

Episode 014

Understanding Motivations

The Power of Motivation

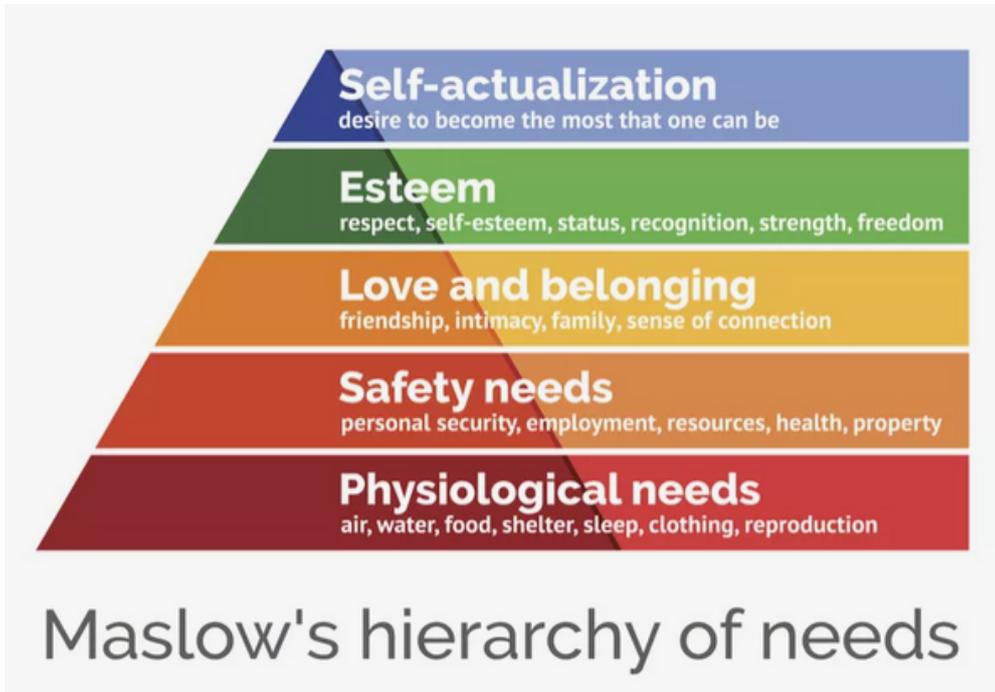
What is motivation? Motivation is the force, either internal or external, which stimulates a person to action.

The greatest and most challenging task in the world is to fulfil the Great Commission. The task is so great it requires our lives. The single greatest need in fulfilling the Great Commission is motivating ourselves and others. Unless we are motivated to evangelism, to become disciples, to make disciples, etc. not much will be accomplished. When we are motivated, we will overcome challenging obstacles and to reach for greater heights. One of the great challenges of leadership is to have a motivated group of people. When people are motivated, many exciting things can happen.

A Framework for Understanding Motivation

To help better understand motivations, I will use the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a framework. Only because it is generally well-known and provides a reasonable means to explain how motivations are formed. Though I will modify it to a more biblical perspective.





Physiological needs are the basic and essential needs of any human being to function. This includes air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing and even reproduction. Safety needs is the next level referring to elements that contribute to a sense of security and stability. It includes living in and operating within a safe and predictable environment. Having a sufficiently secure means of income, adequate personal resources, adequate health etc. We should realise that the perception of what is adequate can differ greatly from person to person. For example, to some having any amount of savings is considered adequate. To some, even a million dollars is inadequate.

The next higher level of love and belonging refer to social needs. The need to be loved, experiencing meaningful friendships and intimacy, being part of a community. Esteem involves the desire to feel good about self. It has 2 parts. The first involves self-esteem, a sense of self-worth, self-confidence, dignity, freedom and such. The second involves receiving esteem from other. That our worth, achievements and contributions are recognised by others.



