

God-centered Affirmation for Those Who Are Not God

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we are beginning a very short, it's going to be four weeks, a four-week Sunday school series on this book by Sam Crabtree.

It's called Practicing Affirmation. Practicing Affirmation by Sam Crabtree. Let me be clear, this is not self-affirmation.

We're not saying I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and people like me. Is there a place for self-affirmation?

I think so. I think not like that, but if we're talking about reminding ourselves and believing for ourselves what the Bible says about us, I think that's true.

The Apostle John. You remember as he wrote his gospel, the fourth gospel. How did he refer to himself?

[1 : 07] You know? The disciple that Jesus loved. That's a very affirming kind of statement, a very affirming sort of recognition of this is who I was, this is who I am.

In 1 John, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God, and that is what we are.

That's a very self-affirming statement. I'm a child of God. I'm an heir of heaven. I'm on the brink of eternal life, and my Father is going to give it to me.

Paul affirms himself. He says he's called by Jesus Christ, appointed to preach the gospel.

He says lots of things that are true and actually good about himself. We can say about ourselves that we're chosen from before the foundations of the earth.

[2 : 11] I'm one of the elect. Those are self. Those are meant to be comforting, affirming statements about ourselves. We're not going to be talking about self-affirmation, but I do want to just point out that there is a gospel-saturated, gospel-driven self-affirmation that we all need to do, that is a matter of faith, of God is saying this wonderful thing about me, and I believe it, and so I'm going to say it to myself.

Well, Sam Crabtree's book, Self-Practicing Affirmation, is not about self-affirmation. It is mostly about affirming others.

The first chapter, we're just going to be doing four chapters in the book. The first chapter, which is the chapter I'm taking, is titled, God-Centered Affirmation of Those Who Are Not God.

God-Centered Affirmation of Those Who Are Not God. It's basically practicing of speaking well and praising others who are not God.

Speaking well of and praising others who are not God. Now, what do you think of that? What do you think of that?

[3 : 42] Maybe, maybe you say, well, I don't want them to get a big head. Pride is such a problem. I don't want to contribute to their pride.

And doesn't praising people fuel pride? Wouldn't it be better not to say anything at all? Wouldn't it be safer? Wouldn't it be better? I think the Bible's answer, just by its example, is no.

No. That's not the only answer. The Bible is the most man-humbling and God-honoring book that has ever been placed into our hands, that has ever been written.

And there's no book that puts man down where he belongs and God up where he belongs like the Bible.

So I want you to just kind of go through your mind. Go to, maybe go to Isaiah chapter 40 and 41. Those chapters in Isaiah. What does Isaiah say about the nations?

[4 : 53] About men? About the kingdoms of men? What kind of things does it say about men? Can you think of that any? Vanity and less than nothing.

Not even nothing. Whatever less than nothing is, that's the nations. What else does it say? What other comparisons does it make all those nations and peoples to? A drop in the bucket. So you drop a drop out of the bucket, you don't stop the whole operation. It doesn't mean anything. Dust on the scales. The inhabitants of the earth are like grasshoppers beneath his feet. The Bible is always telling people, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. That's true. And I think man's great problem in the first sin has probably been pride. Someone said it's the first shirt that we put on and it's the last shirt that we take off.

[5 : 56] So the Bible is always telling people, don't think more highly of yourself than you ought. But I think sometimes we can then try in a certain way to be more holy than God or more strict than even God himself in this way.

Because even with the Bible's emphasis on self-denial, on humility, on warnings against pride, the Bible, God's book, God's word to us, praises people.

It affirms and speaks well of people to the glory of God ultimately. And that's what we want to see. This praise that the Bible keeps on people, it always has a bouncing effect that it bounces to God and it glorifies God.

When what is praiseworthy in a person is recognized. And that's kind of what my main job is this morning is we want to look at the word of God and see just the fact that the Bible frequently praises and affirms and commends people.

And so if we are going to be biblical, we need to be learning what it looks like to practice that. What it means to follow in God's footsteps, to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

[7 : 30] The praise and affirmation of man is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the praise of God.

God is glorified in us. This is what Sam Crabtree says. God is glorified in us when we affirm the work he has done and is doing in others.

Let me repeat that. God is glorified in us. And I'd want to say by us and through us when we affirm the work he has done and is doing in others.

So at its heart, biblical affirming other people is about recognizing and noticing, look at what God has done and then saying it to that person.

Look what God has done in praising God and as you would commend them. So if you go out with Kevin O'Keefe and you're looking at the stars and you stand amazed as you look through the telescope and you look at the planets and then a part of you starts to sing in your heart, Oh Lord my God, how great thou art.

