

1 Peter 1:3-9; Isaiah 53:2-11

Sermons\7 Desires.2

Seven Desires of the Heart: Affirmation

[PRAYER]

I think I was in 4th grade when I was riding my bike around the block where we lived. A little boy no more than 2-3 years old was standing on the front porch delighted to see someone on a bike, and he smiled and waved!

And what I did – I can barely confess some 53 years later – I stuck my tongue out at him. For no reason. I wasn't even a mean kid. But immediately I regretted it and wish even now that I could take it back. I knew in my own immature mind, as soon as I saw the reaction on that little boy's face – a smile turned into a frown – that what I had done was shameful!

Perhaps for the first time in my young life I realized how one person's response can negatively effect another person's feelings. And I was so disappointed in myself!

Today we're talking about the *7 Desires of the Heart*, the seven desires each of us have, and today I want us to focus on *Affirmation!* Affirmation is the opposite of what I communicated to that young child in Parkersburg.

Affirmation can be a compliment! "Nice job! Good work! That was great!"

Doesn't it feel good when someone notices the effort you make and the work you do?

We all desire to be affirmed and to believe that someone approves of who we are and what we do. Think back to the people in your life who have had the most positive influence on you. Were they people who criticized and belittled you, or people who affirmed and praised you? Of course they were people who affirmed your worth.

We long to have parents, friends, and teachers who notice what we do well. These are the people who represent something *good* in us! Tragically, many children not only lack affirmation, but experience criticism and an overload of put downs.

Gary Chapman, who wrote the popular book *5 Love Languages*, advises us: Use words of affirmation and affection: "I love you." "Sweetie." Use words of praise. Identify something your child has accomplished. And don't just praise your children when they succeed. Praise them for the effort!

Chapman was visiting a 13-year old in the hospital with ulcers when he asked him, "What's your relationship like with your father?"

"It's not very good. I don't ever do anything right."

"What do you mean," Gary probed.

"If I make a B on my report card, my Father says, 'You should have made an A.' If I mow the grass, my Father says, 'You didn't get under the bushes.' I don't ever do anything right."

I knew the Father. I knew what he was doing. He was trying to challenge the child to do the best job. But do you hear what the child was hearing? "I don't ever do anything right."

The time to challenge the child to bring a B to an A is not the day he brings the report card home. That's the day you praise them for the B! Two days later you say, "That B was great, but I wonder what we can do to bring that up to an A?"

And remember, even if it's a D, a D+ is better than a D-.

The same principle for affirmation works with your spouse. And it works with you!

I hope you have grown up with healthy doses of affirmation, but I'm sure there are many here who did not.

A. Without affirmation, children grow up lacking confidence in their abilities or talents.

Without a strong sense of affirmation, we may refuse to try something new because we are scared we will look foolish, say or do the wrong thing and people will laugh. And to be embarrassed can be the worst experience in the world for some people!

Think about the number of times you have asked yourself, “What do others think of me?” without really asking that consciously aloud. I walk into kindergarten frightened and alone. I look around to see if the other children smile at me and want to play with me. That need for welcome and affirmation continues throughout our lives, in school lunchrooms, in classrooms, on sports teams, at dances, and as adults in our neighborhoods, at work, or in church.

Can you remember how fragile some of those experiences were for you? And if you moved from one town to another, starting in a new school, hoping for new friends, you went through that whole cycle again.

We do all kinds of crazy things to receive affirmation. Think of the young teenager from a broken or abusive home who is sexually promiscuous, hoping to find a relationship that values him or her!

B. With the absence of affirmation we can feel like we never measure up. “If only I had...” and what would it be that would make you feel important to someone else? Athletic talent? Musical abilities? The high-paying job with the beautiful house? If you can just figure out how to do more, do it better, or do it differently, then people will like you.

I think we can understand what is meant that adults are often influenced by their *inner child*. It’s the painful experiences from the past that subconsciously take over our emotions in adulthood so that we can be almost childlike with our feelings.

One afternoon, Sonya asks her nine-year-old daughter Samantha how her day at school went. Samantha tells her about several boys who teased her. Not particularly bothered about it, Samantha goes up to her room to play. But Sonya is furious. She calls the school and demands to talk to her daughter’s teacher. She yells, “I want those boys expelled!”

So what got into Sonya? Sonya was teased all the time by the boys when she was a little girl. And her daughter’s comment triggered all those horrible feelings, filling her with the same feelings she had when she was young.

