

The Reward Addiction

Contributed by Eddie Boasso
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I have been lately considering why I do what I do in life—have you ever asked yourself that question? As I look at my own life and observe the things that I want to do, rather than what I have to do, I am convinced that as humans we intrinsically do everything in our power for the reward. I believe the reward or benefit of a thing is why we choose to do a thing, no matter how small or big it is, and typically, we would rather have more of something than less so we can relish in the pleasure of it longer. This is especially seen in our consumer oriented society where catch phrases like “more”, “two-for-one”, “bigger”, “extra-large”, and “supersize it”, almost uncontrollably grab a hold of us like having our “necks in a noose”. We have little time for moderation regardless if we have to pay for it physically or financially; as long as it satisfies our gnawing sense of need we will do whatever we can for rewards despite the consequences.

What is it about life that in everything we do and in every conceivable way we yearn and look for pleasure, ease, comfort, and happiness which, in my opinion, is an unspoken addiction without remedy? This is our inherent and inescapable condition we find ourselves in. Our predicament is incomprehensibly eternal: despite how we attempt to silence the unsatisfying cry from within to be fed pleasures, we are left with no other option but to bow down and feed our frenzied souls with every morsel of reward and pleasure we can get. This has and will continue to bring out the worst in man. As we advance as a society with our need for “quicker”, “bigger”, and “faster”, our options will increasingly become overwhelmingly difficult for us to utilize good judgment, while our appetite to obtain more rewards will drive us even further into a senseless pursuit of them.

Do you think this is overstating the issue? Consider for a moment your need for food—why do you eat the food you do? Whether you eat for health or taste, it is reward motivated at the core. Consider your friendships—why do you spend time with the people you do? Because you like being with people that actually like you. This is why your best friend is your best friend. These are simple, positive, and quite normal aspects of life that are obvious, yet they reveal a truth of why we do what we do. Now look at every other area of life whether it’s our faith, job, money, recreation, style of clothing, music, etc.—we do it all for the reward. Some may say, “Hey, I can’t stand my job, I certainly don’t do it for the reward.” I would say for sure you do. You may totally dislike your job, but for the paycheck at the end of the week, you’ll put up with it, and if it becomes overbearing enough you’ll quit to find something “better”. Whether we are speaking of something positive or negative, the truth remains that we will do all we can to maximize the positive and reduce the negative—either way it is an endless search for rewards.

Indeed, if it’s true that we cannot escape such a condition, then we should not question as to “why” it is, but “how” we can manage this inherent

quality, and not have to apologize for our propensity to run after every possibility of reward in any given thing. Nor should we limit our appetites to experience unlimited pleasures and rewards. I believe we were created for this very thing. Certainly as Christians, we have been given access to the greatest reward possible—God Himself! We, by virtue of our profession of faith, say we believe in a Creator who happens to be our Father, and that the greatest expression of His love for us was in sending His Son to die for us so we can be with Him forever. What an amazing reward we have been given!

We were created in the image of such a divine, holy, beautiful being of infinite, tangible, love, of which His nature was put into the very fabric our beings. We were created to live in the perfect condition of pleasure with God devoid of everything contrary to His nature and ways. This was the first state that man found himself in the garden; however, when the fall occurred, our spiritual state died, yet our soul's craving for pleasure and reward did not—it just became polluted.

In Jesus, access to God has been reestablished whereby our impure groping for rewards without God can be transformed into eternal yearnings for God. The Holy Spirit has now become our "governing agent" helping us channel our appetites toward God. As Christians, it's unnecessary to deny ourselves for "denial's sake", adopting a "self-mortifying" mindset to be purged from cravings, but rather we are to deny the ungodly, sinful appetites that keep us from true reward. This is why life without Christ can never fully satisfy because without God's Spirit enabling us, we can never effectively manage our inner craving for reward.

I have often meditated on the promise God gave Abraham in the beginning of his journey to the Promised Land and have made it my escort into God's heart in prayer— "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." your shield, " (Ge 15:1).

Regardless of how each of our journeys may be scripted, with all of their uncertainty and difficulties, the Lord makes it clear from the outset that He "wants to" and "is" to be our exceedingly great reward above all. As we become increasingly preoccupied and fascinated with God, our motivations and daily choices become purified through pursuing Him. This is the secret to a holy life, pursuing holy rewards in a Holy God.

Although Jesus suffered in the most horrible way in laying His life down for our sake, He did it for the reward— us!

"...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy (us) that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

(Heb 12:2)