

Voice of the Church Message
Living the New Life
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“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Motivational speaking is a multi-million dollar industry in North America today. Opportunities abound for learning how to be everything you can be, how to make an impact, how to accomplish your goals, and how you can achieve great things in your life. There are many different motivational speakers and authors out there, but their message is often very similar – you need to tap in to the power and potential that you have within yourself in order to truly reach your potential. And if you can do that, you will succeed.

But what does God's Word have to tell us about motivation? What should motivate a follower of Jesus Christ to be everything that he or she can be? We know that our lives need to be focused on God, and on His glory. We know that God has done great things for us, in delivering us from sin, and from death. He has given us eternal life, and that's the greatest gift imaginable. And as people who belong to Him, we need to align our lives with His will.

But often we still struggle. We struggle with sins that we don't seem to be able to eradicate from our lives. We can stumble and fall again and again in the same areas. And when we fall, we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and try again. Maybe we vow to try harder, to redouble our efforts in doing the things we know we need to do. But sometimes we can also get frustrated, and even fall into despair – wondering if things are ever going to get better, if we're ever going to be able to live the life we know we should be living.

Because when you become a Christian, the struggles still remain. It's true that when many people are converted to Christ, they notice an immediate and striking change in certain areas in their lives. People have been delivered from addictions, from sinful and destructive patterns of behaviour, from hatred and lust and envy and pride, in ways that are often very drastic. But yet, the struggle still remains. There may be an initial period of intense excitement when a person's life is changed by the Lord Jesus and His Holy Spirit; but that initial excitement can wane as the days go by, as life returns to its regular patterns.

And for those who desire to live holy lives, glorifying God in their words and in their deeds, that can be very frustrating. A feeling of hopelessness can rise up, as we begin to wonder if we're ever going to change, if we're ever going to be free from whatever sinful attitude or behaviour we're struggling to overcome. And so you may be tempted to throw up your hands, say, "What's the use anyway?" and simply give up the fight. You may lose all motivation to grow and strive to be the kind of Christian that you want to be.

Or, conversely, you may hear what those motivational speakers have to say, and draw from their message. You may resolve to try harder; to be a better person; to tap into the power you have within yourself; to draw on your own inner resources to conquer the enemy within.

But neither giving up, nor trying to work up the motivation to change within yourself, are the right responses to dealing with the struggles that we all face. God gives us the tools that we need to be motivated to live the new life in His Word. What He gives us in His Word is the ultimate motivational tool – a motivation based on the truth, on what God has done for us, and in us, a real encouragement for those who want to live the new life, but are struggling to do that.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Apostle Paul tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." If you have come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have been made new. The "old you" is gone; you have been re-created.

This is a message that Paul repeated again and again in his letters. He tells us what we have become, what we have been made, in Christ. When we were dead in our trespasses, he says in Ephesians 2:5, God made us alive together with Christ, in His grace. And again, in Colossians 2:13, he says that we, who were dead in our trespasses, God made alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

So in Christ, we have a new principle of life at work within us. We were dead in our sins, but now we are alive. The life from the dead that God's people experience in Christ is every bit as miraculous as a dead man climbing out of his grave. Those who belong to Christ are now able to stand against temptations, are now able to fight against sin, are now able to resist the evil one, and succeed!

This is not some innate power within a person. This is not a matter of tapping into a personal reservoir of strength in order to become a better human being. This is a matter of relying on Jesus Christ, and on His Spirit, who now lives within His people. We are weak, but He is strong. We are prone to sin, and unable to stand against it on our own. But if God is on our side, no one, and nothing, can stand against us. In Chapter 4:4 of his first letter, John addresses God's people as "little children," and says, "You are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." The Holy Spirit is greater than the evil one. In the lifelong battle against sin, He gives us the weapons we need to wage war, and win.

This is the motivation that God's Word gives us. In grammar, there are two terms that help us to understand what the Bible teaches about the new life that believers have in Christ – those terms are the "indicative," and the "imperative." An indicative statement is a statement of fact, and an imperative statement is a command. For Christians, the indicative is this: "You are united to Christ by faith. He has made you a new person. You are no longer controlled by your sinful nature. You are no longer dead in your trespasses and sins. You are no longer a slave, you're free!"

And the imperative flows out of that indicative: "Because this is who you are, because this is what God has made you, because you are a new creation, live like it!" In Christ, we have every reason to move forward in confidence, because we can know for certain that He will provide everything that we need to fight against sin, to make the right choices, to turn away from our old way of life, and to live the new life, to do the works that He has prepared in advance for us to do.

Paul gives us this warning in 1 Corinthians 6:9: the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. He then catalogues a list of sins, and says this: "And such were some of you!" This is what you were, but are no longer! "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.". This is what's new about the new life that comes to those who believe in Jesus Christ. This is our encouragement. This is our motivation – and there is none better.