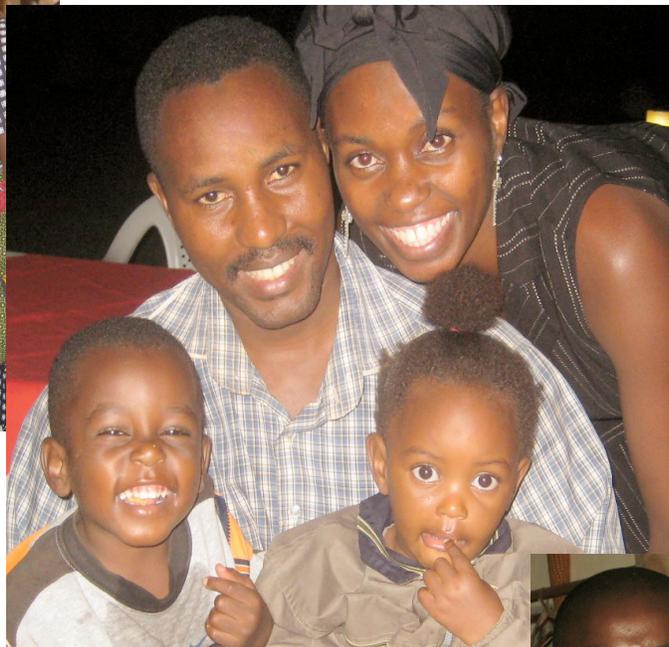


# Created to Belong

How to Transform Our Broken Beginnings  
And Build Belonging



By  
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# Attachment to God Attachment to Caregiver

Attachment to God



Path to the Least  
of These



# **Created to Belong**

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# Lesson 1: Attachment is God's Plan

**God created us to belong first to our earthly parents, then to himself.**

**The child's attachment to his/her parents (HORIZONTAL ATTACHMENT) parallels the attachment God created us to have with him (VERTICAL ATTACHMENT).**



## **Opening prayer and exercise- 30 minutes**

Place trainees in small groups; each group choosing a recorder and spokesperson. Encourage each group member to share the following:

- Name and place of birth
- Their favorite sweet food
- Personal hopes for the workshop

As a group, discuss the unique needs of orphaned or adopted children and report out to entire class.



## **Leader shares personal connection of attachment to a caregiver**



Teach

## Attachment: What is it?

Attachment is an exclusive, emotional connection, between an infant and her primary caregiver (usually a parent, but it will be whoever spends the most time consistently meeting the infant's needs). Attachment does not exist in an individual (the mother OR the infant) but in a relationship and is reciprocal in nature and a feedback loop exists. This feedback loop can be POSITIVE, feeling pleasant to both mother and child as described in the following stories.

*Martha, a first time mother, smiles at her baby Michael. Michael smiles back at Martha, which creates in Martha the desire to smile more at Michael, which results in Michael smiling more at his mother.*

*Sarah, a one- month old infant, cries and her mother Phobice, soothes her by holding her close to her body, patting her gently on her back, and speaking soft words of reassurance into her ear. At the same time, Phobice keeps herself calm remembering that Sarah is not yet able to calm herself (self-soothe) and will learn to do this over time as she internalizes the soothing she receives from her mother. As Phobice's actions help Sarah to calm and settle herself, she feels effective and positive about her mothering because she sees that she was able to provide what Sarah needed. Sarah also feels positive about her mother, who helped her to feel calm and regulated and will cry for her help in the future, until she learns to calm and soothe herself.*

This feedback loop can also be NEGATIVE, feeling unpleasant to both mother and baby as described in the following stories.

*Peace is a colicky\* baby who is fussy all the time and cries no matter how much Joyce, her first-time mother tries to soothe her. Joyce rocks Peace, sings quietly to her, holds her close and tries a variety of appropriate ways to help Peace calm down. Peace continues to cry. Joyce may then feel ineffective as a mother, and may stop trying to comfort and calm Peace, which in turn results in Peace becoming even more fretful and dys-regulated, which only adds to Joyce's experience of failure.*

*\*("Colic" is a condition that usually appears at about the third week of life in which a baby cries for three or more hours a day, for at least three days out of the week, usually stopping by the third or fourth month)*

*Immi is a depressed mother. Her baby, Edward, smiles into his depressed mother's eyes. Immi has a flat affect (no facial expression), and fails to return Edward's smile: she is too depressed to notice. This lack of reciprocal smiling does not feel pleasant to Edward and if this kind of response is repetitive, he may stop trying to engage his mother because doing so does not bring joy to either of them.*

## **Attachment: Why is it important?**

The attachment relationship was designed for survival and is a process that begins in the womb. A newborn baby recognizes the voice of his mother and can select between her voice and the voice of a stranger. If the father has been present during the pregnancy, the baby recognizes his voice as well. While in the womb, the baby also becomes familiar with the kind of music his mother listens to, the sound of her heartbeat, the flavors of the food she eats as well as the chemicals (hormones and neurotransmitters) released by her emotions. If the mother is using medication (street drugs, nicotine or alcohol), the baby is “using” these as well and when this happens, we say that a baby has been “pre-natally exposed to toxins.”

The attachment relationship is the foundation of ALL brain development, impacting every aspect of it, including its physical size! Attachment forms a “template” or pattern in the brain, impacting how future relationships will be experienced, which includes how one experiences and relates to God. Attachment is the foundation of a healthy personality, logical (cause and effect) thinking, and conscience development, becoming self-reliant and how we handle our worry and fear. When attachment does not occur well, it is called “disordered attachment” and the child may not develop an accurate sense of self, where he belongs, or who God is. Additionally, the child may not learn how to trust or whom to trust (so will only feel safe when he is in CONTROL), not develop a normal conscience, or develop normal, healthy relationships.



## **Attachment: Why should Christians care?**

An infant’s first view of God comes from the experience he has with his parent(s), because to the infant, his parent(s) is “God”. The parent(s) is the one who seems all-powerful, all-knowing and capable of meeting the infant’s need. If the infant experiences the parent(s) doing this well he will more likely understand that God is good and will meet his needs. However, if the parent(s) does not adequately meet the infant’s needs, he will more likely understand God not to be good and either not aware of his needs, or that God has chosen not to meet them.

We were intended to understand that God is unconditionally loving and good by experiencing our parent(s) being perfectly, unconditionally loving or good toward us. But because our parents’ parents were not perfectly unconditionally loving or good, they were not able to love our parents in this way, and we will not be able to love our children perfectly. We follow this model of

inadequate parenting all the way back to the first parents, Adam and Eve, and realize that none of us were perfectly parented. Therefore, every parent has his or her own wounded-ness and brokenness out of which they attempt to understand God and to parent.

In the beginning, in the Garden, God created Adam and Eve to have perfect fellowship with him and with one another. Because of their disobedience, this perfect relationship was ruptured. When they went to parent their children, they did so out of a broken relationship with God and with one another. Because of their disobedience, this perfect relationship was ruptured. When they went to parent their children, they did so out of a broken relationship with God and with each other. We call this broken relationship with God and each other, the “Fall of Humankind”.

The “Fall” of humankind then, is most basically, a “Fall of attachment” between God and us. Each one of us is born into sin and is wounded and broken because of this rupture. Consider the following:

From the time we took our first steps, said our first words, we’ve been rebels, disobeying the voice of our God. *Jeremiah 3:25(The Message)*

We’re all like sheep who’ve wandered off and gotten lost. We’ve done our own thing, gone our own way. And God has piled all our sins, everything we’ve done wrong, on him. *Isaiah 53:6 (The Message)*

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. *Romans 3:23 (NIV)*

From these verses we realize that all of us are “attachment disordered”, each of us wanting to do things our way rather than God’s way. (Control is the basis of sin.) Our vertical attachment to God reflects our horizontal attachment to our parents and visa versa. Both are impacted by the rupture of the “Fall”.

When infants (birth-18 months) are securely (strongly) attached we look for four specific behaviors.

1. The infant seeks to stay close to the attachment figure.
2. The infant seeks aid or comfort from the attachment figure when hurt or in danger.
3. The infant is distressed by prolonged separation from his attachment figure.
4. The infant is free to explore the surrounding environment because his attachment figure serves as a secure base from which to investigate these surroundings.

(Illustration: The Daisy Pattern)

Notice that each of these four behaviors is observed within the context of a *relationship* because attachment does not exist in an individual, but in a *relationship*. In comparing the four attachment behaviors from our horizontal attachment to our parents to our vertical attachment with God, we see similarities in a secure attachment to God.

1. We seek to stay close to our attachment figure: God.

I am the vine you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them, bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. *John 15:5, (NIV)*

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. *Psalms 1:1-3, (NIV)*

2. We turn to God when we need aid, comfort, or are in danger.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth should change; though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea. *Psalms 46:1-2, (NIV)*

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. *Matthew 11:28-30, (NIV)*

Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. *Psalms 71:3, (NIV)*

3. Prolonged or perceived separation from God is distressing to us.

Jesus' words from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" *Matthew 27:46, (NIV)*

4. Because God is our secure base, we are freed to "explore our surroundings" and reach out in ministry.

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (to the ends of the earth), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. *Matthew 28:18-20, (NAS)*

I can do all things through Christ who lives within me. *Philippians 4:13, (JBP)*

By you [God] I can crush a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. *Psalms 18:29, (NIV)*

How can we have a healthy attachment to God when we are all attachment disordered?

Ephesians 1:3-12 tells us that we were chosen to be holy and blameless, destined to be adopted through Christ's redemptive work on the cross, according to God's purpose, and to live for the praise of God's glory.

Attachment is "activated" by fear and threats to our survival. When one thinks about it, an infant will not survive without an attachment figure that regularly meets his need for food, love, shelter and protection. And when an infant feels threatened, he will turn to his mother for protection and an assurance of safety. This is essential to his survival. Attachment is necessary for the survival of the infant, and we all were created to belong to our mothers, it is not surprising then, that we were also created to belong to God. And is it possible that God allows us to experience fear and a need for safety, so that we might turn back to him, that He might draw us to himself in attachment



### **Exercise**

To determine whom you are attached to, think of the first two people you would talk to with news of a life-changing event. (This can be a positive event such as the birth of a baby or an engagement to be married, or a negative event such as the diagnosis of cancer or the death of a loved one.) The first two people you would think to tell are your current attachment figures. How are these relationships evidence of the "Good News," that even if we or the orphans we serve, didn't experience a secure attachment, we/they can experience an "acquired" attachment through a relationship with Jesus?



