

FINDING MOTIVATION: PART 1-THE WORLD'S GREATEST UNSOLVED MYSTERY

(From the Gravitational Leadership website blog, Ron Kuest)

Mysteries, cold cases, connections, patterns, conclusions, and solutions. That's been my life. I was educated as a health professional to help resolve mysteries of human illness. I headed up a state crime laboratory marshaling scientific systems to solve crimes. As the administrator of a state drug enforcement unit, our goal was to find significant drug dealers. And the last thirty-six years of my career, our consulting company helped employers unravel the mysteries of how organizations and their people become more effective in work and relationships.

And through those years, I have been confounded by one of the greatest mysteries. It's the struggle by every church community and ministry leader I know to effectively translate the intention of discipleship programs into transformative discipling experiences.

As believers and followers of Jesus, we work for the creator of the Universe. Jesus said he was sending us as the Father had sent him. Yet, in North America, we are seeing a decline in the percentage of those who call themselves Christian. The oncoming tide of common and post-modern culture seems to engulf the work of churches, Christian organizations, and individuals. How can it be? If God chose to allow his power to work through us, why do our efforts at times seem so impotent?

Is this just me? While most pastors feel satisfied with their preaching/teaching and discipleship efforts (crowd-centered ministry), most feel their discipling efforts (person-centered ministry) have been ineffective. Without question, both program and process are essential to a healthy spiritual community.

Here's the mystery. What's the disconnect between discipleship programs and processes and a deep discipling experience?

And, is this disconnect between effort and effect at the core of our challenge— all the world would know God through the Savior?

A pastor friend summed up his ministry this way:

"I tried, and tried, and tried over 50 years to "disciple" men. I would select two to about six and call them to a weekly meeting where we would discuss various topics and read books together. I was well organized and did it mostly like a school class, not lecture, but interactive with assignments, questions, and observations from them and for them. It was a lot of work for me, and I thought I was on the right track because I put a ton of effort into it. The material and the people were good, but they never produced the fruit I hoped for. Eventually, I became very discouraged after a lifetime and gave up on it. I feel embarrassed to say all this because I am one of our district's "successful" pastors, going from a church plant to a multi-staff church with a budget of over \$1,000,000 yearly. We built buildings, supported missions, did local outreaches and all the other things that other's see as "success. I am confident that many others also struggle if I struggle with it. Why is this so hard...so complicated? It should be organic and fun and motivational."

Why does discipling seem so hard? What's the disconnect? Is it that our discipling efforts are, with the best intentions, leader-directed, crowd-centered, and program driven? Or is it possible we've overlooked or under-emphasized discipling, like any adult learning process, has to start in the learner's frame of reference?

A friend, the discipleship pastor of an 8,000-plus church, also laments the apparent results from their significant discipling efforts. He said we celebrate what we measure, and what we measure in discipleship programs are numbers of small groups, bodies in seats, and books purchased. He asks the question, what is the motivation and right appetite for person-centered spiritual growth? Could it be our focus is misplaced?

Here's a piece of evidence we can add to our unsolved mystery. A recent survey shows the impact of Christian culture on the shape and form of American culture. North America is still an influential Christian culture compared to the rest of the world. However, other surveys show our trajectory is slowing. Our trailing indicators are robust. Our leading indicators, not so much.

One thing we do know. Our challenge isn't in the quality of the content—the Word of God. It certainly isn't in the quality and availability of discipleship programs. Media, indeed, isn't the problem. We're utilizing media in cutting-edge and engaging ways. Yet, overall, our reach and our engagement declined. Looking at results, it begs the question, are our discipling efforts looking more like Sears or more like Amazon?

And the issue isn't a lack of professional resources. Pastors are better equipped and trained through academic and resource networking programs than ever before. Is there something missing? What's going on?

I suspect it's not that we are doing discipleship programs badly. It's we're not discipling well enough. See the difference?

Let me tell you my story as we search for the why element of this mystery. In 1976 God called me to a ministry of spiritual leadership training. The call was dramatic and undeniable. However, for 24 years, few doors opened. I was not a pastor, had not been trained in ministry, and had no network. I was often discouraged and couldn't walk away from what I believed was my calling. I continued to prepare and apply what I knew and was learning in secular settings, seeing myself as a "spiritual plow" in places—the workplace-- where I couldn't directly take the Gospel.