[8 : 55] You're saying these stars are amazing. God, you are amazing because you made them. When you look at, you go out west and you look at some mountain and you say it's beautiful.

Well, you're, as you say that mountain is beautiful, you're also saying the creator of that mountain is beautiful. He made that mountain. Or when you're standing on the brink of the Grand Canyon and you are amazed and you go and you speak well and you say, man, you haven't seen anything like this to someone else.

You are praising the creator of the Grand Canyon. You're glorifying the Grand Canyon creator.

And in the very same way, when we see something beautiful, majestic, holy, righteous, good, wonderful, commendable in a person, is not God glorified when we see it and when we point it out? When we see it and when we point it out. The Bible commends and affirms people. Not just as it talks about them.

[10 : 13] That's true. We're going to see some examples of the Bible affirming, but not talking directly to that person. But the Bible shows us an example, examples of of people being spoken directly to and being affirmed, being commended.

So it's not afraid to point out the good and the commendable in people. So we're just going to start going through some examples.

And I want to show you that this is very much the way that we should be looking at people and toward people and what what are what are words should be, what our conversations should be like. It's really we're going to either choose criticism as our predominant way of talking about people and to people, or we're going to choose commendation. And I think the more God glorifying is commendation.

So the Bible, let's just give some examples here. The Bible commends the majesty of Solomon. Talks about Solomon. Now, Solomon had lots of problems, didn't he?

[11 : 25] Eventually in the Bible, talks about those things. But the Bible also talks very well of Solomon. The Lord made Solomon very great in the sight of all Israel and bestowed on him such royal majesty as had not been seen on any king before him in Israel.

So who made Solomon very great? Well, it tells us the Lord. And so Solomon's greatness and his majesty is to be recognized and to be commended.

But at the root lay the majesty and the greatness and the generosity of God who made Solomon like that. Solomon received it and he had it and we are to recognize it.

And we are also at the same time to realize that the Lord gave him that. And so in recognizing what God had made of Solomon, we are recognizing the work of God in Solomon's life.

And so the Queen of Sheba says to Solomon. So we just had a commendation by like a third party sort of. So the speaking of Solomon.

[12 : 41] Now we have the Queen of Sheba and she's going to speak directly to Solomon. And what you're going to see is the Lord doesn't say, oh, and he was very displeased with that.

It was a very natural God glorifying thing. But the Queen of Sheba says to Solomon. So the Queen of Sheba says the report I heard in my own country about your achievements and about your wisdom is true.

Indeed, not even the half was told in wisdom and wealth. You have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your men must be. How happy your officials who constantly stand before you and hear your wisdom.

Praise be to the Lord your God who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. So she she praised God as she praised Solomon.

Solomon. As she talked about. Solomon's wisdom and the joy that he brought to others. You know, if you're looking for a way to commend someone.

[13 : 47] Look for that. How are you making those people happy? That's what the Queen of Sheba noticed. Like your men are so happy. They get to stand here and and they get to hear you in it. It makes their heart overflow with joy to hear your wisdom.

So she praised God as she praised Solomon. And again, it doesn't say God was displeased with her. It doesn't say God felt like his glory was being diminished because she said that to Solomon. No, she is brought forward in the very word of God as as a witness forever and ever of the greatness and the majesty of Solomon and what God had done in his life.

God's faithfulness to his promise to David. God's faithfulness to his promise to Solomon to say, I will make you great. So she affirmed Solomon.

And she glorified God. Those weren't mutually exclusive exclusive things. She they were both at the same time. So you have your Bibles. Please turn to First Chronicles.

[14 : 58] Chapter four. First Chronicles chapter four. About 20 years ago, this verse.

Was made famous. I think by Bruce Wilkinson. He had the prayer of J. Bez book and whatever about that. But here we have this little story of J.

Bez that we don't really know very much about this. This character. All we know about him are the good things that the Bible says about him and the good things that God did for him.

So First Chronicles chapter four, verse nine. And it is interesting because you just it doesn't take much to notice the First Chronicles one and two and three and four.

It's just all genealogy with almost no commentary about any of these people. And then all of a sudden, J. Bez out of the blue gets this wonderful commendation.

[16 : 06] J. Bez was more honorable than his brothers. That's a commendation. That's an affirmation. His mother had named him Jabez saying, I gave birth to him in pain.

Jabez cried out to God, to the God of Israel. Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory. Let your hand be with me and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.

And God granted his request. Jabez. So you tell me what what kind of good things does it say about Jabez?

What just there's obvious, pretty obvious. But what kind of good things to say about Jabez? He was honorable. He was honorable.

