

Motives and the Path to Perfection

Lindon J. Robison and David R. Just

Motives and the Desires of Our Hearts

The scriptures teach that motives, the desires of our hearts, matter to the Lord. Joseph Smith was instructed that his only motive for obtaining the plates must be to glorify God and to build up his kingdom (JS–H 1:46). The selection of David to be the king of Israel was based on his motives, the desires of his heart, which only God could discern (1 Sam. 16:7). Faith begins with the desire to believe (Alma 32:27). Indeed, we will all be judged at some point by our motives. The Lord revealed to Joseph Smith, “For I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts” (D&C 137:9).

The Lord cares not only about our motives but also their consistency with our works. He condemned the wicked leaders of his day because with their outward behavior they pretended to be pious, but their motives were selfish. Their hypocrisy led the Savior to compare them to sepulchers, white on the outside and inside full of dead men’s bones (Matt. 23:27). The need for consistency between our motives and works is also reflected in scriptural guidelines for gift giving. For example, if someone gives a gift grudgingly, “it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God” (Moro. 7:8); and, if someone would give a gift but is unable to do so, it is the same as if he had made the offering (Mosiah 4:24, 25).

The Lord makes clear that we can choose (or bridle) our motives and the behavior that these produce (Alma 38:12). Some behavioral scientists disagree, claiming that our behavior is based on habit and reflex.

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This article resulted from a chance encounter between Lindon and John W. Welch at a Christmas program that included two of their grandchildren. Professor Welch described BYU Studies' interest in articles that have appeared in professional journals but that also have a gospel application. A paper on motives, which Lindon had coauthored, seemed to fit this description. So Lindon approached David Just and asked if he would be interested in cooperating in an effort to describe the relative importance of motives. David's interest in motives had been heightened by a lecture on selfish preferences and rationality in an undergraduate economics class by his favorite professor. After the lecture, he had confessed to his professor that he had a hard time reconciling his own behavior with purely rational and selfish motives. His professor instructed him to repent.



Lindon J. Robison



David R. Just

The exchange between David and his professor illustrates much of the ambivalence we maintain about motives. On the one hand, economics emphasizes that much of behavior can be described by selfish preferences as often expressed in the familiar Adam Smith quote: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.”

However, the gospel teaches a much wider range of motives that we explore in this article, such as characterized by the lyrics of a favorite hymn: “I cannot see another’s lack and I not share.” In the hopes that by understanding our motives, which matter a great deal to the Lord, we wrote this article so that we can better walk the road to perfection.

A dual-decision model rationalizes the conflict by describing two separate decision processes.¹ One decision process is based on habit and reflex, making quick decisions based on immediate circumstances. These decisions are made on autopilot, so to speak. The other decision process for choosing our motives and the behavior that these produce is slow and deliberative, a manual process that considers long-term consequences and a wider variety of trade-offs. Choosing our motives and resulting behavior cannot always happen on autopilot. Rather, deliberately determining our motives requires effort and a long-term struggle. This may be part of what Jacob speaks of when he encourages the Nephites to choose a path such that they can “act for themselves and not . . . be acted upon” (2 Ne. 2:26).

So where do our motives come from? Some economists claim that we are motivated mostly by our own (selfish) need for physical goods and services. As institutional and behavioral economists, we have spent much of our careers exploring other motives derived from other needs. In this essay, we report on a model that considers the need for physical goods and services, the need for validation, the need for belonging, and the need for knowing; these four needs together produce five distinct motives. Then we report on empirical tests designed to measure the relative importance of the five motives and reject the hypothesis that people are mostly motivated by selfish needs for physical goods and services. The model we describe has been useful for us as a way to reconcile our observation that many people appear motivated to meaningful and sincere service and consider the well-being of others in their choices. Finally, we provide scriptural and modern examples of the five motives and discuss how properly bridled motives can lead to more Christlike behavior, but when unbridled can lead to destructive behaviors.

