The Psychology of Prayer Part One

By Betsy Barber

John:

Okay, let me introduce our speaker. This is our last one of the series. Dr. Barber is one of our dear faculty at the Institute for Spiritual Formation. I'll just give you a little of her history, she's in education; she has a bachelor's degree in biology from Trinity College, she has a degree in missions from Moody Bible College, and an M.A. in linguistics from the University of Texas. She was really entering into a life with Wycliffe, in missions with her husband, and that went on for a number of years. And then she came back--I can remember if it was in the late 90s or so--to do her a master's degree and the doctor of psychology at Rosemead School of Psychology. That's where I first met Betsy. She was actually one of my students, but she was the most vocal student I probably had ever met. And so, while I would be teaching I would begin to wonder, "Am I this student? Or is she the professor?" And she was a powerful student, and now she's part of--she's actually the director of what we call the Center for Spiritual Renewal at Biola. It's the, it's really the arm of Biola, of the Institute, where we train our students in doing spiritual direction. And so she oversees our students and our graduates, we have I think maybe about 40 or 50 graduates doing spiritual direction--yeah over 60, and they're seeing over, about, 800 undergrads and graduate students a year in spiritual direction. So the institute has really grown and she's really helped, her and Dr. Ten Elshof, to put together the Center for Spiritual Renewal. And she's really the, my associate director of the institute.

As I think of Betsy, one of the things she wanted me to remind you: that she's a mother and a grandmother, because she's gonna be talking about those issues. She has three children--I
think two of them are here and—oh yeah, there they are, right there. Do you want to raise your hands so we can? (laughs) There you go. That's cool. And four grandchildren. And she'll be a talk—talking about things relevant to parenting; to what happened to us in our parenting, what occurred and, and for good and for bad—how has that affected our spiritual life? As I think of Betsy I probably have three words in my mind. One is insight. Secondly, can articulate the heart; and the third is she is a woman of prayer, and so it's really a blessing to have Betsy at our Institute. So Betsy, come up. Welcome.

[Applause]

Dr. Betsy Barber:

Thanks, John. You know, you never know what John's going to say—it's kind of cool. I remember when I had him as a professor, one of my goals was to be the proverbial voice from the back of the room. Apparently that worked (laughs). Thank you all for coming, I appreciate it. I actually want to start us with prayer. So, let's, let's take a minute to open our hearts to the Lord, again. And what I want to invite you to do is, first of all, that you can prepare yourself for praying by remembering why you're here, by feeling your heart's desire, the hopes you have for this evening; maybe the questions that are kind of on the periphery of your mind, knowing that God our Lord is watching us, is with us; resting then in his hand and holding us. And now, from that place in your heart just take a minute and pray either for yourself or for someone who's close to you, for someone you're concerned about. So pray for your heartfelt concern.
So Lord, hear our prayer; we pray in the name of Jesus.

And as you sit here still, having prayed for this person, notice to whom were you praying. Were you praying to God Father? Did you address your prayer to Jesus, the Son? Were you praying to the Holy Spirit? And if it was God the Father, was it God the Father the judge, or God the Father of Israel? God the Maker of the earth, the Ancient of Days? The one without beginning and end? Who is God the Father, and what was your tone as you approached him: are you confident that He's leaning down to listen to you? Is He resident your heart, as near as your breath? Or do you sort of almost have to beg: "Please listen, please do this?" Did you feel a little defensive like, "Am I bothering you? Are You put off by me coming, am I pestering You when I pray?" Was He in a hurry for you to be done, was He uninterested? Did you think, "Oh, if I catch His attention I may get punished. He may talk to me about this." And where was He when you prayed to Him? Was on the throne in Heaven, was He, like, leaning down looking you in the face, and you were looking at Him? Was He by your side, maybe holding your hand? Maybe you were sitting in His lap, leaning against His breast. Did He, kind of turn away, or was He coming toward you? Or were you wondering if He was distant; were you thinking, "That's because of the sin I'm holding on to," or maybe because you'd been distant from Him and hadn't talked to Him recently?

Maybe you prayed to Jesus the Son. And if you prayed to Jesus the Son, is He like the conquering Lord of revelation--coming to fight the devil and the forces of evil, or is He Jesus the good shepherd, out looking for the lost lamb? Is He Jesus your friend, your companion, or Jesus your big brother that says "call Him daddy. The Father is daddy. He's Abba to us." Maybe He
was Jesus the suffering savior, hanging on the cross, and you were leaning against the bottom of the cross, with Him; needing that in your life right now. Maybe He's the healer. Jesus the healer who welcomes sinners, and blind men, and bleeding ladies, and lepers. And how was He listening? Was He smiling; was He holding you? Was He praying with you?

Or maybe you were praying to the Holy Spirit. And if you're praying to the Holy Spirit, will you ask Him to convict you, or to convict someone else of sin, or to comfort you, or to give you gifts, or to bear fruit in you; or to exegete Jesus to you, to talk to you about Jesus? Or maybe He was the Spirit who rescues you, who brings clarity, who brings order from mess? To whom did you pray, and who is God to you? What comes up in you naturally when you pray to Him? How do you approach Him? How do you expect Him to respond?

For many of us, our prayer life, in our intimate communication and relationship with God, there's a disconnect between the theology that we know and believe, that we read in the Bible, and what we actually experience when we go to prayer. And some of you guys are sitting here going, "Wait a minute, where is this lady going? You know, I know who I pray to. I know my relationship with God. And I know that my conscious theology is powerful in my life. I know God's present. I know he's redeemed me. I know he loves me. I do believe I'm forgiven and that nothing separates me from the love of God in Christ." And that's right. But even in that knowing we also sometimes feel like, "and to whom am I praying, and where is He, and how is He listening to me? How is He being with me?" There are levels of knowing inside of us. And so we say, with the Father in Mark 9, "I believe; help my unbelief." So the Father was said, when He was talking to Jesus, when He wanted Jesus to touch His little boy who need to be delivered.