Occupationally, I was successful. As a discipler, I felt I'd made a difference in the lives of my Oikos. Yet, I was unfulfilled. Then things changed in 2000 when I met for coffee with our new pastor. I intended to ask him how I could help in his ministry. Before I could ask the question, he said, "Ron, how can I help you in your ministry?" It was the most life-affirming, purpose-releasing question I had ever experienced. In my thirty years as a believer in and a follower of Jesus, no pastor had asked me that question. It changed my life.

Evidence. Clue. Game changer. The significant change in my life came with a motivation triggered by personal interest. Is that it? Is that what we need for ministry to become personal? Is that all we need for ministry to become self-sustaining?

Could it be that simple? Personal interest from someone more spiritually mature?

Or was I, am I, an anecdotal exception?

I believe the missing clue in solving this “crime scene,” this mystery, is to understand the role, physiologically and behaviorally, of MOTIVATION in the life of a disciple. I experienced a spiritual irruption (God and man pouring into me) before there could be an eruption (God flowing out through me).

This brings us back to the unsolved mystery. At the same time, Sunday morning remains a robust centerpiece of most church communities. Surveys and anecdotal conversation point to frustration over a lack of measurable results. My heart goes out to pastors who prepare for days for a Sunday teaching and pour their vulnerable hearts out in front of a crowd, and it feels like the people walk out only wondering what they’ll have for lunch. It’s one thing to toss a ball. It’s another for someone to want to catch it. Is something getting lost in translation?

Let’s assume motivation is critical. Information, to become knowledge, requires curiosity. For knowledge to become long-term/life-changing learning, there needs to be motivation—to yearn, to learn, and even more importantly, to act.

We need motivation for life, and we need it for life to become better than it currently is. Motivation is a biochemical process of neuroscience and behavior patterns in its simplest form.

It’s a simple fact. Motivation is necessary for spiritual growth. If the Holy Spirit indwells in us, a crucial question is how can we unlock/release God’s constant and intentional work in us? I believe it, too, responds to motivation through our spiritual will, found in our human spirit.

**At the flesh level, we call it motivation.
At the spiritual level, we call it spiritual hunger.**

While each disciple must feed themselves, what can we, as spiritual waiters, do to help stimulate appetite and serve food?

Is it possible our frustration with ineffective discipling efforts could be as simple as not understanding and applying the neuroscience and behavioral processes of motivation? Is it possible the key to unlocking the life-changing power of God's resident love within every believer in Christ is to understand and apply what we already know about how the flesh responds to motivation? Whether it be in the temptations of focus on daily needs and worries or unhealthy desires and dreams, Jesus says our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak. Is it possible the clue we're looking for is how to stimulate—**motivate**—our human flesh to align with the **hunger** of our human spirit?

In Part 2 of this conversation, I will present a simple process model. It is a model for stimulating the appetite of spiritual hunger. The root of it began with the Lawler-Porter motivation model of expectancy and then took on a life of its own. This process model is not a holistic model of discipling. Instead, it is a slice. It looks at one core-critical aspect of discipling—how we, as disciplers, can stimulate spiritual hunger to the extent that spiritual growth becomes a self-sustaining, self-feeding experience of spiritual nourishment. And for what purpose? So, all people we disciple can fulfill the four basic functions of being a disciple. Loving God. Loving Others. Being Holy. Making Disciples.

FINDING MOTIVATION:

PART 2-THE KEY

TO IGNITING

SPIRITUAL HUNGER

The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.

Mother

Teresa

In Part 1, we looked at the Great Mystery of the Ages. We work for the Creator of the Universe. And Jesus promised all power has been given to us. Why have we not been the significant transformative element for good in our communities we hoped for or expected?

What seems to be missing? Could it be we've overlooked the essential part of the process called igniting or stimulating spiritual hunger? And if not

missing, just not in proportion to the Great Commission and the enabling power with which we've been endowed.

I believe the simple missing clue to solve this “crime scene” --this mystery, is to understand the role, physiologically and behaviorally, of MOTIVATION in, to, and through the life of a disciple. When I experienced that life-changing question from my pastor, “*Ron, how can I help you in your ministry?*” I experienced firsthand a spiritual irruption--God and man pouring into me--before there could fully be an eruption--God flowing out through me.

