

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways am I a Helper? What does this look like in the areas of my husband/family; church family; pastors/elders/deacons; work/community?
2. In what ways am I a Hinderer? What does this look like in the areas of my husband/family; church family; pastors/elders/deacons; work/community?
3. In what ways am I equipping others to be Helpers or Hinderers? What does this look like in the areas of my husband/family; church family; pastors/elders/deacons; work/community?
4. Are we leading/joining others towards God or away from God with our lives, words and actions?
5. Are we leading/joining others to sin or away from sin? Is our comfort like Jezebel's which provoked sinful action or is our comfort like Ruth that leads the grieving eyes towards God and His righteousness?

Encouragement and comfort are two things we cannot give ourselves. They must come from others.

THE NEED (by Susan Hunt)

The following descriptions clarify woman's helper, life-giving ministry. The ezer words are strong, compassionate, relational, life-giving words.

HELPER/LIFE-GIVER	HINDERER/LIFE-TAKER
Exodus 18:4: Defends	attacks
Psalms 10:14: Sees, cares for oppressed	indifferent, unconcerned for oppressed
Psalms 20:2: Supports	weakens
Psalms 33:20: Shields, protects	leaves unprotected and defenseless
Psalms 70:5: Delivers from distress	causes distress
Psalms 72:12-14: Rescues poor, weak, needy	ignores poor, weak, needy
Psalms 86:17: Comforts	avoids, causes discomfort

- Exodus 18:4: "[Moses named his son] Eliezer (for he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh')."
- Psalms 10:14: "But you do see, for you note mischief and vexation, that you may take it into your hands; to you the helpless commits himself; you have been the helper of the fatherless."
- Psalms 20:2: "May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion."
- Psalms 33:20: "Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield."
- Psalms 70:5: "But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!"
- Psalms 72:12-14: "For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight."
- Psalms 86:17: "... you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me."

100 Ideas for Those Who Feel Stuck in Knowing How to Affirm

Sam Crabtree

1. Loan a young person your keys. Or give him his own key.
2. At a committee or board meeting, before moving on to the next agenda item, stop to commend those who worked on the previous item.
3. Write a personal letter or note card that an employee can take home or put in a personnel file. Keep a supply of such blank note cards in your desk for just such a purpose. E-mails will do, but they are less likely to be pinned up on workspace walls or put in a portfolio.
4. Commend the wisdom and helpfulness of a suggestion somebody has made, especially when the suggester has offered to be a part of a solution to a problem.
5. Explain that what inspired you to do some good thing was the other person's example. "I brought coffee cake for the office because I see how much the staff enjoys it when you consistently do thoughtful things."
6. Don't talk down to people; talk up to them. Consider them better than you. "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3). "You probably already know this, but..."
7. Just as God decisively chose Paul in Acts 9, tell your spouse, "I chose you, and I still do."
8. An advantage adoptive parents have over biological parents is to say, "I chose you, "a strong affirmation—and the child cannot boast in it, because the child was not the decisive chooser.
9. Write to children. An enthusiastic and thankful mother of some youngsters wrote me after I had first written her young sons, thanking them for their hospitality (God is very hospitable) in serving me a muffin when I visited their home for an interview related to child dedications at our church. To show the significance of my note (and stickers) sent to the boys, she quoted one of them as saying, "Tall men don't usually send you letters." It is hard to calculate the lasting effect of an affirmation given to a child
10. Share a valuable secret of yours, making it known to the other person that very few others (if any) have been invited into this inner circle of those considered trustworthy.
11. Loan something of value—books, camping gear, a car, a cabin—as a signal of your willingness to take a risk, having noticed something in the other person that elevates your confidence in her trustworthiness.
12. Think of something that is normally not praised, because it is simply expected—like refilling the soap dispensers in the church restrooms. Customarily, those who

have responsibilities for such things as refilling soap dispensers only hear from people when the dispensers are empty. Be the one to notice that they are not empty, and commend the faithfulness of the worker who serves others behind the scenes.

13. In the next birthday card or Christmas card you send, include a personal note commending some Christlike quality you observe in the recipient.

14. Compose a letter to the editor affirming a character quality being demonstrated in the community.

15. Commend someone for the (sensitivity, kindness, compassion, etc.) with which he treated a third party. You noticed, and so does God.