Now think of this: you experience this all the time in your most solid relationships. My husband, Stephen, and I have been married for 35 and a half years. And when I come home from
work, I'm on my way home, a lot of times--a couple of days a week, anyway--Steve gets home
before I do. And so, he'll meet me at the door when I come home. And how my read on Steve
and our relationship may be influenced by the e-mail I answered just before I left, the song I
heard on the radio on the way home, how tired I am, or the look on his face. Now the fact is,
after 35 and a half years of marriage I know his persistent attitude towards me is one of love,
welcome, and commitment. But, in the moment I don't always feel that connection. It's
influenced by a lot of other things. So I want you just, to just to be aware, and to be aware that in
every relationship, in every way that we regard others, we have a varied experience with them.

We all came in here tonight with two things: you came here with both a God-concept and
a God-image. Your God-concept is an intellectually formed understanding of who God is and
who you are to Him. It's what you know that you know, and you can give me chapter and verse
for it. This is who God is. This is how He relates to me. This is how I know it. Our God-image is
a little trickier. Our God-image is a developmentally informed--and by image I don't mean image
like, "We're made in the image of God." I mean this concept of God that we have in our deep
heart; that we, we may not even know that we know all the time. But we carry the picture of God
and who He is in our deep. And that's why I did, had us do, that prayer exercise at the beginning,
and then to look at our prayer and say "Okay, and what goes on in my head and my heart when I
actually come to God? To whom do I come?" God-concepts are conscious. They're intellectual.
We can talk about them, we think about them on purpose, we make decisions about them, and we
know that we're thinking about these ideas. God-images are unconscious; they are formed in the
matrix of our early relationships, our early caretakers. For most of us that's parents or
grandparents, and they are embedded in our heart with an emotional knowledge. God-images are
things that we know by heart, and we don't easily question them, and they're hard to get at.
There are ways in which we experience and perceive something, a kind of knee jerk reaction that comes out of our hidden heart. Let me give you a really silly example. If we're driving on The 5, we may be driving along, feeling really good, feeling relatively holy and confessed up. We may even be singing along with, you know, The Fish on the radio. And somebody comes and cuts in front of us, and we have to swerve, and we almost hit the guy on our right. And what do we say, what comes out of our mouth? (Urgently) Now, don't say it.

[Laughter]

But, but, do you say (emphatically), "God bless you!" Or do you say (angrily) "mhmm"? What comes out when our hearts get bumped when we're not planning on it, that's part of that hidden heart business that I'm talking about. And we have, all of us--this is developmentally true--we all have pockets of stuff in our heart that we don't know, we can't predict, and it surprises us come out, when it comes out. And it comes out in relationships with other people, with what we're scared of, what we're surprised by, what we hope for; and it comes out in relationship to God, too, because we have this internal relationship to Him, as well. And that's kind of what I want to talk about tonight.

Concepts, then, are what we think; images, sometimes called internal objects, are what we know, or what we what we experience about what we think we know--it's not even always what we know. Now, there are of course other things that affect our prayer life. And I just want to run past three of these really quickly, to give you these caveats. If we are physically ill, in chronic pain, or very tired, this is going to, in fact, affect our prayer lives. The entanglement of our bodies can dull our spiritual life. We are embodied spirits, and we ignore that to our peril.
And so—that’s why so many of the spiritual disciplines, by the way, involve our bodies: because we want to integrate our bodies and our hearts. We get want to get our bodies, and our spirits, and our hearts in line with each other. So, because our spirits are expressed by and impressed by our bodies, for some of us, if we’re sick or in pain, it flat lines our prayer life. And so, and so next time you have the flu, notice: did my prayer life change? And you have a cold, or a migraine, or you’re exhausted, notice that. The body lives out the heart. So, we may be physically ill.

We may be emotionally ill. If you're depressed or living with an anxiety disorder, that's going to affect your life in prayer. And a lot of times, folks will come in and think they're in a dark night, and really they're just kind of dysthymic, they're a little depressed. (Chuckles) I worked with the missionary once, I have her permission to tell this. She called, she had--God bless her, this woman had been persevering through amazing things--and just that, just a minor depression for years and years, and she got on an antidepressant, and she told a friend of mine, "These are my Holy Spirit pills." (Laughter) Because all of a sudden she had all this--we'd all seen the gifts and the fruit in her life before, but now she was experiencing His presence with her. It was kind of cool. So, depression is different from a dark night; and a wise counselor, spiritual director, wise friend, can definitely help you sort this one out. These experiences can be untangled. There are ways in which a dark night, which is a spiritual phenomenon of development, verses a depression are very different. All that to say: that can affect your prayer life, too.

Emotional illness, physical illness, and finally, spiritual illness. We may be persisting in sin, and the Bible is really clear that if we're habitually sinning, and sitting in it, fondling the temptation, not fleeing it, not fighting it, not repenting, not seeking out to establish regimes of
righteousness, then we're going to be spiritually blind. Our hearts are going to be calloused hard, and that will really flat line our prayer life. We'll be mouthing words of prayer, but we will not have a united heart, and we will not be praising His name.

