

## Grab the Opportunities

The trial has lasted six very long days. It is your first time serving on a jury. In just a few minutes you will go into a room with eleven other men and women to decide “did he do it or didn’t he?”

The prosecutor is giving his summation. He walks up to the jury box, maintains direct eye contact and says, “What you need to determine are three critical factors as you make your verdict: Motive, did the defendant have good reason to do what he is accused of doing? Means, did he have a way to do what he is accused of doing? Opportunity, did he have a specific time and place where he could do it? If all three of those are present, then your only conclusion is that he must have done what he has been accused of doing.”

Those three factors can be applied to practically anything that we do in life. They can also be applied to what we do as Christians, specifically in terms of world evangelism. Motive is the driving force inside us that causes us to do what we do. It comes from a mixture of emotions and will and intellect. Sometimes it’s hard to figure out exactly what our motivation is. Motives are so deeply part of who we are that they are at the essence of our being.

When it comes to evangelism, that is convincing other people to become Christians, motives can vary greatly. Some people are motivated by guilt. They feel badly that they have so much when other people have so little, that they know Jesus when other people have never heard of him. Guilt can be a very powerful motivator, although it is far less than the best of motivations.

Some may be motivated by the lostness of others. The realization that without a personal salvation through Jesus Christ millions of people will never go to heaven and are lost forever is a very powerful motivation to evangelism. Matters that sometimes seem so important to us do not seem like much when they are compared to matters of heaven and hell.

Some of us as Christians are motivated by

gratitude. God sent his Son to die for us. We have thousands of great blessings from God. In thanksgiving to God how can we do anything less than give back to God and to others? So gratitude constantly motivates our involvement in evangelism.

And then there are some that are not particularly motivated at all. They really don’t care about missions or evangelism. It isn’t that they are bad people. They just have other interests. Evangelism is simply not a high priority.

Several years ago I ran into a person from Wooddale Church who said to me, “You won’t be seeing me at church for the next few weeks. I read that you’ll be talking about missions, evangelism and giving. That’s just not my kind of stuff. I’ll come back after it’s over.”

The greatest motivation for evangelism is the central motivation of the Christian life. Jesus stated in Matthew 22:37-39, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the most powerful pair of motives for anything.

The most powerful motivation in the world is the love of God, and the second part of that motivation is love for other people. Both drive us to evangelism. When we love God we love those whom God loves and “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” When we love our neighbors, whether our neighbors are defined as those that are across the street or those that are around the world, we want the best for them and the best is Jesus Christ.

What would you say motivates you? What is really important to you? If you love God with all your heart, soul and mind then you will love your neighbor and you will be motivated to evangelize as many people as possible.

A second significant factor for Christian involvement in world evangelism is means. If we

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have motives without means we never accomplish anything. A man may have wanted to shoot his cousin but without access to a gun he couldn't do it. Years ago I was interested in buying Wal-Mart stock but I didn't have any money to invest so nothing happened. Motivation to evangelize without a way to do it won't win anyone.

Let's suppose that we truly are motivated. We really love God and we love other people and we want people to become Christians. What could we use to make it happen?

The list may include time. We're all busy, but we could give an hour a month, maybe even an hour a week. How about some vacation time for missionary ministry in Minneapolis, Chicago or Mexico City? Or, it may be relationships. Eighty-five percent of adults who become Christians say they did so through the influence of a friend. So the relationships that we have in all the contexts of life are one of the primary means we have for evangelism.

What about retirement? A friend of mind, almost on the day of his retirement, left this country for two years to go to Asia for missionary service. He could have had it very easy back here at home, but he chose something that turned out to be one of the most fulfilling and best decisions of his entire life.

Or it may be prayer. All of us have a pretty short list of the top three or five items for which we pray. Since I'm someone who writes out my prayer list, I actually have a week-by-week record so I know what I pray for and whom I pray for. I'm not proud of it, but I'll admit to you the number one person I pray for is me. And I also pray for you. I pray for my family, too. Maybe that's your case as well. You pray about your job and your family and your health and finances. How about adding one person who is not a Christian to your list? What about a country or a specific missionary?

Recently I met a nationally known author. She was very clear and direct that she does not believe in Jesus Christ. She is not a Christian. We talked for about an hour and a half. The last time I saw her I was getting on an elevator and she said, "One more thing before you go. Please pray for me." Isn't that interesting? I've not seen her since and I'm not sure I'll ever see her again. But I've added her to my prayer list.

In II Corinthians 8:1-12 there is a powerful conversation that goes on between St. Paul and the Corinthian people in which he talks to them about the use of their means. It goes like this:

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in the grace of giving.

I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

In other words, God is saying, "Let's be realistic about this. What do you have available? Use that as a means to fulfill the motivation." There are some people who financially are poor, but they are rich in terms of time and relationships and prayer. There are other people who financially have a great deal. So whatever it is, just use that particular means. If we follow the biblical guidelines in II Corinthians 8, the big deal is not the

amount of money that people give to help others. Any use of means as a connection to this motivation of loving God and others is to be used in order to fulfill the motivation that we have.

But that's still not enough. Motivation and means without some opportunity won't accomplish anything. Picture the man who really wants to get married. He's highly motivated. He has reserved the wedding chapel, has a marriage license and has talked to the pastor. He has the means. It's just that no woman is interested in him. He has no opportunity.

When it comes to world evangelism there are lots of opportunities to grab. Teachers, office managers, electrical engineers, maintenance workers, builders, medical workers, computer specialists are just some of the people that are needed both in the United States and overseas. The length of time could be one or two weeks, one or two years or long term. Teens, singles, married couples and families, retirees can all find opportunities for ministry.

There's a great line in Colossians 4:5 that encourages Christians to "make the most of every opportunity." Let me tell you, there are hundreds and hundreds of opportunities. Make the most of every opportunity.

Are you motivated? Do you love God and do you love other people? Do you have the means? A lot of means or minimal means, but some means? Will you grab that opportunity? Consider what your part and involvement may be.

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