16. Quote someone positively in his presence. "I agree with Jacob here, who said..."

17. Shannon Archer, a mother of several young children in our church, affirms her own children by affirming all children who demonstrate certain character qualities, saying within earshot of her children, "I'm so pleased with children who put away their things (or speak kindly to their siblings, or ...)" when she sees one of them behaving in that very way. Talking this way affirms the child in question, explicitly elevates the principle being taught and applied, and holds out hope to other children who might be eavesdropping that if they demonstrate the same kind of character, they too will please mommy.

18. Get up from your chair, go to another room, seek out a person, and simply say something like, "I just came to say 'hi' (or 'good morning,' or 'have a great day,' or I appreciate you for ..')." Admittedly, in some relationships that may seem forced, but it will generally be welcomed as a light-hearted affirmation of a person's existence.

19. Say, "I thank God for you."

20. When asked to do a chore, consider saying something like, "Nothing would give me more pleasure right now than doing this for you," because of all the tasks in the universe you could be doing, you choose to do this one. Serving someone can be affirming of them.

21. Nominate someone for an office or post-based upon her integrity, dependability, or trustworthiness.

22. Following a worship service, write a note or leave a voicemail for someone who excelled in reverential musicality, hospitable ushering, enthusiastic reading, or faithful preaching.

23. Meditate on how God affirms his Son in such places as Matthew 17:5 and Hebrews 1:5-9. Ask him to help you be that way toward your own sons, etc.

24. Take a family member to your closet and ask him to pick out what you should wear the next day, affirming his choices.

25. Show a child a place in your yard where you intend to plant flowers. Take him with you to the garden shop to select the plants.

26. Invite a small child to assist you in baking something by handling the ingredients and contributing decisions along the way (the red sprinkles or the blue?).
27. At a family gathering, invite everyone to mention something they admire about (Cousin Siegfried, or Aunt Rosie, or Mom, or ...).
28. Tell someone you were praying for him and wanted him to know that God placed him on your heart.
29. When walking past someone, simply touch him in an appropriate way—a small pat on the back, a friendly nudge with elbow, etc.
30. Respond to that e-mail or note that has been waiting for a response.
31. Complete that task, chore, or request that your spouse asked you to do. It shows you value him or her by listening and acting.
32. When in an argument with your spouse or other family members, take written notes so that you can accurately reflect back to them what you are hearing (affirming the importance of what they are saying) and can take away to-dos.
33. Post the creative work of children, commenting on some aspect of character that was demonstrated in the work—attention to detail, creative use of materials, generosity in sharing the work, etc.
34. Teach a youngster to drive.
35. When a staff member has invested extra time at work, send a note to the spouse, perhaps with flowers or a gift card, expressing appreciation for the generosity in sharing the husband or wife.
36. Ask someone's advice.
37. Ask a younger person's advice.
38. Take that advice. Act on it.
39. Paul said to the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Say to someone, "You are like Christ in (forbearance, boldness, etc.), and I want to imitate you as you imitate Christ."
40. Resolve that before you do any other work at the office or shop or school today, you will affirm a coworker or fellow student.
41. If you see yourself as not especially articulate toward your spouse, stand in front of an anniversary card rack and study some of the phrases used. Then write your own card
42. Jesus is never late. His timing is perfect. While waiting for the start of a meeting, commend those who were on time for their punctuality, which shows respect for the time of others.

43. Jesus is very alert and thorough. When someone brings a mistake or oversight to your attention, humbly acknowledge your error and commend him for his alertness and thoroughness in catching it.
44. There's no one more dependable than Jesus. When someone completes a task you asked her to do, commend her dependability. Reliable people are a valuable asset. Take a moment to say so.
45. Stop and pray right now, asking God to help you to be affirming.
46. Stop again and ask God to help you help others to enjoy being more affirming.
47. Do you know people who are suffering from an illness? They may be encouraged if you commend their endurance, patience, and determination (to stick with the therapy, etc.).
48. When around someone who is biting his tongue, commend that self-control, which is a powerful work of God in him.
49. Do you know of a missionary or someone else doing something risky but right? Commend the courage.
50. No one is more deferential to the Father than Jesus. Commend appropriate deference and a surrendered will when you see them.
51. When you read a biography and come across an incident or episode modeling great character, read it to someone or send a photocopy of the paragraph or page, saying something like, "This reminds me of you."
52. Write a Bible verse such as Hebrews 12:1 on a note card to someone, adding, "I think you do better at this than I do."
53. When someone spots a way to save money, commend his thriftiness.
54. Compare someone you know with a Bible hero.
55. Don't forget to say thank you to those who directly (or indirectly) benefit you.
56. When people enlighten you, inform you, or help you change your mind about something, commend them for their persuasiveness.
57. Think of the most humble person you know. Now praise that person's humility to somebody else who knows him.
58. When a child brings up something he heard in a sermon or in a class, praise him for his attentiveness.
59. When someone solves a problem without waiting to be asked, commend his initiative.
60. Commend a self-sacrificing mother for her loyalty to her children's welfare.

