

Practicing Affirmation

Practicing Affirmation: Chapter One

1. In Chapter One, Crabtree begins with a quote by Jon Bloom: “The love of our own glory is the greatest competitor with God in our own hearts...” If this is true, he then poses the question: “Isn’t praise of man idolatrous?” What are some of the Biblical examples he gives where either God commends/praises/affirms someone or commands us to? What about Jesus affirming people?

2. Crabtree also points out on p. 13: “Those who know they should do something- like commend commendable people- but don’t do it, are sinning.” And on p. 19 he says, “I am suggesting that we rob God of praise by not pointing out his reflection in the people he has knit together in his image.” Describe a situation (without naming names) where you’ve withheld affirmation. What is God saying to you?

3. On p. 16, it’s pointed out the “even to a bunch of scalawags,” Paul affirms the work of God he sees in them. Crabtree points out that these were people who struggled with: serious doctrinal error, divisions, a form of immorality, lawsuits among themselves, problematic corporate gatherings, misunderstandings & misuse of gifts, broad opposition to Paul himself & more. What does it say about Paul that he was still able to affirm the Corinthians and what does it say of us when we are unable to affirm people because of the faults we see?

4. In the author’s acknowledgements at the end of the book he thanks his wife & the people of his church & everyone who has ever written his notes of affirmation over the years (p. 170): “I still have them. What risk did they take? These people risked feeding my pride. Yes, affirmation is risky. Thanks for risking.” Thoughts?

5. What does Crabtree say is “the point” of affirmation on p. 18? Describe a time where you saw something in someone that cultivated an attitude of praise toward God in your heart. Think in these categories (or more)- a friend... a spouse... a child... an elderly relative...

6. On p. 21 he poses the question, “Is there anything to praise in the unregenerate person?” On p. 19 he says: “And in the case of the unbeliever, character is part of the common grace of God, as a gift to the individual”? What thoughts did you come away with about affirmation for the non-believer?

7. “Affirmation gains us a hearing for the *gospel*” (p. 21). Share about a time you experienced this to be true.

8. One of the benefits we see from affirmation is refreshment: “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” (p. 23). Describe a time where you felt the refreshment of someone’s affirmation.

9. Read on p. 24: “To fail to commend the character of Christ in people...” Then he says: “Accordingly- catch this- it is important when complimented to close the loop, to draw out the specific connection to God’s work. Pass the compliment to God. We honor God by responding to compliments by saying such things as, ‘God has been very gracious to me’ or ‘Any skill you see in me I received from God and through those he placed around me to train me,’ or ‘You are very alert to notice what God is doing.’” What are your reactions to this? How could tone of voice & heart attitude play into this? (See ch 8 & appendix)

10. I’ve heard it said that we all have basic human needs for: Approval, Affection & Affirmation (Triple A). Have you ever felt like it was wrong to want to be affirmed? Crabtree says on p. 25: “The elementary desire to be commended is not wrong. The desire to be commended becomes perverted when we desire to be praised for the wrong things, or when the desire to be praised is elevated above the glory of God in the good we do...” Consequently, he poses the question: Is it wrong to desire to be loved? “No... Similarly, it is not wrong to desire to be noticed, to be well thought of, to feel important, to be respected, to be recognized, to avoid conflict, to enjoy friendship, to have a good reputation, to be looked up to, to avoid the anger of someone, or to not suffer rejection- if our desire for such things is pure...(p. 27)” So then, “Our problem then is not that we want to be made much of. Our problem is that we want to be made much of for the wrong reasons. Our problem is that we do not want strongly enough, desperately enough to be made much of by God himself for reasons that he establishes and brings to completion in and through Christ and for his glory” (p. 29). In your own words, what is he saying through all of this?

11. On p. 30 he says: “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.” What do you think about this? What do you think of complimenting someone’s hair or fashion sense or decorating style? Are these empty affirmations- why or why not? (Discuss living in tension)

12. Discuss what it means to practice receiving affirmation.