The Needs That Shape Our Motives

Social scientists generally agree that we are motivated by our needs. This section describes needs that we are motivated to satisfy. We find these needs identified in the scriptures and by modern prophets.

While there is no universally accepted list of needs, four are generally accepted: physical needs and the socioemotional needs for belonging, validation, and knowing.² Our physical needs are satisfied by

1. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 20–21.

2. Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1962).

physical goods and services that protect and sustain life.³ These physical needs are sometimes referred to in the scriptures as our need for bread (Moses 4:25). Examples of physical goods include food, clothing, shelter, and safety.

Our socioemotional need for belonging is satisfied by joining, learning about, and adopting the values of the units to which we desire to belong. The need for belonging is also satisfied by caring for those whose well-being we have internalized—especially family and those with whom we have made covenants and contracts. The need for internal validation (self-respect) is satisfied by acting in ways that are consistent with our conscience, sometimes referred to as our ideal self. The need for external validation (the respect of others) is satisfied by acting in ways consistent with the values and norms of others. And the need for knowing is satisfied by, among other things, discovering how our efforts affect our belonging and validation status as perceived by others.

Our socioemotional needs were described by President Gordon B. Hinckley when he taught, “Every [new member] needs three things: a friend [the need for belonging], a responsibility [the need for validation], and nurturing with ‘the good word of God’ [the need to know].”⁴ Among the things we want to know is that God cares for us and finds our efforts to serve him pleasing (JS–H 1:29; Enos 1:4; 1 Ne. 11:17).

Five Motives

In this section, we identify five distinct motives derived from the needs described in the previous section. Details of the model from which the five motives were derived are described elsewhere.⁵ After describing the five motives, this section describes a progression of our motives from a focus on self to a focus on others that may represent locations along the path to perfection.

Own Consumption. Our need for bread motivates us to find ways to increase our own consumption of physical goods and services now and in the future. We call this motive the own consumption motive,

3. Abraham H. Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370–96.

4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Converts and Young Men,” *Ensign* 27 (May 1997): 47.

5. Lindon J. Robison, Robert S. Shupp, Songqing Jin, Marcelo E. Siles, and Tawni H. Ferrarini, “The Relative Importance of Selfishness and Social Capital Motives,” *Journal of Socio-Economics* 41, no. 1 (2012): 118–27.

which corresponds to the selfishness of preference motive that underlies much of neoclassical economic theory. This motive may explain why we sometimes sell our blood as opposed to donating it, shop for bargains, get upset at the slow driver in front of us, and hurry to get in line ahead of others.

Goodwill. The need for external validation motivates us to act in ways that win the goodwill and the regard of important others. We call this motive the goodwill motive. This motive may explain why we sometimes compliment the efforts of others, perform visible service, “dress for success,” and give gifts.

Promise Keeper. The need for internal validation motivates us to act in harmony with our ideal self, our conscience, or what Robert H. Frank calls our moral emotions.⁶ We call this the promise keeper motive. This motive may explain why we return lost wallets, don’t take advantage of others even when we have opportunities to do so, make anonymous contributions, and keep the rules and our promises even when they can’t be enforced.

Belonging. The need to belong motivates us to change our feelings of connectedness toward others and organizations, especially when we lack the ability or resources to change the feelings and attitudes others have toward us. We call this motive the belonging motive. This motive may explain why we join clubs, volunteer, wear school colors at home games, or contribute to public radio.

Sharing. When filled with empathy, what Adam Smith called sympathy, we internalize the well-being of others. And having done so, we are motivated to act in ways that bless their lives. Smith wrote, “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.”⁷ One way we bless those who are the objects of our empathy is by sharing with them our resources. Therefore, we call this motive the sharing motive. The sharing motive may explain why some soldiers risk their lives to rescue their comrades and why

6. Robert H. Frank, “The Status of Moral Emotions in Consequentialist Moral Reasoning,” in *Moral Markets: The Critical Role of Values in the Economy*, ed. Paul J. Zak (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 42–59.

7. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. MacFie (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1982), 9; also available at <http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smMS.html>.

others donate blood, raise children, volunteer at relief centers, and make donations to charities. The sharing motive may also explain why we stop at traffic accidents and offer help. It is the subject of Sunday sermons that encourage us to respond to “the better angels of our nature.”⁸

Classification of Our Motives. Our current locations on the path to perfection may be marked by the spiritual maturity of our motives. The beginning motive on the path to perfection is the own consumption motive with its focus on self. Close to the own consumption motive on the path to perfection is the goodwill motive that recognizes we need others to satisfy our need for external validation.

Further along the path is the promise keeper motive. This motive, like the goodwill motive, recognizes the importance of others in meeting our needs, only in this case the validating relationship is with our ideal selves. This motive is further along the path than the own consumption motive because it can sometimes prevent us from acting selfishly when the choice is between increasing our own consumption and being validated by our ideal selves. Etzioni described such a conflict between own consumption and promise keeper motives as a conflict between pleasure and moral commitments. Such a conflict may exist when we must choose between going to a movie and visiting a sick uncle in the hospital.⁹

Continuing along the path toward perfection is the belonging motive. This motive recognizes that we can sometimes increase our sense of belonging by increasing our empathy for others. Moral injunctions consistent with this motive include: “love your enemies,” “do a good turn daily,” and “ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country.”

Finally, the motive located farthest along the path to perfection is the sharing motive. This motive arises out of our empathy and leads us to share and serve. This empathetic connection to others creates a sense of belonging, what the scriptures refer to as a state of being one (D&C 38:27).

The strength of the sharing motive depends on the depth and breadth of our empathy for others. The breadth of our empathy is measured by the distance between ourselves and those whose well-being we are able

8. Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address, Monday, March 4, 1861,” http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lincoln1.asp.

9. Amitai Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 255.

to internalize. Enos demonstrated his increasing breadth of empathy, which began with a focus on self and matured to a concern first for his brethren, the Nephites, and later for his enemies, the Lamanites (Enos 1). The Nephites, in the years after the visit of Christ, demonstrated travel in reverse along the motives path, which began with a focus on others and ended with a focus on self (4 Ne. 1:15–40).

The Relative Importance of Motives

This section summarizes empirical efforts to measure the relative importance of the five motives already identified. Some economists have claimed that people are 95 percent selfish.¹⁰ However, this and similar claims for the dominance of the selfish motive need to be empirically tested. The empirical results that we report in this section lead us to reject the claim that we are mostly motivated by the selfish desire to consume physical goods and services.

To answer the question “How selfish are we?” one of the authors and his colleagues conducted hypothetical surveys and experiments with dollar outcomes. The surveys and experiments were designed to measure the relative importance of the five motives, which was inferred from answers to the surveys and dollar allocations in experiments.¹¹ In one hypothetical survey, subjects were asked to imagine themselves as prisoners of war who received candy bars without the knowledge of the other prisoners. Then they were asked how they would distribute them. They could consume them (own consumption), use them to keep a promise with another prisoner (promise keeper), share them with a friend (sharing), use them to obtain the goodwill of a guard (goodwill), or contribute to a camp escape effort (belonging). Versions of this study were conducted among domestic and foreign subjects using different hypothetical scenarios. Typical of the results from these studies are those reported below where statistically estimated regression coefficients (which sum to 100 percent) indicate the relative importance of each motive.

10. Gordon Tullock, quoted by Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Self-Interest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 335.

