

## Bible Study for Medicine of the Person. August 2006

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### Motivation: the example of Jesus.

#### **Introduction.**

Rather than selecting one Bible passage to study, I have chosen to follow the theme of Motivation, looking at a number of incidents recorded in the Gospels which illustrate ways in which Jesus motivated others. Through the Gospel accounts of his life, a picture is built up of a man with great insight into his fellow human beings; all their weaknesses and failures; all their strengths and potential; a man with great understanding of the human psyche and an unerringly sure and sensitive touch in all his dealings.

One of the most amazing aspects of the relatively brief account in the Gospels of the life of Jesus, is how full it is of personal encounters; thumb-nail sketches, snapshots, faces picked out of the crowd, yet each person made to feel special, dealt with as a unique individual, understood and handled with such care by Jesus. Encounters that changed lives.

Paul Tournier, in 'A Doctor's Casebook', points out how much emphasis there is in Scripture on personal names, reflecting God's interest in each person, what Tournier calls "the personalism of the Bible". Everything Jesus did in his earthly life reinforced that fundamental truth, that God knows each by name. Jesus's person-to-person encounters brought healing, restored relationships and demonstrated the love and mercy which is the very essence of God's nature. He changed people's lives. How did Jesus **motivate** people to change?

#### **1. Motivating by challenge.**

##### **The calling of the first disciples** (Luke ch 5, vv1-11).

Luke gives some background to what appears in Matthew and Mark's accounts to be a sudden and unpremeditated response to Jesus's invitation to leave everything and become his followers. Luke's account suggests that Simon and Andrew, James and John already knew Jesus somewhat and he them. In this story, Jesus first of all asks for the use of their boat as a floating pulpit from which to teach the crowd. There follows the incident of the huge catch of fish, when, on Jesus's instruction, they put out to sea again despite their misgivings, having toiled all the previous night without success. Simon in particular is overawed by the magnitude of this event and falls at the Master's feet. At this point, Jesus issues the call to the fishermen to become "fishers of men". Motivation in this instance was by way of a **challenge**: a challenge to take up a new life, with all its inherent risks, sacrifices, danger, hardship; a new life of trust, faith and obedience.

Why did Simon and the others accept the challenge? Simon Peter, we know from later incidents in the Gospel narrative, was an impetuous character, hot-headed, liable to act first and think later! We can imagine him rising to this invitation with spontaneity and enthusiasm, inspired by the charismatic personality of Jesus, excited by the vision, fired by the challenge. Jesus chose the right moment and the right method to elicit a positive response. **Challenge** can be a powerful motivating force.

Is God **challenging** any aspect of our lives at the present time, to motivate us to change? Or should we be more aware of opportunities to challenge others and have the courage to do so?

## **2. Motivating by loving friendship.**

**The story of Zacchaeus** (Luke ch 19, vv 1-10).

Zacchaeus was a social outcast because of his job of tax collector for the occupying Roman government. It was expected that such a man would be lining his own pockets by overcharging his compatriots, paying what was due to Rome and keeping the surplus for himself. In the very familiar story, shunned and elbowed out by the crowd, but curious to see the famous teacher, Zacchaeus had run ahead and climbed up into a tree, to see without being seen. But he did not escape the notice of Jesus, who called him down and invited himself to his house. The general disapproval of the crowd was of no consequence; what mattered was taking the opportunity to reach out to this lost and lonely man. Jesus offered Zacchaeus friendship; gave him the chance to entertain him; offered him unconditional acceptance, a non-judgemental attitude; showed him kindness; made him feel wanted despite his shortcomings and made him feel loved for himself.

And this loving acceptance **motivated** Zacchaeus to want to change, to acknowledge his sins, to be an honest man, to make recompense for his past, to make a new start. The **motivating power of loving friendship**. A wonderful characteristic of Jesus, reflecting God's attitude of mercy and love towards all his people. Jesus saw into the heart of this lonely man; saw his most basic need for friendship and compassion and so gave him the motivation and the courage required to change his behaviour. "Today salvation has come to this house."

Does the unconditional **love and friendship** of God motivate us to change, in our perception of ourselves or in our relationship with another person?