### **Closing prayer**

Theme of gratitude that God has made a way to repair our ruptured attachment to Him through Jesus Christ

## Lesson 2: How Attachment Develops: The Cycle of Trust

Trust is having these two internalized beliefs:

- “My needs are important and I can count on you to meet them.”
- “I know that I am safe with you.”



Opening prayer



Leader reviews main teaching point for Lesson 1

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Teach

How Trust is Born

Thinking about a newborn infant, one realizes that she is unable to meet any of her own needs. She cannot feed herself, change her own diapers or communicate in words that she is afraid or lonely. Therefore, during the first 12 months of her life it can be said that she is “all needs.” One thing an infant can do however, is “SIGNAL”, to let others know she is in need. Babies “signal” by crying. Those of you who have raised babies know that in a fairly short time one learns the different kinds of cries of their baby. Most babies have one cry to signal that they are

hungry, another to signal that they are in pain, another that they are frightened and still another when they are tired.

Babies are unable to calm themselves (regulate their arousal); this is something that is learned from their mother/attachment figure.

When an infant's needs are met appropriately and in an attuned way, the baby experiences relief or gratification and becomes less aroused or less dys-regulated. When one stops to think about it, this cycle of need-signal-gratification occurs thousands and thousands of times during that first year. When these needs are adequately met, most of the time, TRUST IS BORN!

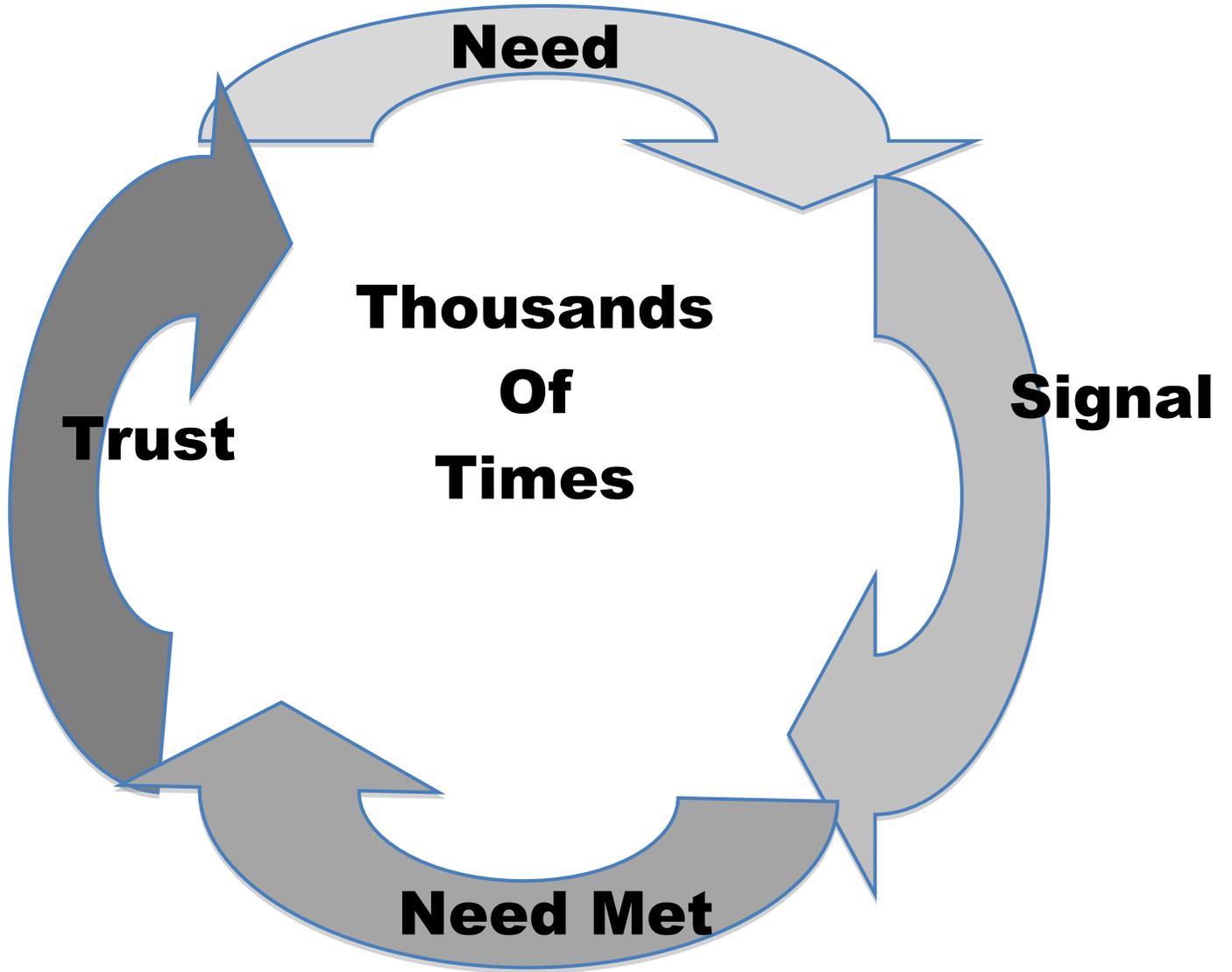
### **Trust**

The baby, who has learned to trust, adopts the beliefs that: "I am important; my needs are important and I can trust you to meet my needs." Trust is having an internal sense that "my needs are important and I can count on you to meet them." When trust is in place the mother/attachment figure functions as a secure base that allows the baby to move beyond the self, exploring and discovering the world around her. She has confidence that when she turns back to the mother, she will be welcomed and cared for. When trust is in place, the infant is free to play because she is not worried about taking care of the mother's need, nor hyper-vigilant because the mother is abusive or unstable. When trust is in place the following five questions are answered in the affirmative.

- *Do you see me?*
- *Are you there for me?*
- *Do you see my needs?*
- *Can I count on you to meet my needs?*
- *Am I worthy of your love and protection?*

Finally, the answer to the following question, "What must I do to get your love and attention?" is answered by the following reply from the caregiver, "Just exist."

# THE CYCLE OF TRUST



In speaking of appropriate meeting of needs (gratification), we must talk about “attunement”. “Attunement” means to bring into harmony with, matching or being in tune with. The principle of attunement is crucial to the appropriate meeting of needs. In order for a baby to experience her need being met, it must be the “felt need” of the baby, not simply what we might think she needs. In other words, if the infant is signaling to be fed and we put a blanket on her thinking she is cold, we are not meeting her “felt need.” If she is sleeping and we wake her up to eat because of our busy schedule, we are not meeting her need; we are meeting our own.



## Discuss

How do we know if we have been attuned and met the baby’s felt need?



## Cycle of Abuse/Mis-Trust

When babies’ needs are not met appropriately, we call this the “Cycle of Abuse” or the “Cycle of Mis-Trust”. Recall the first two parts of the first year cycle: the infant is “all needs” (unable to meet any of her own needs) and she “signals” to have her need met through crying/dys-regulating. In the Cycle of Abuse, instead of having the need met appropriately and the baby experiencing gratification that her need was met, the need is ignored, or the baby is silenced or responded to with yelling or physical harm. This baby’s experience of asking for what she needs is going to be very different. Her internal belief about herself and the world she inhabits will become: “I am unimportant, my needs are unimportant and I cannot count on you to meet them,” or, “It is dangerous for me to ask you to meet my needs, therefore I must meet them myself.” In the Cycle of Abuse, trust is not built and in fact, the very attachment figure who should meet her needs is either unavailable or a source of danger and fear. It is this not knowing if her needs will be met, which results in the belief that her needs **MUST** be met by herself alone. This inability to trust underlies many of the behavioral issues we see in children with attachment disruption.

Both trust or mis-trust is learned in relationships. If a child cannot trust the mother/attachment figure to meet her needs, attachment goes awry and she will have difficulty in knowing **who** she is, knowing **whose** she is, and knowing **who** God is. She will not have learned to trust, and so will only feel safe when she is in CONTROL. Such children may not develop a normal conscience or may never develop normal and healthy relationships.



### **Attachment: Why should Christians care?**

Once again, comparing the horizontal relationship with the attachment figure, to the vertical relationship we have with God, we see that God defines attunement. He is the one who perfectly and ultimately meets our needs.

The cycle of trust with God is similar to the infant's cycle of trust. Our most fundamental **need** is to be in right relationship with God through Jesus Christ (we are never really "at home" until this has occurred). As a result of the "Fall," sin entered our very nature and ruptured the perfect relationship God meant for us to have with him. There is not a thing we can do to repair this rupture making us deserving of God's love. In this way, we are all "attachment disordered."

How are we made aware of our need for God? And how do we "signal" God for help?

Let us look to the scripture. Read and respond to Matthew 14:22-31 in small groups.

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'

'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'

'Come,' he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' *Matthew 14:22-31, (NRSV)*

## Examining the passage

Why were the disciples in the boat?

*Jesus sent them off after the feeding of the 5,000*

Where was Jesus?

*Dismissing the crowd and then going up the mountain by himself to pray*

What happens next?

*The boat was far from land and was being battered by the wind and waves; the disciples were out in the boat all night*

What do the disciples do when they next see Jesus?

*They cry out in fear, "It is a ghost!"*

How does Jesus respond to their fear?

*By trying to calm and reassure them*

Why does Peter ask his question?

*Impulsive and inquisitive? Not sure it is really Jesus? Still afraid?*

What was his need?

*To be rescued*

How does Jesus respond to his need?

*He assures Peter that it is he, Jesus, by inviting him to walk on water!*

Why does Peter start to sink?

*He takes his eyes off Jesus and focuses on the storm around him instead.*

Now what is Peter's need?

*"Lord, save me!"*

*Peter needed rescue from drowning*

Who initiates and who facilitates the "rescue"?

*Peter "signals" (calls out for help)...and then Jesus reaches out and rescues him.*

Why do you think Jesus waited for Peter to recognize his need and ask for help before rescuing him?

*So that when his need was met, he would recognize that it was Jesus who met his need, and therefore trust Jesus.*

Let's review the cycle of trust in this passage: Peter has needs (to be saved from drowning and to have his fear relieved); he "signals" to have his need met by crying out to the Lord, and Jesus meets his need.



## Discussion

Through the lens of attachment, why does God have us ask for what we need?

