

When No One Pats You on the Back

By: David Burruss

There's something really nice about a good pat on the back. Whether it's a kind word, a smile, or just someone noticing your effort, encouragement can lift your spirit like almost nothing else.

But what happens when the appreciation doesn't come?

Maybe you're a parent who quietly sacrifices day after day. You cook, clean, stay up late, and rise early. You fix things that break, pay the bills, offer advice, and put others first. And yet... the kids barely seem to notice. Sometimes, they even complain. You love them deeply, and your efforts aren't done for thanks, but still, wouldn't it be nice to hear it once in a while?

Or maybe you're in a marriage where you and your spouse have your "roles," and over time, those efforts become invisible. You fold the laundry, handle the car repairs, manage the finances, or take care of the meals, but no one really says much about it. One day you go out of your way to help with something that's not usually your task, and you catch yourself thinking, "Surely they'll notice this."

We've all been there. We all enjoy being seen and appreciated. There's nothing wrong with that. But the real danger comes when our motivation starts to shift. When doing good becomes more about being recognized instead of being faithful.

Jesus spoke clearly about this. In Matthew 6:1, He said, "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven." It's not that we shouldn't let our light shine. In fact, He had just said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

It all comes down to our heart. Are we shining to glorify God, or are we quietly hoping someone will applaud us?

This lesson hits close to home. I think of faithful Christians, especially those working behind the scenes, who keep showing up, keep serving, and keep giving. People like Sunday school teachers, kitchen workers, bulletin makers, and nursery volunteers. Many of them never get a round of applause. Yet they keep going. Why?

Because they know they're not doing it for the recognition. They're doing it for Him.

Jesus gives us such a powerful reminder in Luke 17:10. He says, "So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" In other words, don't expect a thank-you parade every time you obey. Just do your duty faithfully and humbly because you love the Master.

And that's the key. Love. That should be what drives us.

When love is your motivation, you won't burn out every time someone forgets to say "thanks." When love is your fuel, you'll keep serving even when others overlook your effort. That's the kind of love Jesus modeled. It's the kind of love He taught when He said, "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great" (Luke 6:35).

Of course, it's still good and right to encourage one another. A kind word or a gesture of gratitude matters. But we should never let praise be the reason we serve. If we do, we'll end up disheartened, bitter, or even spiritually dry when it doesn't come.

But if our aim is to please God, that changes everything.

Because here's the promise: "God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name" (Hebrews 6:10). You may be hidden from the eyes of the world, but not from His. He sees the quiet effort. He sees the private sacrifice. He sees the heart behind the work.

So, if no one pats you on the back today, don't worry. You're not serving for applause. You're serving out of love for your family, for your spouse, for your church, but most of all, for your Father in heaven. And that, dear friend, is enough.

Let's all strive to have the mindset of Paul, who wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

Live for God. Love Him with all your heart. And let that love be your reason for everything you do.