

MONDAY MANNA

3 May 2021

THE WISDOM OF EXAMINING MOTIVES

By Rick Boxx

One day my friend, Don, informed me that he had determined to begin acquiring businesses in related fields so he would be able to sell his customers more products and services – and be able to make more money. More sales can translate into more revenue, which usually means more profits.

So, the next time I saw Don, I asked how his acquisition strategy was going. He informed me that before putting it into action, he had discussed the strategy with his board. One of his wisest board members asked Don an important and profound question, one that put a new perspective on his plans: "Are you doing this for your ego, or for the good of the company?"

That simple but penetrating question caused Don to honestly re-examine his expansion strategy and admit it had been based on only one factor: his pride, his own ego. "More is better" sounds good, but it is not always true. Would he be able to maintain the same level of quality, both in terms of products and services? If not, would "bigger" be the best decision? After careful reflection, Don chose to dramatically modify his plan.

In business, we often focus on the "what" and the "how," but it is just as important to ask the "why" questions: What are the motivations behind our decisions? Why are we determined to pursue the goals and objectives we have established? What is really in our hearts? Fortunately for Don, he had a wise, experienced board member who challenged him to answer those questions.

The Bible has some interesting things to say about the heart – our inner motivations – and the value of seeking out wise counsel to make certain we are making decisions with the proper motives:

Beware of self-deception. When we really want something, our feelings and desires can get in the way of sound reasoning. It becomes easy to rationalise our decisions, and we might not even be aware we are doing it. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* (Jeremiah 17:9). *"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life"* (Proverbs 4:23).

Our motives are as important as our actions. Although we may be cautious to avoid doing the wrong things, it is also possible to do seemingly right things for the wrong reasons. From God's perspective, why we do things is as important as what we do. *"All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord"* (Proverbs 16:2). *Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'"* (Proverbs 20:9).

Sound, trusted counsel can safeguard against a deceiving heart. As Don did above, soliciting the counsel of friends who care about us and are honest to point out problems can protect us from misguided judgment. *"For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure"* (Proverbs 11:14). *"The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice"* (Proverbs 12:15).

It takes wisdom to be willing to accept counsel contrary to what we want to hear. We all have wrong motives at times. A wise leader seeks and listens to discerning advisors. *"Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but counsellors of peace have joy"* (Proverbs 12:20)

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

Have you ever had an experience of determining a course of action, only to have someone question your decision – or even your motivations, as was the case with Don? If so, what was that situation? Did it result in your reconsidering your plans or even changing them?

Why is it so difficult to seek the counsel of others once a decision has been made, and even to listen when the advice being given runs counter to what we would like to hear?

All this talk about motives and motivations – why do they even matter? Is it not enough to pursue profit and success, at any cost? Why or why not?

How does a person determine whom they should go to for counsel and advice? Can you think of any specific traits to look for in wise counsellors?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 12:5, 13:1, 15:22, 19:20,27, 20:18, 21:2, 27:19, 28:14

Mark 7:20-23

Romans 1:21