial thing to get hold of is your own identity and call. You can make decisions only out of that kind of grip on reality. So don't stay just to please us, but only because you believe the Lord of the church wants you there to do something for him.

Now I do not think such a disclosure of His will is gained on the cheap. It requires prayer and fasting and some earnest and painful heart-searching. When I do this, I ask the Holy Spirit

to search out my innermost heart motives. Guess what I often discover? That my motives are usually mixed. Especially I am likely to discover I am not doing things for God's glory and out of delight and fellowship with Him, but out of half-concealed self-interest and self-glorifying. I do not mean that no heavenly motives go into the mix of my inward thoughts, but often because I can detect some good motives in myself, I feel that this is the last and only word. Don't believe it about me or Charles or yourselves. The scriptural emphasis on our encounter with the flesh needs to be taken seriously. I am thinking of some of the underscoring of things like "ambitions" in Galatians 5. It's there in all of us and cannot be ignored.

So especially ask yourself: what is my concern for the glory of God in my life? How much am I led by concern for my own comfort and feeling of well-being? Do I witness out of enjoyment of God? Do I love people—not just on the mission field, but people? Am I willing to imitate the Good Shepherd and die for them? Do I really know the power of the Holy Spirit as I daringly witness? Do I really confront the lost with heaven and hell? Am I repenting regularly?

Once you wrestle over a period of time with these questions, you can much more easily decide whether you should be [on this field] for a longer period of time. Take great care not to be hasty. "He that is hasty in spirit exalts folly." But it just may not be God's will for you to be there as long as we might like. But the reason must be related to His purpose for your life. You might decide that your calling is not to be there because of a revelation of Christ's will to you. This is not to say at all that I am encouraging you to come home sooner, but to get you to put the matter of your whole personal relationship to the Father before God and to decide based upon a clear dependence upon Him in the light of your careful evaluation of your gifts, calling, motives, etc. In other words, to quote my dear wife Rose Marie, "It's important not to decide hastily like an orphan in flight, but like a son who knows the Father's unconditional love."

I think I also need to apologize to you both for my failure to help you more. Actually, here at New Life we see that we have been far too casual in some of our training and preparation for ministry. I don't say this to run ourselves down or because I am guilt-ridden about it. I am not at all, but I think the "flesh" in me kept me back from giving better leadership to you and your ministry. So forgive me please.

Let me assure you how much more seriously we are beginning to take this whole enterprise. All of us here are seeing it as a much more demanding undertaking than hitherto. We also see how much we needed to have much more prayer behind it. Let me counsel you, too, to pray much more. Pray and keep praying and then pray some more.

You are in our hearts. Very much so.

Most warmly in Christ,

Jack

Knowing the Gospel Means We Can Face Our Sins

To a young woman who struggles with alcoholism and sexual sins.



April, 1989

Dear Sharon,

Most cordial greetings to you in Christ! I am writing from Kenya! Here we have been ministering, preaching, and writing. Rose Marie is just back from Uganda, where she spoke several times and met with the missionary women in Ft. Portal. I am working on a book for non-Christians; she is working on an autobiography.

It has taken me a long time, but at last I am getting off a long overdue letter to you. My apologies for the long delay. I could think of a number of excuses, but I think the main reason is my not being sure what to say. Now I realize that may sound strange. Usually I have much to say! But my heart burden has been to help you, and my mind has not been clear as to how. Now I think it is clearer to me what the Lord wants me to share with you. I think it came to me as I was helping Rose Marie work on her book.

In it she makes the point that it is important to know your family roots and the sin patterns you have inherited. Actually the book could help you more than I can. But anyway she says that sin patterns get repeated from generation to generation, taking different forms but always reflecting inherited attitudes of pride, independence, self-deception, lust, love of control, etc.

Her next point is that people really can't stand to look closely at themselves and these patterns unless they understand justification by faith and union with Christ. According to her, it's pretty easy to say, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner," and be thinking only of external actions while ignoring the darkness of the human heart. But if you want to look more deeply, begin by studying the gospel of the cross, know the meaning of Christ's atonement for you personally, and you will be able to take the deeper look.