So, for those three reasons, that's important to consider. But that's not where we're going to land tonight. Where we're going to land tonight is to talk about the developmental and emotional reasons for our experience in prayer. And I want to return to this notion, now, of our God-images, which are formed by our early history, and I want to talk about how they're formed. And here's where psychology does as a favor, because there's been a lot of research in the last, oh almost 70 years now, starting in the 40s, in attachment theory; in how people attach, and we at ISF, we talk about our hidden hearts, our hidden hearts get formed. Psychologists talk about attachment theory in our internal world. So we can know and think clearly, we know 1 Corinthians 6:17 says, "That the one who unites himself with Christ becomes one with him in spirit." We know that. We come to the Lord Jesus, trust in Him for our salvation; His Holy Spirit and our spirit become one. We know that. John tells us, Jesus' best friend John, in John 14 tells us that the whole Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, come and make it their home in us. We know that. We know from Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit, when we run out of prayer and don't know how to pray, continually groans for us; when we don't know how to pray, He prays for us. We know that Jesus is always interceding for us. So those aren't things I'm questioning, and that's not even what I'm specifically focusing on.

What I'm focusing on is: if that's true, what's going on in my prayer life, what's going on in your prayer life? Why aren't we like, you know, joy in Jesus all the way? So, as John would say--that's a John-ism. And we have a variable course here. People who come to know the Lord Jesus when they're three, like I did--I was actually two weeks before my third birthday when my
parents led me to the Lord, and I remember it--often just relate to the Lord with the same psychological mechanisms all along with which they relate to everybody else. Folks who come to the Lord Jesus later will have a different developmental trajectory. Often they'll have waves of consolation. At first they're a new creature, their life has changed; and over time, then, though their psychological mechanisms will kick up, and the Lord will work with them, too, to help them develop and outgrow these ways. Spiritual formation, then, is all about this developmental process of knowing the Lord Jesus and having His character formed in us; becoming like Him, finding out what pleases Him, doing it more and more. Scripture talks about the fact that this isn't all just a conscious, linear, propositional progress.

Proverbs 4:18-19 talks about this progressive developmental process. Now here's, some scriptures are on your sheet, and Chris Baker did a great job of laying out this handout for me, and I said, "Leave whitespace, so they can write." So this is a place where you, whitespace, right? In Proverbs 4:18-19, speaks to this progressive developmental process of sanctification, it says, "the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter to the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they don't know what makes them stumble." Notice, the righteous increasingly know what makes them stumble. We're going to get better and better at saying, "Avoid that temptation. Don't go there. Stay away from that. Don't read that. Don't watch that," you know, "don't gossip. Stay away from this particular person, or talk to them about it." But notice: the righteous increasingly know it makes them stumble. Which means we start out with things hidden to us.

The Psalmist returns to these, talks to these, about these hidden things, in Psalm 139:23 and 24 specifically, when he asked the Lord to search him and know his heart, to test him and know his anxious thoughts, to see if there is any hidden wicked ways within his heart. In
Hebrew, this "wicked ways," or "hurtful ways" literally means a way of pain, or a painful way. And this could be a way that's painful, or even a torture to us, as a result of the effects of sin in our life that hinders us. So these verses get at the fact that the problem of pain in our heart is actually caused by sin that's woven into us from the fall, from the sin of our parents, from the sin of the external world, from our sin.

Paul refers to unconscious ways in 1 Corinthians 4:4-5 when he said, "My conscious is clear," now this is Paul, Paul the Apostle. "My conscience is clear, but that doesn't make me innocent. It's the Lord who judges me. Wait till he comes. Then he'll bring to light what's hidden in darkness, and will expose the motives of men's heart. And," and this is a lovely phrase here, "and at that time, each will receive his praise from God." Isn't that cool how that ends? It's not what you expect.

We're reminded of our hidden hearts in Hebrews 9:7, where they talk about the fact that every year the high priest came and offered sacrifices for his sins and the sins of the people that they had committed in ignorance. Their hidden sins. Sins that they didn't know that they were committing. And then the good news: he goes on to Hebrews 9:14, the writer of Hebrews says, "And the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse our conscience from acts that lead to death." Wow. Jeremiah 17:9 and 10 talks about the heart being deceitful. We deceive ourselves and others; deceiving and desperately sick. There's a wounded heart here, who can understand it?

Our hidden and unknown thoughts actually can, sometimes, condemn us unjustly, as well. John talks about this in 1 John 3 where he says, this is, then, how we know we belong to the truth: because our hearts sometimes can, if you're a good, righteous person and you do stay confessed up, then another trick of the devil is to condemn you and lie, when it isn't the Holy Spirit that's accusing you, or convicting you. And that can just keep us in this, in this swirl of
scrupulosity. So we're paying more attention to sin, or supposed sin, than our salvation and what God's called us to. And so, John talks about that in 1 John 3 where he says, "this is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: whenever our hearts condemn us, God's greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." And then he goes on to talk about your prayer life, in John. So remember: part of redemption is the Holy Spirit reassuring us, "you're children of God, you're children God." And John's talking about that; how to have a restful heart.

Our goal, of course, in all of this is to be like Jesus. Paul talks about this, 2 Corinthians 3:18, "and we who, with unveiled faces," he's comparing that to Moses and then the glory of God in the Old Testament, "We who, with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory; glory to glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit." One of the ways we are transformed is by looking intently at the Lord Jesus getting to know Him and be known by Him, becoming illuminated by Him; glory to glory, becoming transfigured by Him and His Spirit. And we also become more of our true selves as we look intently at Him, perceive ourselves mirrored in His eyes, lay aside--push away the things that aren't there, that aren't of Him, take on the things that are. We'll talk about that a little more.

And the culmination of this, of course, is in heaven when we shall see more than a poor reflection--which is what we see now, here in this earth. 1 Corinthians 13:12, "Now we see but a poor reflection, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I'm going to know fully, even as I am fully known." And John talks about that, too, "Dear friends, now we are the children of God, but it doesn't yet appear what we shall be. But we know when we see him, when he appears, we'll be like him. For we shall see him as he is." And so here in scriptures we see the heart of how we humans develop a self in the first place: by being truly mirrored, by being truly
known, by being truly connected to the Lord. And, you know what? Developmental psychology and neuropsychology agree with this more, and more, and more, and more. All the studies that are coming out say, "Yes.” The research and the disciplines inform us that baby humans grow their internal selves in the shape of the relationships surrounding him.

