

Child, You Are Mine

On Sunday, Alex Pittaway preached his last sermon before returning to Australia to pastor MCC Brisbane. He challenged us to consider how our parents have impacted our image of God.

1. Warm-up Question: Alex shared a clip from the movie “Meet The Parents” where Greg’s future father-in-law (an ex-CIA agent) gives him a lie detector test. What movie (or TV show) best captures the essence of the family you grew up in?
2. The way we “see” God in our minds eye says a lot about our relationship with God. On Sunday, Alex asked us to close our eyes and picture God.
 - a. When you did so, what was the first instinctual image that came to mind?
 - b. Has your image of God changed over time? If so, how? Where did your original image of God come from?
 - c. Imagine God having a face; what expression do you see as God looks at you?
3. Sunday’s Scripture reading, taken from the Prophet Isaiah, gives us an important glimpse into how God really feels about us. Let’s read the passage again. As we do so, imagine God speaking these words directly to you – Isaiah 43:1-7.
 - a. In verse 1, God says, “I have summoned you by name. You are mine.” What does that mean? And how do those words make you feel?
 - b. In verse 4, God says, “You are precious and honored in my sight . . . because I love you.” How do those words make you feel? In your heart of hearts, do you believe that’s how God feels about you?
 - c. Isaiah was speaking to a group of people who were living in exile and found themselves doubting how God felt about them. To them (and by extension, to us) God says, “I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” What personal message from God do you hear in those words?
4. For some of us, it can be hard to believe that God sees us as “precious and honored.” In an article entitled “Creating God in Your Parents’ Image,” renowned child development expert Ashley Merryman says our image of God is dramatically affected by the way our parents brought us up. How our parents responded to us as we reached various milestone moments – e.g., asserting our independence, experiencing a great failure, etc. – affects how we see ourselves, which in turn affects how we relate to others, including God. One well-known psychological model identifies four primary “styles of attachment,” i.e., patterns of relating to others. Take a look at the model on p. 3.

- a. What insights do you draw from this model of attachment styles? What do you think of the model – do you like it or not – and why? Does it make sense to you that our childhood relationship with our parents dramatically affects how we now related to God and others?
 - b. Which of these attachment styles most resonates with where you were 20 years ago? Which most resonates with where you are now?
5. Alex shared some stories about how his parents responded to milestone experiences as he was growing up – and how that affected him later as a young adult. As a young adult, his primary attachment style became “anxious preoccupied.” Eventually, a psychologist told him, “You’ve learned this attachment style from the lack of affirmation you had as a child. Because of that, you felt rejected in school, rejected by friends, and sadly rejected by God, with a God-image resembling a CIA agent, suspicious and ready to kick you out.”
- a. In a sentence, how would you describe your relationship with your parents while growing up?
 - b. Think of a personal “milestone experience” during your growing up years. Tell us what happened, how your parents reacted, and how that may have affected you – for better or worse?
 - c. How do you think your relationship with your parents has affected your relationship with God – for better or worse?
6. To the extent we carry painful wounds from our past, Alex invited us to take positive steps to redeem them. He reminded us of the words of Isaiah 43, spoken to the Israelites when they were doubting God’s love: “**But now**, says the Lord . . . do not fear. Child, you are mine . . . because you are precious in my sight.” Alex went on to say, “You redeem the past by finding your ‘But now’ moment – a moment you can look at your past, acknowledge how that has affected you, and create a break with the past. A moment where you say, “**But now** I’m going to begin to walk down the path of healing.” He suggested three steps toward healing:
- Step 1: Self-awareness – reflect on how you were parented and identify your attachment style.
 - Step 2: Create a “But now” moment where you declare over yourself that you will not be captive to your past. Seek help from God and a mental health professional.
 - Step 3: Immerse yourself in a loving spiritual community that can help you heal your image of God.
- a. What kinds of things keep us from taking healing steps like these?
 - b. If you’re needing some healing from your past, where are you right now in the 3-step process outlined above. What’s the next step for you?

Which “Attachment Style” Best Describes You?

Secure

Diagnostic Statements

"It's relatively easy for me to become emotionally close to others"

"I'm comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me."

"I don't worry about being alone or others not accepting me."

Description

People who have a history of warm and responsive interactions with parents and others. Positive views of themselves, others, and their relationships. Comfortable both with intimacy and with independence.

Impact on Relationship With God

An intuitive sense that God is loving and forgiving. "Child, you are mine!"

Anxious Preoccupied

Diagnostic Statements

"I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but often find others are reluctant to get as close."

"I'm uncomfortable being without close relationships."

"I sometimes worry that others don't value me as much as I value them."

Description

People who seek high levels of intimacy, approval, and responsiveness from others. Overly dependent and may feel anxiousness that only recedes when in contact with others. Doubt their worth and blame themselves for others' lack of responsiveness. Emotional expressiveness, worry, and impulsiveness in their relationships.

Impact on Relationship With God

God is capricious, loves you one minute hates you the next. You devalue yourself, but you do not devalue God. Afraid of going to hell. When you feel close to God, you feel calm, but when not close to God, you feel unworthy.

Dismissive Avoidant

Diagnostic Statements

"I am comfortable without close emotional relationships"

"It's important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient"

"I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me."

Description

People who desire a high level of independence or attempt to avoid attachment altogether. Self-sufficient and invulnerable to feelings. Often deny needing close relationships. May even view close relationships as unimportant. Tend to suppress and hide feelings, and deal with rejection by distancing themselves from others.

Impact on Relationship With God

An intuitive sense that God is a transactional deal maker. A tendency to reject God before being rejected.

Fearful Avoidant

Diagnostic Statements

"I'm somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others."

"I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely, or to depend on them."

"I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to other people."

Description

People with losses or other trauma, such as sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence may develop this way. Uncomfortable with emotional closeness. Negative views about themselves and others. Unworthy of responsiveness from others; don't trust the intentions of others. Avoid intimacy and frequently suppress and deny feelings. Less comfortable expressing affection.

Impact on Relationship With God

I am unlovable or unworthy. God has it in for me. Unable to ask God for help.