11. Robison and others, “The Relative Importance of Selfishness,” 121.

Table 1: Surveys Results Designed to Measure the Relative Importance of Motives

	Own Con- sumption α_1	Promise Keepers α_2	Sharing α_3	Goodwill α_4	Belonging α_5
Coef. Est.	0.33*	0.19*	0.25*	0.09*	0.14*
T statistic	(13.67)	(10.97)	(18.61)	(5.79)	(11.02)
DW	.92	1.45	1.08	1.43	1.71
R ²	0.57	0.49	0.69	0.11	0.56

*Significant at 1%

In survey results reported in table 1, the own consumption (selfishness) motive accounted for 33 percent of candy bar allocations but left 67 percent of the allocations unexplained. Next in significance was the sharing motive, with a coefficient equal to 76 percent of the own consumption motive and 25 percent of the total candy bar allocations. The survey results are not quite up to the standard to “love your neighbor as yourself;” but they are much closer to that standard than the purely selfish motives generally assumed in economic modeling. Next in significance was the promise keeper motive, with a coefficient accounting for 19 percent of total candy bar allocations; the belonging motive allocations, accounting for 13.8 percent; and last, the goodwill motive allocations, accounting for 9 percent of the candy bars.

Despite evidence that reliable results can be obtained by asking hypothetical questions, we asked if, when faced with actual dollar outcomes, experimental subjects would demonstrate the importance of other motives besides selfishness. To measure the relative importance of the belonging motive, experiments were conducted with a variety of participants, all of whom were members of some organization. These organizations included a Rotary Club, an economic club, a foreign student organization at Michigan State University, students from Northern Michigan University (NMU), and the dairy science club at Michigan State University.

The experimental results with actual dollars were consistent with the hypothetical surveys. Participants were asked to allocate money however they liked among options that embodied each of the motives. With respect to the own consumption motive, Rotary Club members kept 9 percent of the money for themselves, dairy club members kept 33 percent, international students kept 24 percent, members of the economic

club kept 16 percent, and NMU students kept 55 percent. In addition, the study tested the null hypothesis that the coefficient of selfishness was equal in importance to the sum of the other motives (a sort of imperfect operationalization of the second great commandment). That hypothesis was rejected again at the 1 percent level for four of the five groups and at 5 percent for the students from NMU.

The experiments found considerable variation in the strength of motives across different groups. Allocation decisions for Rotary Club members are dominated by the promise keeper motive (45 percent) and the goodwill motive (42 percent). Economic club members behaved similarly to those in the Rotary Club. For NMU students, their own consumption motive dominated. In all cases, our study led us to reject the hypothesis that we are 95 percent selfish.

Relationships between Motives

We recognize, and the survey and experimental results reported above confirm, that behind our choices may be multiple motives, and the relative importance of these vary among groups and individuals. We already reported how motives varied between groups of persons. However, other studies conducted by one of the authors and his colleagues suggest that changes in our opportunities to exchange alter the relative importance of motives. To illustrate, when buying gasoline, the own consumption motive appears to dominate. Meanwhile, when voting or donating blood, the sharing or promise keeper motives appear to dominate.

One important pattern evident in our survey results was that the own consumption motive and the promise keeper motive were strongly and negatively correlated. Persons with strong own consumption motives tended to have lower promise keeper motives.

More generally, as the relative importance of any one motive increased, the relative importance of some other motive(s) decreased. This constraint created important connections between motives. For example, consider the goodwill motive. One selfish use of our goodwill is to increase our income by selling products like life insurance, cutlery, candles, and plastic containers, which can then be used to purchase personal consumption items. However, when bridled by a strong sharing motive, we may use our goodwill to increase our income, which we then use to support a local charity.

An example of the connection between the own consumption motive and the sharing motive may be inferred from the scriptures. When filled with love that accompanies a hope in Christ, a necessary condition for

the sharing motive, Jacob taught that we will obtain riches if we seek them, but we will seek them to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, liberate the captive, and in other ways share (Jacob 2:19).

Scriptural and Modern Examples of the Five Motives

This section identifies scriptural and modern examples of behavior consistent with the five motives already described. These examples provide directions for choosing motives consistent with Christlike behavior. The lessons learned from these examples encourage us to adopt the sharing motive to bridle the behavior produced by the other four motives.