61. Draw favorable attention to the orderliness of someone's cubicle, desktop, bedroom closet, kitchen counter, filing system, yard, car interior, etc.
62. Praise the reverential obedience of children. Repeat.
63. When someone comes up with a good idea or solution that was overlooked by others, commend his resourcefulness and creativity.
64. When someone models how to make do in the midst of disappointing circumstances, affirm the rare commodity of contentment and its beauty.
65. When someone advocates for the relief of the suffering of someone else, praise the compassion being demonstrated.
66. When an idea or proposal is slowed down by someone who is expressing misgivings, express appreciation for the cautiousness, even if you're not persuaded by his arguments.
67. Is someone working hard? Trumpet his diligence.
68. Is someone on stand-by? Commend the availability.
69. Did someone adjust his plans when asked to do so? Affirm the flexibility.
70. Do you observe or hear about someone gladly sharing what is hers with someone else? Hold up such generosity as a model to be imitated.
71. Is someone taking pains to avoid hurting someone else? Commend that gentleness.
72. Praise mercy and forgiveness when you see offenses dropped and blessing returned for cursing.
73. Ask a good friend, "How do you think my spouse would like to be praised and affirmed?" Then do it.
74. Ask people you know to tell you about the nicest compliments they ever received. (A question like this might make for a very good group discussion.) See what you can learn from what they report. Act on what you learn.
75. Search the Scriptures for ways people commend others. Do likewise.
76. The reader who has read this far in the list has probably made two generalizations about all these suggestions for affirmation: notice and verbalize.
77. When interrupted by someone, set aside what you are doing, turn squarely toward her, give her eye contact, and pay attention.
78. Nominate someone for something like Alum of the Year, or Outstanding Graduate, or Citizen of the Month by highlighting character qualities as the basis for your nomination.
79. Write a eulogy for a great person who died. Send it to someone saying, "You remind me of this person."

80. Write a eulogy for a living person. Send it to him with thanks and appreciation for demonstrating the character he does.
81. When hearing about the conclusion of a difficult court case, write the judge a note commending his wisdom in the pursuit of justice.
82. When you observe (or hear about) a youngster doing his chores, praise his sense of responsibility as evidence that he is growing up.
83. When someone avoids foolishly lumping things together that don't belong together (not throwing the baby out with the bath water), commend his discernment and ability to make distinctions.
84. Do you see someone who is good at welcoming others, inviting them to share in activities, meals, lodging, etc.? Commend the hospitality.
85. When someone makes provision for the needs of someone who is of a different language, culture, race, age, etc., commend the sensitivity.
86. Before starting the agenda of a meeting, commend someone present for some commendable quality.
87. Put down this list, pick up the phone, and call your (spouse, teammate, coworker, child, parent, etc.) with an affirmation. The point: don't save it until later.
88. Thank whoever it is who restocks the paper in the copy machine at work, church, etc. Thank him for humility of unseen service and dependability.
89. Explore the dictionary for a good word to use about somebody. Use it.
90. Commend a worker (postal clerk, bank teller, McDonald's cashier, grocery store check-out guy, etc.) for smiling and being cheerful.
91. Invite the passenger in your car to set the cabin temperature, the sound system volume, or the radio dial.
92. Literally applaud someone for doing something commendable.
93. Invite others to join you in the applause.
94. Ask God to make you as (wise, kind, faithful, enthusiastic, etc.) as someone you know who excels at that quality. Then tell that person you are praying that way.
95. Insert a character quality into the well-known birthday jingle, like this: "Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday dear dependable Debbie. Happy birthday to you."
96. Make an acrostic of a person's name, using a character quality for each letter. For example, Vicki:

Virtuous

Innovative in solving household problems

Courageous confronter

Kind to aging parents

Industrious

97. Award a bonus or pay increase, or tip your delivery boy, stating the relevance of Christlike character to your action.

98. Ask members of your small group how they affirm Christlikeness in others or ask for fresh ideas. Ask how they like to be commended.

99. Tell your wife, mother, sister, or daughter how she reminds you of the noble woman in Proverbs 31.

100. Create your own suggestion and plug it in here as number 100. Then demonstrate it.