

The Lack of Motivation

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Our subject for this mini-course, as you all well know, is "Motivation", or more precisely, the lack of motivation.

In the broad outline that was handed out to you some time ago, I divided this subject into three sections: First, The Lack of Motivation; second, the Cause or Causes; and finally, the Solution to the Problem, in which connection I also briefly touched on the method of attaining that solution.

After giving this matter some further thought, I decided that it might be better to take the first two subjects together, and to break up the last subject for two separate discussions. My reasons, I think, are quite obvious. First of all, we can hardly discuss the lack of motivation without delving into its various causes. These two are closely related. In the second place, our main concern is, that we seek to find some solution to the problem. That should take up the lion's share of our discussions. Finally, although I personally may not have so much to say about the method of procedure, this is the vital matter for you who as teachers are directly involved with the problem.

So I will divide my material for this evening under two headings:

I. The Lack of Motivation.

II. Its Cause or Causes.

I. The Lack of Motivation.

The term motivation is obviously derived from the word '*motive*'. This is defined in Webster's dictionary as follows: (derived from the Latin: moveo, motum, to move.) That which incites to action; that which determines the choice or moves the will; cause; object; inducement; prevailing design; the theme or leading subject in a piece of music; the prevailing idea in the mind of an artist, to which he endeavors to give expression in his work.

The *Family Word Finder*, published by the *Reader's Digest*, gives as synonyms for motivation the following: Motive reason, impulse, impetus, cause, driving force, impulsions, causation, provocation.

In the *Psychology* written by Filmore H. Sanford, from the University of Texas, I quote as a definition of *Motive* the following: "A Motive is an energizing condition of the organism that serves to direct that organism toward a certain goal."

Under the physiological motives, psychologists usually place such desires as hunger and sex as the chief urges of man, and along with these, the need for air, the need for rest, the need to escape pain, and also others. The psychological motives seem somewhat more difficult to classify. Commonly are mentioned such motives as the need for status, the need for security, gregariousness, or acquisitiveness. These motives are considered more the product of environment, and less the product of the individual's organic nature. In other words, the psychological motives are *learned* motives and the man's pattern of psychological motives is due more to his particular experience in the world than to the fact that he is a needful organism. Quoting from the above mentioned textbook on psychology, we find the following: "The way we interpret the world depends on our motives. The hungry man sees most clearly those parts of the world having something to do with food. The competitively ambitious man will perceive his friends, perhaps, only as stepping stones to his own success. And the man who seeks political office may see his colleagues only as potential voters. Then, too, a man's motive will mightily influence his learning. He will learn those habits and skills most likely to pay off handsomely in the satisfaction of his motives."

In our present discussion we are concerned with the motives, or motivations which impel or induce a child to prepare his lessons and take an active part in his school work. More specifically, at the moment we are concerned with the lack of motivation, or even the aggressive opposition to anything that resembles school work.

Every one of us is aware of the fact that this is an old problem, probably dating back to the day when formal education was introduced. There have always been children and teen-agers who simply despised schooling, and were openly opposed to any form of learning. In former years there were

always a few in every classroom who consistently failed, either because they could not keep up with the class, or because they did not care. The picture of the child sitting on a stool in a corner with a dunce cap on his head is familiar to all of us. Some of these were real pests to the teachers, since they were much larger and older than the rest of the class, they enjoyed making a nuisance of themselves, and often were more than the teacher could handle. There were those who availed themselves of every possible opportunity to skip school, either with or without the approval of their parents. The truant officer was a familiar figure in our neighborhood. As the demands for more thorough and more advanced education increased, the problem of unmotivated students also increased. There are many parents, business men, consistory members, school board members who now bemoan their early lack of interest in a formal education, and who also give evidence of not having applied themselves as thoroughly as they should have. They suffer the consequences of their negligence, but so does God's cause and kingdom in many ways.