Our problem--the unsolved mystery, this crime scene--is that the impact of our discipling efforts has not aligned with our discipling imperative.

It is the GREAT GAP of the 21st century. While we have been and continue to be a force in our culture, it appears we no longer are the predominant instigating force for good in the communities in which we live. Something is getting lost in the translation between discipleship intention and discipling effect and a resulting disciple's impact. Am I being unrealistic? Am I expecting too much? As I said, we work for the Creator of the Universe. That “we would all be one” is His plan. Is this the best we can do at making disciples who make disciples?

In drilling down, let's try and get to the core. In my view, discipleship is the knowledge and craft of making disciples, and discipleship is entirely different than discipling. Discipling happens when program-driven discipleship knowledge and skill hit the road, and the wheels begin to turn. If we know all we need to know about discipleship—the craft--have we missed understanding how we most effectively disciple and how we can help others be the conduit of goodness, light, and power? I fear, too often, pastors hope the message for change begins and ends on Sunday morning. Adult learning science tells us grown-ups don't learn best in rows and being

talked to as if we were still children. It's an excellent place to start, but it's not where sustained learning usually takes place.

Adults learn best when they can integrate accumulated life experiences with new information.

How do we then build on what we know about motivation? Let's start with a universally agreed premise. Everything in a church ministry must have discipling as the core reason for horizontal existence and worship as the core reason for vertical existence. Sunday morning worship and teaching are entry-level discipling. Community service is discipling. Training volunteers is discipling. Evangelism is discipling. And meeting in groups of two or more to discuss life and God in our midst is discipling.

In part 1, we looked at two halves of the same concept of motivation. On the flesh side—the brain and resulting emotions, drives, and physical functions—we need motivation to be alive. We need to be motivated to eat to remain alive and healthy. People die if they lose their will to eat and live. On the human spirit side, we require spiritual hunger to remain spiritually alive.

The biology of motivation is a straightforward biochemical process of rewarding the brain with experiences we value (not necessarily logical) and with tangible experiences allowing us to feel they are achievable. Through a complex set of neurohormones, including dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, acetylcholine, norepinephrine, endogenous cannabinoids, and endorphins, we anticipate and then have experiences. If those experiences give us a “feeling good” sensation, we want more of the same. If experiences provide us with pain, we flee or avoid it. That's the physiological side of motivation and, unfortunately, dependency as well.

The behavior side of motivation is simpler than neuroscience. Behaviorally, we need to feel an effort is achievable (goal-oriented) and is a positive experience (reward oriented). If both are present, we move (motivate) toward the feeling and the experience.

So what? It's helpful to know our problem. But knowing the problem without a tool for change is useless at one level and cruel at another. Consider the model below. It reflects my understanding of how the flesh responds to motivation and how the human spirit responds to transformative spiritual hunger.

