

Chapter 5  
**THE FAN CLUB**

The question is not "if" a man is seeking validation. The question is,  
"where is he seeking validation from?"  
-Source unknown

"The need to be seen, to be heard, to be understood, is simply to be human."  
— L.R. Knost

Refrigerator art. If you have a young child, pages from coloring books, art projects, or school papers may fill up your refrigerator's outside doors. Indeed, art is for all, but doesn't kid art uniquely showcase some of our warmest childhood memories? Pablo Picasso made an affirming statement when he said: "Every child is an artist." (1)

For that reason and many more, I love kid art. My daughters are adults now, but one picture my then six-year-old daughter painted still hangs in my home. This image, entitled *Under the Sea*, depicts the ocean floor, complete with lobster, fish, snails, and sea urchins. The painting is so adorable, I had it framed, and it now hangs on the blue wall in my home office. When I look at this picture, I still see that wide-eyed little girl. I can hear her cute voice and spirit come through, and I can sense her childlike presence. When my older daughter was eight, she created pottery in one of her art classes. The small, striped, ceramic cup currently holds paper clips. The container is colorful, purposeful, and creative, just like her. When I look at it, it brings a smile to my face. It makes me feel like Mister Rogers.

Looking at these creations - and getting excited about them - reminds me of a crucial role I play in my children's lives. I'm President of their Fan Club. As a parent, I couldn't help it. Each word, movement, or achievement was cause for celebration. I even remember celebrating them when they went potty! Although a parent's job description seems endless, for me, I believed the most significant part of my job is to validate and affirm. Perhaps it was because I didn't receive that kind of validation when I was a child, but through the years, how I enjoyed celebrating them. I highlighted their achievements and unique space in the world. Who can forget recall their senior year open house flooded with pictures and memories.

One day, as I was picking them up from school, I unexpectedly ran into one of their high school teachers. As the conversation progressed, he described my daughters as two of the most confident students he'd ever encountered. I was glad someone else noticed my intent! With the utmost humility, I thanked him, hoping it meant I filled my role successfully. But what if I didn't? Or what if I wasn't enough? Could someone else step in as president of their fan club? As an adult, do we even need a fan club?

Most of us equate fan clubs with children or celebrities. After all, "stars" aren't like us. They typically have exceptional charisma, talent, or beauty, which sets them apart. Perhaps we don't feel talented or beautiful enough to warrant a fan club in our ordinary worlds, so we don't bother to give it a thought.

But friends, God sees us differently. He created us with a longing for a relationship. Naturally, this leaves us propelled to find someone to notice us so we can be in a relationship with them. Isn't a big motivation for marriage to have someone be an eyewitness to our life?

Think back to someone you know who was pregnant. Wasn't everyone celebrating the baby before it was born? Did you attend the baby shower? Talk about celebration. Once we're born, God gives us that instant eyewitness – our parents. It expands to include grandparents and extended family and friends. Ideally, this 'inherited fan club' satisfies our need for validation and affirmation. They hang our artwork on their refrigerator and get excited about whatever we do. They attend our sporting events and concerts, support us when we're down, and cheer us on. In a perfect world, they supply the validation and affirmation we were created to need. They may not even be aware they were doing it!

### **The deficit**

Unfortunately, we don't live in a perfect world. We don't always get that kind of attention. As we get older, we get it less and less. As a child, perhaps you realized this when you tried to share your feelings but were talked out of your experience. Or told you should feel something else. Worse yet, when conflict arose, you may not have gotten a chance to explain your perspective and may have ended up being accused or punished for something you didn't do. This type of neglect doesn't feel like a Fan Club. Instead, it feels like unfair treatment, and left unchecked, can manifest itself in our adult lives.

