

BEING TESTED BY PRAISE
By Rick Boxx

Have you ever felt you were being tested? We tend to associate testing with adversity, having to confront significant hardships or formidable challenges. The test involves about how we handle them. But there is another form of testing many of us never consider. It is the testing of ... praise. How do we respond when things are going well and people start telling us how talented we are, what a good job we are doing, or how no one has accomplished what we have?

Consider the following example: The team was excited when Lisa arrived as the new department leader. Everyone had been relieved to see the former leader leave the company after having several personality conflicts and department setbacks. Welcoming the change, they praised Lisa, who had arrived with a glowing reputation, hoping she would succeed in restoring normalcy to the group.

But Lisa had enough experience to know that simply appearing better than her predecessor was not enough to solve the department's challenges. She wisely recognized that the unsolicited adulation would likely fade as soon as she began to make the hard decisions necessary to put things back on track.

The human ego – our sense of self-worth and importance – is a fragile thing. Just as criticism can quickly deflate us and cause us to question our value, praise can puff us up and cause us to start thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. In fact, this is exactly what the apostle Paul cautioned: “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...” (Romans 12:3).

Every day we see leaders who do exactly what Paul said not to do – thinking more highly of themselves than they ought. There is nothing wrong with taking pride in doing work well and succeeding at achieving our goals. However, when pride takes over and we start to believe we are better than other people, regarding them as less important or significant, problems inevitably follow. We might even feel a need to let others know how much we think of ourselves.

Hopefully there are times when we do receive praise, compliments and commendations for our work. The question is, how will we receive and handle that praise? Two verses from the Old Testament book of Proverbs speak directly to this.

Proverbs 27:2 says, “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.” And Proverbs 27:21 declares, “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by the praise they receive.” Imagine that – being “tested by praise.”

A friend who spent years as a magazine editor told me how these verses helped him to maintain a right perspective on his work. He said after he and his editorial team had made considerable

香港工商基督徒協會 (CBMC Hong Kong Ltd)

地址：香港上環禧利街2號東寧大廈11樓1102室 Tel: (852) 2805-1923

Email: enquiry@cbmc.org.hk Web: www.cbmc.org.hk

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changes in the publication's content and design, it was encouraging when people started telling him how much they appreciated the magazine. But he determined to always remind himself God had placed him in that position, had given him the skills and experience it required, and a talented team to support his work.

Affirmation for the work we do is gratifying. But we must never forget it is the Lord who ultimately deserves the credit – and praise – for what we accomplish.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When was the last time you felt that you were being tested? What were the circumstances, and how did you respond?
2. How would you describe what it means to be tested by praise? Have you ever experienced that? If so, in what ways?
3. Why is it easier for us to recognize testing when it comes in the form of adversity, but not so easy when positive things are happening to us or we are being recognized and affirmed for what we do?
4. What is your reaction when you hear others boasting about their accomplishments or the status they have attained? Explain your answer.

Challenge for This Week

Take time this week to consider how you react to compliments or praise. Do you seek them out? Do you feel slighted or upset when you do not receive recognition for your work? Being able to respond in a proper manner might be a matter for prayer, asking God to give you a right attitude.

It would be good to discuss this with your CBMC group, accountability partners, mentor or trusted friend, talking about how both pride and humility can affect how you carry out your work responsibilities and how others perceive you.

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Proverbs 11:2, 15:33, 16:5,18, 18:2, 21:24, 22:4, 25:6-7, 29:23; Matthew 11:29; 1 Peter 5:5-6

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