Advent 2024

Week 1: What’s your motivation?

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# Production Notes:

* Green highlighted text on the screen.
* Yellow highlight: Note the picture of the sprout from a stump. I will reference it below.

# Next Steps Cards:

Pull your next steps card out. Let’s pray that God speaks to us today. You can keep this for personal notes or turn it in at the end of the service.

# Opening Illustration:

Years ago when we only had the little boys Leslie wanted to go on an overnight women’s retreat with the church we were attending. Within three hours we had the apartment absolutely destroyed. Legos, lightsaber duels, pizza, pop cans and nerf darts were everywhere. We didn’t even sleep in our beds; we literally crashed on the living room floor while watching the Ninja Turtles movie, if I remember correctly. The next morning, I woke up and the light of day made even more clear how our little apartment looked somewhere between a city dump and the greatest boy playroom ever. I don’t know…maybe that’s the same thing. Either way, mom wasn’t going to be happy. I woke the kids up knowing we only had a few hours to get the house cleaned up.

Standing before me wasn’t merely a mess and two boys very uninterested in cleaning up, what also stood before me were potential methods of motivation. Thinking of the old “carrot and stick” metaphor for motivation, I decided to start with the carrot, “Boys if you help me clean, I’ll order some pizza for lunch.” It was clear this wasn’t going to work. Knowing time wasn’t on my side I moved to the stick. “Boys, if you don’t help me clean, no T.V.!” This worked but at a very slow and arduous pace.

Back in the 80’s there was yet another research project done that pointed out the reasonably obvious. Extrinsic motivation, even positive, is much less effective than intrinsic motivation. The research called this **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

How you achieve right behavior is incredibly important and directly connected to long term adherence.

Let’s pause on the story and go to the text.

Types of Motivation

* Extrinsic Motivation: Behavior is driven by external factors, such as rewards or punishments. In your example, obeying the speed limit to avoid a ticket is extrinsic motivation. People are motivated by the consequence, not the behavior itself.
* Intrinsic Motivation: Behavior is driven by internal rewards, such as values, personal beliefs, or the inherent satisfaction of doing something good. In your example, obeying the speed limit because of concern for children in a school zone is intrinsic motivation.

Lectio:  
Jeremiah 33:14–15 (ESV)

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” [[2]](#footnote-2)

# Medatatio:

* "Righteous Branch" (צֶמַח צַדִּיק): The term "Branch" (צֶמַח, tsemach) signifies a sprout or shoot, symbolizing renewal and growth from the Davidic line, even after apparent desolation. The addition of "righteous" underscores the moral and just nature of the promised leader.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* "Execute justice and righteousness" (עָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה): These terms denote not only legal fairness but also covenantal loyalty and ethical governance, hallmarks of the Messianic age.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* I want to show you a sprout from a stump. Notice how gentle, small, and fragile it looks? We want to think about power through the lens of destruction, might, and force. Here we have an interesting metaphor God gives for the mechanism of transformation.
* (With the picture of the stump with a small shoot coming out of it still up.) The prophetic metaphor is interesting.
* Think about it. To all the people who say things like:
  + “I wish God would just drop fire from the sky and show that he is most powerful. Then I would believe and follow Him.” You realize that type of motivation is laid out clearly in the Bible many times over. Take the Exodus alone. Pharoah’s only right move was because of clear power over him, and it just made his heart darker.
  + “I wish God would make the good people rich or heal nice people, that would motivate others to follow God.” Again, over and over the Bible shows that even this doesn’t work. Let’s look at the Exodus story again through the lens of the Hebrew people. God’s divine victory, favor, and rewards don’t make the people good. They are one disappointment away from turning against God again.
* What is God doing here? Jesus is the savior of the world and one of the prime ways he will save it is by offering a better motivation. Jesus comes up from the ashes of human filth. Jesus wants us to want Him and want to be like Him. Jesus came to win our hearts. Justice and righteousness are *truly* executed by winning hearts.
* God knew right spiritual motivation is required for humans to be able to *truly* participate in the kingdom of God. The Messiah would be the way we understand this.
* You will never guess one of the main themes God uses to show us the motivation of our hearts - money. I’ll attach a more exhaustive list below.\* Money is one of the prime teaching tools Jesus uses to help us see the motivation of our heart. Ten percent of the Gospels are about why and what we do with our resources. Jesus wants us to want to help others so bad we will inconvenience ourselves to do it. This charity (love) is the motivation of the Kingdom of God. \*\*

Actio:  
Back to the opening Illustration:

There I was standing before two boys and a tornado of nerf darts, pizza boxes, Legos, sleeping bags, pillows, video game controllers, and candy wrappings. Extrinsic motivation was working and sometimes it is required, but I tried to seed something else.

“Boys, does mom like a clean house?” “Yeah dad, she ALWAYS asks us to clean our rooms.”

“How does it make mom feel when the house is cleaned up?” “Happy, dad.”

“Isn’t it fun to make mom really happy?” “Yeah…it is dad.”

The work was the same, but something was changing. The motivation.   
  
Next Steps Cards:

Is there someone God is placing on your heart to help? God wants your motivation to be love.