Scriptural and Modern Examples of the Own Consumption Motive. Without the moderating influence of the sharing motive, the desire to increase our consumption drives selfish behavior. This motive has been associated with much of the evil and ills of the world. Elder Neal A. Maxwell wrote, “In one degree or another we all struggle with selfishness. Since it is so common, why worry about selfishness anyway? Because selfishness is really self-destruction in slow motion. No wonder the Prophet Joseph Smith urged, ‘Let every selfish feeling be not only buried, but annihilated.’ Hence annihilation—not moderation—is the destination!”¹² Making the connection between sin and selfishness, Elder Maxwell also wrote, “By focusing on himself, a selfish person finds it easier to bear false witness, to steal, and covet, since nothing should be denied him.”¹³

Regarding the consequences of selfishness described in sacred script, Elder William R. Bradford wrote, “It was Cain’s selfishness that caused him to bind himself up to Satan and, to get gain, murder his brother Abel. Selfishness debased the children of Israel as they drank and played and corrupted themselves around the idol of the golden calf. And only selfishness could have induced Judas to betray the holy, selfless Lord.”¹⁴

Yet man has need of bread and, like Adam and Eve, must spend a considerable amount of energy “tilling the ground” to provide for himself and his family. What makes these efforts acceptable to the Lord is the mitigating influence of the sharing motive that arises out of our empathy.

The Lord revealed to John and Peter Whitmer: “For many times you have desired of me to know that which would be of the most worth unto

12. Neal A. Maxwell, “‘Repent of [Our] Selfishness’ (D&C 56:8),” *Ensign* 29 (May 1999): 23.

13. Maxwell, “‘Repent of [Our] Selfishness,’” 23.

14. William R. Bradford, “Selfishness vs. Selflessness,” *Ensign* 13 (April 1983): 49–51.

you [the own consumption motive]. Behold, blessed are you for this thing, and for speaking my words which I have given you according to my commandments” (D&C 15:4, 5; 16:4, 5).

John and Peter Whitmer’s appeal to the Lord for guidance was initially motivated by their selfishness (what is of most worth for me). What they learned was that they could not improve their own well-being without serving others, which included sharing the gospel (D&C 15:6; 16:6).

Internalizing the well-being of others mellows selfishness into self-interest—so that when we act, we do so in ways that promote the interests of others as well as our own. As the Lord revealed to the Whitmers, improving our own well-being may be a noble goal if in the process others are elevated and made better as well.

Joseph Smith once taught that the principle of self-aggrandizement is a correct principle “and may be indulged [in] upon only one rule or plan—and that is to elevate, benefit and bless others first. If you will elevate others, the very work itself will exalt you. Upon no other plan can a man justly and permanently aggrandize himself.”¹⁵ The Savior summarized the same principle: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. 16:25).

Scriptural and Modern Examples of the Goodwill Motive. Without the moderating influence of the sharing motive, the goodwill motive is selfish and manipulative. For example, the religious leaders of Christ’s day sought to earn the external validation of the people. Then when their command over the people’s goodwill was threatened by the Savior, they acted selfishly and sought to destroy him, inciting the people to demand the Savior’s crucifixion.

A version of the goodwill motive may explain why some people serve in the Church. Elder Dallin H. Oaks wrote, “Some may serve for hope of earthly reward. Such a man or woman might serve in Church positions or in private acts of mercy in an effort to achieve prominence or cultivate contacts that would increase income or aid in acquiring wealth. Others might serve in order to obtain worldly honors, prominence, or power.”¹⁶ Of these selfish persons, Nephi wrote that they serve to “get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion” (2 Ne. 26:29).

