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Motivation or Growth

By Freddy Davis

Parenting is not for wimps! Anyone who has ever been a parent knows that. When children are young, the difficulty relates mostly to taking care of their physical needs – but not entirely. There is also the responsibility to help them learn right from wrong.

In their youngest years, parents teach this by various kinds of correction – expressing approval and disapproval, teaching them various skills, and perhaps even using mild corporal punishments. However, as they grow older and are able to better understand not only verbal language but also the implications of various actions, the teaching must become more complex.

But what is the ultimate goal of the parent in doing this? All parents know there will come a time when the child grows up and leaves home. At that point they will have little or no ability to exercise influence any more. And that's the way it should be. It is the parent's responsibility to raise them in a way that when they leave they have all the tools and understanding they need to make good decisions as they move forward.

There is a principle here that also applies to churches. The church is the place where Christians should be prepared to go out into the world to effectively express Christ. In order for that to take place, Christians must become spiritually mature to the point that they are able to make right decisions that allow them to personally live rightly and influence society in ways that correspond to God's will.

At this point, a profound distinction needs to be made. Christianity is not like Islam in this respect. Muslims actually have the same desire as Christians as regards their desire to see the will of God (Allah) carried out in the world. The difference is that their efforts are done on the basis of a legalistic mandate. The radical ones attempt to enforce their faith by compulsion, while the non-radicals are simply strongly evangelistic. It is different for Christians, however. Our motivation is purely based on our love relationship with Christ.

But the truth is, it is difficult for Christians who are not prepared to carry out the purpose of God in their lives. The first part of that preparation has to do with the relationship itself. Those who don't maintain their fellowship with God will find it difficult to be motivated to share the love. The second part of preparation has to do with gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to live out their faith in a pluralistic, and often hostile, societal environment. It is at this point that individuals have to put effort into preparing themselves, and where churches have to de-

velop a vision and a plan for equipping their members to engage the world with the gospel.

Where We Currently Stand

Christian pollster George Barna has done American Christians a tremendous service with his polling. It lets us know the state of Christianity in America today, and provides us with what should be both a warning and motivation to become more diligent in our work for Christ in the world.

According to his latest polling, only 4% of the total American population has a biblical worldview. Perhaps we should say this another way for even more perspective. That is, 96% of the people now living in America **do not** have a biblical worldview.

The implications of this are both sad and obvious. Do you ever wonder why:

- sexual immorality is so rampant?
- there is so little public faith in our political institutions?
- there is so much societal turmoil?
- there is so much injustice in the justice system?
- there is so much crime?
- there is so much lying in the news media?
- there is so much corruption in the business world?
- the family structure is falling apart?

It is all because of the statistic above. When that percentage of the population has no real interest in following the beliefs, values and morality revealed by God in the Bible, this is exactly what you get.

But it is even worse than that. Barna's polling also shows that only 11% of Protestant Evangelical church attenders hold a biblical worldview. Let's also put that in perspective. This means that 89% of people who attend a Protestant Evangelical church do not hold a biblical worldview. Thus, the very people who claim to be most closely associated with a biblical worldview don't actually have one. This is the group that is most likely to be actively interested in expressing the Christian faith out in the world. No wonder things are as bad as they are.

The Work That Needs to Be Done

If Christians are going to make a difference in the world we live in, it is going to require a lot of people moving into a space that is a bit uncomfortable. There are people who actually enjoy joining the fray and mixing it up with those who oppose our faith. We should be grateful for those people as they are typi-

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call the ones who set an example for the rest of us (as long as they are doing it with a Christlike attitude).

But the work that needs to be done cannot be accomplished by those leaders alone. The task is much too large for that. It is going to require that every Christian find their place in the process and actively and intentionally engage society – both the person in the pew and vocational Christian leaders.

Application to the Person in the Pew

A church leader can encourage Christians in the church to do what they need to do to advance God's kingdom in the world, but they cannot do the work for them. When it comes to the bottom line, every believer must accept responsibility for the calling God has placed on their lives and get up and do the work.

And make no mistake about it, if you are truly a believer in Christ, you have been called to be a full time Christian to advance God's work in the world. Church leaders simply don't have the contacts out in the world that all the church members have. God's plan is for every believer to become equipped to do the work of ministry in the world, and then to get out and do it. A person's job and societal opportunities are not the calling God has given believers to do in the world. Rather, they are platforms God has given us in order to carry out the calling.

The calling (taking the gospel out into the world) is primary and operates from the platform.

To pull this off, Christians need to take responsibility for their own growth. They need to be active in church because that is the place God has given us to become equipped to carry out the calling and to strengthen and encourage one another. But they also need to be taking the initiative to learn the knowledge and skills to carry out their calling in the world. We can't simply go to church and wholly depend on the pastor to motivate us to do what is right.

Application to Vocational Ministers

As far as the work of vocational ministers (pastors, church staff, missionaries, evangelists, parachurch leaders, ...), Ephesians 4:11-13 is quite clear. The primary work of church leaders is not to "do the work of

ministry" out in the world, it is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry."

Most churches don't look at their leadership in that light, and all too many leaders themselves don't have this vision of their ministry. But that is the biblical model. Honestly, pulling that off is probably the most difficult thing to do in ministry, but it is the bottom-line job description – and it is the only thing that will make a massive impact on society.

And it can't be done simply by preaching a sermon or two each week and teaching a Bible study.

Pastors need to look at the growth of their members as something to promote at a much deeper level. It doesn't matter if many church members (perhaps even most) do not want to participate in a deeper level of preparation. You do it for the ones who are willing. In many ways, it is like the work of a parent who takes seriously the need to instill in their children self motivation to grow. It is important to try to motivate people from the outside, but the ultimate goal is to get them equipped and self-motivated.

So What Does this All Mean?

Let's harken back to the parenting illustration at the beginning. What is it that parents ultimately want for their children? And what

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is it that the children themselves want as they get older. It is essentially the same thing. We want our kids to grow to become competent and self-motivated adults.

Motivation can come from a couple of different sources. One is external. It is certainly good to have people pour into our lives and encourage us to become better, but that is only second best. If we always must have someone pushing us, what happens in those times when there is no one there to do it? We will probably stumble and fall.

The best motivation comes from an internal source. That is where true growth is demonstrated. With that, we are able to go forward even if there is no one there to push us.

And spiritually, that is especially important. Christians need to get to the place where they are mature enough to engage the world for Christ based on their own spiritual maturity. And it is the church leaders who have been given the task by God to help them get there. What do you need to do to fulfill your part in the process?