

Weekly Newsletter: 21st May 2024

Reflection: How to Receive a Compliment

By Joe Barnard

I find that a lot of Christians (me included) are very bad at receiving compliments. Often, we are downright fearful of them. It is almost as if a compliment is a foreign and dangerous virus. If there were masks and hand sanitizers available to protect us from the syllables of a nice word, a lot of us would use them assiduously.

Now, I understand that the human heart is full of vanity and pride and that such sin feeds readily off of any substance that can boost the ego. At the same time, I suspect that the aversion a lot of Christians feel toward loving words is not a byproduct of humility, but rather just another symptom of the stealthiness of pride. The heart was not made by God to exist like a pylon in cement – self-sufficient and self-grounded. Instead, the heart was made to be like a buoy in water, surrounded and supported by love – most importantly the love of God, but also the love and appreciation of one another.

This leads to an interesting question: How should Christians receive a compliment? What, in other words, does it look like to onboard a kind word in such a way that does not sink the heart into the darkened sea of self-importance?

Step 1: Extract and Bin the Husk of Flattery

We need to be aware that not all compliments are truthful; neither are they all spoken in a sincere spirit of love; neither are they all the right word for the right season.

The Bible is clear that we need to beware of flattery (c.f. Prov. 29:5). This is for a reason. We live in a world of foolishness, duplicity, and even malice. Equally, the heart is deceitful beyond all measure. This means that there is a legitimate cause to be guarded at times when people speak well of our character or deeds. Sometimes the words are in fact insincere or untrue. Other times, the people speaking to us don't realise the scavenging pride that is circling the heart like a buzzard in the sky. There is a story of John Bunyan stepping down from the pulpit after a very powerful sermon. One of his parishioners said to him, "That was a fine sermon, sir." Bunyan replied, "I know; the devil already told me so." Why did Bunyan say this? His point was that, unaware to the man, at that very moment his heart was already in danger of being inflated with self-congratulation. He didn't need a pat on the back; he needed a cold shower.

Now, while all of this is true, we need to be careful not to fall into a flattery-phobia. If the heart can suffer from hyper-inflation, it can also suffer from a kind of "flat balloon" syndrome. Often, we despair – not

because of aggressive pride – but because of aggressive shame. We can't find any sign of grace in our lives, anything that indicates that God is indeed fashioning us into vessels of dignity and honour. In such dark valleys, we need someone to come alongside us and tell us truthful observations about the fruits God is bearing in our lives. We need a Barnabas, not a Shimei (see 2 Sam 16).

Step 2: Plant the Compliment in the Soil of Humility

Spurgeon makes an insightful comment on humility. He says that humility is not an underestimate of oneself, but a right estimate of oneself. The truth is that God has given all of us great gifts and talents. We need to recognise these abilities – not so that we can boast about them – but so that, like a ship loaded with cargo, we can measure accurately and soberly the weightiness of our persons. The right use of a compliment is not to think, "I'm better than other people because I can do X," but rather, "Because God has made me with a special grace to do X, I need to use X in the service of God."

Step 3: Burn the Compliment on the Altar of Thanksgiving

I've been very clear about the danger of pride. Pride truly is the capital sin and therefore must be resisted more vigorously than any other deadly passion. That said, there is no need for a compliment to be wasted as food for the ego. There is another option. Gratitude and pride cannot coexist. One cannot give credit to God for His gifts while simultaneously taking credit for oneself. Christians need to appreciate the following fact: gratitude is a kind of spiritual weed killer. The more thankful we are, the less suitable soil there will be for pride to take root in.

This means that one of the best things we can do with a compliment is put it on the altar of grace and burn it as a thanksgiving offering. If someone says, "You are so good at making time for other people," the wrong thing to do is to bin the compliment as if it is a piece of rubbish. Such action comes very near to stealing praise from God. A better reaction is to turn the compliment into a prayer and to give God *all* of the credit for *all* of the good (c.f. Rom. 12:3-4, 1 Cor. 4:6-8). The end result of this will not be a heart puffed up with self-congratulation, but a heart melting with humble praise. The great refrain of Ps. 115 will then be repeated by the heart: "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1).

Missional Planning Morning + Picnic

On **June 22nd** the Mission Team is organising a strategic planning morning. The hope is to plan a calendar of local missional events for the next year (Autumn-Spring). Anyone interested is welcome to come. The plan is to have a bacon roll at 9.30am and then break into small groups for brainstorming and feedback. We'll think strategically about how to reach specific groups in the area as well as how to make use of strategic seasons such as Freshers Week, Christmas/Easter, etc. The planning and prayer will be done by 12pm.

We'll then head out to the park for a picnic (bring your own) and games. Everyone is welcome for the entire morning or just for the picnic.

Church and Community Picnic

For planning reasons, the church picnic has been postponed to **Saturday 7th September**. The location will still be the church building and Montgomery St. park. Please save the date on your calendars.

Book Group

This month's book group meeting will be on this **Saturday (25th May) at 3.30pm** at Alison Nelson's home. This month we are reading Jerry Sittser's book *A Grace Disguised* as recommended by Lorna Ferguson, one of our missionaries. For further information please speak to Anncris Roberts.

Edinburgh Marathon Festival

The Edinburgh Marathon takes place **this Sunday** (half marathon begins at 8am and full marathon at 10am). There are a number of road closures that may impact your journey to church. Please see [here](#) for a full list.

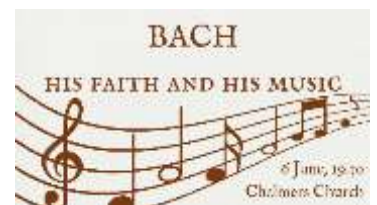
Praying for Tranent



Tim Rawlinson is planning an evening to update people and pray for the work in Tranent on **Thursday 30th May** at 7.30pm on Zoom. This will be an opportunity to meet some of the team and hear first hand about some of the things we've been praying for. If you would like to join, please contact Tim (timrawlinson@gmail.com) and he will send you the details.

Bach – His Faith and His Music

On **6th June**, Sam Orr presents "An evening interspersed with live performances walking through Bach's music showing how his faith in Jesus not only impacted the output of one of the greatest composers on the earth, but the whole history of music as we know it..." The event will take place at Chalmers Church and starts at 7.30pm. For more details and to book, go [here](#).



Church Calendar

For your info and prayers:

- Tuesday: Pickleball and Table Tennis from 7pm
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting in person at 7pm (6.45pm for refreshments) and online
- Thursday: Women's Bible Studies at 11am (in person)
- Saturday: Book Group at 3.30pm at Alison's
- Sunday:
 - Worship Service at 10.30am (and livestreamed). Joe Barnard preaching.
 - Home Groups
- Monday: Baby and Toddlers from 10 – 11.30am



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