These first 4 levels were defined by Maslow as Deficiency Needs. Deficiencies in these areas stimulate motivation to meet those needs. Usually, deficiencies at lower levels stimulate more urgent motivations since the needs are more essential. Once those deficits are adequately met, we tend to focus on the next higher level of needs.

The highest level is self-actualization. Self-actualization is about the sense of personal fulfilment, the desire to better oneself, to fulfil one's potential. Individuals may focus on this according to their priorities. For some, it may be becoming an ideal parent, or achieving economic, academic or athletic success. For some, it may be accomplishments in the creative, social or political fields. Maslow defined this highest level as Growth Needs where motivation can increase as those needs are met. A person who has had such experiences begin to desire more of it.

The basic idea of Maslow's hierarchy is that people will tend to progress from a lower level to another higher level. Though it does not mean that every aspect of the lower level needs to be fulfilled before advancing to a higher level.

I propose three modifications on the Maslow's hierarchy. Firstly, Self-actualization should also encompass be the desire to be the most that one can be in God. This provides for godly desires and goals. It is usually at this level of motivation that the greatest good and outcomes are achieved. Thus, this is the most desirable level for a leader and their people to function at.

Secondly, the motivation to operate at higher levels are provided by our Mindset of values, perspectives and convictions. The point of difference with Maslow's theory is that it is not the fulfilment of lower levels that motivates a person to meet needs at the higher level. It is their mindset. It is a person's mindset which motivates a person to prioritise certain levels which they aspire towards. For example, a person who cares most about financial security will aim to the level of Safety Needs and even neglect the higher levels even though they could aim higher. To the Japanese samurai, honour was everything. They would do anything to preserve their honour, including giving of their lives. This means they are willing to sacrifice all the other levels for the fourth level of Esteem.



Thirdly, it is important to recognise that the determination to prioritise any specific level over others is dependent on the firmness of their mindset. The motivation to operate at higher levels of the Maslow's hierarchy can be undermined when there is a needs-deficiency at lower levels. Is their mindset firm enough to handle the pain of need-deficiency at lower levels? Scriptures support such a view.

Matthew 19:29 (NIV84)

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Scripture often urges believers to live according to God's principles despite suffering lack in the Safety and Physiological Needs levels. Or even when their esteem before others suffers. It means individuals can adjust their mindsets to overcome needs deficiencies.

An example is Charles Spurgeon the famous preacher in the 19th century England. Spurgeon is known as an influential and exceptional preacher who made a significant impact in his time. He was also a prolific writer, producing an autobiography, commentaries, devotionals, magazines, poetry and hymns. All this while suffering from chronic depression and ill health for a large part of his life. He had Bright's disease (a kidney disease), gout, rheumatism amongst other things. In fact, as his health deteriorated, he could not preach a third of year. Yet even in his times of recuperation he did not remain idle but produced many writings. He finally succumbed to his ill health at 57 years old. The key to his productivity despite significant health issues and even opposition he faced in his ministry, was his conviction of God's call and his determination to be faithful. His mindset made a huge difference.

Other examples include some famous artists like Vincent van Gogh who lived for their art and died in poverty. Obviously, they placed low priority on Physiological and Safety needs with their highest priority on Esteem and Self-actualization. It was sufficient for them to get by with minimal degrees of the Physiological and Safety needs. That was their mindset.

However, when a person's mindset is unable to handle the need-deficiencies at a lower level, they will refocus and be more motivated to deal with the lower-level needs first.



What Are the Implications?

As the greatest good and outcomes can result from motivations arising out of the Self-actualization level, it is desirable for leaders to aspire to reach and maintain motivations at that level. The more leaders can understand how to reach that level for themselves and others, the more motivated team they will have.

Leaders must be conscious of de-motivators in our own lives and our people. How existing or new situations can undermine motivations because needs-deficiency are created. Hence, typical life situations such as health issues, loss of job, family issues, etc can significantly compromise a person's ability to function at a higher level. Being conscious of such dynamic possibilities enables a leader to be proactive in adjusting their expectations and in ensuring the appropriate motivational approach is used.

