

In Praise of Praise

The two words we all desire most to hear is first our own name and second a good word said about it. If I can say that I am obsessed with anything, it must be that I am wholly and irrevocably obsessed with praise. It takes shape in many forms and has many disguises. Some argue that it is intangible. But it is not! It is as real and tangible as your living, breathing body.

Pure honest praise is an art few ever discover and far fewer ever master. It says nothing about you that you can insult someone. Anyone can insult someone; but someone who can praise another, it says everything about them. It is astounding the affect a word of praise has on a person's life. Moreover, greater and far more astounding is the transformation in the life of that person who has learned to give it. To praise is to focus on the good in others, on the good in life. Nothing can take the place of it. Yet few will do it. Few will give praise.

Everything we do, everything we think, everything we say begs for it. Our manner of dress—a selection of decided care—our yearning in conversation, our hearts' longing, the chanting, rolling, churning contemplation of our minds all, every whit, solicit praise. We listen for it, lifting our chin, brows arced, as if we were taken with the rise and fall of an agonizing melody, as if we were stretching, striving to pluck an apple from a tree, waiting for it on the lips of the one in front of us; yet, it eludes us. It is not there. Our heels meet the ground again. Chins drop. We are disappointed. Where is it found? Praise me. Praise me. Praise me.

Praise is a meal most people never get. And when they are starved of it long enough they lap the dregs of attention like a sick dog. Some will even go so far as to solicit praise insincere. Sarcasm. Sarcasm is a means with which we guard ourselves against the absence of praise. When using it one is in essence saying, I cannot praise you. You are not worth praising. You are not worth anything; but I, oh! I am worth it. I am worth praising, and if you will not praise me I will praise myself in the act of thrusting you to the ground to whimper at my feet and beg as I raise my fist in the poise of mighty victory. Praise me.

Sarcasm is an eel. It is when you begin to feel that crawling up your spine you know you have heard it. It is that first splash in the sewer of criticism. Praise is welcomed by everyone. Criticism is welcomed by no one. When was the last time you heard someone say, I want your criticism; criticize me?

Praise is truly astonishing. It is the candle that can only be lit by you and me. Honestly and sincerely given, it can fill the deepest abyss. It brightens faces. It brightens lives.

