

Approaching God with freedom and confidence

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Ephesians 3 : 12 In Jesus Christ and through faith in him we might approach God with freedom and confidence

Approaching God with confidence and freedom requires us to be secure in our relationship with God. How secure are we in our relationship with Jesus and with God our heavenly father?

In considering this, I thought about what provides security in human relationships? How do human parents nurture relationships with their children?

The psychological theory I probably use most in my day to day work with children and families is Attachment Theory. Secure emotional attachments are the root and building block of all relationships in our lives. Our first and most powerful emotional attachments are usually to our parents. Secure emotional attachments allow children to step out into the world in confidence, to explore and ultimately to become independent and well rounded adults. Think about the parallels with our relationship with God, our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Parents of a small baby – give love, respond to the baby's cry, provide nourishment and comfort and warmth, keep the baby safe and free from danger, stimulate and encourage.

The baby becomes confident, trusting, feels loved and valued, feels secure. The baby learns to chatter and to smile and to laugh. There is nothing quite like the first smiles of a baby around 4 or 5 weeks of age. The baby explores and plays and is curious about her environment, learning all the time.

Contrast this with the baby who lacks good parenting. I worked last year with a little boy taken into care at 18 months old. He had spent most of his life alone in a cot, his needs were not met, he was given basic food and drink but no stimulation, love or comfort, crying did not bring the parent to his side. As a result the toddler could not walk. He showed no response at all to human contact, his face was blank and emotionless. He never cried, not even when in pain, because he had learned that crying was pointless and did not bring a

parent to his side. . He didn't try to speak because no-one had spoken to him or encouraged his words. He did not like to be picked up or carried or cuddled.

Similar to orphanages we have seen on television with rows of emotionally withdrawn children in cots staring blankly at the camera. Unloved and neglected and unstimulated.

Now three years old, the little boy was beginning to respond to the love and care of foster parents. He was walking and playing and talking and he had started to smile and even to laugh. But he has still never cried, even when he clearly hurts himself. For him, healing will come when he finally cries and learns that those who love him will comfort him and "make it better."

We can draw parallels with our Christian faith and our relationship with God. The following statements are all found in the bible. They are God's word.

God is a loving father.

He has created us and loves us and sustains us.

He knows when we sit down and when we rise up – Psalm 139

The very hairs on our head are numbered

He knew us before we born and he knit us together in our mother's womb

All our days are written in his book – Psalm 139

God offers us more than an earthly father ever could because he is perfect – Matthew 7

Every good gift we receive comes from God who says "I am your provider and will meet all your needs" – James 1

God loves us with an everlasting love and he rejoices over us with singing - Jeremiah 13 and Zephaniah 3

I will never stop doing good to you for you are my treasured possession – Exodus 19

I am your greatest encourager – 2 Thessalonians 2

I am the father who comforts you in all your troubles – 2 Corinthians 1

When you are broken-hearted I am close to you – Psalm 34

As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart – Isaiah 40

Jesus death was the ultimate expression of my love for you – 1 John 4

I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love – Romans 8

I have always been Father and will always be Father – Ephesians 3

Will you be my child? - John 1

I am waiting for you – Luke 15

All of these statements are found in the bible; the bible contains the complete expression of God's love for us in the past, in the here and now and in the future, for eternity.

If we understand these things and accept these things, then we should have no problem approaching God with freedom and confidence. We would want to run to God every day, to seek his presence and to be still and bask in his love. We would be like a secure child with our parent.

I don't know about you but at this time of year, the first week in January, after the busyness of Christmas and New Year celebrations, I just need a bit of space and quiet. A minister friend uses the phrase "I'm all peopled out" after particularly busy times when she just wants to lock the manse door and take the phone off the hook!

Of course I absolutely love the times spent with family and friends and with people generally but Jesus sets us the example of sometimes going off to a quiet hillside or seashore or garden to be with his

heavenly Father, away from the crowds and the noise and the pressures, just to be.....with God. And we need to do the same.

And we should feel completely secure in our relationship with God and be able to approach him with freedom and confidence.

Unlike the totally inadequate human parent, God has never neglected us or abandoned us. He has never heard us cry and failed to come to us. He has given us words of hope in the midst of troubles.

There is a song by Tim Hughes from three years ago where the chorus begins - Here he comes, running to find me, King of the Universe.

God comes running!

We find shelter and comfort and security under outstretched angelic wings. Like startled chicks running to hide under their mother's outstretched wings, God wants us to run to him.

Of course he does not give us everything we want, no good parent gives a child everything that child wants!

I watched three year old Joshua on Christmas Day, surrounded by an abundance of chocolate and crisps and other goodies, several times ask his mum and dad for one more sweetie to be told no! And then he would proceed to ask aunties and uncles and of course granny for another sweetie! His mum and dad knew another sweetie would not be good for him and he might be sick although Joshua himself had no such awareness or concern!

We do not get everything we desire or pray about or feel that we need but God will always treat us as a loving parent treats his children.

So, God wants us to come to him with freedom and confidence and to feel secure in him but that is not all, that is only part of the purpose of this verse in Ephesians. Of course, our personal relationship with God is important. We can have an intimate personal relationship with God. Through faith we can approach God, through faith we have salvation and the promise of eternal life. But that gift of faith is not

for us alone. We are not meant to become so focused on our personal relationship with God that we turn our backs on the real world.

A very small number of people are called by God to a life of prayer, perhaps even separated off from the world but the vast majority of Christians are called to the mission field, in their own community or country or abroad in another land.

You see, the young child who is so secure and comfortable in his parents' arms, in his parents' home needs to grow up and move on, to make new relationships, to make his own choices and to make his own contribution to society and on-going family life. But his parents should still be an anchor, a source of wisdom, of unconditional love and encouragement, of help in times of difficulty.

And so it is with followers of Jesus Christ. Grounded in their faith in God and in Jesus Christ, rooted in the personal relationship they have with God through his holy spirit, Christians are to make known the manifold wisdom of God and share with others the unfathomable riches of Christ.

Put more simply, we are called to live out our faith, in our actions and our words, in the example we set wherever we are, in how we react to situations and circumstances. The more we experience God's faithfulness and power, the more fulfilled we will become and our security in God will increase and increase.

This is summed up in the verses following on from our reading in Ephesians, verses 14 – 20 which is Paul's prayer for the people and which is a prayer for each one of us as we enter a new year. Paul prayed

I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with the power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know his love that surpasses all knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!

Amen