Nevertheless, the problem as it is before us *now* has intensified to a degree that it has actually become very serious. The public school leaders bemoan the attitude of the pupils towards their school and toward the demands placed upon them by the school. School teachers throw up their hands in despair. School boards are desperate with the problems that confront them. Many school teachers and administrators are resigning from their positions to seek out other vocations, less nerve-racking, less futile, less dangerous to their health and life. Our Christian schools are also definitely suffering from the lethargy and tendency toward mediocrity so evident among the students. All are agreed that something must be done, and soon! We can sum up the problem of lack of motivation under the following headings:

1. There is an aggressive opposition to all authority, in the community, in the home, in the church, and no less in the school. This comes to expression in:
 - a. The destruction of property, as was evidenced in the recent fire in the Rosewood Public School, which has been ascribed to arson. Many other examples of destruction of property are known to all of us, even to the extent that our own pupils have made themselves guilty.
 - b. Disrespect for teachers and administrators; name calling

and other expressions of contempt.

- c. Sins like stealing, swearing, vile language and actions.
2. There is an indifference toward school work, so that children treat it like drudgery, produce mediocre work, attempt to get away with as little as possible, often make themselves guilty of copying, cheating, and allowing others to do their work for them.
3. Parental interference with the instruction given and/or discipline administered. Complaints against the grades the child receives, resulting in an attitude of complacency in the child.
4. Finally, many children deliberately disturb the class, assert themselves by plaguing the less capable, mocking others, and making a general nuisance of themselves.

All of this is a very serious matter which requires some thorough investigation and discussion. The lack of motivation virtually compels the school to lower the standard of education, so that the student of today does not obtain the training that his parents received some years before. Much time that should be devoted to instruction is wasted on discipline. The instructors and administrators are confronted with nasty situations that have to be cleared up either in the school or with the parents. At times one is inclined to place "christian" in quotation marks.

This is the more serious because our present standard of living requires a better and more thorough training than in the past. Not too many years ago a farmer could run his farm with very little business acumen, mathematical ability, and ability to express himself in writing. Today with the large farms, expensive machinery, modern equipment, the problem of income tax, and many other matters, the farmer, as well as the businessman must be able to cope with the problems of the day. Students graduating from school must either be prepared to enter college, or be able to take up a job which involves machinery, computers, and other modern equipment. Reading and writing have always been important, but are more important now than ever before.

Even more importantly, the church must be equipped as never before to fight the battle of faith in a world of growing wickedness and apostacy. Now, more than ever, the devil realizes that he has but a little while, and is doing his utmost to destroy God's Church before the end of the ages is come. Our children are facing a future in which antichrist will arise to exert

his power upon the earth. All the signs of the times mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24 are reaching their culmination in that Man of Sin who will sit upon the throne, ruling over all the earth, as if he were God. His coming will be with all the cunning deceit and treachery of the Prince of Darkness himself. It will be required to know the Scriptures, to recognize the claws of the Beast, to be able to determine our calling over against those evil forces, and to stand for the truth. Our children are the active church of tomorrow. They are the future fathers and mothers, elders and deacons, school teachers and leaders of the congregations. They must be able to read and write, to study and to discern, to be fully equipped as men of God, ready even to die, if need be, when the persecutions of the early church and of the seventeenth century come upon us with greater intensity and more furious hatred of the world than has ever been known. Jesus warns that there will be tribulation far surpassing anything known in the past. Only he that is faithful unto death will receive the crown of life. True, we and our children can stand only by the grace of God, but this grace is not poured into us while we sleep. God uses means, the means of His Word and the instruction based on the truth of His Word to equip His people for their calling on earth as stewards in His house. Our common calling is to be faithful, even unto death!

II. The Cause or Causes of This Lack of Motivation.

Various reasons for this growing lack of motivation have been offered in our newspapers, weekly magazines, and various other sources. The general spirit of defiance and disrespect for authority has been ascribed to the anti-establishment movement so prominent in the sixties and early seventies. A generation is growing up that opposes all tradition, all existing laws and institutions, even every form of government, without offering anything better in their places. One cannot help but wonder whether this is one of the fruits of the efforts toward "self-expression" advocated some thirty, or forty years ago.