If that's you, I'm not sure why your fan club wasn't capable. There are many complicated reasons for a defective fan club. Perhaps your parents didn't receive validation or affirmation themselves and didn't know how to give it to you. Maybe they were so preoccupied with life's troubles or meeting their own needs, that left nothing for you. This happened to me. My dad was continually sick, so we were frequently at the hospital. This left little time for me. Mom tried to compensate by affirming me, but it felt like I was being patronized, because what I really needed from her was her undivided attention. I also recall a story of a middle child whose younger brother had special needs. Her family was so overwhelmed with taking care of those needs, they didn't realize their daughter felt unnoticed. Maybe your fan club was more of a correction club. How heartbreaking to see a child without a fan club. Without being celebrated, a deficit rises, leaving us empty.

Unfortunately, without a fan club, or a defective one, we may feel like orphans. As orphans, we may search to find someone, anyone to take notice. As we grow, we cling to others who give us even a little bit of affirmation. Grandparents, friends, peers, teachers, coaches, pastors, talents, or busy-ness become our fan clubs. If we're still left feeling unseen, we either escape by numbing ourselves or search for recognition.

The search typically begins with over-achievement, hoping this will provide approval from our defective fan club. Good grades, making the all-star team, getting into a prestigious college. If that doesn't satisfy, we may respond by doing nothing or playing the victim, draining others by

avoiding life's rigors. If the need is still not met, we seek out validation and affirmation from other sources. Affairs, drugs, alcohol, and other addictions are all wrought with a deep need for validation.

Others try to ignore the need. They may say, "it's all "water under the bridge," why bring it up now? I don't need anyone's attention. Friends, you can't change the fact that your fan club didn't deliver, but I would caution you not to ignore it. The deficit doesn't go away because we want it to. God created us for relationship. As we see in subsequent chapters, needs unmet rise to the surface. This is the dross. Not having a fan club could be one of yours.

### **Celebrating each other**

In a perfect world, what would it feel like to be celebrated? Is it more than just a birthday cake?

We can't properly understand how to celebrate each other without understanding the differences between validation and affirmation. With that information, we can better determine how much deficit we have or figure out how we can provide for others.

Validation is merely acknowledgment. When we acknowledge someone or someone's experiences, we tell them they have the right to express their perspective of their experience. Validation is crucial because acknowledgment supports God's divine establishment principle of

free will. Since God honors our free will, we must honor other's right to their perspective, even if it's different from ours. Listening is one of the best ways to validate, but it doesn't mean we have to agree or view that person's experience in the same way.

One of the best listening skills to show someone validation is to do what communication experts call "reflecting." If we do this properly, we paraphrase what the other person said. This paraphrase allows others to feel heard. When we reflect correctly, we are not trying to talk someone out of their experience. Instead, we acknowledge they have a human right to make their own choices and have their perspective. Just like trees, streams, or any other living thing, we occupy space in this world. No one else can take up our sacred space. Validation doesn't offer judgment, it merely acknowledges. I recall when I was a kid, I would tell my Mom "my finger hurts when I do this". Her response was, "well, just don't do that." Honestly, I didn't feel acknowledged in that moment.

Affirmation is different. Although affirmation may acknowledge, it takes it a step further - it communicates a favorable judgment. It celebrates. When we affirm someone, we are offering our approval. Words of affirmation are positive and life-giving and make us feel celebrated! A special gift that shows you noticed someone can add that special touch.

Go ahead. Celebrate. Put your three-year-old son's picture on the refrigerator. Doing so validates his space in the world. If you want to take it further and affirm him, tell him what you

like about it. This affirms the action. However, if you're going to affirm him as a person, show approval of something truly unique in the picture or his effort.

## **Expectations**

Now that you've read these definitions, can you say you received adequate validation or affirmation? Was it enough? Did you feel celebrated?

Since we live in sin-filled world, expect there will be some deficit. An excellent way to measure your need is to ask yourself the following question: Do you assume someone doesn't love you if they don't agree?

