

Scripture: Romans 8:1-11

Sermon Title: "Heavenly Minded. Earthly Good."

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What motivates you? What inspires you? What encourages you? These are some fascinating questions because the answers will likely be different for many of us – being motivated and encouraged in similar and dissimilar ways. However, what makes these question that much more intriguing, is the fact that the answers for us as individuals have likely changed throughout our lifetime. Think about it, what motivated you when you were a child? I for one remember being asked by my mom, when I was maybe 8 or 9 years old, to help with the farm chores. Feeding the animals, filling the water troughs, things like that. And when I think about what my motivation was to help with these chores, I remember 4 shiny quarters. For that was what my mom was going to give me if I worked with her in completing these tasks each week. 4 shiny quarters seemed like a virtual goldmine and so I was happy to help because, with those quarters it felt like I could buy anything that I wanted, maybe some sweets or a toy that I have been longing to possess. This was one way that I was motivated as a child. What motivated you?

Now, progressing along in life, think about what motivated you when you were a teenager? For many teens, knowing that they will soon be getting their driver's license was an excellent motivation. To be on your best behavior, helping out around the house, being kind to your family, because a license soon awaits and what good is a license if there was no car to drive!

And now think about the things that have encouraged you in adulthood? For some, the idea of reaching their full "earning potential" can be a powerful motivator – to achieve financial success! For others, motivation comes from family – wanting to provide the best, to be the best, to do the best for them. Sometimes people are motivated by the feeling of happiness, and will do all that they can to ensure a sense of happiness in their life. Occasionally, motivation comes from being accepted by others and so people will do all they can to be welcomed and included into an exclusive group or into a particular

subculture in our world. And chances are, you can think of many other motivations that have led you in one way or another at some point in your life.

But where do these motivations come from? Are they innate aspects of our being that are deep within us or are they created within us by the world? I personally believe it to be a combination of the two. In our scripture reading today from Paul's letter to the church in Rome, we hear of this notion of a life lived according to the flesh, which in essence is referring to a life that is ruled by our desires within and desires of this world created by flesh, created by humanity. So much of what motivates us comes from the influence of the world around us as well as from places deep within us. I mean, what tells a child that they need the latest and greatest toy? Perhaps it was seeing all the commercials that made it look like the best thing ever! Or maybe it's an inborn desire to have what others have and to simply fit in. What tells a teenagers that driving is so important? Maybe it's the influence of peers and the expectations of our society or might it be the innate desire for freedom and the ability to get up and go? Where does the motivation of "financial success" come from – maybe our culture that often elevates things and money as god and maybe from an innate sense of greed. Why do we strive for happiness? Is it because we see in so many movies and read in so many books the "happily ever after" ending and are conditioned to settle for nothing less or is it a defense mechanism within so that we can avoid dealing with the hard things in life like grief and pain? Why do we strive to be accepted by others? Is it because the world tells us if we are not part of the "in crowd" we are not worthy or is it founded in a desire deep within that knows the importance of being part of a tribe, of a community. For these and many motivations, we can see the influence of the world and the influence of our being that can equate to the idea of a life lived according to the flesh.

But, as Christ's disciples, we are reminded in Paul's letter to the Romans as well as by the message found in the life of Jesus, that we are called to live no longer according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit of God. And so, when we are living by the human definition of "success" or "acceptance" or "happiness", we are living not by God's

Spirit, but according to the flesh. And yet, when we follow Jesus, when we seek the leading of the Holy Spirit, our motivations change and so do our definition. For when we live by the Spirit, our life is no longer ruled by humanity and motivations of this world. When we live according to the Spirit, we reject the human definition of “success” that says you need more things, more money, bigger houses, the latest and greatest toy, and we trade that in for a heavenly definition of “success” that says, because you are God’s beloved, because you care for others, because you live out your faith in transformative ways, are you not already a success? And through it, we are motivated to do good in the world. We reject the human definition of “acceptance” which often means conformity to be part of the “in crowd” and we trade that in for the heavenly definition of “acceptance” which embraces all, and celebrates the differences created by God. And through it, we embrace our neighbors close by and far away in new ways. We reject the human definition of “happiness” which seeks to eliminate any grief or pain from our lives and which is also often reliant on having more stuff, and we trade it in for the heavenly definition of “happiness” that reminds us that God is with us even in the midst of grief and pain as witnessed by the cross and that “happiness” is not found in things but in God. And through it, we find happiness in God and God’s beloved people.

A life that is lived according to the Spirit is a transformed life led, inspired, motivated, encouraged by new definitions. As the book of Romans reminds us, a life lived according to flesh, according to the desires of humankind, is one that is dead. But when we allow God’s Spirit to lead us, when we allow our motives to change, when we follow God’s ways and not the ways of the world, we find life anew! We do not only find eternal life, but we find what life for our mortal selves and what life for this world should look like when we allow God to define, when we allow God to be our motivation.

Friends, when we live our lives according to God’s Spirit, we are being heavenly minded. Setting our sights on God and God’s Spirit which leads us onward. And, the

wonderful part about all of this is, when we are heavenly minded, our lives begin to produce earthly good in a new way. For with the heavenly definition of success, we see a world transformed by love and care. With the heavenly definition of acceptance, we create a world of compassion, tolerance, justice and love for all, regardless of any difference. With the heavenly definition of happiness, we embrace the spectrum of life's events and through it all, we serve our great God.

So let us be heavenly minded, living according to the Spirit. And through this new and renewing mindset, through these new motivations informed by these new definitions, let us always be an earthly good. Amen.