

Parenting As A Refuge: Building Secure Attachment With Our Children

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;”Ps. 46:1-2

Psalm 46:1-2 has always been a meaningful passage to me. It generates a visual of God being a safe place to take shelter. As I pondered these verses, it strikes me that parents are to be a refuge pointing children to the ultimate source of protection.

Several years ago, I distinctly remember finding myself in a hail storm with my 18-month-old son and his 3-year-old sister. As we sat in the parking lot with our vehicle getting pelted, I looked in the rearview mirror to find my son staring at me with a look of terror on his face. He was rightly concerned given he had never experienced hail and sitting inside a small metal vehicle made the sound deafening. He was looking at me to assess if his terror was warranted. While scared myself, I recognized his non-verbal plea for help, smiled and assured him we were going to be okay. Admittedly while telling him this message, I was having a difficult time believing.

This simple example demonstrates the ongoing dance between a child and their caretaker that is played out in daily interactions. Over the course of a child’s life, thousands of these interactions play out and begin to build a foundation for how the child views relationships. Consider the following relationship continuum: one side represents hurtful and negative relationships and thereby relationships are avoided; and on the other side, relationships are a place of continual validation and thereby anxiously pursued so you can always feel approval. The parent-child relationship can be viewed through this continuum which can help provide perspective on how you might need to adjust your parenting approach.

Somewhere between these two extremes is viewing relationships as something to move toward for growth and learning while also realizing that no human relationship has the capacity to fulfil every desire. The parent-child relationship is a wonderful, God-designed relationship to lay foundational truths. As parents we want to be a safe place for our children to approach. This will in turn allow us to teach, verbally or non-verbally, our children. Teaching them they are loved and need instruction helps prepare them to view themselves accurately. Often parenting is viewed as correction more than comfort. Yet corrective parenting without comfort parenting can create an environment of either fear or perfectionism. Parents are to provide both comfort and correction. No parent balances this perfectly, but we can lean on *Lamentations 3:22-23* when our days end and we recognize our interactions with our children were not what we hoped when the day began.

Human tendency is to either minimize the importance of healthy, scripture-honoring interactions or get overwhelmed and stuck in our mistakes. Scripture encourages the believer to recognize our continued need for growth while trusting God’s provision. (*1 John 1:8-9*) This certainly holds true for parenting. Though far from perfect we can still be a safe source of directing our children toward truth. Not just “do this” and “don’t do this,” but a demonstration that relationships are a place to live out God’s instruction. A place where we receive comfort as well as correction. In general, the Scriptures paint a picture of relationships being difficult, refining, and enjoyable. Consider Paul and Barnabas’ relationship, which, like most, experienced seasons of each. (*Acts 13-15*)

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As parents it is certain our relationships with our children will experience both sorrow and joy. As we walk through these parenting experiences, some questions to keep in mind are:

- What are my children learning about relationships and the world around them from my interactions with them?
- As a parent am I giving both correction and comfort?
- As a parent am I a safe source to approach?
- Do my children believe I am there for them?
- Do I often get overwhelmed by their questions or emotions?
- Am I willing to listen and provide wise direction versus constant correction?

Providing direction is often what we think in the context of parenting. However, especially as children grow into adulthood, parents will need to be a “safe” place to come prior to being allowed to provide direction. Being a safe parenting source means being able to consider these questions and honestly considering situations rather than just jumping to a quick conclusion based on our preconceived ideas. As parents may we provide comfort and correction to our children so we might point them to the one, ultimate relationship they desperately need in life...a relationship with their heavenly Father. *Psalm 46:1-2* beautifully demonstrates the refuge and strength available as we find shelter in God and point our children towards Him.