Examining how our horizontal attachment relationship reflects our vertical attachment, is it any wonder that God arranges our circumstances so that we can be made aware of our need for Him? The “treatment” for our attachment disorder with God is for us to learn to trust him through the cycle of trust. How do we “signal” God? “**Signaling**” behavior with God is simply prayer. And prayer is basically dialoguing with God (both talking and listening).

## The Visual Cliff Experiment

What might God be asking of you? Does He have you in a place of need so that you can learn to ask and trust? When Jesus summoned Peter to walk on the water, He allowed Peter first to ask, “Lord, is it you?” We too can bring our needs into our relationship with God. He knows all about them and yet calms us by saying, “Take courage...it is I. Do not be afraid.” Matthew 14: 27. (NAS)



## Closing prayer



## Interventions for Parents and Caregivers

When treating children with attachment disorders, one of the first things needed is repeating the first year cycle, the cycle of trust, as these children may not have had the experience of learning to trust an adult.

By having to ask for what they need (“signaling”) and then having their needs met appropriately by their attachment figure (adoptive/foster parent, orphanage staff, etc.), the child re-experiences the cycle of need-signal-need met and can begin the process of developing an ability to trust. The following Interventions can be applied:

1. Expecting eye contact when speaking to each other (eye contact is one of the building blocks of attachment)
2. Speaking to one another with respect by using their name/title each time: “Yes Mom”, “No Dad”, “Thank you Son”
3. Time “in” rather than time “out” (keeping them close by rather than sending away)
4. Appropriate physical affection
5. Games such as: Mother-May-I; Simon Says; Follow the Leader; Trust Walk
6. Following directions practice
7. Waist pack of goodness and light
8. All good things come from...(whoever is the attachment figure for that child)
9. Stories with themes of a parent figure being trustworthy, unconditionally loving, faithful, kind and forgiving

Interventions that help teach self-regulation

1. Being regulated your self is most important!
2. Breathing/winking/moving your tongue practice
3. Butterfly hug
4. Copying a drum beat, hand clap or finger snap
5. Stories about an angry/anxious/fearful/sad child learning adaptive ways of dealing with difficult feelings

## Lesson 3: Accepting Authority: The Cycle of Repair

Conscience development begins through experiences where the mother imposes limits that result in the toddler's feeling of "separation" or "rupture." Then, through the mother offering, and the toddler accepting, "reunion" or "repair."



Opening prayer



Leader reviews main teaching point for Lesson 2.



Teach

How Conscience Develops

During the second twelve months of life, significant developmental milestones occur such as:

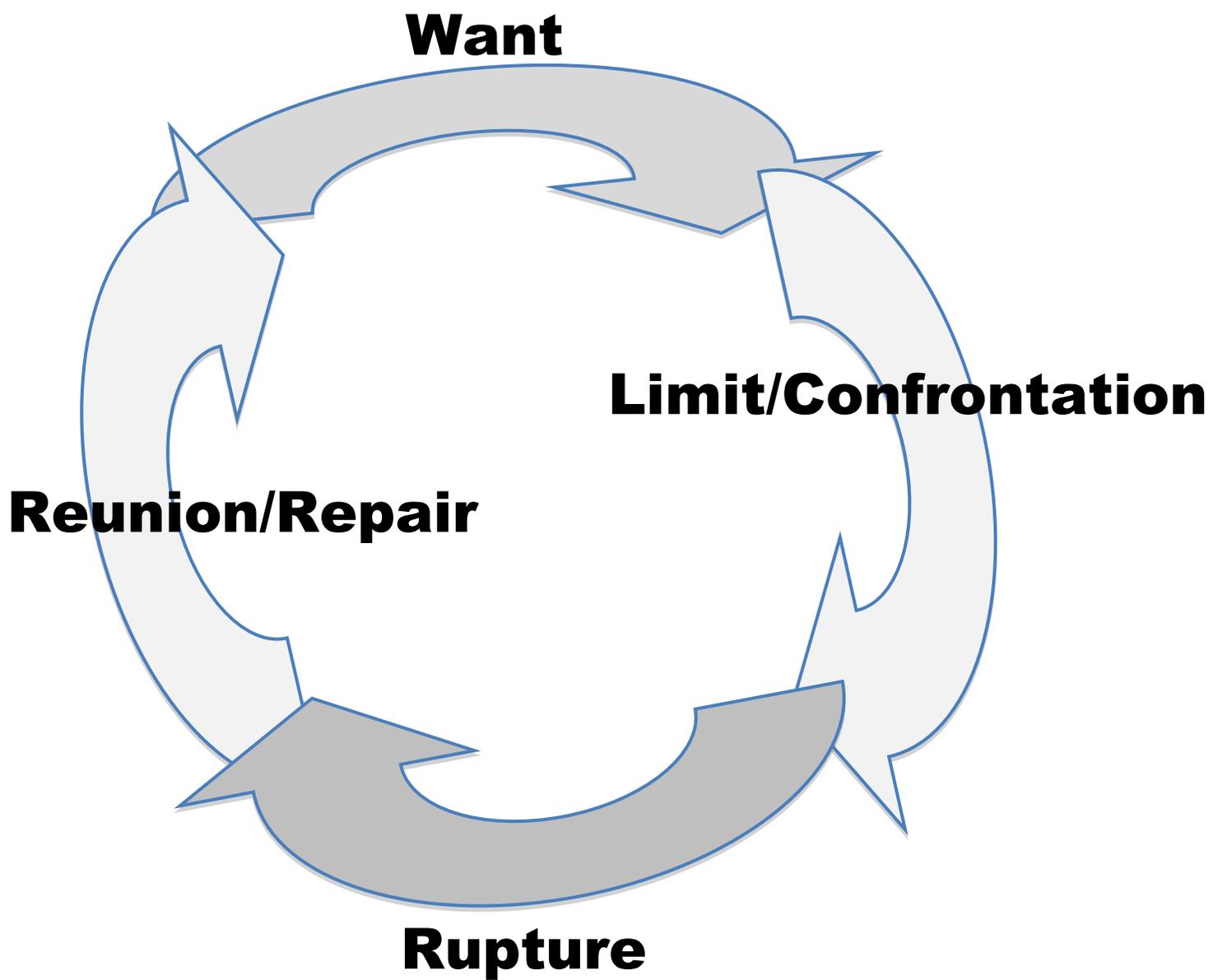
- the ability to communicate accurately and with intention

- the ability to take action resulting from increased mobility (typically, the ability to crawl is achieved between six and ten months and walking by about fourteen months).

This increased mobility and ability to communicate with intention results in a toddler's ability to take action about his also increasing curiosity and impulsivity. He is therefore at greater risk for getting into dangerous situations. Though a delightful season of increasing independence for the toddler, for the parents it is a season of increased vigilance, as they must constantly monitor their child's movements to assure his safety. It is during this second year that conscience development begins.

Trust must be in place before conscience development can begin. If a baby has learned to trust his mother during the first year, he will want to "please" her since her being happy gives him a feeling of calmness and emotional regulation. A baby/child who has not learned to trust an attachment figure will not have this desire to "please," a pre-requisite for learning to accept authority. (It is possible to learn to obey authority out of fear, but this is very different from learning to accept authority from a foundation of trust.)

We acknowledged that a baby is "all needs" in Lesson Two. As the baby moves into his second year he begins to have "wants" as well as needs. When these "wants" are in conflict with what is good for him, he must learn that the word "no" exists and not just the word "yes."



**Second Year Cycle or Cycle of Authority**

Example:

Imagine you are standing near the road watching your toddler who notices something interesting on the other side of the street and runs into the street to explore. The child does not “need” to run into the street, he “wants” to. This is the “want” in the cycle. You see that a car is coming down this very same road in the direction of your child. You shout, “Stop, don’t take another step”, which is the “limit” or confrontation in the cycle. Your toddler stops, turns around and seeing, the look of displeasure on your face starts to cry. Your shout has frightened him and he sees in your face that you are not happy with him, though he does not understand why. Your “not being happy with him” does not feel good to him (it is dys-regulating), and because he wants to feel good again, he accepts your limit and stops. This event of your being displeased is experienced by the toddler as a rupture or separation in his relationship with you and forms the “rupture” in the cycle of authority. He does not yet know that you, his attachment figure can be upset with him, and still love him. In healthy relationships, ruptures need to be repaired. The last step in the cycle is that of “repair/reunion.” A repair takes place when you pick up your child, rub his back and say something like, “I know it scared you when I yelled at you, but I can’t have you running into the street. You could get badly hurt. So no running into the street, ok?” As the child accepts the repair by allowing himself to be comforted and saying “ok”, he feels that he is re-united in his feelings of connection to you and a reunion or repair has taken place. Notice that the repair step actually has two smaller steps within it: the step of initiating the repair, and the step of responding to that initiation. A repair is not considered to have taken place unless both of these steps have occurred.

It is through these experiences of having limits imposed, experiencing a separation/rupture, and then offering and accepting a repair that a child learns to tell right from wrong. This second year cycle is the beginning of conscience development and is called the Cycle of Authority.



### **Accepting Authority: Why should Christians care?**

Once again, comparing our horizontal attachments to the attachment God intends us to have with Him, we see many similarities in the second year cycle. God often answers new believers’ prayers in ways unusual for seasoned followers of Christ, taking them through the cycle of trust,

answering every prayer or meeting every need immediately with obvious answers. Just as it is not healthy for a toddler to remain an infant, it is not healthy for us to remain spiritual infants. Imagine telling a 4 year old, “You don’t have to use a toilet, just keep using your pants. No problem!” Or imagine a 6 year old who hasn’t learned to feed himself! These images are both grotesque and disgusting to us. Why? Because we know that we were made to outgrow these childish ways. Likewise, God wants to move us from spiritual infancy to spiritual toddlerhood. We are not meant to stay spiritual infants. Discerning good from evil comes with maturity. And just as a 4 year old needs to grow and mature to move out of infancy and become more like his parents, so we need to move out of spiritual infancy to become more like Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 5:12-14, (NAS) observes:

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil”.

Francois Fenelon, archbishop to Louis the XIV, writes in *Christian Perfection*:

“How could we believe that we love him if we cannot resolve to think on his law and bend all our energy to doing his will? Those who fear to see too clearly what this love asks, fool themselves by thinking that they have this watchful and devoted love. There is only one way to love God: to take not a single step without him and to follow with a brave heart wherever he leads...God has little patience with those weak souls who say to themselves, ‘I shall go this far and no further’”.



