

# GROW

## AN SMBS SERIES

### Lesson 1 – The Right Motives Teacher Edition



**(Illustration)** A motivational speaker once told the story of a young businessman asking an old, successful tycoon the secret of his wealth. The old man told him to meet him at the beach the next day at four in the morning. When the young man got there he arrived dressed in a suit and was somewhat surprised when the old man told him to get into the water. He waded out until the water was waist deep, but the old man said farther. Finally, when he was up to his nose, the old man came out to him and pushed his head underwater. He held him there for as long as he thought he could without killing him. When the young man came up gasping for air, he asked him, “When you were underwater, what did you want?” The exhausted young man replied “Breathe!” to which his mentor replied “When you want to succeed as bad as you want to breathe, then you will be successful.”

What people want bad enough they will usually pursue hard enough until they get it. Which is why in Matthew 5:6 Jesus tells us “Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Here’s the basic truth that lies behind this verse: Those who want to be righteous bad enough will be. Thirsty people will do whatever it takes to get water, drowning people will do whatever it takes to get air, and people who really want holiness will take whatever steps are necessary if it means they will be holy. Unfortunately, we often only half want it, or only three-quarters want it. We want to change, but we want to sin, or we don’t want the inconvenience it would bring our lives to really root out our sinful behaviors. We hate our sin, but part of us loves our sin, because if we didn’t we wouldn’t go back to it again and again.

***Can you think of any examples, biblical, personal, or otherwise, of someone who wanted to change, but not enough to do what was necessary?***

Scripture knows this, which is why God seeks to motivate us for holiness in many ways. Some Christians argue that love for God is the only proper motive for obedience. Others preach and teach in such a way that fear becomes the only reason people obey. Still others preach a prosperity gospel that seeks to earn obedience by appealing to people’s desire for reward or happiness. All of these motivations, at least to some extent, are legitimate and should be used by the believer to fight sin. Today we are going to see that we should be motivated by fear, reward, and love.

#### **I. We should be motivated by fear.**

Some Christians argue that it is wrong to live a life motivated by fear. As we will see today, Solomon would disagree. So would Christ. So would Paul. Over and over again Scripture warns us that the consequences of our sin are grave, hoping that we will think twice before we disobey. While fear should not be our only motivating factor, meditating seriously on the serious cost of our wickedness ought to drive us to purity.

#### **A. Fear of Punishment – It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

- 1. Before salvation** – Christ often warned that there were grave consequences for rejecting him (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). Scripture is clear that the punishment for our sins is great, which is why in the Old Testament the prophets spend so much time warning about the coming punishment upon Israel and the nations for their sins (see for example Hosea 13:7-16; Joel 2:1-11; Amos 5:18-20; 6:8-14; Obadiah, Micah 1:1-7, Nahum). Salvation is not just an escape from hell, but God wants us to know the seriousness of the choice, and makes it very clear the awfulness of that place (Luke 16:19-31).
- 2. After salvation (Hebrews 12:3-11)** – God loves us so much that he will never quit on us. We will never face wrath, and we will never face condemnation. We will, however, face God’s

discipline, or to use the KJV term, chastening. God's discipline is an unmistakable demonstration of his love, but it is intentionally miserable. Fearing God's future discipline enough to stay away from sin or to forsake sin is a good thing, after all that's the whole point of discipline. For a child to not disobey because he doesn't want a spanking is a good thing. For a Christian to stay away from sin because they don't want God to make their lives miserable for a time is also a good thing.

- B. Fear of Consequences – Sin is not just wicked; it is stupid.** Galatians 6:7-8 warns that our sins will have consequences. As Rand Hummel often says "You can choose your sin, but you can't choose the consequences of your sin." You cannot sin and win. In fact, it was the thought of those who had made the choice to sin and paid a heavy price was a strong motivating factor for Paul to live a disciplined life (1 Corinthians 9:24-10:12). Much of Scripture is spent trying to wake up sinners to the dangerous and horrifying state in which they are in. Many of the Proverbs are spent warning people not to warn that specific sins will have disastrous consequences, such as lust (Proverbs 5:7-14; 6:27-35), laziness (Proverbs 13:4; 20:4), a lack of self-control (Proverbs 25:28), and pride (Proverbs 16:18; 29:23).

*How can a motive of fear become wrong if it dominates?*

## **II. We should be motivated by reward.**

Here we have another motive that, if it is the only motive or if it becomes disconnected from God can be problematic. However, God often encourages us by promising blessings for obedience, and if that was not supposed to motivate us, why did he tell us that?

- A. We should desire future glory.** Peter once asked Christ what he would get for leaving all and following him. Christ could have used the opportunity to upbraid his disciple. "That's a ridiculous question Peter, isn't love for me enough? You shouldn't think about such things." But Christ's response is quite different. He tells Peter that he will be richly rewarded, both in this life and in the one to come! (Matthew 19:27-30) Paul tells suffering believers that their

sufferings do not even compare with the glory that will be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob found the hope for future glory to be one of the major the motivating factors of their life even though they died having not yet received what God had promised them (Hebrews 11:10, 13-16).

***In Scripture, we see the hope of heaven be a very strong motivator. Why don't people spend more time thinking about and looking forward to heaven today?***

***What can we do to help create a healthy desire for heaven and for the rewards God has promised us?***

## **B. We should desire present blessings.**

- 1. We should desire peace.** In the Old Testament, God promised his people peace if they would obey him (Leviticus 26:6; Psalm 29:11). Peace in the Bible means more than just a cessation of fighting, it includes inner rest and tranquility. This is what Christ meant when he said "Peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). But as in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament peace is conditional. Peace is God's reward for the believer who is prays thankfully, thinks rightly, and obeys faithfully (Philippians 4:6-9).