15. Quoted in Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 61.

16. Dallin H. Oaks, “Why Do We Serve?” *Ensign* 14 (November 1984): 13.

On the other hand, some may seek the goodwill of others to do good when their desires are mellowed by love. Such was the case of Ammon, one of King Mosiah's sons. During his missionary sojourn with the Lamanites, he was assigned to tend King Lamoni's flocks. While he was engaged in this effort, robbers scattered the sheep he and Lamoni's other servants were tending. Apparently, losing the king's sheep was a capital offense, and Lamoni's servants were afraid of the consequences. Ammon saw the situation as an opportunity to impress his companions with the power he had received from the Lord and to gain their goodwill, which he could use to lead them to Christ. The Book of Mormon records, "Now they [Lamoni's servants] wept because of the fear of being slain. Now when Ammon saw this his heart was swollen within him with joy; for, said he, I will show forth my power unto these my fellow-servants, or the power which is in me, in restoring these flocks unto the king, that I may win the hearts of these my fellow-servants, that I may lead them to believe in my words" (Alma 17:29).

Other scriptural examples consistent with the goodwill motive include Mormon's account of the Nephite effort to convert the Gadian-ton robbers—so they would consider the Nephites as their brothers and sisters and no longer seek to destroy them (3 Ne. 5:4), and Jacob, who was motivated by the desire to earn Esau's goodwill when, after many years of separation, he sent him gifts in advance of their meeting (Gen. 32:3–5).

The desire to win the goodwill of others may explain the popularity of self-help classics such as *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. The theme of such books is that the goodwill of others is really an important resource that can be gained by validating others and inviting them to belong.

One historical tragedy was that of Pilate, who seems to have let his desire to earn the goodwill of the Roman emperor and some Jewish leaders exceed his sense of duty to protect the innocent, this duty falling under the promise keeper motive. To promote this selfish end, he allowed an innocent man in whom he found no fault to be crucified.

The Savior counseled against giving alms to gain what we have called the goodwill of others for selfish purposes: "Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matt. 6:2).

It may be that the goodwill motive led Joseph Smith to lend Martin Harris the 116 pages despite being counseled against such action by the Lord (D&C 3:12–15). Afterwards, he was steadfast in resisting the

goodwill motive when it came to matters of the Lord's kingdom, preferring to follow God rather than man.

Scriptural and Modern Examples of the *Promise Keeper Motive.* Somewhere deep inside of us lives the need for internal validation from our ideal self, sometimes called our conscience. This motive is characterized by a quotation attributed to Joan of Arc. She declared in the words of a poet, "One life is all we have, and we live it as we believe in living it, and then it's gone. But to surrender what you are, and live without belief, that's more terrible than dying—more terrible than dying young."¹⁷

President Thomas S. Monson quoted a poem by the famed minister H. E. Fosdick to describe the connection between duty and the promise keeper motive: "Men will work hard for money. They will work harder for [the goodwill of] other men. But men will work hardest of all when they are dedicated to a cause. Until willingness overflows obligation, men fight as conscripts rather than following the flag as patriots. Duty is never worthily performed until it is performed by one who would gladly do more if only he could."¹⁸

At times other motives may lead us to act out of character with our ideal self—but there is a price to be paid. If our ideal self is a person of integrity, then we keep our promises. Otherwise we suffer the strains of a stressed relationship with our ideal self.

Elder Oaks also identified our sense of duty or loyalty as an important motive for serving. "Those who serve out of a sense of duty or loyalty to various wholesome causes are the good and honorable men and women of the earth."¹⁹

President George Albert Smith declared, "It is your duty first of all to learn what the Lord wants and then by the power and strength of His holy priesthood to magnify your calling in the presence of your fellows in such a way that the people will be glad to follow you."²⁰

President Abraham Lincoln spoke of the importance of being validated by one's ideal self when he wrote: "I desire to so conduct the affairs

17. Maxwell Anderson, *Joan of Lorraine* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1945), act 2, scene 4.

18. Harry Emerson Fosdick, in *Vital Quotations*, comp. Emerson Roy West (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 38.