# Resources:

**\*Examples in Jesus’ teachings of money as a lens to the heart.**

1. **The Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:17–27)**  
   When the rich young man asked how to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him to sell all he had, give to the poor, and follow Him. The man’s sorrow at this command revealed that his heart was anchored in his possessions, showing that his wealth was not just material but a false source of identity and security.
2. **The Widow’s Offering (Mark 12:41–44)**  
   Jesus praises a poor widow who gives two small coins, all she had to live on, contrasting her with wealthy people who give out of abundance. Her act of sacrificial giving reveals a heart fully surrendered to and dependent on God.
3. **The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13–21)**  
   A man amasses wealth, building larger barns to store his goods, only to die that night. Jesus calls him a fool for prioritizing earthly riches over being "rich toward God," highlighting the futility of placing ultimate trust in material things.
4. **The Zacchaeus Transformation (Luke 19:1–10)**  
   Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector, encounters Jesus and experiences life-changing grace. In response, he voluntarily gives half his wealth to the poor and makes restitution to those he cheated. His generosity is evidence of a heart radically transformed by Christ.
5. **The Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30)**  
   Jesus tells of servants entrusted with their master’s wealth. Those who invest and multiply it are rewarded, while the one who hoards out of fear is condemned. The parable teaches stewardship and faithfulness, emphasizing that wealth is a gift to be used for God’s purposes.
6. **The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1–13)**  
   Jesus commends a shrewd manager for using his position to prepare for the future, encouraging believers to use worldly wealth wisely to secure eternal rewards. He concludes, “You cannot serve God and money,” underscoring the spiritual implications of financial choices.
7. **Paying Taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:15–22)**  
   When asked whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus replies, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” This teaching highlights that money has a rightful place but ultimate allegiance belongs to God, not material wealth or political power.
8. **The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32)**  
   Though not primarily about money, the younger son’s squandering of his inheritance and subsequent repentance demonstrates how reckless spending can reflect a heart focused on self-indulgence, while the father’s extravagant forgiveness reflects God’s grace.
9. **The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19–24)**  
   Jesus warns against storing up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and instead encourages storing up treasures in heaven. He declares, “No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and money,” drawing a direct link between wealth and spiritual allegiance.
10. **The Feeding of the Five Thousand (John 6:1–14)**  
    While not about wealth directly, Jesus multiplies a boy’s small offering of five loaves and two fish to feed thousands, demonstrating how God blesses and multiplies generosity, no matter how small the gift.
11. **The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16)**  
    This story of workers receiving equal wages regardless of their hours worked challenges conventional notions of fairness and entitlement, revealing God’s generosity and inviting His followers to trust His provision without comparison.
12. **The Cleansing of the Temple (Matthew 21:12–13)**  
    Jesus drives out money changers from the temple, declaring, “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.” This act demonstrates His anger at the misuse of money for exploitation and challenges believers to consider how financial practices align with God’s values.
13. **The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:12–24)**  
    Jesus teaches that true generosity involves giving to those who cannot repay—"the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." This parable highlights the heart of God’s kingdom, which values selfless generosity over transactional giving.
14. **The Tribute Coin (Matthew 17:24–27)**  
    When asked about paying the temple tax, Jesus provides a coin from a fish’s mouth to pay for both Himself and Peter. This miraculous provision underscores God’s sovereignty over material needs and challenges His followers to trust Him for provision.
15. **The Anointing at Bethany (John 12:1–8)**  
    Mary pours expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet as an act of worship, prompting Judas to criticize her for not selling it to give to the poor. Jesus defends her, saying, “You will always have the poor, but you will not always have me,” revealing the priority of honoring God above all else.
16. **The Sending of the Seventy-Two (Luke 10:1–12)**  
    When Jesus sends His disciples out to preach, He instructs them to take no money or possessions, teaching reliance on God’s provision and the hospitality of others. This act of faith serves as a lesson in detachment from material security.
17. **The Woman with the Alabaster Jar (Luke 7:36–50)**  
    A sinful woman anoints Jesus with costly ointment, prompting criticism for wasting valuable resources. Jesus praises her act as one of profound love and worship, showing that generosity flows from a heart overwhelmed by grace.
18. **The Parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 7:41–43)**  
    Jesus tells of two men forgiven of debts, one large and one small, to illustrate that those who are forgiven much love much. This parable connects financial forgiveness with spiritual gratitude and the heart's response to God’s grace.

\*\***Academic sources supporting the theses that Jesus uses money frequently as a tool to understand the posture of our hearts.**

1. Blomberg, Craig L. *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
   1. Craig Blomberg provides a comprehensive analysis of biblical teachings on wealth, including how Jesus frequently used money as a teaching tool.
2. Keller, Timothy. *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters.*New York: Dutton, 2009.
   1. Keller examines idolatry in modern culture and emphasizes Jesus' frequent use of money and possessions as metaphors for spiritual allegiance.
3. Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993.
   1. Keener provides historical and cultural context for Jesus' parables, including His use of money as a diagnostic for the heart.
4. Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels.* Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1992.
   1. This reference work includes detailed entries on Jesus’ parables and teachings, with emphasis on His frequent use of money and stewardship themes.

1. Deci and Ryan, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, 1985 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esv?ref=BibleESV.Je33.14-15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gesenius, Wilhelm. *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)