When we are triggered by the past and childlike emotions begin to take over, we need to make healthy choices about how *we* deal with those emotions. We want to turn what triggered that reaction into moments that transform our lives. We are responsible for how we react: will we respond with an impulse reaction or with a healthy choice that is more in tune to mature adulthood?

Another example: Maria came from a lively Italian family who engaged in loud, aggressive conversations. She married Bill, who was an only child and whose family was very quiet. They never debated any subject nor tolerated rambunctious voices. One day a neighbor stopped by to loudly complain about the barking dogs across the street. Maria chuckled and agreed that the dog was a problem. Bill, on the other hand, felt attacked and retreated into the house.

One situation experienced by two people with two very different reactions. These two people had very different life experiences through which to filter any new situation.

The point is, if we can accept that we each have a filter through which we interpret our

world – a filter that is unique to us – we are on the way to embrace our past in a healthy way. We know that our *reactions* belong to us and are not dictated by others. This is an important step of maturity. It allows us to stop blaming others for making me feel so angry! Others don't "make" me angry; I choose to be angry! And then I can start growing. We can say, "I see how I reacted to this and where my trigger came from."

Find Meaning In the Pain. When we own our reactions, we are beginning to acknowledge our own story. We stop denying the past and we accept the emotions that we carry inside. And this leads you to find *meaning in the pain*.

Let me say something about painful memories, the absence of affirmation, or the refusal by others to hear or understand you. Each of us has pain that is unique. But pain is also shared. Our pain, greater in some than in others, is part of the universal experience of pain in the world.

Do you know anyone who hasn't experienced some heartache or hardship at some time in their life? So pain is part of the general human condition.

Jesus, who is the Son of God, was also, in every way, a man who experienced the human condition of pain and suffering. In fact, we Christians believe that He not only experienced it, He took all of it to the cross in order to redeem the pain, defeating the power of sin in our lives! He took all of the pain to the cross!

Even before the cross, Jesus experienced the emotional abuse of Jewish leaders around Him, the abandonment of His own disciples when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the physical torture of Roman soldiers. Then Jesus knew the agonizing death on the cross and the feeling of being abandoned – even by God the Father.

Have you ever felt abandoned? Have you ever felt humiliated, frightened, worried? In that last day is there anything Jesus didn't experience that is a part of our experience with pain?

Let me read what was said about Jesus some 700 years before He was arrested, beaten, and crucified in His last 24 hours.

READ Isaiah 53:2-11

² My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him.

³ **He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.** We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.

⁴ **Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down.** And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins!

⁵ **But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed.**

⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth.

⁸ Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But **he was struck down for the rebellion of my people.**

⁹ He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.

¹⁰ But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when **his life is made an offering for sin**, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands.

¹¹ **When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied.** And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins.

How could we ever doubt a love so great that God the Son chose to step into our place to receive the punishment for sin! **Beaten so that we could be made whole, whipped so we could be healed.** Do you hear that? The prophecy describes the *purpose* of Jesus' death for us!

Whatever your pain, Jesus is familiar with it. Our first reading from Peter told us: **There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while.** (Think of those trials in terms of whatever pain or tragedy we experience in this world.) **These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold – though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.**

There's a day when we will be *free* from the trials of this world! Praise God!

You can share your pain and burdens with Christ and He will lighten your burden!

Our souls are hungry for affirmation. Think how often you may have wondered, "Does God really love me like the Bible says He does?" To know that God does love us and that He bestows His grace on us is a life-transforming experience! Jesus shares your burden. Whatever your pain, Jesus is familiar with it. **He was whipped so that we could be healed!** Let this give you confidence in yourself and your abilities. Let His love fill the longing to serve such a God as He leads you to accept His calling and purpose for your life.

As we make our way through the *7 Desires* we are not just assessing what happened a) in our own experience with affirmation, b) but how can we better affirm our children or our spouse, and c) experience affirmation from God!

Regardless how your self-worth may have taken shape, it's important that you believe the truth about yourself: You are who God says you are: **"You are a chosen people, royal priests, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."** (1 Peter 2:9)

When your self-esteem sags – remember what you're worth! Remember that you were bought with a price, not with something that ruins like gold or silver, but you were bought with the precious blood of Christ, the pure and perfect lamb. Remember that! Meditate on it! Focus on it! Allow God's love to change the way you look at – you!