### **Discussion: When God says, “No”**

Ask: “What are some of the ways God says “No”?”

(Silence, closed doors, circumstances, asking us to wait; elicit other answers from the group)

1. “WHY does God say “No”?”

Read each of the following passages and have the group explore the “whys.”

“And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” *Romans 5:3-5, (NIV)*

This passage tells us that God allows suffering so that our character can develop and our hope in him will not disappoint us.

“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.” *James 1:2-4, (NIV)*

This passage teaches that trials perform a deeper work in us that can accomplish the fruit of maturity.

“For this very reason you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For anyone who lacks these things is nearsighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble.” *II Peter 1:5-10, (NIV)*

This passage teaches that our faith ought to be supported with the acts, or fruit, which come from following Christ and that if this is not happening, we are nearsighted and blind.



### **When God says “No”**

Sometimes when a person experiences God saying “No”, he responds by saying things such as:

- “God is not loving”
- “I can’t believe in a God who would allow -----(fill in the blank)”
- “God is not fair!”

Yet suffering may be God saying, “No” to my comfort so that I can grow in maturity. By reading Job 2:9-10, we can better understand this. (Ask how many are familiar with the story of Job and if most are, you will not need to give the following background: Job was a righteous man who feared God. He was very wealthy with 10 children, property, servants, and enormous herds of livestock. Job took care in how he raised his children and he feared God. We are then told that God and Satan are having a conversation where Satan insists that the only reason that Job fears God is because God has blessed and protected him and that if God took all this away, Job would certainly curse God. So God allows Satan to stretch out his hand against Job. Job’s servants all die. He loses his livestock. Soon all ten of his children die. Eventually, Job is physically and painfully afflicted. While he was scraping the drainage from the “loathsome sores” on his body, his wife tells him to “curse God and die.”)

“He [Job] told her [his wife], ‘You are talking like an empty headed fool. We take the good days from God, why not also the bad days?’ Not once through all this did Job sin. He said nothing against God.” *Job 2:9, 10 (NAS)*

When we believe in the goodness of God, then even his “No” is not bad.

### **The Second Year Cycle: Accepting Authority**

Similar to toddlers, we learn to accept God’s authority through the Second Year Cycle. And it is in this Second Year Cycle that God teaches us right from wrong. Recall the steps:

1. WANT
2. Attachment figure saying “NO”/SETTING LIMIT/CONFRONTING
2. RUPTURE/SEPARATION created in the relationship
3. REPAIR (initiation of repair and acceptance of repair)



### **Discussion: The Lesson from King David (“a man after God’s heart”)**

Divide into small groups and read together:

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, “This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”- So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period. Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, “I am pregnant”. *II Samuel 11:1-5, (NRSV)*

1. Did David need Bathsheba or want Bathsheba? (As king, David had many wives already as well as access to many of the virgins in Jerusalem).

2. How did God say “No” to David?

(David knew the scriptures and that adultery was against God’s law, so when he lay with Bathsheba he clearly knew that this was wrong. Some might say that it really was God’s fault that David sinned. After all, God could have made David momentarily blind so that he wouldn’t have seen Bathsheba bathing! Or God could have made David hungry all of a sudden so that he left the rooftop and went to the kitchen for something to eat! These explanations are ludicrous and yet, how often we hear similar kinds of logic.)

3. How does David try to fix the situation by himself?

Paraphrase II Samuel 11:6-26:

- David brings Uriah home from battle in the hopes that he will have relations with his wife and then no one will know that Bathsheba's pregnancy resulted from David's adultery
- Uriah sleeps at the gate rather than with his wife
- David makes Uriah drunk and tries again
- Uriah still sleeps at the gate
- David has Uriah killed and takes Bathsheba as his own wife

4. What is the evidence of the rupture David experienced in his relationship with God?

Read-Psalm 51:2-4 ("my sin is ever before me...against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...").

5. How does God initiate the "repair"? Read II Samuel 12:1-14 (Notice that God is the initiator, the one who sends Nathan. This is another example of how God said "No").

6. How does David respond to God's initiative in repairing their broken relationship? Read Ps. 51:10-13. (By accepting God's repair, David could once again look in God's face and not just see his own sin. As with the horizontal, so with the vertical, eye contact enhances attachment.)

I propose that God wants us to grow and so creates cycles of authority so that we can become "meat-eaters". In your life, how might God be saying "No"? How do we pay attention to God's limits and confrontations, his "No"? God speaks to us in many ways, but definitely through the scripture. Are we taking time to be still and listen? What are our circumstances telling us?

God is the great initiator when repair is needed. What is our response? God took initiative with David and he will also take it with us. Salvation, freely offered, is the supreme example of his initiating repair. He also offers repair when other ruptures occur: how will we respond? Notice ways that God offers repair to you this week.



### **Closing Prayer**



## **Interventions: Helping children who have not had adequate attachments to learn acceptance of authority.**

We must assume that the child has learned to trust an attachment figure in order to learn to accept authority. When this has not happened, then please see Lesson Two for some ideas of how to build trust for the unattached child. In the Second Year Cycle, often the step that has been missed in the unattached child is the step of “repair”. He has not learned that he can make mistakes and still be loved, accepted and valued. He has not learned that a loving adult can set a limit or confront his mis-behavior and still want to be in relationship with him.

- 60 Second Scolding: 15 seconds to get down on the level of the child, eye to eye, and be very clear and stern, that the mis-behavior exhibited was not ok, and then for the next 45 seconds provide repair, hug the child and say something such as, “But I know that you can learn to do it differently and I will be right at your side helping you with this”
- Truth Tellers Club/Liars’ Club or Cooperator’s/Non-cooperator’s Club
- “Practice” opening/closing door; following directions; asking respectfully; co-operating, etc.
- Noticing and reinforcing the positive (high five; pizzazz: “way to go”, “good job”.)

## Lesson 4: Community: Knowing Who We Are By Knowing Whose We Are

We are meant to be in Community: belonging to ourselves, belonging to God and belonging to others.



Opening Prayer



Leader reviews main teaching point for Lesson 3.



**Discussion: Belonging to ourselves, belonging to God and belonging to others.**

1. Read Genesis 1:26 and note the use of the plural pronouns “us” and “our.” Why did the author write it this way?

”Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. “ (NIV)

God is demonstrating the fact that He exists in community, within the trinity.

2. Read John 1:1-3. Who was present in the beginning? What does this mean?

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” (NIV)

This means that God has always been present in community with himself, within the Godhead.

3. Read Genesis 1:27. Why does God’s image include, male and female, rather than just one or the other?

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (NIV)

Somehow male and female together, more adequately reflects the image of God and expresses his character, rather than male or female alone.



## **God Exists in Community as Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

In this lesson we will be learning about “belonging;” belonging to ourselves, belonging to God and belonging to others.

### **Belonging to Ourselves: It Takes Two to be One**

Infants form their sense of self by internalizing the way in which their attachment figure sees them. They then see others through the “attachment template” of how they have learned to see themselves. They know “who” they are by knowing “whose” they are. Similarly, in our attachment with God, we learn to belong to ourselves by belonging to God. The same principle applies: It takes two to be one! We know “who” we are by knowing “whose” we are. When we belong to God, we learn to see ourselves through the template of His unconditional (agape) love. God’s view of us is the truest view there is; even more than how our mothers see us.



## Discussion: Belonging to God

Take 5 minutes to elicit from the class verses about belonging to God. Ask them to explain how each verse illustrates “belonging”.

You may include the following:

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” *Galatians 4:4-7, (NIV)*

This passage tells us that God sent his son to redeem us from our orphaned state, so that we could be adopted into His family.

“For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.” *Psalms 139:13-16, (NAS)*

Psalms 139:13-16 reminds us that before we were formed in our mother’s womb, God willed us into being and knew us intimately. We were “claimed” by God from the beginning of time! Our existence was chosen by God! We belong to him!

### Belonging to Others

We are “hardwired” to belong to others. Our brains develop in response to relationships, and if relationships are inadequate or absent, our brain development will be severely impacted. Orphan research in England during the 1950s demonstrated that even though infants had adequate food, hygiene and shelter, without human touch, they died!

### Being Claimed

Hearing from our parents, “You are MY son/daughter,” is vital to our identity and sense of belonging. We call this, “being claimed.” Think of how hurtful the opposite message is, i.e., “You are NO LONGER my son/daughter!”

Ask the class to turn to a person next to them and discuss the question, “Who claims you as their own?”

Adoption (or becoming orphaned, or a foster child) always involves loss, the loss of the biological mother. We know that in the womb babies become familiar with their mother's heartbeat, the sound of her voice, the kind of music she likes, as well as her emotional states. When babies are born, they expect to continue the relationship with this mother with whom they have become familiar. If a birth mother does not raise her baby, regardless of the reason, it is an enormous and foundational rupture and loss for the infant. Every adopted/orphaned child asks them self, "Why was I rejected, abandoned or left alone? Why was I not worth keeping?"

In the same way, our spiritual "adoption" as God's children involves great loss. We were created to have a perfect, unbroken relationship with God, but because of sin, we have experienced the loss of this ideal. What was intended in the mind and will of God can no longer be. And God sacrificed his son, so that we could return to this unbroken relationship with God. What greater loss than this?

### **Being Named: Being Part of a Horizontal and Vertical Community**

Turn to a person near you and discuss how your family/village decides the naming of a child.

There are many cultures where a baby is not named at birth. Instead, she is closely observed and a name is chosen that embodies not only her character, but all the hopes that the family holds for her future. Some cultures hold the belief that the "gods", being jealous, will punish or harm a beautiful child. As a result, children are often named disgusting things, in the hopes that the "gods" would not notice that child: names like wart, infection, or beast.

Ask: What is in a name and why are names important? (Names are how we identify ourselves as being part of a certain family, village or country. Names identify **whom** we belong to.)

What are some bible verses that remind us of the ways God has named us?

"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you O Jacob, he who formed you O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." *Isaiah 43:1*, (NRSV).

Every believer can substitute their name for "Jacob" and "Israel" in this passage, and when we do so, we hear God's personal call to each of us: "But now thus says the Lord, he who created you O [your name here], he who formed you O [your name here]."