I was in the seminar this summer, and this good, Jewish, Buddhist man, was brilliant man--that's who he is, that's how he identified himself: as a Jewish, Buddhist. And, a brilliant man, and he said, "You know, it's the funniest thing." He said, "We come out hard wired for relationship and attachment. We have to attach, we're driven to attach. It's like, we're made for it or something." (Laughs) and I'm like, "yeah, that would be true."

[Laughter]

Okay. We're made for it; we're made to attach, we're driven to attach, we're hard wired that way. The first 18 to 24 months, and then again in the first five or six years of our life, that's our--they're crucial, and that's our primary task here. In the process of becoming a self: we're laying down the unconscious grids, the patterns, the templates, for how we think. It's like, I'm wearing contact lenses. Unless I talk about them, I'm not even aware of them because they're the grid through which I see the world. They're what mediate reality to me. I don't even think about them. They're just there. These unconscious patterns, or templates, in our heart are like that. We don't even think of them. They're just what structures reality for us, that it's what tells us: who we are, who the other person is, what's likely to happen, what's possible to happen. Stuff like that.

All right. So, there's this great, if you guys are into this I would point you to--I gave you four books on the back of the handout for further reading, and one of them is by Daniel Siegel,
it's called The Developing Mind, and if you're into science, or you'd like to know more about the nitty gritty part of this, it's fantastic stuff. It's just like, for me, I read it and I stop in worship because it's like, "wow, God, look what You did!" But it's too much for us, tonight. So I'm not going to go there. Suffice it to say that the neurobiology of this is really sturdy, hard science, okay?

So then, our unconscious God-image and our map of reality is formed within our families of origin by the time we're six years old. And then we begin to relate with God as we come to know Him with the same psychological structures we relate to everyone else. And here's the kicker: if when we're learning new things--like to grab something at four months, to sit up at six months, to walk at 12 months, to talk at 18 months--our parents are there mirroring us, reflecting it, bringing the world to us, enjoying us, protecting us, providing for us, giving us their presence. If all that is in place, we developed by the time we're two, what's called object constancy. So, that's where these unconscious images of the other person get inserted inside of us. And even then, when the child, the toddler who's 2, is away from mommy, the child knows mom; has, carries that image of mom in the inside. Simply put, faith is object constancy with God. Faith isn't walking by sight. Faith is when we can't see Him, but we trust Him. We know He's there. We know we're His. We know who He is and we know what it is between the two of us. And if we don't have the capacity for object constancy in the first place, then we're going to struggle with faith. And we're going to struggle in some real particular ways, which in just a minute I'll unpack four of the ways.

I gave you some quotes there. For many of us, since we are little sinners being parented by sinners, marrying sinners, and begetting other little sinners--when I do marriage seminars, I talk about, you know, marriage being: pick a sinner, any sinner.
I won't go into that. But, for many of us our parents, our early caretakers weren't the safe haven that you would hope for. And so being known, loved, and provided for wasn't our full experience; it was spotty. Sometimes they were there, sometimes they weren't, sometimes they were always not there in particular ways. And so, we have damage here. We have pockets of trauma. We have islands of dissociation within us and that's some of the hidden heart stuff that comes out, and when it comes out we go "what--where'd that come from? What's going on here?" Because it's hard to press to get at. I gave you some quotes from two of the other books that I referred, I'm referring you to. Jordan's book, especially, if the stuff I talk about tonight you go "yeah I want more of that." Jordan's a really good place to start, Reclaiming Your Story. The point here is: whether parents know it or not, when they're parenting their child, no matter if they take them to Sunday School every Sunday and send them to Awana--and that's all good things and we did that with our children. So I'm not, like, disrespecting that at all. The fact is, we're also giving our children a lot more that we're not aware of. We're giving them how we were parented. We're giving them an experience of "can I trust the big people in my world? Can I be taken care of? Can I be provided for? Or am I scared? Is it regular; can I count on it? Or is it like at, you know, playing a slot machine. I put money in all the time trying to attach, an (makes clicking noise) once in a while I get a payoff and sometimes I don't."

Stop and consider this: spiritual formation is going to involve a deeper self-knowledge for us to clear away some of this developmental gunk and grunge, and it's going to be more than just putting on the spiritual disciplines. Those are wonderful, and a really good place to start. But to heal the developmental wounds and scars, in order to see more clearly who we are and
who God is, we don't just put on new habits and good theology. We also have to take off some things some of these hurtful ways; some of these painful, anxious, provoking ways that Psalm 139:23 and 24 talk about. And so that's going to deal with junk, our junk, our stuff. And we have to, as Ephesians 4 says, "put off the old person and the former manner of life that's presently corrupting us in desires of deceit." And this negative putting off is also crucial in formation.

Now remember: whoever is there, whoever is around the little kid for the first four years, they are going to attach to. And it's likely that they'll attach the three or four people. You know, mommy, daddy, and brother. If mommy, daddy, and brother all have the same attachment style inside, then that's going to be the attachment style. By the time a child is four or five years old, one of their caretakers or one of the people around them will it become the predominant relationship, and that's the grid that the child is going to operate out of. And it really doesn't have anything to do with love and nurture. I mean, hopefully it does. But if the child is raised by abusive people, that little kid is going to do everything they can to accommodate the abusive person and to attach to them. There were studies done on children who were in concentration camps during World War 2, and they actually attached to each other because they, they didn't have any other adult caretaker to attach to.

