



August 17, 2026

MOTIVES MATTER

Why do our motives matter? They are important because they are at the core of our behavior. They are what motivate us to act and react the way we do. Character is determined by motives. I Corinthians 4:5 states that God will expose the hidden motives of our hearts and we will be judged by them. Psalm 139 declares that God knows everything about us, even the words we are going to say before we say them. Nothing can be hidden from his sight. Jesus gives an example of exposing the inner motives of the heart when he calls the Pharisees hypocrites because they pride themselves on their righteous rule keeping but are really full of selfish ambition rather than caring about the poor and suffering. Their actions may have looked good and impressed other people but their hearts were in the wrong place and that is what matters to God.

So asking myself why I do things and asking God to search me and show me my true motives helps me to discern what's in my heart. Why do I get so defensive when I feel falsely accused or misunderstood? Why is it more important to be right in a disagreement than to preserve the relationship? Why can't I be more accepting and less critical? Is pleasing people or staying in my comfort zone keeping me from speaking up for truth and justice? Is it because my actions and reactions are motivated by ego, fear, anger, self-preservation, or wanting control? When I

acknowledge my true character the next step is asking for God's transforming power to create a new clean heart in me because his primary motive is for me and all of his children to be like him.

What is God like? We all know the answer: God is LOVE. That means his primary motive is for us to be redeemed, reconciled and renewed; living in union with him and each other. His goal is to remove all that keeps us apart and destroys the life of unity and wholeness he intends for his children. Tim Mackie of the *Bible Project* podcast defines love as "the settled purpose to act in a way that brings about the well-being of another person regardless of how I feel or they respond." It is perpetual self-giving; the very opposite of my natural human self-centeredness. I Corinthians 13 makes it clear that if anything I do is not motivated by love it is useless, no matter how good it looks. Who can live up to such a standard? Only Jesus. Only by letting Jesus live in me can he make me a new person by creating in me a changed heart motivated by love.

Knowing that God's loving motive for each one is to do what is best for our well-being has been a tremendous help for our family these past months. His caring presence has given us the strength and peace we've needed to get through the challenges of our daughter, Kristin's, serious health issues, her son, Jake's, harrowing rescue from a life-threatening situation and the unexpected death of Mac's brother. We were able to trust that he knew everything that was happening and to recognize that these trials were an opportunity to grow in faith and see God at work.

Not only is getting to know my motives and God's motives important, but seeking to understand the stories behind the attitudes and actions of others can help bridge the divides that separate us from each other. The recent sessions offered at our church based on the study called *The After Party* focused on contrasting the motives of the Combatant, the Exhausted, the Cynic with the Disciple when it comes to the political divisions in our relationships. The key priorities of the disciple are humility and hopefulness. A disciple's focus is to be on preserving Christ like loving relationships versus winning an argument, insisting on being right or feeling hopeless and giving up. The greatest reason for hope is because we are assured that God's motive of love and reconciliation wins!

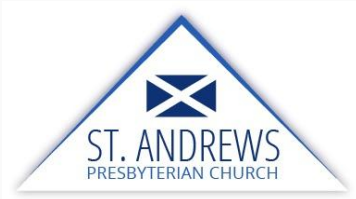
Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Test us and know our anxious thoughts. See if there is any self centered, untrusting,

prideful motive in us and motivate us in your way of self giving love.

Create in us a pure heart and renew a loving spirit in us.
(My paraphrase of Psalm 139:23 and 24 and Psalm 51:19)

~Written by Marilyn Whisner

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