

HOW TO BRING OUT THE BEST IN OTHERS

David Livingstone wanted to be a pastor. His first chance to preach was in the pulpit of a little church in Scotland. He'd worked and prepared his message well. He wanted to be a great preacher. He wanted to go give his life on the mission field. And when he got up to preach that night he tried to speak but nothing came out. Finally he forgot his sermon altogether; so he apologized to the people and left in great shame. But Robert Moffat, the famous missionary, was there. And Moffat came up to him after the service and said, "You can be a great and wonderful servant of God. Why don't you go to medical school?" Today you can't mention Africa without thinking about David Livingstone. But what would have happened to David Livingstone without Robert Moffat?

Today is Mother's Day. It is a day when we remember and celebrate the contribution our mothers have made in our lives. One of the things we strive to do as parents is to bring out the best in our children. Today I want to talk about how to bring out the best in others.

Heb 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The word here for spur is the word PAROXUSMOS which comes from the words PARA which means "by" and the word OXUS which means "sharp or pointed". Together they mean "by poking with something sharp". When you spur a horse you poke it in order to get it moving – which is a good picture of what this word means.

Years ago I heard of a youth group that hung cowboy spurs all around their church to remind people of this passage and the power of encouragement.

Painter Benjamin West tells how he loved to paint as a youngster. When his mother left, he would pull out the oils and try to paint. One day he pulled out all the paints and made quite a mess. He hoped to get it all cleaned up before his mother came back. But she came and discovered the mess. West said what she did next completely surprised him. She picked up his painting and said, "My, what a beautiful painting of your sister." She gave him a kiss on the cheek and walked away. With that kiss, West says, he became a painter. Every day you and I are trying to paint the picture of Jesus in our lives through what we say and do. But we make messes. The last thing we need is for someone to come along and say, "What a mess!" What we need is a kiss of encouragement. It's vital for life and for relationships.

1 Thess 5:10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.
11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

How do you spur someone on to love and good deeds. How can we as believers encourage one another? Today I want us to consider 3 key principles for bringing out the best in others.

1. The Gift of ACCEPTANCE

You can't bring out the best in other people until you first accept their uniqueness. The fact is that God made everybody different. None of us are alike. We're all different. Even twins are different.

1 Corinthians 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men

To bring out the best in people we must embrace their uniqueness. We must all learn that we don't have to compare ourselves with anybody else. God put each child on this earth for an individual purpose and reason. That's difficult because today we live in a culture of comparison. We compare, literally, everything. Clothes, cars, homes, grade point average, income. We live in a constant culture of comparison. Often when we come across people who are different than us we reject them.

A few years ago I was pastoring a church and we had a new young couple join us. All the other young couples were your typical clean cut church kids. This couple had long hair, wore lots of leather and had tattoos. They stood out like sore thumbs and they had a very hard time fitting in because no one wanted to hang out with them. It wasn't until I got to know them that I found out that they had been to Bible College and had an effective ministry to street youth.

In speaking about acceptance, that does not mean agreement. You can accept someone without necessarily agreeing with their lifestyle choices. The world's idea of acceptance means that you have to acknowledge that people can live whatever lifestyle they choose and that there is no right and wrong. That is not what I am saying. We cannot simply turn a blind eye from sin and downplay its importance. God's word presents very clear standards of right and wrong for all of us.

God accepts us for who we are, but loves us too much to allow us to stay that way. Everyone is welcome to come and attend this church. There is no screening at the door, come as you are. However, once here we will all be confronted and challenged by God's standard as presented to us in His word. We recognize that we are all in process. If sanctification was the alphabet, there would be people here that are R and some that are L and some are B. The person at R is working on becoming S. The person that is B is working on becoming C. The person at R cannot say to the person at B that they are any better off because all of us are a work in progress.

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

In speaking about acceptance I am simply saying that we recognize that all of us are different. Some people are coordinated. Others of us are very uncoordinated. Some of us are artistic. You can see spaces and you can draw beautiful pictures or shaped things and others of us are stuck with stick figures. Some of us are good at numbers and others of us can't add two plus twenty. Some of us are good with words. Some of us are good with people and relational skills. Some people are naturally born leaders.

Gal 6:4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else

Nobody is good at everything. Mark Twain once said, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education. Einstein flunked many of his courses, including math. Steve Jobs dropped out of College because he was frustrated with formal schooling. Bill Gates dropped out of math class in High School. Richard Branson struggled with Dyslexia and dropped out of school at age 16.

How do you know when you've really accepted somebody? Simple. You don't insist that they be like you. You let them be themselves. So many today are trying to make carbon copies of themselves. They say either subtly or overtly, "You need to be like me. Act like I do, think like I do, talk like I do." Some people think that discipleship means creating people in your image – people who will act like you do. When God made you, you were not a carbon copy of someone else. The world does not need another you! When God made you he broke the mold – THANKFULLY!

Prov 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

This is one of the most misunderstood verse in the Bible. Many people think that it is a promise but it is not really. Many people think that means that if you raise your child in a Christian home and try to instill in them good godly ways, then when they grow up, they may go through a period of rebellion but eventually they will come back to the Lord. That is not really what the verse is trying to say. God does not promise us that in the Bible because your kids have a free will. Even the best kids can choose to walk away.