Part of God's chastening process for sinning believers is the gracious removal of peace. David felt this acutely, probably after his sin with Bathsheba, when he wrote in Psalm 38:3-4 "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me." (see verses 1-8 for a longer description) Those who choose to live in sin forfeit the peace that God so desperately wants to give them.

***Can you think of any biblical examples of people who enjoyed peace even during difficult circumstances, or who lacked peace because of sinful choices?***

**2. We should desire joy.** God desires that his children have joy (Nehemiah 8:10). But as we have seen above, God's blessings are conditional. Christ wanted his disciples to have joy, but told them they needed to be obeying his commands and living in his love for that to be the case (John 15:10-11). Both joy and peace are fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and in that passage the fruits of the spirit and the works of the flesh (5:19-21) cannot exist in the same place at the same time (5:16-17). If we choose to live selfish, sinful lives we forfeit the joy that God desires us to have.

Desiring peace and joy ought to compel us to fight sin. Although we don't always receive material blessings when we follow God, and life doesn't always work out the way we expect or want, we know that when we obey God we can always have peace and joy. When we feel empty, tired, drained, and lifeless, we ought to check to see if there is sin we are harboring in our lives. And when we know that our discouragement and emptiness is a result of sin, that ought to make us run to God and beg him to change us so that we can have the peace and joy he wants us to have.

***How can we have a healthy desire for the rewards God promises us without becoming too self-focused?***

### **III. We should be motivated by love.**

While fear and reward are both legitimate motives, if they do not include or lead to a love for God they go from being helpful to being dangerous.

**(Illustration)** Nobody is upset with the parent who warns an out of control child that a spanking is coming or who rewards their teen with a trip to dinner at their favorite restaurant when they get good grades on their report card. But the child who either lives in constant fear or who lives for what he can get from his parents is a sad sight indeed. Fear and reward both have a proper place, but both need to be placed within the context of a loving relationship.

#### **A. Our love should flow from gratitude.**

Obedience and love go hand in hand in the Bible. In the Old Testament, before God reminded his people of the laws they needed to keep, he began by asking for their love (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Christ says that if we love him, we will obey him (John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 5:3). How then do we develop a love for God? Where does that kind of love come from? The answer God's Word gives us is that our love for God should spring from an understanding and appreciation for his love for us (1 John 4:19). Paul said that the love of Christ controls us, because as we contemplate his death for us we realize that our lives belong to him (2 Corinthians 5:14).

**(Illustration)** Imagine a friend helps you move. They bring their own truck and load up all your stuff that they can, as well as helping you load the moving truck. They drive with you to your destination and help you unload. Then they make two more trips as you load, then unload, load, then unload. You tell them you are very thankful and they leave. A couple of months later, they are moving a couch and ask if you can come help out. We recognize that in a situation like that any reasonable person would help. On a much greater scale, when God has given us everything, how could we not do the same?

***What practical ways can you daily remind yourself of the goodness of God?***

**B. Our love should seek to please God.** We cannot earn God's love or grace, that is freely given. We can and should, however, seek to please the God who already loves us and desires what is best for us. Paul spoke over and over again on the need for pleasing God (Ephesians 5:10; Colossians 1:10; 3:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; 4:1; 1 Timothy 2:3; 5:4; 2 Timothy 2:4), as did the author of Hebrews (whoever he may be) (Hebrews 11:6; 13:16), and John (1 John 3:22). Just as a child wants his father or mother to be pleased with them, so it is not only permissible but right for a believer to want his heavenly father to be pleased with him.

***Why do people in Christianity today shy away from talking about pleasing God?***

- C. Our love should desire God's glory.** If we love God, we will want to obey and serve him. This is the reason and the purpose for which we were created, to bring God glory (1 Corinthians 10:31, Colossians 1:16). Our love for God should desire that his name be exalted, that people see him as the incredible being that he really is, and when we sin, we fail as ambassadors for him. We give people a bad and wrong picture of what our God looks like. When we fail to live holy lives, people don't see God as holy (1 Peter 1:16).

**(Illustration)** Max Lucado<sup>1</sup> tells of meeting a Jewish Rabbi who shared the following story. A wealthy businessman worked on the top floor of a skyscraper. Most of his employees had not seen him, but they knew his daughter who worked in the same building for her father. She was rude and demanding, expecting the workers to leave their posts and meet her every last need and desire. Now, never having met the father, the workers would nonetheless have developed a very negative picture of what he is like in their mind. However, if she was kind, and thoughtful, and helpful. If she was a delight to be around and genuinely cared for others, then the workers would have had thought very well of their boss they had never seen. Why? Because the actions of the child reflected back on her father. Likewise for us, living a right life reflects the kind of God we serve. When we are obedient to him, we show others what he is like. When we sin and are selfish, we fail to show others what he is like.

If we really understood our job as image bearers of God and as redeemed saints reflecting the character of our Savior, we would be grieved to our core with every "little" sin. We would desire to live holy lives, because we would want people to see how incredible and awesome is the God we serve.

Before you can change, you have to want to change, and you have to want it bad enough. God's Word seeks over and over again to motivate us to change, by threatening the consequences if we don't, by holding out the promise of reward before us, and by reminding us of the love that God has shown us. The more we think on and allow these motives to become a part of the way we think about life, the more and more we will find ourselves wanting to change, and the more we will change.

Now, wanting to change won't automatically make us holy, but it's a crucial first step. We will begin examining the dynamics of how biblical change works in future lessons.

***Which motive have you been motivated by the most? In what ways could other motives help you in your battle against sin? Which motive have you been motivated by the least?***

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *It's Not About Me*, chapter 16.