19. Oaks, "Why Do We Serve?" 14.

20. George Albert Smith, in *One Hundred Twelfth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1942), 14. See also Thomas S. Monson, "The Sacred Call of Service," *Ensign* 35 (May 2005): 54.

of this administration that if, at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall at least have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me.”²¹

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego may have been motivated by what we call the promise keeper motive. They refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s idol even when the consequence of refusing was being cast into the fire. Still, their conscience would not allow them to worship the idol, preferring to be at peace with their ideal selves rather than earn the goodwill of the king (Dan. 3:18).

Karl G. Maeser once described the importance of what we refer to as the promise keeper motive by connecting it to honor. He was asked about the phrase *word of honor*. He responded, “Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape, but stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I’d die first!”²²

Nonetheless, the virtue of the promise keeper motive may also be turned to vice unless mellowed by the sharing motive. For example, consider the story of the Savior’s parable of the prodigal son and his brother. The prodigal son’s brother believes he has done his duty and earned the goodwill of his father. So he is taken aback by his father’s joy at his prodigal brother’s return. He complains to his father, “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment” (Luke 15:29). The father then chides his dutiful son for his lack of joy over his brother’s return while affirming his goodwill towards him. A lack of empathy and love prevented the brother from sharing in his father’s joy.

Scriptural and Modern Examples of the Belonging Motive. Being isolated is often connected with unhappy words like “lone and dreary.” Jacob described his people as “being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem” (Jacob 7:26).

There are two ways we can change our connections to others and increase our sense of belonging. The first one is to increase the sympathy others have toward us. This effort may be described as a component of the goodwill motive, which we have already described. The second way we can change a relationship is to change the way we feel about others,

21. Bob Blaisdell, ed., *Abraham Lincoln’s Wit and Wisdom* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2013), 117.

22. Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953), 71.

what we sometimes refer to as a change of heart. Regarding the need to change our caring for others, Moroni encouraged his people to “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moro. 7:48). One of our hymns has us praying, “Lord, give me the will to mend; O Lord, change me from foe to friend.”²³ Another hymn also describes the importance and the need to change our feelings toward Jesus Christ:

More holiness give me,
 More strivings within,
 More patience in suff'ring,
 More sorrow for sin,
 More faith in my Savior,
 More sense of his care,
 More joy in his service,
 More purpose in prayer.

More gratitude give me,
 More trust in the Lord,
 More pride in his glory,
 More hope in his Word,
 More tears for his sorrows,
 More pain at his grief,
 More meekness in trial,
 More praise for relief.²⁴

As G. K. Chesterton said, if we can be interested in others, even if they are not interested in us, we will find ourselves “under a freer sky, [and] in a street full of splendid strangers.”²⁵ Ruth expressed her motivation to belong when responding to her mother-in-law’s encouragement to make her own separate life: “Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). And when Nephi gained a promise from Zoram to join Lehi and his people, the covenant was that he would change his allegiance and commitment—he would belong to this new family. And if one more example were needed, it would be the Anti-Nephi-Lehies,

23. Lorin F. Wheelwright, “O Love That Glorifies the Son,” in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 295.

24. Philip Paul Bliss, “More Holiness Give Me,” in *Hymns*, no. 131.

25. G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: John Lane, 1908), 35.

who changed their feelings for the Nephites, after their conversion, from antipathy to sympathy (Alma 23:18).

However, the need to belong can also lead those most lonely to join with destructive groups. Giddianhi, the leader of the band of robbers, displayed how the belonging motive can be perverted when he attempted to entice Lachoneus to join his nefarious band: “Yield yourselves up unto us, and unite with us and become acquainted with our secret works, and become our brethren that ye may be like unto us” (3 Ne. 3:7). Clearly part of the motive for joining this murderous band was to belong to a group and obtain the external validation that one naturally craves.

