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Deborah Longenecker

Cedarville University, deborahlongenecker@cedarville.edu

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Cream-Colored Sticky Note

Deborah Longenecker

Deborah Longenecker is a junior keyboard pedagogy major. She grew up in Kuwait and enjoys learning how music intersects with other disciplines such as art, literature, history, and science.

My wooden Ikea desk, thoroughly nicked and scratched as is proper for a “scratch and dent” buy, has witnessed much of my studies from elementary school to senior year of high school. It has withstood the drumming of nervous fingers waiting for inspiration. It has been massaged by a computer mouse skulking through social media sites. And buffered by a cream-colored sticky note, it has felt the touch of a pen scribbling a convicting reminder to its author: “Are you doing this for self or for love?” This little note captures the essence of the metamorphosis that God has wrought in my life. Throughout my years as a student, God has taught me much about integrity and motivation.

Although I “prayed the prayer” at age four, my motivation for any semblance of Christian life was actually the pursuit of my own pleasure. I loved goodness because to me it meant good consequences, which meant happiness. My utilitarian attitude toward goodness logically resulted in impending catastrophe: if goodness and my own pleasure did not coincide, pleasure would dominate. Or in the words of that sticky note that I stuck to my computer monitor several years later, I would do things for self, not for the love of God. In early high school, I found that logging onto Facebook instead of doing homework for my online classes made me happy, so I ditched goodness and went straight for pleasure. Unfortunately, my personality also naturally includes a secretive streak. So not only did I routinely disobey my mom and log onto Facebook during school hours; I also developed nearly superhuman abilities for deception and covering up.

Obviously this trap I had walked into compromised my integrity. To everyone but my family, I looked like a sweet, quiet,

Christian girl. But in reality, all sorts of nastiness lurked inside my heart. Because I had barricaded my heart with deception, the sin festered in darkness—and almost no one knew. But though God allowed me to make these unwise choices, he only let me go so far. Eventually guilt began to bother me—guilt that would gradually override the pleasure of my sin. One day, I finally decided to confess to my mom some of the issues that I had hidden.

In the painful process of breaking down the barricades of my deception and shedding light on the darkness inside my heart, I realized that goodness lay completely out of my human grasp. Now I had to depend completely on God for the way out. By his mercy I forsook my sin and began to live by his power. By the time I turned seventeen, God had given me an intense disgust for and hatred of deception in any form—so much different from my previous deceitful self. Furthermore, when God showed me my utter inadequacy for goodness, he also started the process of changing my motivations. After realizing the love God had for me in Jesus' death and resurrection, I became increasingly motivated not by pleasure but by love for God. This gradual change in motivation continues to send out reverberations into all aspects of my life, including my role as a student.

In the life of a student, especially one who already studies hard, one's motivations hold great importance. Paul discusses godly motivation in Colossians 3:23-24, which reads, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." These verses do not simply say, "Do your work well." If they did, they would allow for hearty work founded on bad motivations, such as studying hard to gain people's applause, to raise one's self-esteem, or to humiliate someone else. Instead, these verses instruct us to do our work "as for the Lord," which means that not only must we turn out quality work, but we must do it for the right reason: to please God. Hard work by itself is not enough—it takes holy motivation to fulfill our academic duties "as unto the Lord."

Godly motivation for study will also build a student's integrity. Obviously, when we study with the intent to please God, we will naturally develop integrity: the alignment of appearance and reality. We can express integrity in study by resisting the urge to cheat on

tests and letting our test results reflect what we actually know. Additionally, what we do when supposed to be studying also falls under the issue of integrity. Dalia Akhnoukh, a junior in the Honors Program, notes that it is “really important to maintain integrity in those times [when you are alone], because your character shines most in the times when you’re alone.” In my case, surfing the internet secretly while pretending to study compromised my integrity. God-glorifying motivation protects a student from such deceit.

Integrity in study—and in every aspect of life—stems from the proper motivation of pleasing God. I can see this principle illustrated in my own life: once I began to follow Jesus fully with my whole heart, I saw my motivations changing and my integrity growing. I began to ponder the question posed by the cream-colored sticky note and decided to live life no longer for self but instead for the love of God. Aside from the joy and the peace that naturally results from obedience, I look forward to “the reward of the inheritance” mentioned in Colossians 3:23-24, for it is the Lord Christ whom I serve.

Works Cited

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