The most important key to any person's motivation is their mindset and the firmness of it. Which is why Scriptures prioritises the values, perspectives and convictions of believers so highly. The more leaders can nurture the appropriate mindset and increase its firmness, the greater and more consistent motivation can be harnessed. Hence, leaders should be discerning of inappropriate, unbiblical, ungodly mindsets which undermine motivation towards biblical lifestyles and mission. Further, the lack of firmness creates a susceptibility towards needs-deficiencies. Those with such weakness are often pulled down from the greater levels of Self-Actualization motivation.

Developing a Better Motivational Mindset

As explained, our mindset is a critical part of our motivation. So let's examine some key values, perspectives and convictions that increase our motivations as a Christ-follower.



Values

- Biblical and godly values. God Himself is highly motivated to be righteous and do good. Thus, the more we assimilate biblical and godly values, we too will resonate more of God's heart and become more and more motivated as God is. Thus, we will become more motivated for the right and godly reasons.
- Love for God. When we love God, we relate with God and seek to please Him. This value draws us closer to God and catches His heart. It will motivate us to grow and serve Him more, for His glory.
- Love for others. A love for others will motivate us to do better to reach out to, to serve and bless others. It will motivate us to compassionately go further, the extra mile, for the sake of others.
- Faith in God. Faith motivates us to believe for greater things in God. For God's vision and purposes are greater than ours. As we trust Him more and grasp more of His purposes, it lifts our vision for greater outcomes.
- Excellence. As God is a God of excellence, it motivates us to aim for excellence in what we do. It motivates us to be better in ourselves, in what we are able to achieve.
- Justice. This motivates us to seek to right the wrongs, to bring what is fair.

Perspectives

Following are some key perspectives that complement biblical values to motivate us:

- God is sovereign. This perspective provides us hope that everything will eventually turn out well, even through the darkest times. Hence, we remain motivated in what we believe God has called us to.
- God is good and wants the best for us. This provides us a sense of security. It helps us trust in what God is allowing us to go through, even when we don't understand. We can remain motivated to press on towards a better outcome because we are secure in Him.
- God wants us to do our part and God will do His part. This motivates us to do our best, trusting that God will do His part to help us in what we cannot do.
- God rewards the faithful. This motivates us, knowing that we will be rewarded as we remain true to Him and His calling for us. This provides an incentive for us to pursue significance.



Convictions

Godly convictions arise from godly values and perspectives. It is the depth of convictions in our values and perspectives that enable us to have firmness in our mindset. The deeper our convictions anchor us in what we believe, the better we are able to withstand bigger storms in our lives. The deeper our convictions, the higher we can rise against the challenges. The stronger our convictions, the greater the motivation we can access. To understand more about building stronger convictions, look up the episode on [Building Deeper Convictions](#).

Conclusion

By modifying the Maslow's Hierarch of Needs, we have provided a useful framework to appreciate how we can be motivated or demotivated. This framework emphasises the crucial role of our mindset of values, perspectives and convictions and its firmness on the level of need we prioritise our motivations on. A wise leader will use such a framework to raise the motivations of others to the higher levels of self-actualization.



Discussion Questions

These questions could be done personally or as part of a group discussion.

1. How valid do you think Mindset is as the key consideration for prioritising the level of need? Why?
2. Why do you think that firmness of mindset influences our determination to pursue a certain level of need despite the pain/cost we may incur?
3. How can you use the concepts learnt here in motivating others?

Actionable Steps

Following questions are to prompt us on suitable actions. Importantly, come up with steps you will take to make progress. Give them datelines and priority.

1. Can you identify 1-2 areas that can significantly impact your live if you have increased motivation?
2. What mindset of values, perspectives and convictions do you need to improve or modify to increase your motivation in 1 or 2 key areas?
3. What steps can you take to increase the firmness of your mindset in those areas?





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