In my counseling experience, I've seen clients on either side of the pendulum with this topic. Would someone who truly felt validated worry if the other person agreed with them or not? Can we live without affirmation if we receive validation? Conflict arises in the expectation.

Deep down, as adults, we need someone, anyone, to acknowledge our experience. We also need someone to celebrate us. To think we're cool. However, as we mature, the need is more cleverly disguised. We don't have temper tantrums anymore, so where do we go to find our fan club?

## **The God who sees**

Since we were created for relationship, God wants us to know that we are seen. This can get challenging sometimes because we're looking at others to satisfy the need instead of God. Let's take a look at one of our bible heroes, David through the eyes of validation and affirmation.

When he was young, we could say that David didn't have much of a fan club. His brothers thought he was a little crazy for saying he was called by God to be King and fight the giant. King Saul even doubted the young shepherd. Not much validation there. Certainly, no affirmation. Quite frankly, the opposite.

Jump ahead a few years. As an adult, David committed some serious sins. Let's analyze David's interest in Bathseba. We might conclude David used her as a way to feel validated or bored as most affairs reveal. (We'd probably have to ask David's counselor about that.) That one simple act resulted in him committing murder. Could part of this be related to David's unresolved deficit? Since he went into exile, who could he turn to to validate him?

As we read the Psalms, we see two sides to David. David, the human, and David, the man chasing after God's heart. Which one is he? If you look closer, you'll see that most of the Psalms show David's laments and desperation for God to notice him. Each Psalm showcase a different facet of David. As you go further into the Psalms, you get to Psalm 139. In this psalm, you'll see how David begins to understand who is the source of true validation and affirmation.



*O LORD, You have searched me and known me.*

*You know when I sit and when I rise; You understand my thoughts from afar.  
You search out my path and my lying down; You are aware of all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue, You know all about it, O LORD.*

*You hem me in behind and before; You have laid Your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*

*Where can I go to escape Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?  
If I ascend to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there.  
If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle by the farthest sea, even there Your hand will  
guide me; Your right hand will hold me fast.*

Friends, the kind of attention God provides is far above what any other fan club can give you. He is with you twenty-four-seven, so no matter what you're going through, he's there. And if that's not enough, God takes it a step further. He PURSUES you! Take a closer look at Psalm 23, verse 5.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*

The root word for "follow" is actually "pursue." The verse now reads: *Surely goodness and mercy shall PURSUE me all the days of your life.* So yes, God notices you, but He is continually pursuing you. You can't get much more noticed than that! Do you see it?

If you haven't felt pursued by God, my prayer is that you will view your space in the world as God sees it - sacred. Even if your fan club was faulty, or you don't feel like a star, remember He sees everything about you. No matter what facet you look at this from, you can't escape His presence. Psalms 37:5-6 tells us

*Open up before God, keep nothing back; he'll do whatever needs to be done:  
He'll validate your life in the clear light of day and stamp you with approval at high noon.*

Friends, He validates you by His presence. He is always here, right with you.

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LISTEN TO: You are Here

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You are here when my path seems straight; You are here when I worry;  
You are here when I'm trusting you; You are here when I doubt your love

You are here when my heart is full; You are here when I'm weary;  
You are here when I'm running fast; You are here when I'm standing still  
You are here; You are here

You are here when the tempter comes; You are here in injustice;  
You are here when I show my pride; You are here when I failed again;

You are here when abusers come; You are here I'm falling;  
You are here when I am losing faith; You are here when I bow my knee  
You are here; You are here

There are mountains that I must climb; There are fears in the storm;  
There are moments I feel alone; But your mercy keeps calling me home

You are here when I cannot see; You are here when I worship;  
You are here when my body aches; You are here when I call your name;  
You are here when all hope is gone; You are here when my heartbeat stops  
You are here; You are here; You are here

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### **Reflective Questions**

- 1.) Was your fan club adequate or faulty?
- 2.) Did you feel validated or affirmed?
- 3.) What ways does God validate you?