This deeper look can then lead to a more thoroughgoing repentance and a hearty confidence through the Spirit that I am not an orphan, but a living son of the heavenly Father through faith.

Take a specific sin like anger. You and I know its visible consequences. Everyone is shamed by how our anger has maimed others. But then take the deeper look. Why am I angry? What fuels it? Why do I forgive people, but later on end up taking it all back?

These are burning questions.

They also have a wonderfully simple answer in Scripture. In James 3 and 4, God says that we are angry because we are proud. We have pride in our own sinful nature, but we also have had models of pride in our family background. We have deeply ingrained attitudes of superiority inherited from a dark past. Our sinful nature responds to these inherited attitudes with enthusiasm. We have seen in our models attitudes of superiority, contempt for others, and patterns of pride coming to expression in bitterness or rage.

How do we overcome the pride? Our ancestors probably did not; how then can we expect to do so? Actually it's impossible. But that's where grace begins. When the Spirit works a healthy self-disgust, a hatred of my sins in my heart, then I pray honestly without a secret intention to remain unchanged.

Honesty, humble integrity, that's what moves God to run to our cry.

You see, we often pray and see little fruit because we are praying one thing but in our heart we have other plans.

Take the person addicted to drugs. He cannot get off them for the simple reason he does not want to get off them. The day he wants to get off them he does. But until he really wants to be changed he always has a secret intention in the heart not to go off the drugs. The rest is all talk.

So my suggestion is that you study James 3 and 4 closely and take a close look at your inner life, and at the same time study Galatians 2 and 3 to see the beauty of the love of God in the gospel.

Put it together by faith. Or better, let the Holy Spirit put it together for you as you cry out for divine intervention to work deeply in your life.

Please don't think I am speaking to you as an outsider. As a nonsinner. No, the reason I understand you is that God has given me some understanding of my own vile heart.

Do you remember the time you came to my home for prayer meeting several years ago and you and I sat on the couch? I questioned you about your inner life—but you were not listening.

At least that was my impression. I believe I said that you did not know yourself very well. I tried to do it in love. Maybe it was done with some frustration too. Well, the reason I knew what your inner life was like came from a knowledge of my own desperately evil heart!

Let me be even more forthright. I think it is a lifelong process getting to know yourself. Paul said that when you get to know yourself you confess that you and every man are liars (Rom. 3). Now I am ashamed to confess how many deep lies there are in my heart. How is it now with you? Have you brought your innermost deceptions into the light? Are there still secrets in your heart?

Think once again of your visit to our home. As I sat on the couch with you I thought that lying was as natural to you as breathing. Do you remember how many times I asked you if you really meant what you were saying?

Now I understand that you believe that God has worked in your life, and the church has accepted your repentance. Praise God for that! I rejoice in it. But have you taken that close inner look at the roots of it all—the proud, independent unbelieving heart, a deceiving heart?

That's scary for me. To do that.

When I do that I know the engine does not need just a tuneup but a complete reworking.

I think such an inward look is possible if you know the power in the blood of Christ. It is the sole basis of God's justification of the ungodly. What a wonderful thing for God to do for us! Complete forgiveness.

Such a teaching cuts the root of our sin. Self-centered pride is the root, and to rest on free justification kills our pride. Why? because in our justification we must accept that nothing of righteousness comes from us, could come from us, and we are forced to acknowledge the shame of our sin. Only mercy and love can save us, and these come from God to the ungodly (Rom. 5:5–6).

But there is even more. We are always properly concerned to get sin out of ourselves. At least we should be. But we need something more foundational. We need to have the Lord transfer us out of sin. To bring us into a kingdom of righteousness, to kill us and resurrect us under a new lordship. We are not justified in our sin. No, justification carries along with it a death to sin and

What do you have to do to get this? Nothing. Just come undone and rest on what Jesus has done! Look, the gospel is a mighty power. See the Lamb. One look at Him takes away a universe of sin from the human heart. [The last page of this letter is lost.]

e 2'

In Christ,
Jack Miller