The good news here, and I want to tell you this upfront before we jump into where we're going to land for a while here, and that's the four basic attachment patterns and what that might look like in your spiritual life. The good news is that we attach lifelong, and so even if you come in here tonight and as we talk you sit here and go, "My parents were drug addicts. I was neglected. I was beaten. I was abused." And you realize that you have a pretty chaotic attachment style. First of all, that doesn't mean that that's where you're staying and sitting today, because you may have already experienced some healing and loving relationships because we build
attachment lifelong. So healing is possible at any point and from any place in attachment. So healing or redemption happens. So I just I want to give you that caveat. The other thing is for those of us who are parents and grandparents in here: this is just really good news, I think--speaking as a sinner--good enough parenting, to give the best attachment style to your children, only has to be in sync with them and attuned 30 percent of the time. Isn't that good news? Yeah.

See, I know. So, as we jump into the rest of this stuff, hold on to those two facts: you know healing happens, attachment builds lifelong, and 30 percent is the water mark, you know, for parenting. Yes, amen, thank God. Redemption built in here.

Okay. So the four patterns: what are these unconscious patterns of relationship, of attachment; and this goes beyond bonding, now, okay, but it starts with bonding. Beyond bonding to attachment, with which we relate to everybody including God, that forms who God is to us and how we approach Him. I'm going to start and spend the most time on the healthiest one, which is called secure attachment. So it's secure as a child, secure as adults in your handout.

Remember, for better or worse, the infant has to attach and adapt to accommodate whoever is taking care of them. So, so if the person has parents who are secure, and who parent them well--and we're going to talk about in a minute what parenting well looks like--then, when the little baby, and this is with 18 months old, you know 12 months old they've done these studies. If the mom leaves the baby in a lovely environment with a safe caretaker and leaves, the little secure baby will cry, briefly, and then will go on playing, even relate, maybe, to the nice caretaker. 10 minutes later mom comes back, and the baby's overjoyed to see mom, crawls over to them, runs over to them, you know is, briefly makes this contact and then gets down and starts playing again.
Okay, so this is a child who, in Diane fascist terms, knows how to feel and deal. The child can feel when the mom leaves, miss mom, but be reunited with mom or dad and be happy; and the child can just deal. The child can play. These are children who play well. They explore, they play exuberantly, they play freely. They're just happy little campers. And they can maintain the connection. They are visibly happier than the other three types of attachment styles we're going to talk about, and they even can adjust to being around strangers if the strangers are nice to them. Secure children, in general, have flexible parents who respond while engaging with a whole range of the child's feeling. They were cared for well when they were new and as they go on they're cared for in five specific ways.

We see these parents having what's called contingent communication. So they say they see the child signals, they make sense of the child signals, they respond to them in a timely way. They mirror the child--remember those Bible verses? That means they know the child's self-experience and they can reflect it back to them. So you hear a secure mom, who's raising a secure baby, say to the 5 month old that's crying, "Oh, are you crying because you're hungry, or maybe you're wet? No, you just want to be cuddled." So the mother intentionally attends to the internal state of the child, makes good empathic guesses, and actually impugns intentionality the child, already. That the child is responding, is crying, in order to tell the mom the message that "I'm not hungry, I'm not wet, I just need some cuddling." Okay? Contingent communication: the communication is contingent upon the state of the child, and the parent is able to kind of put themselves aside to be compassionate towards the child. So, the child isn't a problem be solved, or a situation to be handled, but they're a little person to be known.

Besides mirroring, another piece of this is something called state matching. This has a lot to do with emotional resonance. A lot of it is verbal, it's tone it's--I asked my daughter if I could
give example for my grandchildren here. My eldest grandchild, Bridgette, is four years old now. When she was a baby, she just came out this happy go lucky, ready to relate, little person; let's play, let's giggle, let's, whatever. Which is really nice for me because I'm extroverted; I have a loud voice, I talk fast, I laugh loudly, I laugh often, and so I'd be holding the baby and something, you know somebody would say something, and I'd laugh and Bridgette would be okay with it. Bridgette's little brother, Sam, who's two and a half now, wasn't like that when he was a baby. And I remember just being shocked by this. You know, we'd all be sitting around after dinner and I'd laugh loudly and Sam would cry. Sam did not like loud voices, especially mine, and I mean I remember thinking, "I cannot take this personally. I have to," like, I'm thinking psychologically, "I have to match him." You know? (Laughs) Okay, Bridgette and Sam have two little sisters, identical twins, who were born way too early last spring and so they spent the first four weeks of their life in the neonatal intensive care unit. They're fine now, but it was touch and go, and scary for a while. And we would go and hold Jane and Kate, and we would barely even talk; we would whisper to each other, and we might hum a little bit as we held them. But they were still supposed to be on the inside. They weren't supposed to be outside for two more months. They came out really early. And so we were very gentle and quiet around them, and we matched them even more.

Okay, so that's an example. Study the little people you're around and notice: they have preferences. And a good parent, a good caretaker, is going to match this a little person and what they like. This is overall a process is called attunement, and you can see attunement if you're watching parents and kids, caretakers and kids, you can see it when it's happening. It's this milky-state, matching, co-created reality; here we are together, and we're just in sync, and if something happens and breaks it--for example, if the mom's nursing, the baby's happy, the
mom's happy, life is wonderful; voices are humming in the background, birds are flying around, and the baby's feeling Mommy's hair, and all of a sudden the baby grabbed mom's earring and (makes noise), and mom yells and the baby screams, and attunement has been breached, and there's a disruption. And a good mom will say, "Oh it's okay, it's okay, it's okay. You just hurt my ear. It's all right." They'll soothe the baby, get the baby and quiet it back down. So then you're in attunement again. Attunement, breach, disruption, repair. Okay? And the fact is, anytime we're working with sinners, that's the pattern. That's as good as it gets. It's a cycle, waxing and waning. And good parents know how to go and find the child and reconnect.