Scriptural and Modern Examples of the Sharing Motive. When we internalize the well-being of others, their successes and good fortunes as well as their deprivations become our own. We are motivated by their needs, which may include the need for bread, validation, belonging, and knowing. This dimension of the sharing motive is captured by the words of a hymn: “I cannot see another’s lack and I not share.”²⁶

Lehi’s description of the reasons why he taught his children the teachings of Christ would fit under what we call the sharing motive; Lehi desired that his family know the things of God. “And I have none other object save it be the everlasting welfare of your souls” (2 Ne. 2:30).

What we call the sharing motive may have been a part of what motivated George Washington, about whom it has been written, “In all history few men who possessed unassailable power have used that power so gently and self-effacingly for what their best instincts told them was the welfare of their neighbors and all mankind.”²⁷

Alma provides a wonderful description of being motivated by what is referred to here as the sharing motive and the own consumption needs of his people. After Korihor accused him of acting selfishly, Alma responded, “Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the judges until now, with mine own hands for my support, notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people. . . . And now, if we do not receive anything for our labors in the church, what doth it profit us to labor in the church save it were to declare the truth, that we may have rejoicings in the joy of our brethren?” (Alma 30:32, 34).

26. Grace Noll Crowell, “Because I Have Been Given Much,” *Hymns*, no. 219.

27. James Thomas Flexner, *Washington: The Indispensable Man* (New York: New American Library, 1984), xvi.

Sharing, the most Christlike of motives and furthest along the path to perfection, is often challenged by our selfishness. Such was Joseph Smith's test. Moroni warned Joseph about seeking the plates for selfish reasons. He told Joseph that "Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family), to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive than that of building his kingdom; otherwise I could not get them" (JS-H 1:46).

On the surface, it seems that such a noble motive as sharing is unassailable. Nonetheless, if the sharing motive leads us to care about uplifting one person to the detriment of others, it may also be seen as a vice. For example, the book of 1 Samuel tells in great detail how the prophet Eli's sons not only did not believe in the God of Israel, but openly made a mock of God's commandments. Despite Eli acknowledging their faults, he would not remove them from their office in the priesthood. The Lord did not just punish Eli's sons (killing them both in one day), but Eli as well, removing all of his house from their positions in the priesthood (1 Sam. 2).

As Enos illustrates, the righteousness of the sharing motive depends on the radius of our caring—from family and friends, whom even the Gentiles love, to those not like us—and when fully developed the radius of caring includes even our enemies. And only when we have reached that radius of caring can we become truly Christlike.

Summary: Our Motives and the Path to Perfection

Elder Maxwell taught the importance of educating our desires: "Fortunately for us, our loving Lord will work with us, 'even if [we] can [do] no more than desire to believe,' providing we will 'let this desire work in [us]' (Alma 32:27)."²⁸ President Joseph F. Smith taught, "The education then of our desires is one of far-reaching importance to our happiness in life."²⁹ Elder Maxwell connected desires and works by referring to President Brigham Young, who taught, "Holy desires produce corresponding outward works."³⁰ Therefore, concluded Elder Maxwell, "Only

28. Neal A. Maxwell, "According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts," *Ensign* 26 (November 1996): 22.

29. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939), 297.

30. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 6:170 (January 17, 1858).

by educating and training our desires can they become our allies instead of our enemies!”³¹

Christ prescribed the path we should follow when he commanded us to first love God and second our neighbor. When we are filled with love, our sharing motive is strengthened and bridles the own consumption, goodwill, promise keeper, and belonging motives. Only then are we led to do noble deeds.

The path to perfection requires that we develop right motives. This will be a lengthy and difficult process. Joseph Smith taught that “the nearer man approaches perfection, the more conspicuous are his views, & the greater his enjoyments, until he has overcome the evils of this life and lost every desire of sin; and like the ancients, arrives to that point of faith that he is wrapped in the glory and power of his Maker and is caught up to dwell with him. But we consider that this is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment.”³²

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31. Maxwell, “According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts,” 22.

32. Joseph Smith, “To the Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” *Evening and the Morning Star* 2 (February 1834): 135.