

Motivation Techniques

1 Peter 1:17-21

Introduction

As a parent, one thing that Alison and I have struggled with at times is how do we motivate our daughters for good behaviour? I'm sure we're not the only parents who struggle with this and indeed it's not only parents. Teachers receive training in how to encourage good behaviour and minimise poor behaviour. Schools will often have a policy concerning behaviour which outlines what will happen when students do the wrong thing. I dare say that it would not be part of many schools today but I attended schools where corporal punishment was handed out. I first received the cane in grade 4 as a 9 year old in a State School and then the strap far more times than I can count when I was at a Catholic boys school. At that school one of our wood work teachers had a length of wood which he would use to enact discipline. He called his piece of wood, 'Milo' because 'It's amazing what a difference Milo makes.'

Looking more broadly than schools, we note that work places and sports clubs often expect people to agree with standards and their are consequences should those standards not be met. Finally, as a society we will seek to reward good and upright living through awards and ceremonies and we punish bad behaviour. Society may punish un-desired actions by giving 'the look' of social disapproval through to the formal imposition of fines and to the removal of our freedom by imprisonment.

Generally speaking motivating people to particular behaviour can be considered to fall into two categories: First, people are motivated by being mindful of the consequences, positively or negatively, of their actions. So, children may be told that they will be taken to the park if they just sit quietly during Aunt Madge's afternoon tea, or they may be warned that there will be no game time if they don't stop fighting with their siblings; Second, people may be motivated to desired behaviour by calling upon the identity of the person. I can still remember my Catholic school motto, "My body's big, my brain is small, I come to school to play football." While I say that jokingly, St

Laurence's College did indeed have a reputation for being a rugby school producing a number of state representatives and Wallabies. While it wasn't explicit as our motto there was an unspoken expectation that to be a Laurie's boy meant that you took sport, and particularly rugby, more seriously than many other school activities.

This morning we're going to see how Peter uses both of these motivational techniques, that of external punishment or reward and internal identity, to encourage his readers to live lives which honour God.

Be Mindful of Consequences (v. 17)

Starting with verse 17, we read, "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear." Peter here is using imagery which he has used earlier in his letter. Peter had said in verse 3 and 4, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you." Then in verse 14 Peter had described his readers as "obedient children." So Peter here is affirming that his readers are indeed children of God but provides extra information about the character of God the Father. Specifically, Peter says that God the Father is One who judges each person's work impartially, that is, fairly and rightly.

In terms of motivating right behaviour Peter is reminding his readers that they are to be mindful of the consequences of their actions. While the consequences could be good for right actions or bad for wrong behaviour, the context puts the emphasis on being mindful that God punishes wrong behaviour, "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."

We are not told what the bad consequences for wrong behaviour are but there is no hint that Peter is suggesting that wrong behaviour would lead to people being excluded from God's family (and indeed the next section would go against that thought). Christians are to live in reverent awe of our Heavenly Father, fearfully

mindful of God's judgement upon sin and wrong-doing. We can't just look at people outside the church and say how bad they are while thinking that because God is our Father he won't discipline us for sin and wrong-doing. Our Father is an impartial judge and we can expect discipline.

I don't think it's healthy for Christians to quickly cry out, "Why me?!" whenever they get sick or have a problem but I do encourage us to pray on a regular basis, the prayer from Psalm 139, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." We should fearfully ask God to help us address sin in our lives. And yes, if we're sick or suffering other difficulties it's appropriate for us to humbly ask God, "Is there a particular reason I am suffering in this way? Heavenly Father, are you disciplining me? If so, please reveal this to me so that I can confess my sin and live a life that honours you."

So then, as all societies in the world require a system for the punishment of wrong-doing, so God motivates right behaviour by using negative consequences for sin and bad behaviour.

However, Peter's use of external motivation, that of emphasising consequences, is given far less space than the second way of motivating people, that of calling upon the person's identity.

Be Mindful of Value (vv. 18-21)

Peter now continues his thinking but instead of emphasising more reasons why his readers should be obedient in the face of God being an impartial judge, instead Peter draws attention to how it is that his readers came to be declared God's children. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

In these verses Peter talks about how God the Father had always planned to send the Messiah since before the creation of the world. We talked some weeks ago about how the gospel was always God's Plan A but here the emphasis is on what God's Plan A achieved.

God's Plan A resulted in us being "redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors." To redeem something means to buy something back. If a person goes to a pawn shop and sells a bicycle there there is normally a period of time when the seller can buy the bicycle back. The price they pay to buy the object back is the redeeming price. Today we think in terms of objects being redeemed but through history this concept has often applied to people. When people found themselves in economic hardship they may have chosen or been forced to sell themselves into slavery. People were also commonly taken as slaves by raiding parties and as a result of conflict. The ancient world would have associated redemption with people being bought back from slavery.

But what are these people being redeemed from? Peter says that it is "from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors." While it's not politically correct to criticise other cultures and beliefs, Peter says that the traditional beliefs that his readers had were empty, they had no ability to deal with any problem of sin and barrier between them and God.

Missionaries, and indeed all Christians, who find themselves dealing with people of other cultures should do their best to understand and respect the culture of the people their engaged with and adapt to the culture as appropriate. However, we do this while not forgetting that it is only in Christ where true hope is found. I was speaking with some missionary friends in Nepal and they know the language fluently, they dress like locals and act like locals in many ways. However, when my friends talk of the fear that the farmers have in their village, "Will we get a good crop, maybe we should have sacrificed a bit more to appease the gods?" Then they remember the empty traditions that dominate the thinking of so the people there and why the message of Christ's unique and sufficient payment is required.

Peter continues to talk about what God's Plan A was and this should serve as an internal motivator for his readers as they understand more their identity and value in God's sight. The cost of Peter's readers' redemption was "the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." Not only was the Messiah a perfect lamb, but the pre-existent nature of the Christ is indicated by Peter saying, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." It wasn't just that God had planned to send the Messiah before the creation of the world but that the Messiah was in existence and was now being revealed.

How is it that this should act to increase the internal motivation of Peter's readers, and ourselves, to live lives which honour God? Peter wants his readers to know how precious they are in God's sight and how they were redeemed at such a high cost. If this is what your Heavenly Father is willing to do see you be his, surely you will want to live a life that lines up with our identity. Peter concludes his paragraph by indicating that this actually is the case and so this provides greater hope that their internal motivation will continue to impact their lives and their behaviour, "Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Conclusion

In conclusion, yes we should be mindful that God is our Heavenly Father as well as being a just judge and so we should be careful to take sin and wrong-doing seriously. However, rather than simply fearing judgement imposed upon us, we should be internally motivated by seeing our incredible value in God's eyes by the lengths that our Heavenly Father would go to to make us his own, determining his plan even before we had shown interest in him.