

Chain Reactions

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In her elderly years, my mother is battling various health issues. We recently went through several mornings of low blood pressure, so low that she could barely get out of bed. One of her doctors became concerned and wanted her to be monitored in the emergency room. Blood work revealed that she had a kidney infection, which led to increased fluid loss during the night, which led to ... low blood pressure. So, antibiotics for the infection have steadied the early morning blood pressures.

We medical laymen wouldn't normally make that connection. And herein lies a spiritual parallel: sometimes our sins arise from an alternate source, a place that we might not think to look within ourselves. That source might give rise to feelings and thoughts that are acted out on a seemingly unrelated basis. The problem: we have to discover the true motivations for our actions before we can effectively fix them.

Take Judas, for example. It still seems incredible that one of Jesus' closest associates could betray Him, and we marvel at what could have possibly been his motive. Some have speculated that he was dissatisfied with Jesus' restraint and wanted to force Him to seize power – a desire which, if true, arose from a misconception of the kingdom.

But the Scriptures only reveal one realistic possibility, and it is not so noble as pressing Jesus to display His divinity. When Mary anointed the head of Jesus with expensive oil at the feast in Bethany, it is John who notes that *“one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot ... who would betray Him, said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’”* (Jn 12:4-5). What noble compassion Judas had for the poor! And how admirable to reprimand the wasteful Mary! Except that wasn't Judas' concern at all: *“This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it”* (Jn 12:6). The reprimand rightly belonged to Judas, and Matthew records that after Jesus so rebukes him that *“Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver”* (Mt 26:14-15). The Scriptures reveal no other motive for Judas' action than greed.

We humans are complex creatures. Our memories, or the suppression of them due to extreme distress, can provoke what seems to be irrational or uncharacteristic behavior later on in life. Insecurities can drive us to wretched excesses. Saul's lack of faith in God and extreme jealousy of David led him murder a whole village of priests and embark on a crazed manhunt – even as David proved his innocence to his once-beloved king and father-in-law time and again. It was lust, not hatred, that led David to murder Uriah in order to cover up his illicit affair. And David was blind to this until Nathan's piercing story of the ewe lamb (2 Sam 11-12).

So how do we discover our true selves and understand our true motivations? God's word reveals the *“thoughts and intents of the heart”* (Heb 4:12). Without honest self-assessment, we might never get a handle on genuine repentance and correction.

