

Watch Out for This Fruitless, Deceptive Motive

One night I opened an email from a woman I didn't know who thanked me for a blog post I had written. She mentioned that a certain ministry—one I had never heard of—had shared my work. *I wonder if others have shared this post too*, I thought, and I immediately searched online for the article's title.

My eyes widened in surprise at the resulting list of individuals and organizations who had shared my writing. As I read their glowing comments, a grin spread over my face. The grin got wider with every click, tap and swipe. I silently wondered how many people had read what I had written. Hundreds? Thousands? My heart swelled with pride, until suddenly I remembered something.

The article was about hardship and struggle. I had written it after God opened my eyes to a particular truth from Scripture that had deeply resonated with me. With tears streaming down my face, I had written with burdened, hurting people in mind, thinking, *Oh, how I long for others to see and delight in this truth!*

But the tears in my eyes had long since dried up. Now, instead of tearing up, I was grinning. Rather than imagining the burdens carried by individuals on the other side of my screen, I was imagining how *many* people had gathered there. I had gone from Christlike serving to devilish self-exaltation.

Sadly, this isn't the only time I've detected this progression in myself. What begins as a desire to serve others, share my gifts or give of myself sacrificially often morphs—without me even realizing it—into a desire to serve myself, receive recognition, and get validation.

Author and pastor Kevin DeYoung puts it this way: “Do I want

money and recognition? Do I feel the need for validation? Do I like it when I look successful? Or do I want people to learn more about Christ and honor Him with their lives? Yes, yes, yes and yes. I pray that my heart is mostly concerned with the last yes, but sometimes it's hard to tell."

I completely relate. Do you? Perhaps you don't write or speak like I do, but I'm guessing you've experienced a midstream shift in motives. Maybe you set out to bless someone with a meal, then found yourself obsessing over the compliments about the food. Or you participated in a missions trip, then found yourself almost bragging about how you had served. Or you opened your home and your heart to adoption, then found yourself enjoying the elevated opinions of others that you garnished as a result.

Serving the Lord can quickly turn into serving ourselves. This has always been the case, but I think that for our generation, social media creates unique challenges.

Social Media Fog

Social media opens thousands of windows into our lives and ministries that allow us to spread the truth of Jesus to a watching world like never before. But there's something about all of those open windows that taints my motivation.

Yes, I'm tossing truth and encouragement out to a hungry world, but social media makes it possible for me to get something back—often in only two seconds flat.

Every time someone "likes" or retweets what I've said, I get approval. When my work is shared or repinned, I get affirmation. When someone takes a photo while I'm serving then tags me or hashtags my name, I get recognition. So every click, swipe and share provides tangible evidence that people like my message, that they like *me*.

Social media is like a fog machine filling the murky rooms of

my heart and making it nearly impossible for me to sort out my motivations. *Why* am I sharing this post I've written? *Why* am I tweeting this truth about Jesus? Is it because I want to serve Him or because I want to serve myself?

Even when social media has nothing to do with how I serve God, my heart is still a dimly lit place. Knowing and sorting out my motivations takes careful, dedicated work.

Unite My Heart

In Psalm 86:11, David asks God to *unite his heart* so he might fear the Lord and walk in truth. Obviously, David asked God for this because he sensed that his heart was divided. Part of him wanted one thing, and another part wanted something else. He had conflicting motivations.

Often this is the case when we serve the Lord but especially when we take steps to expand our ministries in new ways. Our pure motives and tainted ones are all jumbled up together. So before we employ some creative, new strategy for spreading the light of Jesus, we must first turn the light inward and consider the motivations of our hearts.

To help evaluate my own heart in times like this, I've developed a decision-making tool, which I call the "Heart Sifter."

The Heart Sifter

Suppose you're considering taking—or not taking—a bold new step in ministry. Perhaps you are deciding whether to offer yourself as a Bible study leader. Or whether to submit a book proposal. Or whether to confide in a friend your dream of leading worship. Your decision on how to proceed will be driven by motives. The Heart Sifter helps you sort and weigh the often conflicting motives of your heart.

Here's how it works:

- Name the two options you're trying to decide between at the top of a sheet of paper. Often these will simply be either taking this new step vs. not taking it.
 - Now add four quadrants below your two options; you'll have areas to record positives and negatives for both.
 - In each column, list the positives and negatives—the reasons for or against both options. Empty out each of your heart motives onto the paper. Be honest and thorough. Ask God to help you sift your heart and consider each of your motivations separately. Here's an example of what your chart might look like:
 - Now, here's the most important part: Go back and evaluate each motivation you have listed in your four quadrants. Take a big, black marker and cross out any motivation that is driven by fear, insecurity, selfishness, false humility or inadequacy. As you do this, surrender these false motivators, which are not from God. (For practice, you might want to use my sample to consider which motivations need to be crossed off.)
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- Now, look at what is left standing. These are the right motivations of your heart! Your decision should be made based on *these* motivators, not the ones behind the black ink.

When you eliminate wrong motives from your decision making, you are more free than ever to follow God's leading. You aren't held back by fear or doubt. You aren't driven by selfishness or approval addiction.

One word of caution: Crossing off a false motivator with a black marker does not mean you're finished with it. (I wish!) Even the most mature woman of God must continue to check for creeping selfishness, fear, pride and doubt. But the Heart Sifter is a multiple-use tool!

As we eliminate false motivators, we unite our hearts to serve the Lord—not ourselves—in bold, new, creative ways.

Have you ever set out to serve and give, then found yourself wanting to receive affirmation and get recognition? It's so important, especially as we consider expanding our ministries, to weight our hearts and eliminate wrong motives. How will you use the Heart Sifter this week to get clarity on what God is leading you to do? {eoa}

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