I hope for you the spiritual things are like screaming at you at this point. Think of Jesus finding the lost lamb. Think of the parables in Luke's 15, you know the lost, coin the lost sons, the lost lamb. Think of Jesus on the cross. Think of all the initiation that God goes through to seek and to save the lost; to reconnect with us. He's always out there looking. You know, He's always holding out His hands. And that's what good parents do. Good parents, when there's a breach, however it was caused, reconnect; get back into attunement. Okay, attunement.

Good parents even go on beyond this mirroring thing to predictive mirroring. Predictive mirroring is when you know the child better than they know themselves, and you are looking at the child's ability to modulate their emotion and you're saying, "it's going to fail. I need to intervene." So the kids are playing around and it's 10 minutes to bedtime, and they're having a hilarious amount of fun, and they're having a pillow fight in the living room, and they're yelling and laughing at the top of their lungs and you say to them, "Guys we have to stop now because ten minutes from now you're going to be crying you're so tired and so let's settle down and let's read a Bible story. Let's read a bedtime story. Let's do something quiet." And the kids go, "No, no, I don't want to stop!" But the fact is they need stop. Your friends, your good friends, will do
this for you. Anybody in attunement in a secure relationship is gonna be able to predictably mirror.

Think about Jesus and Peter. Jesus did this with Peter. Like big time. Peter always thought he knew who Jesus ought to be, and Jesus always knew better who Peter in fact was and who He was. And Jesus says to Peter when Peter's like (mocking surfer voice), “I'll follow you; the rest of those losers will walk away. But not me man. Remember? I'm the one I got off the boat, and walked on water, and all that good stuff. I'm the first one that said you're the messiah." And anyway, so Jesus says, "three times before dawn you're going to deny me, but when you restored, go and minister to your brothers," talk about predictive mirroring. "Peter I know you. I know what you're going to do and I want you to know that that's not going to break the relationship between us. There's restoration. We're still connected." And that's also what children need to know, friends need to know, anybody in a secure relationship needs to know that the other person's need, or their failure, or their sin, or their anger, doesn't drive the other person away, overwhelm them, or break the relationship. That's one of the characteristics, strong characteristics, of a secure attachment.

Okay, secure attachment inoculates us against trauma. So when folks who are securely attached, when 4 year olds who are securely attached, have some catastrophic thing happen in their life or they see something horrible, they can repair. They can be healed, far more quickly than little kids who have one of these other three attachment styles. So a secure attachment is just, it's such a blessing for us.

The ability to repair we talked about, the breaches in attunement, and repairing them, and how God does that with us. Emotional communication. This means that the child feels deeply and lovingly understood; that the other person really knows what's going on inside. We have to
share and amplify their positive emotions of joy and excitement. We have to help them notice their happiness and contentment, and we have to be adept at soothing their negative emotions so that they know "I can feel any of this and I can be comforted. I can feel any of this and it can be shared." And over time this will allow the child to develop a sense of having a very secure base inside, and that's help their sense of self develops.

Developing a joint coherent narrative. This is crucial. Teach your children to tell their life story. Teach them, as age appropriate, your life story. So, you know, Bridgette, we went camping this summer and I'll say, "What'd we do when we're camping? We put up our tents, and then what'd we do? We had a fire. And then when we do? We had supper. And then what? We had marshmallows. Then what? We went to bed. Then what? We got up and played in the hammock." I mean just that, just a narrative: "What do we do next? And what do we do?" The story of us. This helps us make sense of a complex world. The fact is, no matter what the caretakers attachment style was from their parent, if they've done their work, and know their own life history, and understand it, they aren't going to pass the chaos down to their kids; either their physical kids or their spiritual kids. Knowing our own story is the best way to not pass on the generational sin that comes with our families. So the best predictor of secure attachment in a child is a parent who knows and understands their own historical narrative. This is how people who were abused as a child can avoid abusing their own children, passing it on. Not becoming perpetrators. "I know what happened to me growing up and I know what it means." This is part of why forgiveness is so important and we'll talk about that before we end this evening.

Examples from Scripture. Psalm 191 is a really good example of talking about somebody who has secure attachment; a weaned child leaning up and then saying, you know the Psalmist says, "Trust in God like this, is Israel." Somebody who's satisfied, who can rest in the presence
of the parent. The prodigal son, the younger one who ran away, even though he was sinful, is a good example of secure attachment because when, as the Bible says and as Luke tells us, he came to his senses; when he comes to his senses he knows the father, and he knows how the father will respond in provision and for him. And so he goes back and he's right. Now, interestingly enough the other lost son in that story, the elder son, who was the good boy that stayed home, didn't know the father and he's the next--one of the next styles we're going to talk about. You know but, but he didn't have secure attachment to the father, whereas the younger one--even though he sinned--did. I've listed in your handout the, the adult patterns of security. They just march right out of the children's ones that we've talked about.

I want to go on here to the insecure attachment. There are two types of insecure attachment. One is called preoccupied as an adult, one is called dismissive; and these come from insecure kids whose parents are self-referential. Self-referential means: when they do this situation where they have the parents leave the infant or toddler with a kind stranger in a playroom, and go out for 10 minutes, and then come back, the children don't have the same pattern as the secure kids do. They have two different patterns which we'll talk about in a minute. But when the mom or dad comes back, these moms or these parents say things like--instead of saying "Oh I miss you, are you Okay? How's it going?" They say, "Did you miss me?" Because for these parents it's all about me, you know, not about the child. It's about me. And so also the parents here rebuffed the children's attempt for intimacy. So when the children run over and want to be picked up, as some of them do, the parents won't pick them up because they're busy talking to the researcher. You know they're, "Oh no, no, no,"--don't want to take care of their kids.

