

“What Gets You Going? Relationships?” Luke 10:38-42;

John 13:1-15; 31-35 1/21/18

I work out a couple times each week at the Y. I'm sure you can tell in this fitted robe! Anyway, lately I have noticed some interesting differences among the people who work out where I do. Some, like me, have a clear plan regarding which exercises we are going to do, and we move quickly and deliberately from machine to machine. Personally, I like to minimize my time in the gym so I can get on with whatever is next in my day. But there are others who take a different approach. (Some might say, the wrong approach.) Between their sets of exercises, they circulate around the workout room striking up leisurely conversations with anyone who will engage with them! Their priority seems to be to make friends! They don't seem to understand that some of us are on a schedule!

I think my experience illustrates two of the three different motivations that we are talking about in this sermon series. People like me are achievement-motivated (at least in this situation). We have clear goals and take direct action to achieve them. The other people seem to be motivated by what David McClelland, in his analysis of motivation, calls “affiliation” or relationships. They are motivated to establish connections with other people. Other things are secondary, including workouts!

McClelland identified three primary motivations. He believed that everyone is motivated by all three, but that most people have a dominant one. The three are: Achievement (which we talked about last week), Affiliation or Relationships (which we'll talk about today), and Power or Influence (which we'll talk about in two weeks). As I mentioned before, we have provided a self-assessment tool for anyone who would like to explore their own motivation. It's located in the Fellowship Hall and in the Narthex.

Let's talk about the need for affiliation or relationships. Everyone needs to connect with other people to some degree. John Donne's famous poem, "No Man Is An Island," sums this up well.

"No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

Clearly, each of us is connected to our fellow travelers on this journey called life. And each of us needs to experience those connections. But the need for human connections motivates some of us more than others.

Listen to this well-known story from Luke's gospel about Jesus, Mary, and Martha. Think about the different kinds of motivation while I read the story.

³⁸Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things;⁴² there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

These are the same sisters, whose brother Lazarus would later be raised from the dead by Jesus! Jesus was close to this family. As an itinerant teacher, he relied on the hospitality of people like Mary and Martha. In this story, Martha is identified as the homeowner and hostess. She wants to provide a nice meal to honor Jesus and his disciples. Meanwhile, her sister, Mary, seems to be slacking off! Rather than help with the meal, she's just sitting there with Jesus, listening to him. In fact, Luke describes her as "sitting at his feet," which is the characteristic posture of a disciple. The rabbis in Jesus' day would never have allowed a woman to be a disciple, but Jesus is different. He welcomes anyone who will follow him, including Mary.

Finally, Martha has had enough! She points how unfair it is that she is doing all the work, and asks Jesus to intervene. Wisely, Jesus gently refuses, but commends Mary for her choice. I imagine that Martha was not amused!

Here, we have two sisters who are motivated by different things. Martha seems to be a type “A” achiever, with a long checklist of things that need to get done in order to make the dinner a special one for Jesus. It’s important to note that there is nothing wrong with that! We need people like Martha, or our dinners would never get cooked, and our guests wouldn’t get taken care of! However, Mary has a different motivation. She wants a personal connection with Jesus, so she sits with him and listens to him.

I don’t think Jesus’ response was intended to say that those who are motivated by relationships are better than those motivated by achievement. He was telling Martha that the opportunity to deepen one’s relationship with him like this is a rare one, so Mary did well to set aside other concerns and attend to that.

Jesus himself clearly valued and was motivated by human relationships. He spent much of his three years of ministry investing himself in his twelve disciples and other close followers. As he approached the time of his death, he demonstrated the importance of relationships

when he washed his disciples' feet, instructing them to do the same for one another. ¹²*After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?"*¹³*You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.*¹⁴*So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* ¹⁵*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.* (John 13:12-15)

Serving others is only important if people are important! And they are, because each one of us is made in the image of God, and therefore should be valued and treasured by others. Jesus goes on to give what he calls a "new" commandment, to love one another, to put the good of another person before your own good. So, all of us are called to be in loving, serving relationships with others, but this comes more naturally for some of us than others.

I think of a good friend who died a number of years ago. Her name was Jeanne Arcuni, and I got to know her when I was a youth director and she was one of the adult youth group leaders. Jeanne was clearly motivated by relationships. And because of that, people loved to be around her. When you talked with Jeanne, she had a way of making you feel like you were the only person in the world! Our youth group was a large one, with several hundred kids, so we'd divide them up so each adult leader had

about a dozen to look after. But there were always some kids who were difficult to be with, and most of the adult leaders preferred not to have those kids in their group, but Jeanne would volunteer to care for the most difficult kids in the youth group, because she saw God's image in each of them. That's just the way she was.

When Jeanne died of cancer, her obituary listed no great achievements, but she had developed many caring relationships with people of all ages, and over 700 people attended her funeral! Relationships are what motivated her! Maybe you know some people like Jeanne. We've got some of them in this congregation! I thank God for them!

Now, there are some pitfalls with this motivation, just like there were for the Achievement motivation we talked about last week. We can get so wrapped up in the life of another person that we lose objectivity and become enablers of bad and destructive behavior. Or, we can become hurt when other people don't return our friendly, warm overtures. Or, we can be disappointed when others don't share our passion for relationships and want instead to focus the committee we're in on the task at hand!

But just like we need the achieving Marthas of this world, we also need the relationship-motivated Marys. Look for the Marys of this world, and thank them for their care for others! They too are doing the work of

God, though perhaps differently than you. And in two weeks we'll look at the third motivation, power or influence.