He was worthy of honor. More than his brothers. He depended on God for his success.

[17 : 10] He was a guy that trusted in the Lord. What else does it say about Jabez? He prayed.

He prayed in the face of what felt like fate. That's what this whole business is. He was born in pain. His name met pain. And it sure seemed like his whole life was just going to be a painful one. And yet, despite this feeling maybe of inevitability, he prays. He trusts the Lord. And God granted his request.

Jabez was honored above his brothers. He was more honorable than them. And he was blessed above them. Why was he blessed above his brothers? Well, the Lord did it.

The Lord granted his request. And so Jabez's honor is recognized. And you see the root of it. It's what God had made of him. It was what God had done in him.

[18 : 20] You don't honor God when you ignore Jabez's honor. You actually end up dishonoring God. Who answered Jabez's prayer.

Who made something of Jabez when it seemed like there was nothing that was going to happen except for pain. And so when you look at Jabez and his honor and his blessing, you're seeing the goodness of God.

So when you recognize it in Jabez, you should go to God and you should recognize the giver. We're going to turn to some other passages, but just let me give you some other examples here.

The Bible commends the Proverbs 31 woman. And it says, it does more than that. It gives us a command that we should commend women like that.

It says, a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. That's a command that we are to recognize, recognize people that fear the Lord and honor them.

[19 : 29] Speak well of them, praise them. So men, if you have a Proverbs 31 woman, she is to be praised.

The Proverbs 31 woman, though, is, I think, in the whole big picture of the book of Proverbs, she is a picture of every wise person. Yes, it is talking specifically about what wisdom looks like in a woman's life as a wife and as a mother.

But you remember, we've met lady wisdom in Proverbs 7 and 8. And so the Proverbs 31 woman is sort of like lady wisdom incarnated into a living person.

And I think the greater point is that wherever you see God-given wisdom incarnated in a person, it is, you are to praise it.

You are to notice it. And it is right to point it out. Wisdom is supreme. Therefore, get wisdom.

Esteem her.

[20 : 38] And she will exalt you. Embrace her and she will honor you. One of the reasons held out to pursue wisdom in the book of Proverbs is that it does bring honor and esteem.

Not just from God, but from man. So praise of man and praise of God, they can be at odds.

Jesus talks about that. Of the Pharisees, they wanted the praise of men rather than the praise of God. That was a situation where they put man over God.

They wanted the praise of man more than they wanted the commendation of God. That's obviously not right. So the praise of man and praise of God can be at odds, but not necessarily so.

This is where we want to, we don't want to have an all or nothing or either or. We want to, okay, what does the Bible say? It's a both and situation. It's like obeying man and obeying God.

[21 : 47] Can those be at odds? Yeah. So Peter, the apostles standing before the Sanhedrin, Peter says, you tell us who should we obey?

You or God, man or God? And the clear answer of it is between you and God. We have to obey God. If you're expecting us to put man over God, then that's not going to happen.

We're going to choose God. I think the same thing is with praise. If we are praising men instead of God, then that's wrong. If we are obeying men over God, then that's wrong.

And if we're praising men over God again, then we've chosen incorrectly. But that's not necessarily the paradigm always.

That's not necessarily how we need to look at this. Jesus gives us a very helpful paradigm. He says, render unto Caesar's what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's.

[23 : 00] Jesus is not forbidding tribute taxes to to God or to Caesar. Excuse me. And.

He's saying instead, you give each their due. You notice and you fulfill your duty towards both of them. So Jesus doesn't forbid tribute or taxes to Caesar.

And so we aren't talking an either or you either praise God or you praise man. It's a both. And we praise God. And men, we praise God for who he is, for what he's done, for his acts of salvation, for his character.

And then we praise men when we see in him or in her. Something that reflects God's glory. So when we we praise God's kindness and then when we see a bit of that kindness reflected in a man, it's right for us to notice it and say something about it.

So when our child does something generous. It's right to show and say, look at what the Lord is doing in you.

[24 : 16] That's wonderful. Wow. Look how generous you were. That's so great. That's just how that's how God is. So we praise God for who he is and all that he does.

And then we praise men when we see something in him or her that reflects God's glory. Or go to Hebrews 11 in your mind.

There's another example. A whole chapter talking about the greatness and the goodness of these people's faith and what they did and how they're an example for us and and how we need to imitate them and and what they did by faith.

So is the writer dishonoring God when he commends the faith of Abel and Enoch and Abraham and Moses and Isaac and Jacob and all of the rest?

No, it's very interesting. Hebrews chapter 11 is bookended with the word commend. 11 to this is what the ancients were commended for.

