

“Practicing Affirmation”

Sam Crabtree & John Piper

Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

When our mouths are empty of praise for others, it is probably because our hearts are full of love for self. It demeans Jesus as though he were stooping to do something unworthy when he says, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21, 23). If he says it, should we consider it beneath us to say it? God is glorified in us when we affirm the work he has done and is doing in others.

We can sin in two ways: by idolatrous commendation, or by failing to commend the commendable. Obedience to God supersedes obedience to man, but does not forbid all obedience to man. Good affirmations are God-centered, pointing to the image of God in a person. What’s the Point? Good affirmations are God-centered, pointing to the image of God in a person. God is a desire-transformer.

When he transforms our hearts, we don’t affirm others out of sheer obligation, but rather because we want to. We want them to enjoy the refreshment from being affirmed that we enjoy when we are affirmed. God is the prime mover of all good affirming.

Are you not eagerly longing to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”? Something is seriously defective about the person who does not desire to be affirmed by God in this way: He gets the glory for producing the quality being affirmed in me. I shouldn’t stop desiring it.

Don’t affirm any old thing. Don’t affirm empty trendiness. Don’t stroke the ego. Commend the commendable! Value the valuable! Supremely value the supremely valuable. Worship only Christ, and then commend his image in people. The best affirmations acknowledge and encourage progress in the direction that fulfills that very purpose for living on this earth: to glorify God by becoming Christlike. Some unbelievers are actually better behaved than some believers. This behavior is God’s gift to them, not their intrinsically meritorious character.

Affirmation is like an invigorating sudsy shower after a long day of manual labor. It’s like a cool rain after a long, hot dry spell. It delivers a combination of relief, respite, hope, optimism, satisfaction, and energy. It’s life-giving. It blesses. Do you want your relationships to be more refreshing to you? Then serve up banquets of refreshment for others.

We affirm and refresh others by paying attention to them. Generally, it is easy to affirm early in a relationship, because no offenses have been committed yet. But over the course of time, we can experience a growing desire to bring certain corrections to the table. Which will dominate?

Affirmation or correction?

Affirmations tend to evaporate over time. Meanwhile, corrections keep piling up. Corrections tend to out-number affirmations, and by doing so, corrections sabotage or undercut the value of affirmations.

The bean counters are telling us that a healthy state in a system actually requires 3–5 positive events to overcome one negative event.” You can tackle the mountain (the whole marriage relationship) and break it down into a bunch of easy-to-climb molehills of affirmation. If a pattern of corrections is outweighing the affirmations, the sting stays with us, and the corrections keep picking the scab. It’s easier for a person to endure physical sickness than the crushing blows of words that impact the soul: An overabundance of correction will result not only in a person’s tuning out your legitimate corrections, but tuning you out almost altogether.

While loving relationships are not all about tomfoolery, people who can’t laugh together are probably very thirsty for more affirmation in the warp and woof of life together.

There are ratios in the affairs of the heart. Proportionality matters. The ratio is like a checking account. Affirmations are deposits. Corrections are checks you write against the balance in the account. If you write too many checks in relation to the deposits, your checks bounce—they’re no good. It will take additional deposits to restore your credit. Here then is the simple principle: people are influenced by those who praise them.

Giving praise does wonders for the other person’s sense of hearing. We find pleasure in affirming positive behaviors, which then become positive patterns, because behaviors that are consistently rewarded tend to be repeated. Correction packaged with the affirmation will contaminate and weaken the affirmation, perhaps making it altogether fruitless. Corrections tend to cancel affirmations, and the closer the proximity to correction, the more crippled the affirmation. Let affirmations stand alone, separated from correction.

A vacuum of approval is not likely to refresh the person or to glorify God who has graced the person. Just because we don’t drink poison doesn’t mean the body will be healthy; it must also receive nutrients. Just because we aren’t drilling any holes in the bottom of our canoe doesn’t mean that the waves and storms of life won’t require us to actively do some bailing from time to time. A steady diet of affirmations in a relationship is like watering and hoeing in a garden—it’s refreshing and keeps the weeds down. Just doing nothing won’t keep the weeds down. Weeds have a way.

It’s part of this fallen, cursed world. It is a foolish error to assume Affirmation goes beyond passive acceptance to a steady diet of active approval, not aiming only for minimal correction, but earnest commendation.

Yesterday's refreshment doesn't refresh permanently. You can't stockpile freshness. When affirmations are disingenuous, the affirmed will come to not trust the affirmer and will begin to wonder what's really going on. affirmation is not about lowering standards. It is about commending incremental progress toward those standards as those standards reflect the character of Christ.

Why Affirm Others?

1. Affirming others earns us the right standing from which to make suggestions. people are more willing to listen to us when they have experienced the refreshment of affirmation from us.
2. Affirmation lifts morale. It's good for the home, the office, the church, the locker room.
3. Affirmation energizes people.
4. Affirmation of others makes us easier to live with.
5. Striving to affirm others puts us in the practice of looking at them positively—that is, looking for evidence of God's work in them. The image of God is present in all humans, but is often missed by those not looking for it. Affirmation doesn't require deep insight, just simple sight. And action. See good things and point them out with appreciation. uses time that could have been wasted complaining.
6. By commending Christlike qualities, and celebrating them when we spot them, affirmation showcases the character of God, giving him honor for being the kind of God he is.
7. Behaviors that are rewarded and celebrated are more likely to be repeated.
8. When we commend God's image in people, God is glorified, and that's why we were made—to glorify God.

Praise has tremendous potential as an ally to persuasion, and we should not forget it. divided families lose track of the tremendous power and importance of simply affirming. If it helps you, think of it this way: geese honk encouragement and fly in formation. Skunks travel alone. He ordains that refreshment be achieved through means. The means I am talking about is your affirmation of others, affirming them, blessing them, commending and congratulating them, and thanking them.

The pain of relationships impedes and destroys even the desire to affirm, much less the active practice of affirming. If you only commend people to their faces, the temptation to flattery may rise, politicizing the process, possibly contaminating it with favor-seeking or hoped-for reciprocity. people tend to be influenced by those who commend them.

While I agree with behaviorism when it says behaviors that are rewarded tend to be repeated, and we forfeit influence if we pretend it is not so. In fact, I am arguing that

God may allow all the other factors, including prayer, to be held hostage by failure to practice affirmation. So when desiring to express longings without coming across as indicting, work overtime at affirmation first.

As much as it lies with you, ensure that the context or backdrop of expressed shortcomings is an environment of affirmation and approval. Receive praise as an advance deposit on the “well done” eventually coming from God himself. If we have alienated our listeners, if we have turned them off. It doesn’t matter what perfect programs we are broadcasting over our radio channel if they’re not tuned in. When overwhelmed by correctives, insufficient affirmation can leave your influence held hostage.