Still others trace this entire spirit of indifference to the spirit of democracy. Democracy, so it is said, does not want intelligent and industrious students. It is undemocratic for one to excel above the other. Equality results in mediocrity, in a nation of sub-literates, lack of discipline, and life of pampering.

In a recent article in the *Banner* the large families were blamed for much of the mediocrity evident in the schools. In spite

of what Scripture teaches us in Psalm 127 and 128, as well as in many other passages, Harold P. Pluimer, lecturer in science at Minneapolis; Minnesota writes: "The Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, which have declined for the past twelve years, should soon start to climb again. We've been misreading the signs; we've blamed the teachers, the schools, the T.V., and the system, for the decline in intellectual development of our children in schools. Intellectual growth, to a large degree, is dependent on the family size and family configuration. With the family size decreasing, the Scholastic Aptitude Test scores should soon rise again." (*Banner*, June 9, 1978).

One thing stands out in bold relief, and that is the fact that the modern psychologist does not reckon with Scripture, and particularly not with the fact that man is more than a highly developed animal, the highest of all the earthly creatures, only slightly lower than the angels. Moreover, that God created man with body and soul. Physically man is of the earth earthy, so that he functions through the body in his various relationships here on earth. Spiritually man is related to God, so that he always functions as a rational-moral creature in love or in hatred toward God. Scripture teaches us, that *from the heart* are the issues of life. So that all man's desires, thoughts, plans, purposes, words, deeds and actions have a moral value: he either acts out of love to God, or he sins in all that he does. Nor must we lose sight of the fact, that man was created in the image and likeness of God, to know, to love, and to serve God as His friend-servant, in the threefold office of prophet, priest and king. Adam was created as God's steward laboring in paradise to the glory of God. Already to Adam was given the cultural mandate to increase and multiply, to replenish the earth and to subdue it. Therefore he was king of the earthly creation with dominion over every creature upon the earth. Even though the fall was a breach of covenant, which brought God's severe judgment upon our first parents and their posterity, man still retained the image of God, now perverted into opposite motivations. Man's knowledge became foolishness, his righteousness unrighteousness, his holiness unholiness. Instead of being devoted to God man seeks himself, striving to dethrone God and replace him with his own superiority over the creature. Instead of being friend-servant of God, he is rebel, defiantly treading God's law under foot. Instead of being a concerned king, who seeks the welfare of his earthly domain, he does all in his

power to mutilate it, always working toward his own destruction. This is especially evident in man's use of pesticides, weed-killers, and other poisons, whereby much more is destroyed than man ever intended. The soil, the streams, the lakes, the oceans are being polluted to a point where it becomes obvious that man is bringing the vials of the Book of Revelation upon himself. The tyrant of creation commits spiritual, moral and physical suicide. Man is always motivated by his hatred against God, even as we confess with our Catechism, that we not only *do not* keep God's law, but also are incapable of keeping God's law, because we are "prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor." (Lord's Day 2.) Only grace can deliver us from the horrible death in which we cast ourselves. The image of God is renewed in us by God's powerful, super-natural work of regeneration and sanctification. In our Christian schools we are dealing with the covenant seed of God's church, that is, children restored as friend-servants of God, with the calling to be stewards in His house, His witnesses, to live to His glory. Anything less than that is sin, and therefore also every lack of motivation must be traced back to our natural depravity, and must be branded as sin, wherever and however it may appear. *The chief cause of all lack of motivation lies in our depraved nature.*

One of the most serious evils of our time is the *total lack of respect for authority*. This begins with the flat denial of God and rejection of His law. Scripture speaks of the fact, that there is no thought of God in the minds of wicked men. And refers to the church of the last days as "having a form of godliness, yet denying the power thereof;" which power is God and His Spirit. The new morality advocated by prominent individuals like Ann Landers, the uprisings resulting often in destruction of public property, including school buildings, the loose morality among married and unmarried, the defiance of the authorities, and many other evils give evidence of this total lack of respect of authority. The whole spirit of democracy, as well as the anti-establishment movement, can be traced to the total disrespect for authority.

