

# The POWER of PRAISE

BY BOBBY NEAL WINTERS

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting, So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified." (Isaiah 61:1-3, NASB).*

I am a teacher at a university and have taught at the university level for twenty years. One of the hazards of being a teacher is forgetting what it means to be a student. A few years ago I got such a reminder when I took a series of classes in Russian.

The group of people who took these classes was a rather odd crew. There were ten students, and most of them were professors like me who were there just because they wanted to learn the language. We were people in our '40s, '50s and '60s.

On the other hand, the teacher was a 24-year-old Russian woman from Ukraine. Compared to the students in her class, she was a mere slip of a girl, but she was very talented as a teacher. She employed a variety of techniques which were innovative and effective, but one of the things I remember most wasn't new at all: She put stickers on the top of our papers.

When we did well she put smiley faces with a thumbs-ups and the message "Good work." For those who did badly, she had a frowney face with the message "Try harder." These are things you would do for elementary school students, but what might surprise some of you is how well it worked on college professors.

That is because we are all still children. By "we" I don't necessarily limit myself to college professors, though it might be particularly true for us, but I mean that we all—you, me, them—are children.

I am 43 years old now, and I don't remember a single instant when I gave up being a child. I've got wrinkles, I've got bills to pay and I've got responsibilities galore, but I don't remember a time when I quit being

that person I was when I was a child. People talk about finding their "inner child." What nonsense! I am my inner child, so are you and so is everybody else.

One thing about children is that they need reassurance. When Mommy walks out through the door, they like to be reassured that Mommy is going to be coming back (sometimes to the point of driving Mommy out of her mind), and when Daddy yells at them, they need to be reassured that Daddy still loves them.

And, when a child does something well, the child needs to be told the thing has been done well. The need to please is there; the need for approval is there. A pat on the back is all it takes, but that pat on the back is needed.

I preach once a month at a pair of congregations in the towns of Frontenac and Opolis, Kansas. These folks might be simple, small town people, but they have the talent of affirmation. They are some of the most affirming people I've been among. They have raised me up by their affirmations and have made me into a better person than I would have been without them.

I used to think I didn't need praise. I thought people were just supposed to do a good job for the sake of doing a good job, and I suppose that is an ideal we should reach for, yet the reality is that when we go out into the world we take our licks. Not everyone in the world is out to raise us up. Some people like to make themselves look bigger by taking others down a notch, and they'll do it just for fun.

When that happens, it's nice to have some of these affirmations

stored up. It's kind of like having a nice layer of fat stored up for when the cold weather hits, except it doesn't make your belt tight.

There is a trick to this, so it doesn't come easy. The compliments we give have to have some base in reality. People can see through insincerity—eventually, so in order to affirm someone you have to get to know them. This takes time, and time is one of our most precious commodities. The overwhelming majority of medical expense is spent during the last six months of life, and this is so we will have the last six months of life, so that we will have that time.

We need to take the time to get to know people. Here I am preaching to myself. Every moment of my day is taken, and every person I get to know seems to take a little more of my time. There are times when I scream to myself that I don't want to make any more friends, because I can't afford the time!

Yet, I also believe we are all made

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in the image of God and when we take time to get to know someone else, we are seeing what God looks like from another angle.

We must go out into the circle of the world and get to know what God looks like. We must offer an affirming voice to his children so they may be raised up and look even more like him. □

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