As Paul quotes Hosea 2:23 in Romans:

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" *Romans 9:25, (NIV)*

### **Being Part of The Body of Christ**

Intimate relationships in Christian community are essential for spiritual growth. Christ's body, the church, is meant to be the place where we visibly display God's attributes to those around us. Children look to their parents as their first model of who God is, and in doing so, they ought to be able to see a reflection of Jesus and his love for them, through their parents' words and behavior. There is a problem however: no parent perfectly expresses God's unconditional love and so the child's first image of who God is, will be distorted.

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13: 34,35, (NIV)

Christ's Body, the Church, is only complete with all its parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-20), every part having a function

"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us; prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness." *Romans 12:4-8, (NIV)*

Three things we cannot do by ourselves:

- Be born
- Get married
- Be a Christian

What does it mean for us to be community to each other? It means we are inter-dependent and that we need each other. Sing a Welcoming Song such as: "Welcome to the Family," By Debbie Kerner Rettino, '82, sung by Kid's Praise III

Welcome to the family, we're glad that you have come to share your life with us as we grow in love, and may we always be to you what God would have us be, a family always there to belong and to be strong.

May we learn to love each other more with each new day, may words of love be on our lips with everything we say, may the Spirit melt our hearts and teach us how to pray, that we might be a true family.



## **Interventions for Unattached Children**

1. Use claiming and naming language whenever possible
  - “You are my kid!” or “That’s my kid!” said affectionately communicates that the child belongs to you.
  - “Everyone in our family loves chocolate just like you!” indicates that the child shares some off the characteristics of other members of the family.
2. Do not differentiate between your birth children and adopted children by saying your birth children are your “real” children.
3. Make sure that everyone in the family has responsibilities-all family members have chores and jobs, not only birth children or not only adopted children.
4. Help your adopted child make a life-book or a time-line of their life, validating their experience before they came to live with you.
5. Provide Christian education for all your children so that each might know that:
  - they are adopted by God.
  - they belong to God first.
  - that people have a “spiritual attachment disorder” until they come home to a relationship with the God who made them.

# Lesson 5: Accepting All of Me and All of You

Object Permanence: “You” still exist, even if I can’t see, hear, smell, or touch “you.”

Object Constancy: “You” can be both “this” and “that”: all at the same time.



Opening prayer



Leader reviews main teaching point for Lesson 4.



**Teach**

**Object Permanency and Object Constancy: “The Dark Night of the Soul”**

**Object Permanence: “Things that go away come back”**

The infant’s brain is an immature brain lacking both speech and the ability to reason. As a result he has not yet learned that when his mother leaves a room, she not only still exists but that most certainly, she will come back. The ability to maintain a mental image of someone who

is absent is called “internalization” and is usually developed by the thirty-sixth month of childhood. In psychology, the term “object” is used when referring to the attachment figure (the mother or other primary caregiver). When the ability to internalize the attachment relationship has not yet developed, we say that object permanence or “internalization” is missing. When object permanence has not yet developed it is as if the young child believes, “What I see now, in this moment is the only reality, therefore, Mom only exists if I can see her!” The child then experiences the despair of separation, believing “Mom does not exist if I can’t see her.”

Object permanence is learned through a combination of brain development and other factors:

- Parents consistently going away and coming back
- The presence of “transitional objects” that remind the child of the parent
- Games such as peek-a-boo and hide and seek.

### **The Kissing Hand Story by Audrey Penn**

This book tells the story of Chester the raccoon\* who is preparing to attend school for the first time and is not at all sure he wants to leave his mother to do so. Chester’s mother understands his worry and tells him the “secret of the kissing hand.” She then kisses the palm of his hand and tells him whenever he wants to think of her all he needs to do is place the palm of his hand on his cheek and remember, “My mommy loves me, my mommy loves me,” and he will feel her love travel from his cheek all the way to his heart! Chester loved his kissing hand.

Mother raccoon gave Chester what we call a “transitional object”, something that represents her presence even when she is absent. (“Transitional objects” represent our attachment figure and help us to “transition” from our being with her, to our being away from her. Many children carry a favorite blanket or soft toy with them when their mothers are gone as a way to feel a connection to her.)

Chester also wanted to be sure that his mommy didn’t forget about him when he was at school (remember, if he has not yet learned that his mother exists when he didn’t see her, he will not know that he exists to her when she does not see him) so he placed a kiss on her hand as well.

\*Raccoons are striped, furry animals about the size of a small dog. Feel free to substitute an animal that your audience is familiar with.

Adults also use transitional objects! We wear wedding rings so that even if our spouse is out of town, or we don't "feel married" at the moment, we are reminded that our marriage commitment still exists. We display pictures of our family in our places of work, as a reminder of their importance to us.

**Self Permanence** is knowing that "I" still exist even when, "Mom is not there"; "I have not seen her," or she is upset with me and therefore, looks, acts or seems different. We do not learn that "we" exist until we learn that our object/attachment figure exists. Children will not acquire self-permanence until object permanence is in place.



### **Object Permanence: Why Should Christians care?**

I need to know that God is there even when:

- I can't see Him.
- He looks or sounds different (What are some ways that God might sound different? He may be silent; He may say "no"; He may convict me of sin).
- I don't feel Him because I am different: struggling with depression, anxiety, and/or grief.

When we are weighed down by doubt or other difficult emotions, we may need others to hold God's permanence for us.

Activity: draw heart on hand as a reminder that we are never forgotten, or pass out glass/paper hearts.



### **Discussion: God's Transitional Objects**

What are some transitional objects that God has provided for us that remind us of his faithfulness, presence and permanence? Here is a wonderful picture of God's "kissing hand."

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See I have inscribed you on the palms of my hand.” *Isaiah 49:15-16, (NRSV)*

Following is an example of the Holy Spirit as a transitional object:

“But I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go. For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes he will convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation: sin, because they do not believe in me; righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; condemnation, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.” *John 16:7-13, (NAS)*

Examples of the scripture being our transitional object:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” *II Timothy 3:16-17 (NAS)*

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.” *Hebrews 4:12, (NAS)*

Below are examples of the body of Christ being transitional objects:

”For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” *Matthew 18:20, (NAS)*

“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” *John 13:34-35, (NAS)*



**Object Constancy: Knowing that the Other Person is “This” and also “That”**

Demonstrate: Hold up your fist and ask, “What is this?” Then hold up your open hand and ask, “What is this?” Show the fist one more time and ask, “Is this a fist or is this a hand? The correct answer is that it is both a hand and a fist at the same time, which is an illustration of the complex concept of “Object Constancy.” Object Constancy” is “knowing” that a person

(especially our attachment figure) can be both one thing and another all at the same time, "Mama can be angry at me AND still love me, all at the same time. Object constancy is understanding the mother's/attachment figure's many complex parts exist across time, space and emotions. It is knowing, that the other person is "this" and also "that." Object Constancy is usually in place at 4 or 5 years of age.

Object constancy is a primary process and must be learned before we can learn **self-constancy**, i.e. that **WE** can be both "this" or "that." If we do not know that our attachment figure can be many things all at the same time, we will view ourselves in terms of only one thing or another. It's as if we ask, "If I'm bad, can I still be good?" Being able to accept all of oneself, the good and the bad, is necessary for the development of morality. If I cannot accept my own failures, then I will need to blame others for them rather than take responsibility for them myself.

Demonstrate finger pointing and how repair helps with blame.

### **When Object Constancy is Missing**

One of the hallmarks of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is "splitting," which means seeing everything and everyone in terms of extremes; black or white, good or bad, all or nothing, the numbers one or ten. It is seeing a person only as one thing or another, not both at the same time. In a child, before object constancy is in place, she is unable to understand that Mother can be angry with her and loves her, all at the same time. It is as if she believes that Mother is either the "loving mom" OR the "angry mom" and cannot be both simultaneously.

One might recall the experience of "falling in love" when all mental energy is spent thinking about the Loved One and how wonderful they are. We see only the positive and good in the Loved One and believe that all of what they are now, in their being wonderful, is all that they are. Then one day the Loved One disappoints us and we are outraged because we didn't realize that our Loved One could be both so wonderful and so hurtful, all at the same time!

**Exercise:** "Parts Language": list at least five parts of YOUR personality (e.g. the loving part, the generous part, the ashamed part, etc.). Now role-play a child's mis-behavior such as stealing or lying. Using "parts language", help them see that their mis-behavior is only a part of who they are and not the only thing they are. For example, "Let us see if your truthful part can help your lying part."

This way of talking with a mis-behaving child can decrease their shame and help them to learn to accept responsibility of them self.



## **Object Constancy With God**

Ask:

- “Can God be BOTH just and merciful?” (It is only in recognizing God’s justice that we can see His mercy)
- “Can God be BOTH righteous and forgiving?”(God is holy and without sin therefore, judgment and punishment for sin makes sense.)

God is **all** of his attributes. The whole of who he is, is who God is. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow!

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” Hebrews 13:8, (NAS)

### **When Object-Constancy is NOT in Place with God**

This can be seen in the following beliefs that God is only one way or the other:

- Angry Judge (fire and brimstone) OR
- All loving and inclusive (everyone goes to Heaven and there is no punishment for sin).

The truth is; the whole of who God is... is Who God is!

Using the language of “parts”, self-constancy with God:

- There are never enough “good parts” to earn God’s favor, so we must accept our sinfulness, and that
- God’s only solution for repair is through Christ Jesus

Just as the infant needs to learn that Mom still exists and is good, even if he can’t see her, or her voice sounds different because she is angry or sick, we need to learn that God is unchanging even when he seems or feels different.



## Discussion: Why does God allow us to experience a “dark night of the soul?”

The “dark night of the Soul” is a concept not often discussed today yet, throughout the ages; it is something our patristic fathers and mothers have written about (Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, for example). The “dark night” also called the “experience of desolation,” is the experience of not having the “consolation” of the presence of God, or the **sense** of His presence.

Discuss the following in small groups:

When God is “silent:”

- Does he still exist?
- Does he still love me and extend his mercy to me?
- Can I still count on him?

Often the “darkness” is allowed for our growth and maturity. Sometimes the community/body of Christ holds our connection to God when we feel far from him by reminding us of his permanency and faithfulness when he seems far from us.

Read the following selection to the class:

### **Sleeping with Bread**

During the bombing raids of WWII, thousands of children were orphaned and left to starve. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children who had lost so much could not sleep at night. They feared waking up to find themselves once again homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit upon the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night the bread reminded them, “Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow. “ (*From the book: “Sleeping With Bread: Holding What Gives You Life,” by Linn, Linn, and Linn*).