[25 : 26] And verse 39 at the very end. These were all commended for their faith. Now, it doesn't say exactly who commended them.

I don't think. But either way, it was it's either God or man commended these people for their faith. I think it was both. But I think you see by the just the example of Hebrews 11.

It's right to notice. And it's right to appreciate. And even to commend those who have lived out lives of faith. So when you see someone who goes through something hard.

And they do it by faith. And they're persevering and they're enduring in it. Or maybe they're like Abraham and they're waiting a long time.

Or they make a hard sacrifice. And it's by faith. It's right to notice that. And it's right to say something to them about it.

[26 : 29] To the glory of God. Turn over to 2 Corinthians. So 2 Corinthians chapter 8. 2 Corinthians chapter 8.

Remember, I talked about there are situations where the Bible talks sort of in a third person. They're talking about people and commending them. And there's other places where the Bible, where people are talking directly to another person and commending them.

And so there's not this loophole of it's okay to talk about someone behind their back. But it's not okay to talk about them to their face. The Bible shows us both.

Of sort of speaking well of other people behind their back. Not gossiping. Speaking well of them behind their back. That's great. And also speaking directly to them is good too.

That's what you have here in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verse 7. But just as you excel in everything. He is writing to this Corinthian church.

[27 : 37] Just as you excel in everything. In faith. In speech. In knowledge. In complete earnestness. And in your love for us. See that you also excel in this grace of giving.

He's talking directly to them. And he's not afraid that like this is going to go to their head. He's saying this is true. You do excel.

You excel in all these different aspects of Christian living. You excel in your faith. You excel in your speech.

You excel in your love for us. You excel in your zeal. Your earnestness. You excel in your grace. Now excel in the gift of giving too.

Add to your goodness. Add to your goodness. This goodness of giving. Now. I think you know that.

[28 : 44] The Corinthian church had some problems. In a lot of ways. They had a very torturous relationship with Paul.

They had problems. They had problems in the church. They had problems with sin. They had problems with. Partisanship. They had lots of problems.

But Paul didn't think it too dangerous. To say. It's like. It's too dangerous to say anything nice to these people. You don't want to. Commend them. No.

They had lots of problems. But he openly recognized. Their. Gifts. And their graces. And.

I just have to ask. Maybe. Are we trying to be wiser. Than Paul. If we give in. And say. Oh. It's too dangerous. We can't do that. That's not right.

[29 : 45] Maybe we're trying to be wiser than Paul. Are we trying to be wiser than Jesus. Is it possible.

That Christ likeness. For us. Could look like. More affirmation. For others. We say. We want to grow. To be like Christ.

We pray. I want to be like Christ. Maybe for us. In particular. Or I'm just saying. You singly. I want you to think about it. Maybe you.

Need to grow. In this affirmation. Of others. Jesus. Did this. He did it frequently. Where he talked. To people. And he told them. Good things. About themselves. He affirmed. The Canaanite. Mother. Woman. You have.

[30 : 39] Great. Faith. When Mary. The sister. Of Lazarus. She broke. An alabaster jar. A very expensive.

Perfume. It was made out. Of pure. Nard. And poured it. On his head. People started. Criticizing her. Remember. I told you. There's going to be.

One of two things. That is going to. Predominate. Predominate. Our conversation. And our speech. Is either going to be. Criticism. Or commendation. There's a place. For both.

But we're asking. Which one has the. Predominance. These people. Are criticizing her. That was foolish. She. She could have given that. To the poor.

Well. What is she thinking? Mary was rich. Mary was very wealthy. Mary. Lazarus. Martha. Martha. They were. They were. We don't know what they did.

[31 : 36] But we know that they were wealthy. And. Mary did. This extravagant. Absolutely. Prodigal. Wasteful. Thing. With her money.

And. They tell you. It was worth. Over a year's wages. This jar of perfume. So we'll say. I don't know.

Forty. Fifty thousand dollars. Whatever. A year's wages. It's gone. It's gone. In a few minutes. All on Jesus head. And everyone is nitpicking at her.

And Jesus said. Leave her alone. She's done a beautiful. Thing. To me. They thought. They were being.

Holy. And wise. And righteous. And Jesus says. Leave her alone. She's done something beautiful.

[32 : 33] To me. Was Jesus afraid. Of making Mary proud. Was he afraid. That his praise. Would go to her head. I guess not.

He wanted her to know. In front of all her critics. That she had done. A beautiful thing. He didn't talk about. Her. And defend her. Behind her back.

He defended her. To her face. So to speak. I could give you. Probably six. Other examples. Of Jesus. Commending people.