Okay, two patterns. One is preoccupied as an adult. These folks begin trying very hard to hold on to their caretakers. All the children begin this way. And they do it in ways that frequently
backfire. Relationships here are a place where there's room for only one person, not two people, and the one person isn't the self, it's the other. And so folks with this attachment pattern grow up with a center of gravity that's out there; they're always looking--anxiously looking--out there to say "Am I okay? Are you okay? What's, what's going on?" And they will do anything to keep the connection in the relationship. Folks here are drowning in feelings. They're drowning in abandonment of past relationships. And so that keeps them from vest, investing, in present relationships with new people. They're preoccupied with their parents' lives, and as children they're resistant to being soothed. It's hard for them to be comforted. These folks feel, but they don't deal. So the kids cry when Mom leaves, they cry the whole time she's gone, and when she comes back they still cry. They can't be comforted. It's like they dial their emotions, they crank them way up, and it's like "I know, I just got to work really hard to get your attention, and so I'm just going to cry, and cry, and make a loud noise. I'm gonna be and make big emotions, and exaggerate."

Mom's here are sometimes present, and sometimes absent, and the baby can't predict them. Kids can't predict. And so they do all they can to, to cling to their neediness, to express their distress, or to be frantically entertaining them, loving to get the parents attention and hold it, to force the adult response. So the child doesn't have time for their own core self. They don't play very well by themselves. They're way too busy with, with the adults in their external world. And it's really tough for folks like this to grow up in Christ. It's better to stay needy, it's better to stay young, because then you get the attention. You know, you get, you get the attention of the older ones. And so folks, believers here need lots of expressions of repeated reassurance. I do wonder, sometimes if folks, you know folks who get baptized five times, come forward every time? I wonder if it cause some, for some of them if it doesn't spring out of this kind of internal
experience of not being able to be sure of the connection so needing that like nail it again, you know. The cost of relational relatedness here is our own self experience that says: "I can't express and feel me and still be with you. And I've got to be with you. So forget me. You know you're, you're the act in town. I'm going to pay attention to you."

Parents here unpredictably responsive. That's part of the problem. You know they aren't the 30 percent parents, even. And so, the parents are preoccupied in the past. Preoccupied adults are obsessed with romantic partners. The strategies they have for trying to keep relationships often actually push people away rather than pull them closer. They worry about rejection. They can be experienced as intrusive and controlling--now they themselves don't experience themselves that way. They would say that's the last thing they're trying to do. "But I'm trying so hard to please you." You know? And the person is going "enough, enough already." They even sometimes will make people angry on purpose, because they feel so reassured if somebody gets angry at them; because anger is a great connector. "You know, if you're angry at me you care," you know, and apathy is what they're scared of. If you're apathetic towards me, if you're like, "whatever," oh that's like the kiss of death, because that's non-connective. Anger at least means I matter to you.

I think one of the best examples of these, of this pattern in scripture is, is the whiny paralyzed guy at the pool of Bethesda, Bethesda--well the scripture spells it both ways. Do you remember the guy? Been paralyzed for over 30 years, lying in one of the five colonnades around this pool, waiting for the waters to be stirred so they could go in and get healed. And Jesus comes up and says to the guy, "Do you want to be well?" Now, this is the rabbi that's gone around healing all these people. What does the whiney guy say? He doesn't say, like the guy Jesus walks up to the blind guy and says, "What would you like me to do for you?" The blind
guy's like (emphatically), "Please yeah can you heal me?" That's Mark 9. Okay, but John 5. This
guy is like, here's the thing about the creator of the heavens, and earth the savior of the world,
and the rabbi that's been going around healing people comes up to him and says, "Do you want to
be well?" And what does he say, do you remember? He's like (panicked and whiney), "Well,
they all push in front of me when I get into the water, and I never get down, and I don't get in. It's
not fair. They're not, they don't play fair. I never had my turn."

[Audience laughter]

Jesus, being Jesus, was merciful and healed him anyway. But there was a problem with it,
if you remember: the guy goes and he squeals on Jesus. The authorities say, "Who was that?"
And the guy's like, "I don't know." Jesus comes and finds him and says, "Watch it. Don't send
anymore, or it'll be worse than before." And then the guy goes and tattles on him to the
authorities. I mean, this is--okay, preoccupied pattern.

[Audience laughter]

For folks here, you can imagine that it's never, it's like: "does Jesus really love me, will
He never leave me? What do I have to do to earn His favor?" You know, that kind of behavior.
Okay?

Dismissing, which is the other one. Now preoccupied and dismissing they both have
some strands of security in their, attachment. But then they have this other stuff. Dismissing, this
attachment style grows when the child fails to regulate the behavior of their primary caregiver,
because the person's withholding; they don't give much contact. And so the child needs comfort, needs soothing, and the caregiver just doesn't come through. These are folks who can deal, but not feel. These are the folks who say "well I know my dad loved me. He never said it, but I know he did. And he probably did, but never said it. He never hugged me." These are the folks that the family message is: "of course we're connected, but don't make a big deal about it." These are the: "don't cry. It's all right, stop crying. Stop crying, I'll give you something to cry about." That's, this is the kind of message that these kind of parents give. And so, kids learn "wow, if I want to be around my parents--and I got to be around them they're the only game in town--okay, I'll dial it down. I'll be placid. I'll be good. I'll be cool. I'll look like I don't need them. I'll just I'll just, you know, kind of be around. We'll be together."