What can you hold onto when God seems “silent”?

Having “permanency” in the “silence” is:

“Never doubt[ing] in the darkness what God has shown you in the light.” Author Unknown



## **Interventions to help children develop object permanence and self-permanence**

Babies and small children learn that their parents exist even when they cannot see them by having their parents go away and come back repeatedly. They learn this through games like peek-a-boo and hide and seek. They also learn this by having transitional objects that remind them of their parents, such as a special blanket or stuffed animal. Additionally, they learn this through making funny faces with you, talking in funny voices or wearing a goofy hat (even though your face or voice changes, you are still you.) These games help them to understand that a person can look or sound different and still be the same person.

Helping older children who have experienced the trauma of neglect or abandonment to develop object permanence is challenging because the critical window or optimal learning time in brain development has passed and though new learning can occur, it is much more difficult at an older age.

1. Let the older child know when you are leaving for even a short period of time, and when you expect to be returning. Be sure to re-engage the child so that he knows you have returned.
2. Play games of hide and seek where the theme is a person “disappearing and re-appearing.”
3. Tell/read stories with themes of leaving and returning.
4. If you have to be away for more than a day, a calendar where the child can mark off each day until your return can be helpful, as well as daily phone calls when possible. You could also write little notes for him to read, one for each day you are away.
5. Give the child a picture of you to take with him to school or to be able to look at when he is not with you. This could also be accomplished with some memento to remind him of you.
6. Helping a child know that he exists to you when you are absent from each other is also important. One can do this by asking the child to draw a picture for you to keep when away from him, or you showing him that you keep a photo of him with you.
7. Upon your return, you can let him know about some of the times you were thinking of him while you were away, e.g., “I saw a blue car and I thought of you because I know that is your favorite color.”

### **Interventions to help children develop object constancy and self-constancy**

Babies learn object constancy primarily through repairing the relationship when there has been a rupture.

Again, with the older child who did not achieve this developmental milestone during the “critical period,” offering interventions that will help in developing this will be more difficult. Some suggestions below:

1. Playing “dress-up” and acting out a different “persona”/role
2. For mis-behaviors: 60 Second scolding- for 15 seconds, get down on the level of the child, eye to eye, and be very clear and stern, that the mis-behavior exhibited was not ok and why, and then for the next 45 seconds provide repair; hug the child and say something such as, “But I know that you can learn to do it differently and I will be right at your side helping you with this.”
3. A toy, called a “transformer” changes from a robot-like figure to a truck or airplane. This is an example of how people can be both “one thing and the other,” and still be the same person.”
4. Teach that there are many colors between black and white, that there are many shades of grey. Similarly, teach that there are many numbers between one and ten.

## Lesson 6: Inter-subjectivity--the Experience of Feeling "Felt"

Inter-subjective communication, the experience of someone truly understanding, creates connection in relationships and creates positive brain changes in both the person being understood and the one providing the understanding. God offers inter-subjectivity in his relationship with us.



Opening prayer



Leader reviews main teaching point for Lesson 5.

**Teach**

**Inter-subjective Communication: Feeling Connected to Others**

When someone understands us we say they “get us” or that “we feel felt by them,” meaning that they know who we genuinely are. Being understood in this way helps us feel connected to others and is called “inter-subjective communication” or “contingent communication.” Sensing our mind in the mind of another helps to shape and organize our brain in part, by simultaneously

activating the two hemispheres of our brain. This impact on the organization and development of the brain begins in infancy and lasts our entire life.

Elements of Inter-subjective communication:

- It is affective, involving feeling and emotion that “resonate”, hitting us at a deep level and leaving an impact on us.
- It is allowing you to impact me in a way that changes me (and my brain); and the fact that you have had an impact on me, changes you (and your brain)!
- It actually changes both of our brains, (a process called “neural sculpting”), by releasing neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) in both of us!

For us to communicate inter-subjectively however, we must order and organize our own emotions so that we can respond rather than react to others. If we do react rather than respond, the communication will not be inter-subjective and the other will not feel that we understood them. They will not have the experience of “feeling felt.” Research has shown that inter-subjective communication is the most relevant determinant of relational health, cross-culturally!

**Three Parts of Inter-subjectivity:**

1. Co-regulation of affect (together managing feelings and emotions)
2. Co-construction of meaning (creating meaning together)
3. Shared attention (agreeing to focus on the same thing)

1. **Co-regulation of affect** is having another share our feelings with us. Talking about a trauma with a caring other does not change what happened, the trauma still occurred. However, having another become familiar with our trauma by listening to us, creates a new and different experience of the trauma because we no longer experience it alone.

2. **Co-construction of meaning** is the cognitive/thinking piece of inter-subjectivity. In order to create meaning together, we have to validate our interpretation. Sometimes people think that because they feel a certain way about an experience, their feelings must be the truth, when in fact that may not be the case at all. An example: suppose a child, who has been raped, believes that she was raped because she was bad/worthless or somehow deserved it. But is

that why she was raped? Of course not! The child's concrete thinking or traumatized feelings constructed this meaning.

When we then help the child to "see" in a new way, from our perspective or from known historical facts, we can help her create different meanings that will result in her feeling very differently about the guilt she feels. "The soldiers were raping everyone because they were bad men. It was not my fault." (The child may be helped to know that she was not the only one victimized and that it was not her fault.)

3. **Shared attention** is agreeing to focus on the same thing with another. "Let's read this book together;" or, "Let's go look at the flowers;" or, "Let's talk together about the conflict we just had."

Sharing attention involves a surrender of sorts because by it, I surrender my right to see only my own point of view, allowing myself to see through your eyes as well. This can create vulnerability in me since you might see me in a way that is different (less favorable for example) than how I see myself. Agreeing to focus together on a passage of scripture about whose meaning we disagree, is one example. If I look from your point of view, I might be challenged to change my view, or I might see that you think my view is inferior, which can then make me feel vulnerable.



### **Discussion: Communicating Inter-subjectively with Children**

How might we communicate contingently or inter-subjectively with children, helping them feel like we are truly hearing them? Some of the approaches might include: making eye contact; getting down on their level; perceiving their "signals;" together with the child, making meaning out of what they are trying to tell us; providing timely, sensitive responses; offering connecting experiences through playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

Non-contingent communication often takes the form of interrogation, judgment, attempting to "fix" the situation, or making incorrect presumptions about the child's motives and experiences.

### **The Still Face Exercise**

1. Divide class into pairs (no spouses together).
2. Make sure every person has only one partner. (Offer to be a partner yourself if that is needed.)
3. Among the partners identify who will be “Person A” and who will be “Person B”.
4. For the next 60 seconds, “Person A” is to talk to “Person B” about something that happened during the past week. It should not be the best thing that happened, nor should it be the worst thing. It should be something kind of ordinary, such as a meal eaten or a conversation with a family member.
5. For the first 30 seconds of the time, “Person B” should show good listening skills, by making eye contact, asking questions if appropriate, saying things like, “tell me more” or, “yes”, and showing interest.
6. During the second 30 seconds, while “Person A” continues talking, “Person B” is to look at their feet.
7. Next, switch roles so that “Person B” does the talking and “Person A” demonstrates both styles of the listening.
8. When you are finished ask for feedback with questions such as:
  - What was that like for you?
  - Did you like the first 30 seconds better or the second? Why?
  - Have you ever experienced someone “looking at their feet” when you are trying to share something important with them?



### **Our “Experience Expectant” Brain**

Our brains are “experience expectant,” which means that what we have experienced in the past is what we will then anticipate experiencing in the future. This distinctive pattern of experience expectancy may limit our sense of “feeling felt”/inter-subjectivity because, as we expect what we have previously experienced, we may be unable to experience what is actually there, especially if it is different than our previous experience.

If we have experienced a strong attachment in our attachment relationship, in other relationships we will then expect:

- Appropriate nurture
- Predictability
- Attunement
- Effective repair

Conversely, if we have experienced a poor attachment in our attachment relationship, in other relationships we will then expect:

- Not being nurtured
- Un-predictability
- Mis-attunement
- Inadequate or absent attempts to repair

What we have experienced in the past is what we will expect in our future.

Examples: (or the instructor may use on from his/her own experience)

1. In John's family, every time a parent raised their arm, someone got hit. So when the orphanage worker raises her arm to give John a hug, John, expecting to be hit (expecting what he had experienced), hits her instead.

2. Peace endured malnutrition in her family of origin, never knowing if or when she would eat her next meal. When she first came to the orphanage, she would rush to be the first one at the table and eat as much as possible before the others even sat down. Why? Her experience of food deprivation led her to expect that there would never be enough food, even when there was evidence to the contrary.

Ask class members to turn to their neighbor and provide examples from their own lives of being "experience expectant".

A person can "re-learn" experience expectancy, but it will take MANY repetitive, reparative experiences to change this early patterning in the brain, requiring empathy, patience and skill on the part of the caregiver.

### **Mirror Neurons: The Brain as “Imitator”**

By studying the brains of monkeys, researchers have discovered that the brain is created to imitate others. For example: when two monkeys are placed together, and one reaches for a glass, the other monkey observes this. The same motor neurons that are activated in the “reaching” monkey’s brain are activated in the “observing” monkey’s brain, simply from watching the “reaching” monkey.

#### **“Hiya Joe!” Exercise**

1. Have entire class stand, and have half of the class face the other half.
2. Have each person choose someone on the opposite side to observe (it doesn’t matter if more than one person is observing the same person).
3. Say to the right half of the class, “I want you to imitate what I do, facing the left side of the class.”
4. Then wave your right arm in a wide arcing motion and say, “Hiya Joe!”
5. The right half of the class then faces the left, moving their arm in a wide arcing motion and saying, “Hiya’ Joe!”
6. Then ask the left half to copy what the right half just did. More often than not, you will see the groups mirroring one another. In other words, if you as the leader waved your right arm in an arc, the first observing group (right half) will also wave their right arms, as will the second observing group (the left half), which is observing the first! Who told them to wave their right arm (rather than their left) in an arc? No one did. These are mirror neurons in action.

Infants learn about the world in different ways. In order to learn about “things,” they must mouth and manipulate them. In order to learn about “people,” infants must imitate them.

