

## MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, September 24, 2019

### Incentivizing Christianity

**Overview:** In a world where we are surrounded by incentives, why not incentivize Christianity? It seems to work well when selling cars or in athletics - so why not use it as a tool to strengthen our walk with God. But can that approach be right with the quiet piety and solitude we associate with Jesus. Will we sell ourselves short with this view or could our walk be stronger if we attach a few incentives?

**Thought Starter:** What do you remember about the first time you studied the Bible on your own?

#### Segment Questions:

- Use a 1 to 10 scale to say how much you like the phrase "Incentivizing Christianity." 1 = dislike, 10 really like
- Using the same scale, what is your view of the expanded definition?  
*Conversations, commitments and critiques that motivate or encourage Christians to develop stronger spiritually in a way that brings benefit to their daily living.*
- In what way does the passage about the talents speak to this expanded definition?
- Are there other passages from Scripture that tie into our theme of incentivizing Christianity?
- In what ways does your faith benefit your daily living?

#### Action Questions:

- A friend comes to you and confides, "My walk with God seems distant. I have so much going on and find myself daily reading a small bit of scripture just to check it off the list. What have you found helpful to grow closer to God? What motivates you to go deeper in your walk with Him?"
- How does this counsel compare to other areas of your life where you have struggled (*maintaining weight, diet, exercise, addictions, etc.*)? For example, signing up for a class to help make exercise more regular. Or joining Weight Watchers.
- How can some of these principles from other areas carry over to be incentives to walk more closely with God?
- How can incentivizing Christianity help you today?

#### Personal Prayer:

It would be nice to be internally motivated to walk closely with God. To not need outside help. To be honest, in a fallen world we can't do it. May we have these incentives in mind as we ponder walking with Christ. 1) That we gain hope for today and for the future; 2) We have the incredible privilege of a relationship with our Creator, the King of the Universe; 3) We can experience a bond of love we could not otherwise conceive (1 John 4:19 | *We love, because He first loved us*). Thank you Lord for guiding us to a deeper walk with you.

<https://tifwe.org/christians-incentives-biblical-perspective/>

## Introduction

Two weeks ago, I was flying from Kansas City back to Indy via an Atlanta connection. Weather had earlier closed the Atlanta airport for an hour, and it was a mess. My 9:45 departure ended up leaving at 1:30am. While waiting to board I ended up in a half-hour conversation with the gate agent and the co-pilot. At some point the dialog turned to incentives. The gate agent explained how the ground crew works together as a team to get the plane out early. Each flight is graded and on-time or early departures gain them points which are turned into quarterly bonuses. This gate agent had just received a check for \$900.

It got me thinking about my own personal walk with God... and how I was feeling a need to go deeper with Jesus. I wondered if some of these same motivational ideas that the airline industry was using could help me. Could better incentives give me a stronger walk with God?

My first stop in looking into it was to get the definition of incentive. “a thing that motivates or encourages one to do something.” Or “something that incites or tends to incite to action or greater effort, as a reward offered for increased productivity.”

Those don't sound very spiritual, so I tried to reword them a bit while still staying true to the meaning. I converted the word “things” from the definition to three words. Conversations = with God and others; Commitments = Setting specific goals and action points; Critiques = willing to have tough things pointed out. “Something” becomes “develop spiritually.” And “increased productivity” became “benefit my daily living.”

That leads to this definition for incentivizing Christianity: **“Conversations, commitments and critiques that motivate or encourage Christians to develop stronger spiritually in a way that brings benefit to their daily living.”** So, it's the idea of doing things that help my walk with God that make it less about spiritual discipline and more about spiritual benefit. Then a quiet time becomes something I want to do rather than have to do.

Is it okay to “incentivize Christianity” when put this way? Maybe. But how do we do that and what does the Bible say about it? That is what today's session will seek to discover.

To give us a bit of Biblical perspective to start the conversation, here is a passage that talks about incentives. The parable of the talents. Matthew 25:14-30

<sup>14</sup>“Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. <sup>15</sup>He gave five bags of silver<sup>[a]</sup> to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

<sup>16</sup>“The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. <sup>17</sup>The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. <sup>18</sup>But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.

<sup>19</sup>“After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. <sup>20</sup>The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, ‘Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.’

<sup>21</sup>“The master was full of praise. ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!’<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>22</sup>“The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.’

<sup>23</sup>“The master said, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!’

<sup>24</sup>“Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. <sup>25</sup>I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’

<sup>26</sup>“But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, <sup>27</sup>why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’

<sup>28</sup>“Then he ordered, ‘Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. <sup>29</sup>To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

There are other stories from scripture that may address incentives as well. Jericho and the walls. King Jehoshaphat and plunder at Beracah (2 Chronicles 20). Keeping the commandments giving life.

May these thoughts about our motivation and incentives strengthen our walk with God.