

WHY SPEAKING WELL OF YOUR SPOUSE IS SO IMPORTANT

5 REASONS YOU SHOULD GET IN THE AFFIRMATION BUSINESS TODAY

As a leader, the health of your marriage directly affects the impact of your leadership. I have witnessed this time and time again. Being effective at work or in ministry begins by being effective at home.

Early in our marriage, Gail and I attended a church led by a dynamic, thirty-something pastor. He was an extraordinary communicator. He was a wise and empathetic counselor. As a result, the church grew rapidly.

But as we got better acquainted with him and his wife, we started noticing a disturbing trend in the way they related to one another. They would often make disparaging remarks about the other in public.

At first, it seemed cute. Their comments seemed playful and humorous. Everyone laughed. But over time, they became more and more pointed, thinly masking their frustration with one another.

We ultimately left that church. But several years later we learned they suffered an ugly divorce, both admitting to multiple affairs. They lost their family and, of course, their ministry. To this day, it grieves me to think about it.

Conversely, I noticed that Sam Moore, my predecessor at Thomas Nelson, always spoke highly of his wife. He would often say, "I hate to leave her in the morning, and I can't wait to see her in the evening." They have been married nearly sixty years now. Last time Gail and I were with them, they were holding hands. It was obvious they were still in love.

In reflecting on these two experiences, I am convinced that praising your spouse in public is one of the most important investments you can make—in your family and in your leadership.

This is important for at least five reasons:

1. You Get More of What You Affirm Have you ever noticed that when someone praises you, you want to repeat the behavior that caused it? This is just human nature. It can be a form of manipulation if it isn't genuine. But it can be a powerful way to motivate others when it's authentic.

This works in the opposite too. You're going to get more of what you complain about. Focus on the negative, and you'll notice it all the time. It'll poison your relationships, all of them: spouse, kids, colleagues, and so on.

It pays to be positive. Notice the good things and affirm them. Call them out. Acknowledging your spouse is huge in terms of reinforcing the behavior and getting more of what you like.

- 2. Affirmation Shifts Your Attitude** Words are powerful tools. They can create, or they can destroy. They can build up, or they can tear down. I believe most people have a drive to align their actions—and their attitudes—with their words. If you start speaking well of someone, you start believing what you say.

Think back to the pastor and his wife I mentioned above. It's easy to think, "Well, speaking poorly about one another was a symptom of something much deeper." Absolutely. But if we correct the externals, it can have a big impact on our inner life.

We have a choice as we go through life. We can notice the positive or stew in the negative. If we focus on the positive, it will eventually bring our attitude into alignment.

- 3. Affirmation Strengthens Your Spouse's Best Qualities** Encouragement is also a powerful force for good. All of us need positive reinforcement. This is why when we're working to develop a positive habit or lose some weight, a little encouragement from people who notice can keep us going. This is true in every area of life.

Your spouse has great qualities. If you're in a rough patch in your marriage, you might have your doubts. But I promise!

Maybe your spouse is really brave in one area. Or kind. Or considerate. Or perseverant. Affirm those qualities, and they'll only get stronger. Think about what that means: By affirming your spouse, you're helping them become all they were created to be.

- 4. Affirmation Wards off Temptation** The costs of an affair are devastating. Your reputation, family, friendships, job, finances, emotional health, legacy, even your soul—they can all go right out the window.

But when others see you are happily married, they are less likely to proposition you. It's clear you're not discontent or trolling, looking for another partner, fling, or whatever.

Affirming your spouse is like a hedge that protects your marriage from would-be predators. It will keep you out of compromising positions. Talk about your spouse publicly, positively, and often. It's adultery repellent.

- 5. Affirmation Provides a Model to Those You Lead** To be a truly effective leader, you must lead yourself, and then you must lead your family. Your marriage is a powerful visual of how you treat the people you value the most.

When you speak highly of your spouse, your followers are more likely to trust you. But if, on the other hand, they hear you complaining about your spouse, guess what they begin to wonder?

I wonder if he complains about me. I wonder if she's negative about me when I'm not present. If that's how they treat the people closest to them, I don't want any part of it.

As a result, they hold back. They don't bring their best effort. But if people see you authentically praising those closest to you, they'll be more willing to step up. It reinforces your qualities to lead and creates the optimal climate for your leadership.

10-Day Challenge

To help you really reap the rewards of these five reasons, I want to extend a challenge. If you're not married, you can modify this list as needed. Try this for next ten days.

- Ask your spouse to read this post and then find some time to discuss it.
- Decide together you are going to speak well of one another in public—and in private.
- Don't try to stop a bad habit. That rarely works. Rather, cultivate a good habit by noticing the positive: the way they look, something they've said, or something they've done.
- Acknowledge them. Praise them. Thank them. If you don't know what else to do, start by being grateful—and expressing it.

I would encourage you to keep track of your experience. I'm not talking about a novel; just keep a daily record of your impressions in a journal or Evernote. Periodically review your notes and see if you can glean any lessons learned and then apply them to your marriages.

Affirming your spouse in public is an investment that pays big dividends. In a world where fewer and fewer marriages last, it can be a difference-maker.