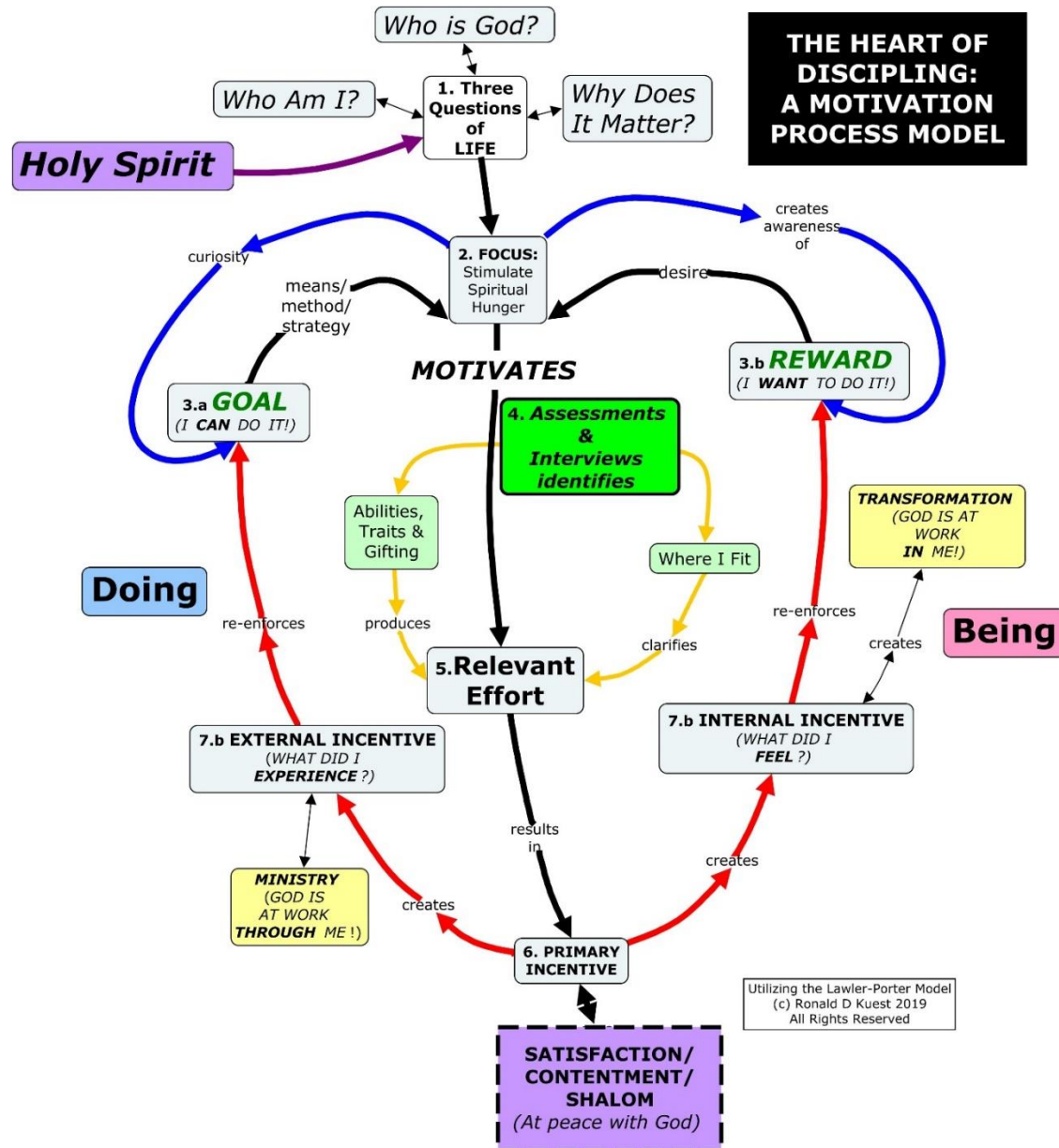
The metaphor for the model is the heart. It is a constantly refreshing organ for oxygen, food, and waste in a continuous process.

Let's walk through the essential steps viewing the model as if it were a map. Let it speak to you.

Before you travel the map of the model, know I made several assumptions. They are:

- Our spiritual being (conduit for spiritual nature) is in battle with our flesh (pleasure-seeking and survival-oriented) and Satan.
- Our flesh (eyes, ears, tongue/language, thoughts) is a conduit for all things spiritual. Everything in our spiritual being must come out through the material being.
- Motivation is an issue of the flesh. Spiritual hunger is an issue of the human spirit and our soul.
- Discipling usually begins before a choice of salvation.
- God is at work in his Threesome through the constant call of the Father and the mysterious cooperative work of Christ and his Spirit.

With that foundation, let's take a road trip through the model, step by step, and see if any more evidence and clues can bring us to a conclusion as to how we can be a more effective participant in transforming spiritual hunger into devotion to God (i.e., discipling). Don't be overwhelmed by all the lines going in different directions. Start at the top. Let it talk to you as you follow a trail.



Step 1. Three questions and four skills. This is the entry point for discipling conversations. A discipler needs only to have these three questions on their mind to direct conversation intentionally. Who am I? Who is God? Why does it matter? Simply being ready to ask these questions is the most essential and influential role of a discipler. To facilitate the conversation, a discipler needs to know four essential skills. They must understand how to **C L A P**. **C**-create/stimulate/show curiosity. **L**-listen to the voice of the disciple, listen for meaning behind messages. **A**-ask open-ended questions. **P**-promise to be available for as long as wanted or needed.