All of this has not been without effect upon the church, also upon us. The dread and terror of time past that children had for police, preachers, teachers, and even parents was, indeed, not healthy. Yet today we experience the opposite extreme, often a total disregard for authorities, or a defiant opposition to them. This reveals itself in a lack of *God consciousness* and lack of

spiritual sensitivity. Children often seem to have no awareness of the fact that they are the covenant seed of the church, and that also as children they are responsible before God to be stewards of the gifts, the talents, the time, the health, the capacities given to them. This reveals itself in many ways. First, whether it is a reflection of the home or not, children have an entirely wrong sense of values. Fun, entertainment, vacations, sports, luxuries have top priorities. How far our affluent times are responsible for this may be difficult to say. Second, their chief ambition seems to be to carry away the approval of their peers. One or two, or maybe a small segment of a class may control the attitude of the rest. Third, there is prevalent an entirely wrong conception of God that smacks of antinomism. Maybe the modern church world with its strong emphasis upon the love of God, at the expense of God's justice, along with their constant reference to a kind and gentle Jesus, may have put its stamp upon us and our children, even though we are not aware of it. One almost receives the impression that the child thinks, I can sin, because I will be forgiven anyway. Fourth, the proud, boastful use of foul language, oaths and slang speaks of a lack of true fear of God. Other associated evils can readily be added to this list.

We ask ourselves, in how far is the home responsible for this situation? Is there a relaxing of authority in the home, so that the children are allowed far too many liberties? Is the father too engrossed in his business, or in sports, or whatever, to give the necessary attention to the children. Is the mother working too much outside of the home, or in other ways neglecting her calling in regard to rearing the children? In one word, is there a seeking of the bread that perishes rather than the enduring Bread, Christ Jesus? (John 6:27). Does the world make its inroads into our homes through TV and magazines, leaving lasting impressions that influence our outlook on life? Is there too much discussion in the home on material things, and a sorry lack of spiritual discussions? Is the line of communication between parents and children broken through the fact that families are not home together as they should be? Are the parents more concerned about their children's prestige or popularity than about their education?

Is the church possibly lax in some areas as far as our children and young people are concerned? Does the preaching fail to reach the children and their unique problems? Are our

children being properly trained in the catechisms? Are they being spiritually built up by the various church activities planned for them? Is there a lack in the sing-spirations, a lack of enthusiasm, of spiritual zeal, or true edification? Are there other realms in which our churches are failing our young people?

Finally, and this brings us to the root of the matter, how about our schools? Is there, possibly unconsciously, a distinction made between nature and grace? Is intellectual attainment too strongly emphasized at the cost of failing to develop the whole man of God? Is there a true, distinctively Christian atmosphere in the school room? Is there sufficient emphasis on Christian living, Christian stewardship, Christian influence upon each other? Is the individual child counselled, directed, that the man of God may be fully equipped unto every good work?

These and other questions we shall face as we strive for a solution to our problem. May our God graciously guide us by His Holy Spirit.

“ . . . It is only by wide reading, the consultation of varied references, and the investigation of many sources of information that the student can be introduced to the varied aspects of the Creation order and its historical, cultural development. The student cannot learn everything he has to know by personal experience. He must use every available medium of recorded knowledge in order to acquire and retain knowledge of God's Creation and to expand that knowledge. That means the student must have access to books, records, films, filmstrips, pictures, maps, globes, artifacts, specimens, and other forms of media from which he can learn.”

quoted from

“The Christian Library: Frill or Necessity”

by Louise M. Hulst, *Christian Educators Journal*
Volume 18, Number 1, October-November, 1978.