

Personal Reflection – March 2021

Lavish Affirmation

Our loving, dynamic rector, Stephanie, of Nativity Episcopal Church in Raleigh, N.C, comes sometimes to visit this old parishioner. We chat and I always feel more whole after her visit. One day, I said, “I drink a lot of wine!” Stephanie smiled and quietly replied, “Well, you don’t drive any more. So...?” She has a gift of putting a kindly spin on whatever happens. Whatever!

After a hospital visit which involved for me a 911 call, an ambulance ride, surgery and recovery, Stephanie remarked during a visit: “You are resilient, Jane, and you always find the joy.” Those words will work for me the rest of my life. Thank you, Stephanie!

When I was teaching, I used “*lavish affirmation*” as a teaching tool, and taught teachers to consider using it with their students. Often, men in the course would initially disagree with the idea, saying “No, I don’t do that kind of thing.” I would respond, “Well, Tom, I appreciate your transparency. I will use this “tool” all week as you are learning here in this course on how to teach. On Friday I will ask you what use it was to you in *your* learning.”

Invariably, Tom and others with him would admit that lavish affirmation *had* worked for them, and they hoped to try it in their teaching process.

What I hear Stephanie constantly doing is “lavish affirmation.” I imagine our Creator at the final judgement putting a kindly spin on what we did with our lives, and why we did it.

Recently, I read James Zull’s 2002 book, *The Art of Changing the Brain*. He explains the neurobiology that affects learning. The amygdala is a small gland that pours adrenalin into the blood when we feel scared, mad or sad. While that is happening, the synapses in the brain that would develop new dendrites (new learning) are inhibited. They *cannot* occur. Only when the amygdala is calm and quiet can such synapses occur.

Those gentlemen in the course experienced new learning. They did it better and better. The teaching tool of “lavish affirmation” worked for them, keeping their amygdala calm. It works for teacher and for students.

Try it!

by Jane Vella