Step 2. Focus: Stimulate Spiritual Hunger. Motivation starts when a person begins to be aware of their appetite and hunger. “I WANT MORE OF YOU, GOD.” If there is no hunger, no eating, no nourishment, and no appetite for more. Spiritual hunger is the spark for spiritual growth.

Step 3. Notice both being and doing experiences are happening simultaneously. For sustained motivation being and doing experiences are essential.

Step 3a. Goal. On the DOING side, curiosity creates a sense of direction. This is the objective experience. A disciple must understand knowing God better, deeper, and more intimately is achievable. “I CAN DO IT.” A discipler can help by suggesting or sharing a reading plan or a devotional.

Step 3b. Reward. On the BEING side is the subjective feeling. It is a sense of reward, a desire to have and repeat the pleasurable reward of experiencing God. “I WANT TO DO IT.” It is a feeling of intimacy and safety.

Step 4. Assessments and Interviews. Church staff can significantly help by administering and coaching a disciple to understand better their unique equipping and intellectual, emotional, and spiritual uniqueness and gifting.

Step 5. Relevant Effort. For motivation to be self-sustaining, something has to happen. The disciple needs to experience a sense of struggle, growth, accomplishment, and reward. Living a life as a Christ-one is not a passive experience. Relevant effort can be anything from outward serving to inward journal writing, bible reading, or contemplative prayer.

THREE INCENTIVES

In our metaphor of the heart, steps 1-5 are oxygenated arterial blood flowing out to energize and give life. As the spent venous blood returns for renewal, there are incentives to continue to cause the metaphorical organ to want to thrive. These are experienced through three incentives.

Step 6. Primary Incentive. What is the point of all this prayer, service, spiritual growth, suffering, and joy? It can't be just in the works (doing). And it can't be just in the faith (being). It has to be a point of the point. The main thing of the main thing. Experiencing God. Experiencing the Threesome at work in and through us transforming us into a new creation. The reason for everything has to start with finding a growing sense of satisfaction and contentment of being at peace with God. Here's a critical point. A relevant effort is evidence of transformation at work, but it is not the primary incentive.

Experiencing peace with God is the primary incentive.

Step 7a. External Incentive – Once a disciple experiences a growing closeness to God, there is an increasing sense God is at work THROUGH me. This is the experience of ministry. Ministry gives us a sense of purpose, meaning, and worth.

Step 7b. Internal Incentive—At the same time, there becomes an increasing sense God is at work IN me. This is the awareness of the divine presence and working. Despite the temptations of the flesh and the arrogance of the human spirit, we experience an increasingly healed and vibrant soul.

Here's the goal of this process model: IF motivation is taking place, it is becoming a self-feeding cycle. Developing spiritual self-feeders is the target for sustainability—a growing, insatiable dependency for more of the experience of God in my life.

How can this model help you? As starters, here are a few suggestions. And if you discover more ways or have stories to tell about using the model, please let me know at rdkuest@comcast.net.

1. **Use it as a map for the disciple.** When you begin to disciple someone, ask, “Why are you doing this, and what do you want to achieve and experience?” Then show the disciple the route they can expect to follow. Ask, “Where are you in the model? How can I help you in your ministry?”
2. **Use it to evaluate your current discipleship programs and discipling efforts.** Is person-centered discipling taking place? How do you know? What is missing? What's going well? Why? What do you fear is not going well? What can you do to change this outcome? Is understanding the significant role of personal motivation at the core of program design and discipling implementation?
3. **Use it to design new discipleship programs and help active disciplers** know the pathway for self-sustaining spiritual growth.

4. **Understand the significance of Step 1.** Effective discipling requires an effective discipler who knows how to intentionally ask the three questions and then **C L A P**.
5. **Church leadership's role is at Step 4.** The church needs to have assessment services available for use by trained volunteers. Staff and volunteers must be ready to ask, *"How can I help you in your ministry?"*
6. **Form a strategic discipling task team.** Be sure and include, if possible, someone with experience in marketing or social media networking. Include someone with a psychology background, and be sure and include several experienced disciplers who have their feet on the street. Of course, make sure your staff person with the greatest passion for discipling is on the team. Only two choices are available. Evaluate EVERYTHING the church does. Do something if it doesn't have a clear ring of discipling in its effort. Review, revive, renew, or take it out behind the church building and shoot it. If you have to shoot it, don't worry, there's no suffering. It's already dead.