What it says is that we should train up our children "IN THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO" it means "according to their own natural bent or personality". It means train up your children according to their own giftedness, abilities, and talents. In other words, if your child is good at athletics, steer them toward athletics. If they're good musically, steer them toward music whether you care about it or not. If they're good with numbers then steer them toward numbers. If they're good at making money steer them toward money! Don't try to make them you. Let them be them.

This applies not only to kids but to everyone God places around you. Accept the uniqueness of others and you take a first step to bringing out the best in them. Help them to become the person that God wants them to be and you will be doing a great service for the Kingdom of God.

2. The Gift of TRUST

Nothing brings out the best in people – kids or anybody else – faster than having somebody believe in them and trust them with responsibility.

Luke 16 :10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. 11 So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? 12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?"

This is why we as a church believe so much in small groups. In a service like this one there is only so many people who are required. However, in a small group every member is a part and leader.

We live in a society filled with irresponsible adults because they never learned responsibility as children. We must gradually turn responsibility over to our children as they grow, not hold on too tightly and not over protect them. If you grab a person by the arm that is trying to go in a different direction than you and you pull them hard enough then you can keep them from moving for a time but what happens when you let go of that arm? They end up flying in that direction!

That is what I see happen so often with parents. They hold their kids back trying to protect them. When they finally let go and that kid goes off to college they end up flying into all sort of trouble and do everything their parents told them not to.

There is only one way to learn responsibility. You learn to be responsible by somebody trusting you with responsibility even when somebody thinks you don't deserve it. In the long run you're far better off trusting your kids too much than too little. Overprotection really is a form of rejection. When you overprotect your children, you're in essence saying, "You're not competent. I don't trust you. You can't be relied on. Therefore I'm going to have to keep things real close." Yes, they will make mistakes when you trust them. So did you.

You're not perfect and your Heavenly Father accepts you. In the long run you do far more good for the emotional, mental and spiritual health of your children to over trust them rather than under trust them. People respond to responsibility. They thrive under it. They grow. They develop. They blossom.

On the other hand if you treat people like babies you will be stuck with babies. Delegate, release, empower people. Because when you trust people with responsibility they blossom.

Howard Hendricks is a well-known professor and has written several books on families. He said after interviewing thousands of parents he said most of them would say, "If I had it to do over again I would do less for my kids and have them do more for themselves." Teach them to do more for themselves to develop self-reliance - actually God-reliance. When we take responsibility for people we take it away from them. You see that everywhere today - it's called co-dependence.

I look back on my life and I am so glad that people trusted me with responsibility - even the times when it was stretching for me.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Anybody can tell how those twelve disciples would have never got along together. They're as different as night and day. They were ordinary. They were fishermen, rough around the edges. Jesus chose twelve men and later said to them, "I'm going back to heaven. Now it's your job to give salvation to the whole world. Spread the message." Would you do that? He trusted the salvation of the world in the hands of a few men. Obviously it worked because we're all here and 2000 years later Christianity is still growing. Don't create insecure kids by overprotecting them. Trust them with responsibility.

If you want to bring out the best in people you must first accept their differences. Then trust them with responsibility.

3. The Gift of GREAT EXPECTATION

If you want to receive the best from people and bring out the best in people, expect the best from them. Often we do not realize how as parents we set our children up for either success or failure by our expectations of them. We do these as employers, as supervisors. Your expectations have a profound influence on others because people tend to perform at the level they're expected to perform.

In 1968 there was a Harvard psychologist named Robert Rosenthal. He published a study, which is now very famous called “The Pygmalion in the Classroom Effect.” It studied the impact of teachers’ expectations on students in the classroom. He did an experiment. He took a group of kindergartners through fifth grade students and gave them all a learning test. The next fall their new teachers were casually given the names of four, five, six high achievers. These people were given that title supposedly based on the test they’d had the previous year. The only problem was, what they didn’t know was that the test was rigged. Those children who had been labeled “high achievers” were simply chosen at random. There was no basis for that labeling.

At the end of the year, the students were retested and the amazing results were the students whom the teachers thought had the most potential – they just thought they did – had actually outscored everybody else. The teachers described these children that they thought were high achievers as happier, most curious, more affectionate than average and having a better chance of achieving later in life. But the only change during that year was the attitude of the teachers because they had been led to expect more of certain students the students came to expect more of themselves. The teachers communicated their positive expectations in terms of tone of voice, facial expression, even touch and posture. Karl Menninger concluded that attitudes are more important than facts.

What that says is if you want to build confident kids, confidence is more caught than it is taught. It’s how you believe in people, how you treat people. Whatever you want people to be, treat them like you want them to become. If you are a supervisor you ought to learn that when you take pride in other people’s work, then they do too. Every great leader knows the power of positive expectation.

Part of expecting the best in people comes from an understanding of their God given value – who we are in Christ. When we see people not from our own limited perspective but see them as Jesus sees them we will expect the best in them.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations ... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals with whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. – CS Lewis

This past week on Good Morning America they had their GMA Play of the Day. It was the video of a mother who recently interrupted a Michael Buble concert. She stood up in the middle of the concert and asked Michael Buble if her son could sing a song with him. Of course Buble was hesitant but to his credit he called for the son to come up onto the stage. The son started singing and was fantastic. Soon Buble and the son were singing a duet together. That kid was able to do something he could have never even dream of – singing on stage with Michael Buble for a song that was seen around the world, all because of a mother who believed in him.