## **3. Motivating by giving responsibility.**

**Sending out the seventy-two** (Luke ch10, vv 1-23).

In this Bible passage, Jesus appoints a larger group of his followers to go out into the surrounding villages in pairs as missionaries, proclaiming a message of peace to those who will listen, warning those who reject the message of a

judgement to come. Luke's account describes in some detail the preparation and teaching Jesus gives, endowing them with a sense of authority and confidence to act on his behalf. He instructs them in what to say, how to react both to success and to rejection, to "carry no purse or pack and to travel barefoot", relying on the hospitality offered to them. What a daunting task. What faith Jesus showed in them. How much trust he placed in each one. They had presumably all spent much time in his company, listening to his teaching, observing his healing ministry, talking with him and asking questions, travelling alongside him. But only by **doing** the work of missionaries could they really grow and test their faith. Jesus judged that the time was right to give them real **responsibility**, to show that he had faith in them, that he believed them capable of acting for him, that he could entrust his work to them. The **motivation of responsibility**.

And we learn that they returned 'jubilant' with success. Like the toddler learning to walk, who eventually lets go of mother's hand and takes his first steps, the disciples found that, in the power of the Spirit, they could indeed rise to their new-found responsibility and step out in faith. Luke records that, "At that moment, Jesus exulted in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and wise, and revealing them to the simple.' " His faith in them had been vindicated and he rejoiced.

How do we respond to the **responsibility** placed on each of us to demonstrate the love of God in all our dealings with other people, whether in our professional or personal lives? How may we motivate patients, pupils, colleagues, friends by encouraging them to accept appropriate responsibility?

#### **4. Motivating by forgiveness.**

**The woman taken in adultery** (John ch 8, vv 2-11).

In bringing this woman to Jesus, the Scribes and Pharisees believed they were presenting him with an inescapable dilemma. If he spared her life he would be condoning her behaviour and contradicting the Law of Moses, which laid down the death penalty for what was regarded as one of the gravest sins. On the other hand, if he were to order her to be stoned, it would contradict his teaching about the mercy and fatherly love of God and he would lose all credibility as the friend of sinners. They saw the woman as an object to be used to their own ends, a pawn in their game. Jesus saw her as a person with feelings, a frightened soul who merited compassion.

Jesus understood their motives and their harsh, judgemental, hypocritical attitude. "Let whichever of you is free from sin throw the first stone at her", he said, and one by one they went away, the eldest first. What Jesus offered to the woman was a chance to start again, which is what **forgiveness** provides. "Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go; do not sin again." This was no easy escape from punishment. The woman was not just to forget all about it and return to her old ways. Jesus showed he believed in her worth as a person and her capacity to change for the better.

**Forgiveness** can be a powerful motivating factor in bringing about change. Knowing oneself forgiven and able to make a fresh start is so liberating. I am reminded of a favourite illustration in Corrie Ten Boom's writing: God takes all our sins and throws them into the deepest lake, then puts up a sign, 'No fishing!' This assurance of divine forgiveness was one of the most important ways by which Jesus motivated people to change.

The **motivation of forgiveness**. Is it something we need to seek for ourselves or offer to someone else?

## 5. Motivating by example.

For this final section there is no specific Bible reference, because the entire life and death of Jesus constituted the perfect demonstration of **motivation by example**. Throughout every chapter of the Gospels we read of his perfect love, his unfailing kindness and understanding, his care and compassion, his ministry of healing and helping. Finally we read of his death at the hands of those he came to save, a life laid down without anger or recrimination: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Jesus, the Man for Others, the Son of God. He not only *told* of the love of God, he *demonstrated* that love in his whole life and death.

He drew people to himself by his sheer goodness and motivated them to want to be more like him themselves. His **example** of perfect living in accordance with the will of God enabled others to see the immense possibilities in their own lives and stimulated a desire to change and be better people.

The **motivation by example**: perhaps the most effective way of all. It is a sobering thought to remember that we are all providing an example to others by the way we live our lives, to patients, work colleagues, casual acquaintances, friends and (perhaps hardest of all) to our own family. Our lives can only stand up to that scrutiny if we live as Jesus did, in the power of the Holy Spirit.