

The Biblical Art of Affirming Others

by Claude Thomas

If we ever want to develop healthy relationships, we must develop the biblical art of affirming others. The art of affirmation is a Christian skill that will revolutionize relationships in our families, in our friendships and in our workplaces.

The Apostle Paul practiced the art of affirmation in his relationship with Philemon.

Consider what he wrote to his friend:

"I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother." (Philemon 4-7, NKJV)

Here is the underlying principle in the art of affirmation:

People positively respond to positive and healthy reinforcement.

To have positive and healthy relationships, we must learn to reinforce positive and healthy characteristics. This is how Paul affirmed Philemon.

How do we develop the art of affirmation?

It all starts with training. We need to train ourselves to see what is positive and healthy in another person's life. But in order to see such traits, sometimes we need to train our eyes.

In high school, our youngest son participated in an art project. A part of this project was viewing a featured art exhibit with various kind of art. Jan and I went with him to support him and view the exhibit. Now, some of the art was very interesting to me. But, honestly, some of it I just didn't get.

I was standing at a painting that looked like someone spilled paint out of three or four buckets on the canvas, let it dry by accident and then decided to frame it. The painting made no sense to me at all.

Two other people came up just about the time I was going to view another painting. So, I thought it would be interesting to listen to their views on the "spilled paint painting."

They went on and on about the nuances of meaning and strokes of genius reflected in the painting. I concluded they were trained to see and appreciate what I didn't see and couldn't appreciate.

When Paul saw Philemon, he trained himself to view the best in Philemon. Philemon was by no means perfect, and he certainly had negative characteristics - owning slaves perhaps his most glaring character flaw.

But Paul saw Philemon as a friend and brother in Christ, and he wanted to develop their relationship. How did Paul develop this relationship? Through affirmation!

Taking our cue from Paul's affirmation of Philemon, there are skills we can employ today to develop the art of affirmation. When we affirm others, we should:

See the positive. The art of affirmation always works in positive terms.

Be personal. Paul tells Philemon how he touched him personally. Biblical affirmation reveals how the other person impacts us in a positive way.

Affirm present characteristics. Paul deals with the things that Philemon is doing right, right at that moment.

Be specific. See how Paul makes specific note of Philemon's qualities as part of the art of affirmation.

Be passionate. Paul wholeheartedly affirms Philemon's worth in Christ.

From Paul's relationship with Philemon, we discover the biblical art of affirmation. It will revolutionize our relationships, so practice it today.

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Article by Claude Thomas

Claude Thomas is pastor of First Baptist Church in Euless, Texas. For more resources from Dr. Thomas, visit www.LifePoints.org.