

Environments of Grace & Truth

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10

Grace is essential to our spiritual growth, our foundational values, and our ability to live the life to which God has called us. We came to Christ through grace, we bring others to Christ through grace, and we live by the enabling power of God's grace. As Dallas Willard puts it, "The believer burns grace like a 747 jet burns fuel."

In creating environments of grace, we give others a safe place to be themselves and to grow in becoming the people God designed them to be. We can take off our masks in an environment of grace, because here we admit our weaknesses, and we find help to keep our weaknesses from controlling us or damaging others.

Characteristics of an Environment of Grace

- Emphasis on affirmation, not criticism
- Truth-telling, with love
- Emphasis on people's potential, not performance

A key component in creating an environment of grace is the ability to skillfully affirm others. Affirmation is not flattery, because it is based in truth. We recognize and truthfully proclaim the work of God evident in others, and in doing so we enable them to discover God's good work in themselves.

Most of us didn't learn the art of affirming from the culture around us, so it is a skill which can and should be developed so that we may love others well. An Affirmation Tool follows on the next page, which can be used in groups to foster a culture of affirmation and grace.

Multiple copies of the Affirmation Tool should be given to each group member so that they can fill one out for each member of the group. Choose one person at a time in the sharing time, and all members of the group express their affirmation of that person by sharing the descriptive words they chose for him/her, and explaining why they chose them.

Adequate time should be allowed for sharing, and for the person being affirmed to respond to the group by accepting—not rejecting!—their affirmation. Remember to share only positive observations, and to take into account that you are sharing about how you experience that person.



affirming each other

What I believe to be true about _____

- | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| accepting | encouraging | insightful | promotes |
| adaptable | energetic | intelligent | prophetic |
| administrator | enterprising | in-touch | protector |
| adventurous | even-keeled | joyful | purposeful |
| affirming | exciting | kind | real |
| analytical | exemplary | knowledgeable | relational |
| artist | experienced | leads | relevant |
| assertive | factual | listening heart | respectful |
| authentic | faithful | loving | risk taker |
| authoritative | festive | loyal | sacrificial |
| benevolent | firm | mature | scheduled |
| bold | flexible | meek | scholastic |
| called | focused | mentor | secure |
| can-do | fun-loving | merciful | selfless |
| careful | future-thinking | motivated | self-controlled |
| change agent | generous | motivator | sensitive |
| charismatic | gentle | nurturing | service-oriented |
| comforting | genuine | observant | shepherd |
| committed | gifted | optimistic | shrewd |
| communicative | giving | orderly | spiritual |
| compassionate | goal-driven | organized | spontaneous |
| concerned | good | original | stable |
| connected | gracious | passionate | strong |
| conscientious | gregarious | pastor | successful |
| controlled | group-oriented | patient | sympathetic |
| creative | healer | peacemaker | takes charge |
| credible | helpful | persistent | talented |
| cunning | honest | persuasive | thoughtful |
| decisive | honorable | pioneering | tolerant |
| deliberate | humble | point-person | trusted |
| dependable | humorous | polished | very verbal |
| destined | imaginative | positive | visionary |
| detail-oriented | industrious | powerful | vulnerable |
| determined | influential | practical | watchful |
| discerning | ingenious | precise | wealthy |
| disciplined | initiator | predictable | winsome |
| doctrinally sound | inquisitive | principled | wise |

I feel most strongly that this person is:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

notes...