Saying. Wow. Look at your faith. Look at what you're doing. Oh. Nathaniel. Here's an Israelite. Without any guile. Things like that.

So. Here's Jesus. He's the one. Worthy. Of all blessing. And honor. And praise. That's where all creation is going. Is this affirmation.

[33 : 32] Of God. Of this praise. Of God. And that's. And Jesus is at the very heart of it. He's at the center of the throne. And. He. Is affirming.

Others. Not perfect. Not sinless. Not in heaven. On earth. And maybe we need to be more Christ like. In our affirmation.

Of others. Now. What's our point here? Oh. Wow. Here's our point. That. Good affirmations. Are God centered.

Pointing to the image of God. In a person. Everything is from God. And through God. And to God. So that in all things. Including the commendable. Qualities and people.

He might. Get. The glory. What. Does someone have. That has not been. Given.

[34 : 27] By God. Who has ever given to God. That God should repay him. For from him. And through him. And to him. Are all things. To him. Be the glory forever. And so. Where you see.

Something good. In your husband. In your wife. In your children. In your friends. In your friends.

Those good things. Are from him. And through him. And to him. He gave your wife skill.

He gave your husband. Kindness. Whatever it is. And she uses that skill. Through his strength. And it echoes back to him. And so. When you don't praise her.

When you don't. Commend him. It's just. Not her. Or him. That you're failing to recognize. You're failing to recognize.

Something of God. In them. And through them. And working in them. And so. We rob them. Of encouragement. That's what we're going to talk about. Next week. We rob them. Of encouragement.

[35 : 22] And we rob God. Of the praise. That. That he could have. When we don't point out. His reflection. In them. And so. We need to be.

Opening our eyes. And seeing. Like. That there is. The whole. The whole earth. Is full of God's love. The whole earth. Is full of his mercy. And that's. And that.

Pours down. And that floods down. Into people's lives. Even unbelievers. Have. There's common grace. There's commendable things. And we can truthfully. And.

Kindly say. To an unbelieving teacher. Our. Unbelieving. Excuse me. Teenager. Or our neighbor. God has given you.

Such skill. This is amazing. What you've done here. You. You're working. Very hard. What about. In the church. First Peter. Four. Ten.

[36 : 15] Each one. Should use. Whatever gift. He has received. To serve others. Faithfully. Administering. God's grace. In its various forms. If anyone. Speaks. He should do it. As one. Speaking. The very words. Of God. If anyone.

Serves. He should do it. With the strength. God provides. So that. In all things. God. May be. Praise. Through Jesus. Christ. To him. Be the glory. And the power. Forever. And ever. Amen. In the church.

God. Has given. All of his people. The Lord. Jesus. Has given. All of his people. Gifts. And we are. Stewards. Of that gift. And when we. Do it. In the strength. That God. Provides.

God. Is glorified. And it's right. For us. To see it. And point it out. And so. You see it. In them. And you say. God is really. Helping you.

To teach. God is really. Helping you. To encourage. To serve. You're really. Growing. In this area. And I see. God. Working in you. Or God. Is using you. Brother. God. Is using you.

[37 : 11] Sister. Keep it up. And so. Let's be catching. Each other. Doing. Good. Let's be catching.

Each other. Doing good. This is the opposite. Of a critical spirit. Someone jokingly. Said. You know. Some Christians. Have the spiritual gift. Of. Of criticism.

And they're always. Catching people. Not quite. Measuring up. Not quite. Doing the right. Thing. Having a hard time. And they criticize. And let's not be. Those kinds of Christians.

Have you ever. Gone to dinner. With a criticizer. Go out to eat. The waitress. Is too slow. The food. Is not right. The manager. I can't believe. He set the tables.

Up like this. This is taking too long. No one cares. About service anymore. Back in my day. And on and on. It goes. And no one. Can do anything right. And. It's a miserable time. I guess.

[38 : 08] Unless you're. Participating in it. But it's like. Swimming in a toxic pool. And it's poison. And they don't help anyone. They don't make restaurants. Better. Not with that kind of spirit.

They just bring everyone down. And so. You don't want to go out. To eat like that. And you don't want to go to church. Like that. And you don't want to live. In your family like that. Like I said. God's goodness and love. Fills the earth. Fills his people.

And so. We want to be on the lookout. This week. For someone. That we can say. Hey. I really appreciate this. About you. You've done. That was good.

I see you growing. In this area. So. I think that's where. We're going to end. Just with that. Homework assignment. Catch someone.

Doing good. This week. And say. Something to them. About it. To the praise of God. We're dismissed. We're dismissed. And say.