### **Internalizing positive and negative**

Children internalize what they observe through their mirror neurons. If a child is watching Mom and Dad hugging, what is being internalized is, “I am being hugged,” as the child’s own “I am being hugged,” neurons are firing.

If a child is observing Mom and Dad punching each other, which neurons in the child’s brain are being activated? The, “I am being punched,” neurons are firing, which is why even seeing violence/trauma is so impacting to children. They experience it as if it is happening to them. (Think about the mirror neuron impact of violent television and video games!)



## God and the Three Parts of Inter-subjectivity

### 1. In considering **Co-regulation of Affect** or “feeling” with God, read:

“You have loved us first, O God, alas! We speak of it in terms of history as if You have only loved us first but a single time, rather than that without ceasing You have loved us first many times and every day and our whole life through. When we wake up in the morning and turn our soul toward You-You are there first-You have loved us first; if I rise at dawn and at the same second turn my soul toward You in prayer, You are there ahead of me, You have loved me first. When I withdraw from the distractions of the day and turn my soul toward You, You are there first and thus forever. And yet we always speak ungratefully as if You have loved us first only once.” *Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher, (1814-1855)*

Or read: “Footprints”

“One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him and the other to the Lord. When the last scene had flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints and noticed that many times along the path there was only one set of footprints in the sand. He also noticed that this happened during the lowest and saddest times in his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord.

‘Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk all the way with me, but I noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I don’t understand why, when I needed you most, you deserted me!!!’

The Lord replied, ‘My precious child, I love you and have never left you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you!’”  
*Author Unknown*

### **Ask the class:**

Why is it that we have such difficulty internalizing God’s love, delight and interest in us?

What are ways we can experience God’s “feeling” with us?

Reading, reciting, reviewing the Psalms is one way.

In the Psalms every emotion known to humankind is expressed. This is a way of experiencing God’s knowing of our hearts and “feeling” with us. Remember, having another “feel” with us, changes us, and our brains! A relationship with God can actually make our brains healthier!

### 2. **Co-Construction of Meaning** with God: creating meaning with God and seeing from God’s point of view. (Is that person someone to fear or someone to see as beautiful, created in God’s

image?) Creating meaning together is the cognitive or thinking part of inter-subjective communication. One reason scripture is so important is that it engages our thinking, which can then impact our beliefs. This is where our knowledge informs our theology.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” *Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)*

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” *II Timothy 3:16,17 (NIV)*

Checking out our interpretations together with God through the story of Joseph: what his brothers meant for evil, God meant for good:

“And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.” *Genesis 45:5-8, (NIV)*

We do not see the “whole picture”: only God does. Therefore, we must stand firm in our faith in God; that he is good and that we are never outside of his reach.

“But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” *I Samuel. 16:7, (NIV)*

**3. Shared Attention:** allowing God to direct our attention so that we are focusing on the same thing as him. God’s attention is always toward us with the invitation “to focus together.” Turning our attention toward God then, is accepting his influence. One way church leaders from antiquity have turned their attention toward God is through the “spiritual disciplines.”

“The spiritual life is a gift. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who lifts us up into the kingdom of God’s love. But to say that being lifted up into the kingdom of love is a divine gift does not mean that we wait passively until the gift is offered to us. Jesus tells us to set our hearts on the kingdom. Setting our hearts on something involves not only serious aspiration but also strong determination. A spiritual life requires human effort. The forces that keep pulling us back into a worry-filled life are far from easy to overcome. ‘How hard it is,’ Jesus exclaims, ‘to enter the kingdom of God!’ (Mark 10:23). And to convince us of the need for hard work, he says, ‘If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me’ (Matthew 16:24)...The discipline of solitude, as I have described it here, is one of the most powerful disciplines in developing a prayerful life. It is a simple though not easy, way to free us from the slavery of our occupations and preoccupations and to begin to hear the voice that makes all things new.” Making All Things New, Henri Nouwen

- **Listening and solitude:** Being quiet in God’s presence and focusing on him.
- **The prayer of recollection:** letting go of all of our roles until we are left with the basics of who we are at our core. Example: I sit prayerfully before God and one by one let go of all my roles: “Lord, I am not a wife; I am not a mother; I am not a daughter; I am not a friend; I am not a counselor”, and so on, until I come to the only role I have left: “I am your child”.
- **Contemplation** using our senses to see and experience God’s presence in the world around us:
 

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:19-20, (NIV)
- **Meditation/lection divina** of the scripture: this is where we listen quietly and prayerfully as someone reads the same passage of scripture, three times. We listen for what God wants to say to us through his word.
- **The Examen:** at day’s end, examining with God: “Where did I sense your presence today? Where did I sense your absence? What made my heart “sing” today? What took the song in my heart away?” The purpose of the Examine is to notice the movements of God in our daily life.
- **Spiritual direction:** meeting regularly with a wise and discerning mentor who listens with us to what God might be saying to us: or observing with us, the movement of God in our life.

### **Increasing the inter-subjective field with God**

God wants to be inter-subjective with us. God “gets” us like no other! Our longing to be known and to “feel felt” is really a longing for God. He feels with us. Asking God to feel with us and allowing ourselves to feel with him changes our brain in positive ways! Seeing “with” God helps me make meaning of life’s events from His perspective, not just my own. Asking God to help me to focus on the same things he is focused on: not being afraid to listen, see, or to know his mind.

**What God says is the truest of true:**

- About me.
- About you.
- About the world and things he cares about.



## Interventions for Inter-Subjective Communication

Creating Inter-subjective experiences with children:

### 1. Co-regulation of emotion

- Providing experiences where you are feeling together with a child.
- Listening carefully and accepting whatever the child is feeling.
- Sharing experiences and sharing the feelings about them, telling a story together; playing football, walking to the market, or creating a puppet story.
- Being curious “out loud” about what you think the child is communicating about their feelings, e.g., “You are telling me something very sad but you have a smile on your face. Can you help me understand?”
- Matching a child’s emotional intensity and then bringing the intensity down to an appropriate level, e.g.: saying with great feeling, “You are telling me that you are really upset at how unfair this feels! ‘It’s just not fair that Joyce got to go first!’ Let’s see if we can figure out a way for you to let me know you are upset without hitting”.

### 2. Co-creation of Meaning

- Figuring out together what something means. A child abandoned by her parents has decided that she is “garbage;” unimportant, also to be thrown away. Explore other possibilities with her:
  - Perhaps her parents being HIV+ did not want her to catch the disease.
  - Maybe her parents had no money to feed her and felt that if they abandoned her she would be taken to a good orphanage and given food.
  - Is it possible that her mother was an alcoholic and her addiction kept her from properly caring for her daughter?
  - Make a time line together about the child’s life: looking for ways God’s love has been manifested and how his “plan for a hope and a future” has been carried out (Jeremiah 29:11).

### 3. Shared Attention

- Show interest in the things that interest the child so that you can share the experience with him or her.
- Invest time in doing things together, whether it is digging, playing football or talking about issues.
- Focus together on God through prayer, Bible study or sharing scriptural truth.

# Lesson 7: The Stories We Tell

Through Christ we can make peace with and accept our life story, which then helps us be better parents, spouses, friends and family members.

## Opening prayer



## Leader reviews main teaching point for Lesson 6.



## Telling the Stories of Our Lives

Cross culturally, throughout time, humankind has created meaning and passed on its history through storytelling. Stories have been a way to explain life events and understand behavior; painting “word-pictures” activating both sides of our brain that in turn, helps us organize our minds. Until the twelfth century when the printing press was invented, access to printed text was limited so that history, folklore and the scriptures were passed on through “oral tradition”.

Often this “oral tradition” was told through the use of stories. Recall Moses’ words to the Israelites:

“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.” Deuteronomy 11:18-21, (NIV)

Each of us has a story to tell. Some of us have been telling the same story over and over, our whole lives. Others see their story developing and changing over time.

Storytelling facilitates the capacity to:

- Reflect on positive and negative experience;
- Generate new solutions to problems;
- Consider our feelings and actions; and
- Consider the feelings and intentions of others.

In making sense of our experiences, (“making peace with our past”), we can be helped to see our story in new ways. We know we have made peace with and accepted our history when we are able to tell a “coherent life-story”. A “coherent life-story” is a consistent, organized, specific and balanced reflection, which recalls both positive and negative life events, especially those related to attachment experiences. A “coherent story” includes emotions and sensory information as well as facts, thoughts and the meanings we’ve given them.

Our life story conceptualizes the mental state of our attachment figure and its impact on our life. Though a coherent life-story is consistent in terms of history (the facts stay the same, i.e., we are not re-writing or revising them over time), the meanings and impacts our history has had on our life may change.

Example: Medad, was an intelligent man. As a child, however, his father beat him regularly, constantly telling him that he was lazy and would never achieve anything good in his life. Pretty soon, Medad began believing the “story” that his father told about him and did not pursue schooling or employment. As an adult, when Medad gave his life to Christ, he began to see himself in a whole new light, through God’s eyes: made in His image, a person of value. He was able to see that his father did not really “see who he was” and yet, Medad had accepted his father’s story about him. He then was able to change the meaning he had given his story,

(which had actually been his father's story about him). This allowed him to see himself more accurately and change the story about himself. He began to notice his intelligence and aptitude for business and eventually opened up a small shop that helped support him and his family.

The way an adult tells her life-story is an accurate predictor of how her child will attach to her. In fact, a pregnant woman can be interviewed and the attachment style of her unborn child can be predicted with great accuracy, (until that child reaches the age of twenty); just by the way the mother tells the story of her life!

A coherent life-story creates intimacy by letting others see the authentic "me/self" ("into-me-see").

Coherent Life-Stories:

- Indicate resolution of trauma/loss (good mental health) and allow us to live in the present.
- Affect our ability to attach to others, not just our children but in other important and intimate relationships as well.
- Affect how our children attach to us and prevent us from passing on our traumas.
- Can help us change our attachment style from weak to "learned strong".
- Activate the corpus-collosum, the fibers connecting the brain's right and left hemispheres, which helps to integrate the brain.
- Help with emotion regulation.
- Help to organize our minds so that we can think, feel and act with clarity.

### **We can't change the past. Or can we?**

- Until it is processed and made sense of, or made peace with, the past remains the "present" by influencing us in undesirable ways.
- Telling our story helps us to process and move toward coherency by helping us integrate our history, bringing together the themes from our past, with the ongoing story of our lives, as we move into our future.
- Do we want to live in the present or in the past? Not accepting the totality of our history inhibits and prevents coherency, which in turn prevents true intimacy.

