

Attachment Wounds: Ten Steps that Heal

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One primary emotional need of human beings is the ability to bond and attach. Previous articles in Practical Family Living News have addressed this topic. In this article, a simple childhood story will illustrate core wounds that affect trusting others, and thus the ability to bond and attach. Following the story, ten steps will be explored to help us as individuals and as family members learn to bond and attach with one another in new Godly, and healthy ways.

One winter an eight-year-old girl was suddenly and unexpectedly informed by her parents that she must give her cat, "Ivory" away to her grandparents. The girl asked "Why?" but all she was told was, "It's for the best." Night and day, the girl thought about Ivory. The cat was a consistent, loving companion to her. One afternoon she wrote to her grandfather with detailed information on Ivory's favorite foods, how he liked to be cuddled, and the meaning of his certain "meows." She even drew a diagram of how a warm bed could be made for Ivory because she knew that her grandfather could build anything. Finally, a letter arrived from her grandfather. Excited to hear how Ivory was and especially if Grandpa had made the new cat bed, the girl tore open the letter and began to read it. However, nothing in the letter was as she expected. Instead of living in her grandparent's house, Ivory was living in an unheated shed. Instead of table scraps and canned cat food, her grandfather wrote, "He's probably finding some mice." Inside the envelope another enclosed piece of paper looked familiar to the girl. She unfolded it and saw that it was her diagram of Ivory's bed. Her grandfather had sent the diagram back and had written over her meticulous drawings and measurements: "What an imagination you have! Ha, Ha. That animal doesn't have time to sleep, he's too worried about catching enough mice to keep him alive!"

Loss, trauma, and especially shame in early childhood, can scar us and make it difficult to trust God and others. With this girl's experience, A number of factors contributed to this girl's emotional pain. First, she was not informed or prepared ahead of time that she would lose her pet. Thus, the loss was intensified and flavored with elements of shock. Secondly, her questions regarding her cat's sudden departure were met with a generalized and pat answer. Her feelings and emotions were not listened to or validated. Third, the girl eventually developed her own coping skills by formulating a care plan for her former pet and sending this care plan to her grandfather. However, instead of being received with love and understanding, the care plan was disregarded and mocked. Her trauma was further intensified when her core concern, the cat's life and safety, was joked about with implied messages of perhaps the cat even dying.

To begin the healing process toward healthy attaching to God and others, the following steps may be helpful.

1. Ask God for courage to receive more of His love. Psalm 139 and Zephaniah 3:17 especially speak of the depth of God's love.
2. Take a small step in changing a relational pattern with others. Verbalizing a positive statement to another or accepting an affirmation or sign of affection from another can be a start.
3. Ask Him to be your anchor in "staying with" the new feelings and emotions of this new bonding pattern.
4. Invite God into any discomfort with these new emotions.
5. Expect that other loved ones may not be at the same level of changing their attachment patterns. Do not take this personally. God may be protecting you from too much change at once. Even positive change can be overwhelming!
6. Slowly increase new positive ways of connecting. Author and speaker, Gary Chapman, suggests that couples ask one another: "What three things happened to you today and *how do you feel about them?*" It is the "feeling part" of this exercise that will nourish attachment.
7. Ask God to show you when you are falling back into former unhealthy ways of attaching. Receive His love and forgiveness, and begin again.
8. In God's timing, you may want to inform your loved ones when their ways of attaching and bonding to you are hurtful. It is important that this information be shared in an attitude of love and respect. Remember: Negative attaching may be related to core wounds of shame, loss or trauma.
9. If drugs, alcohol, or sex (outside of the marital covenant) are being used as a replacement for healthy attaching with others, this may need immediate professional counsel and spiritual intervention
10. When you tire with this new process, rest and wait on Him. The following passage may assist you in receiving God's desire to bond with you. "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17).

God's quietness can touch our trauma; His being with us can heal the loneliness of loss. When it is shame that threatens to numb or distort God's truth about our worth and value, His voice not only calls our name (John 10:3) but *sings* over us with delight and rejoicing.

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