

STRENGTHENING THE WILL AND INTERPERSONALISM

Virgil Warren, PhD

Will is an aspect of people that links mind, emotion, and action to create what we call “person.” In addition to other factors, personal relationships impact the will, the mind, and the emotions to produce action. Will contrasts from stimulus-response; so we are more than a set of complicated electro-chemical processes. We can decide; we do not have to respond to the strongest environmental stimulus. Since we can decide, we find ourselves living by values more than by drives and stimuli. We are not the determined creatures depicted by Skinnerian behaviorism, but persons created in the image of God.

Other people greatly enhance our motivation to endure suffering, cope with temptation, master the body, grow in the faith. Love from other people has a particularly strong effect because love combines emotion, mind, and values into one experience. When we can trust others, we are willing to try and try again. People exhort other people with their words (Hebrews 13:22). Francis Bacon said, “*Rhetoric functions to harness reason to imagination for the better moving of the will.*” Other people’s examples of commitment inspire us to greater achievement (Philippians 1:14). Jesus used encouragement by other people when he sent out the Twelve and the Seventy in pairs. Fellowship with other people and prayer to God combine two dimensions of interpersonal relationship “*for the better moving of the will.*”

Interpersonal motivation has greater potential than motivation based on any other source. Things cannot fully satisfy persons. Since personal relationship answers to all the potentials persons have, it has greater power than lesser things do—money and things money can buy--even ideas. Understanding comes from ideas, but exhortation comes from ideas imbedded in someone we respect. Love is the best motivator. Love as acceptance is related to the “home court advantage.”

Lesser sources of motivation include fear. Fear applies to binary formats like those present in legal and conceptual structures. Fear predominates in these, because if people are not right or completely right, the only alternative is for them to be wrong, which has penalties people fear. Fear of failure produces the adverse effect, because it causes lower quality of performance (cp. a clutch foul shot in basketball) or frustrates a person so much that she quits or will not even try. When fear, fear of failure, or fear of rejection is removed, the level and consistency of performance rises.

The “*bondage of the will*” we do not explain as the result of hereditary natural depravity. The pull of sin does not have the character of natural inability, but ingrained habit. People are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). Influence, not miracle, provides

satisfactory assistance for breaking the power of past behavior on present resolve. (See notations about empowerment under the interpersonal essay “Holy Spirit.”)

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