Example: A pastor's wife once came to the author's office because of her increasing anxiety, manifested in panic attacks. When asked, "Tell me about your childhood", she reported that she had had a "happy childhood." Upon further exploration with questions such as "What made it happy?" and "What were your mother and father like?" It was noted that she was unable to recall specifics about how her childhood was happy or describe her parents in any specific way. It was later learned that as a child, she had endured a significant amount of neglect and abuse, but had been unable to recall or describe it without many hours of conversations in counseling. She thought that if she just "pretended that the negative things had not happened," the memories would disappear and have no influence on her life. Instead, the memories manifested in the present, as an anxiety disorder. Once she was able to make peace with and accept this part of her life-story, her anxiety improved as well.

It is important for each of us to work on our "issues" so that we can make sense of and have peace with our past. When we fail to do this:

- We are much more likely to pass on our traumas and their toxic effects to our children, in turn making it less likely that we will foster healthy attachment with them.
- We will be less available to be in "the present" in our marital relationship and friendships, and our ability to build intimacy will be decreased.
- We will be less likely to see, know and accept ourselves.



### **God Transforms our Stories**

Many people are living without the hope that anything about their life can be different, resigning themselves to the belief that, "Life will always be like this." It is true that we cannot change the facts of our history, but we can change the meaning we give it!

Victoria Dickerson of Santa Clara University states that: "Information of a difference leads to change." This is a challenging and life-changing principle because this is exactly what Jesus Christ came to do! He came to inform us that our eternity and our life could be different. By changing the tragic ending to humankind's story, Jesus offers the only difference that can make a real difference. This is why we call the Gospel, "good news." Paul informs us of the difference life with Christ makes:

“That is not the way you learned Christ! For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.” *Ephesians 4:20-25, (NRSV).*

## Two Life-Stories

### Story One: Difficult Childbirth and Obstetric Fistulas

Ask class: Why is childbirth difficult in many developing countries, especially in rural/village areas?

1. The pelvis of girls in their early teens has not finished developing and is often too narrow for a baby to pass through
2. Multiple pregnancies where the mother's body does not have a chance to heal before becoming pregnant again
3. Inadequate access to health care at time of delivery
4. Extended labor, over many days, where the head of the baby is pressing vital obstetric structures (the birth canal, urethra, rectum) against the mother's hard pelvis, causes necrosis (tissue death) and the development of a fistula

What is obstetric fistula?

*(an opening between the birth canal and urinary bladder and/or the rectum resulting in continual and involuntary releasing of urine and/or feces)*

Why are woman with obstetric fistula unwelcome in their communities?

*(They are unpleasant to be around: continuous odor of urine and feces without the ability to keep themselves clean, spread of bacteria and contamination to anything the woman comes in contact with, such as people, furniture, flooring)*

What would it be like to be a woman with an obstetric fistula? What feelings would you carry?

*(Lonely, depressed, shame, regret, anger, fear, unable to be a part of community and family life, may be unable/not allowed to care for one's own children)*

What would it be like to then find out that a treatment for obstetric fistula exists and is being offered to you at no cost?

A Walk to Beautiful is a film about the Women's Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The film follows the story of four women with obstetric fistula who learn that there is a hospital that provides treatment. Each was given information that things could be different for them (information of a difference). And so they changed, beginning to have hope and reaching out for the promise of help. Their lives also changed as they went to the hospital and had the surgical repair. For the first time, in too long, they were treated with physical touch, care, respect and dignity. Upon leaving the hospital they were given the gift of new clothing which would have such a positive impact after being unable to keep one's clothing clean due to the fistula.

### **Story Two: Jesus, the Woman, and the Dying Girl**

Break into small groups and **read Mark 5:21-24**, answering the following questions:

- Who was Jairus? (A synagogue official)
- What was the typical attitude of synagogue officials toward Jesus? (judgment, disrespect, ridicule, felt threatened by Jesus)
- What did Jairus want Jesus to do for him? (heal his daughter)

#### **Read Mark 5:25-34**

What was the woman's physical problem?

*(she had an "issue of blood," like a twelve year menstrual cycle)*

#### **Read Leviticus 15:25-32**

- What did the Law say about a woman with an issue of blood? *(she was unclean, not only for the seven days of her "regular issue of blood," but also for any day she had an issue, plus seven days after it stopped; during her time of uncleanness, anything or anyone she touched would also become unclean—see Leviticus 15:19-27)*
- Why did Jesus' ask the question, "Who touched me?" Surely, being all-knowing (omniscient), he knew who touched him? *(Jesus wanted to acknowledge and draw attention to the woman, not to shame her, but to free her)*
- How did the disciples respond? Why? *(I think they saw this opportunity to improve Jesus' reputation with a synagogue official, as an opportunity for really good public relations, since most officials felt threatened by Jesus and disrespected him. The disciples were "managing" Jesus' image seeing this as a chance to impress, a good "career move" for Jesus. It is as if they were saying, "You must be joking Jesus! Why are you stopping to talk with this*

*unimportant person when you have this important person right over here? A woman no less! Keep moving right along Jesus, we have more important people to impress.”)*

### **The Woman’s Story**

What was the woman’s story? *(She had an unusually long period of being unclean, so was separated from loved ones for twelve years.)*

- How would you feel, lacking human touch, except for inadequate medical care, for twelve years? (feel lonely, ashamed, afraid, see self as unimportant, of little value.)
- The woman with the issue of blood, like all of us, had a brain that was “experience expectant.” What had been her experience in the twelve years of her uncleanness? (Complete rejection). What was she expecting from Jesus? (Complete rejection).
- How does Jesus respond to the woman? *(He treats her differently than all the others by first giving her the dignity of a response, he acknowledges her by saying: “Who touched me?” and by allowing himself and Jairus to be inconvenienced for her sake.)*
- How does Jesus dignify her with a relationship and a name? *(“Daughter!” identifies her as part of his family, no longer alone but belonging.)*
- How does Jesus grant her the dignity of restoration? *(“Go in peace”-healing; she is restored to health in her body and in relationship to her community, no longer unclean, making her new story public since others witnessed this.)*
- What about Jairus? Did Jesus forget about him? Is Jesus still available to meet his need as well? *(Jesus meets Jairus’ need as well, though in an unexpected way, Mark 5:36-43)*

## Changing our Stories

### We can change our stories by:

- Letting Jesus be the “difference that makes the difference” in our lives.
- Taking his hand and letting him impact our story so that “our story” becomes his-story.

### Do we want to be a part of God’s Story?

God’s story is a redemptive story. We were created to belong to God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and through this relationship, we can:

- Be securely attached to God and others.
- Experience trusting relationships, as we learn to bring our needs to God and others.
- Be ethical and moral, and as we learn to please our parents, teachers, mentors and heroes, we can learn to please God.
- Be connected and accountable; we were created to belong to one another in ways that make us more like Christ.
- Have object permanence and object constancy; the assurance that God is there even if we don’t feel him, or he sounds different.
- “Feel felt” as we experience God’s inter-subjectivity with us, (“feeling felt with God”).
- Create coherent life stories by making peace with the life God has given us so that we can be all we were meant to be.



## Interventions to Help Children Process their Stories

1. Create a life book that has a page for all significant events in a child's life: details of birth, early years, facts known about parents and siblings, school attendance, hobbies or interests, things they are good at, memories.
2. Create a time-line that details the years in the child's life with significant events listed, including which family members were part of their lives during any given time period.
3. Collect photos of child if possible and let the child keep them in a special place.
4. Help the child "tell their story" by providing listening and acceptance (not judgment). This can be done using puppets, writing a story about their life, or a series of drawings.
5. Have the child write a poem or a song about events in their life.
6. Have the child write a very harsh letter to a person in the past who has victimized them. Do not send the letter but help the child work through their feelings of anger, fear, shame and sadness. Next, help them create "meaning out of tragedy." (Example: I am made in the image of God. This happened to me because of bad men, not because I am bad. I want to and can, help others heal who have also been through this.)
7. Draw a picture about or write about their hopes for the future

## GLOSSARY

**Attunement**-to be “in tune with” or “to be in harmony with”, to match or adjust something to something else. When the attachment figure meets the infant’s need appropriately

**Attachment**-an exclusive, emotional connection between an infant and the person who most consistently meets her needs; does not exist in either individual but in the relationship between the two

**Claiming**-publicly declaring someone belongs to you; claiming the child as your own (“This son is MY son.”)

**Dys-regulate**- an inability to calm or soothe oneself or control one’s emotions

**Experience expectant**-what we have experienced in the past is what we anticipate we will experience in the future

**Horizontal Attachment**-the attachment which occurs between two people

**Internalization**-the ability to maintain a mental image of someone who is absent and adopt their view of who you are

**Inter-subjectivity**- the sense that someone really understands us; the experience of “feeling felt”, someone “getting us”

**Mirror Neurons**-brain cells that imitate the actions of others as if it were happening to me

**Object**-the attachment figure, most often the mother, but can be anyone who most consistently meets a child’s needs

**Object constancy**-knowing that one’s attachment figure can be both “this” and “that” at the same time, “my mother can love me and be angry at me, all at the same time”

**Object Permanence**-internalizing that one’s attachment figure exists even when she is not seen

**Pre-natal Exposure**-when a pregnant woman is using drugs, nicotine or alcohol and her baby is exposed to these toxins while still in the womb

**Reactivity**-responding only with our emotions, not with both our emotions and reason

**Regulate**-to be able to calm and soothe oneself; controlling one’s emotions

**Repair**-the act of fixing or mending a relationship; knowing that when there is a “rupture” in a relationship it can be fixed

**Secure Base**-knowing that the attachment figure is available any time the child needs help; the center of an infant's world which allows her to explore the world around her, knowing that her attachment figure will be there to welcome her back when she needs to return; the place a child goes for "re-fueling"

**Self-constancy**-knowing that I can be two opposite ways at the same time (for example, I can be "bad" in some ways and "good" in others)

**Self-permanence**-a child's knowing that he exists even if his attachment figure is not present, or if she looks, acts or seems different

**Signal/crying**, the way a baby lets others know his needs

**Transitional Object**-something that represents our attachment figure even when the attachment figure is not there (for example, a special toy, blanket, or photo)

**Vertical Attachment**-the attachment that occurs between a person and God

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