

*How can I keep myself in the game?*

*Introspection: What motivates me?*

Motivating oneself to stay in the game of learning can be a problem. Of course, some students are just naturally motivated from within. They love to learn new things. Others depend upon outsiders to keep them moving. It has long been true that many classroom students expect, or perhaps need, the teacher to motivate them to learn. Research at the University of Michigan indicates “Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher’s ability to maintain the interest that brought students to the course in the first place.”<sup>1</sup> While the instructor may be willing to supply their need, it is unreasonable to expect any teacher to be able to motivate every student. In typical schools, there are other factors that assist teachers in keeping students moving through the material. One of these is the school’s system of grading. It provides an obvi-

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1 Ericksen, S. C. “*The Lecture.*” *Memo to the Faculty*, no. 60, (1978), Ann Arbor: Center for Research on Teaching and Learning, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Michigan.

ous, even public, means of measuring student progress against course content and comparing them with their peers. Desiring respect from their peers may also keep some from doing very poorly. In any case, students who leave high school for the university may find that these outside factors do not have as much impact on their progress because everything is less personal. In college, students are expected to keep up with the agenda on their own. Of course, mom and dad have to be answered to if they are paying the bills; consequently, they also serve as motivators. All of these outside factors, and others not named, can be placed in a category called *extrinsic* motivation, they are from the outside, or external.

Thankfully, some students don't need such outside inspiration. They are naturally interested in learning and have an innate ability to motivate self. Whatever attitudes and natural desires drive them can be classed *intrinsic*. That is, of or relating to the nature of oneself. It is by far the very best type of motivation. Students who can cultivate within themselves convictions and attitudes that will intrinsically motivate them will get much more out of study, will do much better making the journey of life, and will have a whole lot more fun doing it. How to intrinsically motivate self is a vitally important subject to consider, especially as you engage in individual, self-directed study.

That is really a main focus of this book. What has been and will be said about motivation is true for any kind of study – school, work, recreation – and is certainly true for study of the Bible. Every disciple of Jesus must be able and willing to engage in individual, self-directed study in order to grow in faith and become like Jesus Christ. While the matters discussed in this book will help a classroom student, our focus is primarily on the self-directed student. In the area of self-study, a lack of sufficient motivation to see a project through to completion will eventually destroy the prospect of any real learning. So how can one motivate self?

### Factors That Motivate

It would be nice if there were a simple strategy for self-motivation that would work for all, but there is not. There are many factors that affect a student's desire to learn, and not all learners are motivated by the same things.<sup>2</sup> There has been some research done to identify the key factors that enhance a student's self-motivation.<sup>3</sup> Some of these are:

- Subject material in which the student can find personal meaning and value
- An open and positive attitude toward the study
- Study tasks that challenge but are not too difficult
- Frequent, positive feedback confirming the student can complete the course of study successfully.
- A feeling that the student is a valued member of a learning community

Let's spend a few minutes considering each of these.

### Studying That Which Has Personal Value

Studies have shown that university students are more highly motivated when the class they attend meets the personal needs for which they enrolled in the course.<sup>4</sup> Needs vary by the individual.

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2 Bligh, D. A. *What's the Use of Learning?* Devon, England: Teaching Services Centre, University of Exeter, 1971, and Sass, E. J., *Motivation in the College Classroom: What Students Tell Us* (1989), *Teaching of Psychology*, 16(2), 86-88.

3 Lowman, J. *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984; Lucas, A. F. *Using Psychological Models to Understand Student Motivation*, In M. D. Svinicki (ed.), *The Changing Face of College Teaching. New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 42. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990; Weinert, F. E., and Kluwe, R. H. *Metacognition, Motivation and Understanding*. Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum, 1987; and Bligh, D. A. *What's the Use of Learning?* Devon, England: Teaching Services Centre, University of Exeter, 1971.

4 McMillan, J. H., and Forsyth, D. R., *What Theories of Motivation Say About Why Learners Learn*. In R. J. Menges and M. D. Svinicki (eds.), *College Teaching: From Theory to Practice. New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, no. 45. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.

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The student may want to earn a degree, qualify for a certain job, complete some task, acquire a new skill, or just have a new experience. Or maybe completing the course represents simply meeting a challenge head on and succeeding. Whatever the need, a student is more likely to stay with a study that addresses some personal need.

Surely the same is true for those who study independently and must rely on themselves for motivation. Asking, “What should I study?” gets to the heart of the issue. More, why should I study this subject at this time? What will I get out of it? Of what value is it to me? How does this study I have chosen address my personal needs?

Such questions bring us face to face with the issue of true need. Perhaps it would be worthwhile to consider whether your perception of need is a reflection of your true need? A personal illustration may help. When my wife and I moved to Prague in 1992 to teach the Bible, I met many Czechs who knew nothing of Jesus Christ, or the Bible for that matter. Under Communist rule for fifty years, they came for study with me largely out of curiosity – curiosity about Americans and the Bible as a book of literature. Since they knew little or nothing of Christ and what He had done for them, they didn’t feel a need to learn about salvation. In fact, several told me that though they had lived under Communism, a godless philosophy, for decades, that system had lost its captive power. Now they were free, and did not need a Savior.

Having long believed that when I study the Bible with someone it is best to start where they are, I began by asking where they wanted to start. Almost always the answer was, “Why, in the beginning, of course. Where else do you start with a book?” Their perception of their need was very different from what I knew their need to be. They needed desperately to cultivate a saving faith, but they felt only a need to satisfy curiosity about the book and its teacher.