But you know what happens when they do the experiments with these kids where the parents come and go? And the kids and the kids don't cry when the parents leave. And the kids, when the parents come back, they don't run over to him to be picked up. But you know what their little hearts are just going like crazy. Their cortisol levels, their stress hormones, are off the charts. Their blood pressure is up. These kids are every bit as anxious as the preoccupied ones that are screaming, but they don't show it because they've learned to accommodate and adapt to the internal world of their caregiver. And so, this person defends in order to avoid the emotion, so they get to keep the relationship. So when this person reads Psalm 62, "pour your hearts out to God, you people," he's like "Are you kidding? Why would I pour my heart out to God?"

Hebrews: "approach God confidently to the throne of grace. Pray to your Heavenly Father." "No, I'm not gonna be doing that. I don't want to bother Him. I know the way to stay near Him is to just leave Him alone; not need, anything not ask. Just be cool, be placid."
These children actually have a hierarchy of attachment behaviors that you can see on the tapes that they do with these. To find out, you know, the attachment styles for the kids. Lots of visually checkable visual checking. They may move a little closer to re-establish connection. They may say something, make a noise, but if it's not responded to, they just stop. And this leads to detachment. They actually look like they don't need their parents. They look like they don't care because they've dial down their strategy. They have a minimized strategy. Adults then, here, relatively un-invested in romantic relationships; a higher breakup level than the previous one we talked about. They tend to grieve less, although they feel lonely. They may be aware of where a feeling empty inside, and they--while the type we talked about before the preoccupied were likely to have been the victims of bullies--these guys are likely to have been the bullies in the relationships.

I think it would be really helpful for folks in this style to think about Jesus as presented in Isaiah 53: a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, the one who deals tenderly with sin-sinners, the one who doesn't break a smoking reed; if he walks on it he's so gentle, he doesn't even break it. The one who seeks the one lost lamb, the high priest who knows what it's like to be weak and who is tempted in every way that we were, Hebrews 4. This is the person, then that, that these folks who have this style can begin to open their heart to and say "Show me, show me. You can sympathize with me. If I'm needy with you, you won't turn your face away." Thomas, doubting Thomas, is one of these guys you know. (Sarcastically) "Oh yeah for sure, He rose from the dead. I'll believe it when I can stick my finger in his side. I saw him die, don't get my hopes up." You know, dial it down, dial it down.

The last one and then we'll take a break. Unresolved, disorganized, or fearful. In families of severe poverty, where the parents are mentally ill, the parents are drug addicts, or the parents
are criminal, or single parent families. About 70 percent of the children are going to have this. Okay, this is the style that develops inside the little person when their parents, when they can't deal or feel. The parents can't handle their emotions and they just can't even take care of them and be with them. Okay? And the amazing thing is, it's not every child in these families. There's some children who come out of these families shining like gold; and sometimes it's because they had a grandma, they had a babysitter, they had a teacher, they had a Sunday school teacher, that saw them and loved them, and they were resilient and they grew. Okay? But, for many of these children, they're conflicted, they're disorganized, they're disoriented. The person who's taking care of them is either one of two things: the person is either frightening—we see these little kids on the tape approaching their caregiver with, it's called the silent scream, monkeys even do this. There's like (takes sharp breath in) you know, this terror inside, but they have to approach because it's the caregiver. They got to attach, you know?

So either the person they're approaching is frightening, or the person they're approaching is frightened and they're dissociating. And so their cognition and emotion is fragmented inside. They're not in touch with their whole self. They're numb, likely. And that terrifies infants. Infants look into these, their parents’ faces and it like—for example: say a baby has, is colicky. I don't know if any of you had a colicky kid, but oh my goodness that—after a while you just (sharp breath in, angrily) "what could I do with this kid?" And if you are a parent that dissociates, you're going to like numb out, you're going to do something that's going to terrify the child because it's like you disappear inside, and they can't find you. And they got to find you, because got attach, that's what kids do.

Okay, so that's what grows folks, then, to do these desperate, ineffective attempts of connecting with their caregivers. We see these babies, when the mom goes away and comes
back, the baby approaches the mother with their arms out, but they're walking backwards. So there's this ambivalence of: "I need you, but I'm scared of you." Or they'll come up to the mom and get within two feet of her, and then just collapse on the floor. "I can't go any further."

Behavior like that, children who just have, have no good strategy to connect with their parents. Parents who are frightened or frightening maybe; abusive maybe abandoning. And so there's just an untenable position here the little kid has no solution to.

So, adults who grow up like that often will have strands of the other attachment styles, because they've had other caregiving experiences, perhaps, but huge vast wastelands of this chaos inside. And so they may be severely introverted--now this isn't just shy. This isn't just "I prefer quiet." This is like, severely, "I can't get words out of my mouth" introverted. Or very un-assertive. They always tend to feel exploited, self-conscious, very negative; and they may fluctuate between extreme neediness, or extreme withdrawing. Extreme emotion or total flat lining and dissociation. They just, their emotions are totally dysregulated. And relationships are terrifying. They know that. But they also long for them.

In scripture when I was thinking about this, I think about like the demonized Gadarene man. You know, he had nothing, and Jesus healed it. Jesus found him. For folks like this, being in the body of Christ is crucial. Because, remember, earned security is possible from any position. And so a secure relationship in a small group, with a disciple-er, with a close friend, with a spouse, with a therapist with a spiritual director, can make all the internal difference; because, especially when we're a new creature, the Holy Spirit's ready to grow these new things in us. And this is part of the Ministry of the body of Christ and the church to folks who come with this attachment style. But again, prayer life can be pretty chaotic, because they don't feel
like they can count on God. So they really, really need to see God with skin on. They need to see the church. They need to experience that in the body of Christ.

Let's take a break now, and come back in 10 minutes or so. Thanks.