



FILLED
with
HIS LOVE

Strengthening Our Attachment
to *God* and to *Others*

Russell T. Osguthorpe

*For my parents, Wes and Iva,
who taught me the meaning of
safe, secure, enduring attachment
by the way they lived their lives.*



NOTE: The author will donate all royalties from the sale of this book to charitable organizations that serve children and families who struggle with attachment disorder.



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Part One

ATTACHMENT
AND LOVE

I begin this section by describing my own search for answers regarding human relationships. It has not been a seamless, step-by-step systematic search, but rather a start-and-stop, hit-and-miss, here-a-little, there-a-little quest. In recent years I have focused more on the idea of attachment and what it means to form a deep, lasting, loving relationship with another. Because those who have studied the principles of attachment began their own search by observing the parent-child attachment, I will also begin there.

An infant enters the world completely dependent on others. The attachment that develops between the infant and the caregiver—most often the parent—is a sacred bond that gives life not only to the infant but also to the parent. Holding a newborn in your arms is like holding eternity. Nothing quite compares to it in mortality, and no one can explain the depth and breadth of the feelings that a newborn brings to eager parents whose capacity to love is beginning to increase in a new and miraculous way.

Prophets and apostles have always tried to help parents understand the profound blessings that await them as they welcome a new child into their home.² They make it clear that the child is a gift from the Lord, that both parents have a key role in the development of the child, and that both can be attached to the child forever.³ The quality of the parent-child attachment is the key. A relationship is never simply good or bad. Rather, every relationship is unique because each person is unique. Therefore, a parent can't discover a formula that will work the same with every child. Each parent-child attachment must be formed anew.

When a secure, healthy attachment is formed between a parent and a child, the attachment has two primary qualities: It offers the child a safe haven and a secure base. A safe haven means that the child can turn to the parent and seek refuge in time of distress. The child feels safe in the presence of either parent. A secure base is present when attachment with parents provides the child confidence to explore the world, to learn, and to discover. One parent may be more adept at offering the child a safe haven, while the other may find it easier to provide a secure base. This may be one reason that prophets have taught in “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” that whenever possible children should be reared by both a father and a mother.

What happens if children do not form a healthy, strong attachment to their parents—if they don't experience the safe haven or the secure base? In what ways does the attachment experienced by a child in the early years affect relationships as the child matures? Or do most children simply outgrow the problems of unhealthy attachments? These are questions worth pondering, not only for parents but for anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of the origins of their own relationship style. Equally important is the question about how parent-child relationships might affect one's ability to form healthy attachments later in life, especially the marriage relationship. Because our concept of the new and everlasting covenant of marriage is so central to our doctrine, I will explore how principles of attachment can help us as we seek an eternal mate and, once we find that person, build a joyful, life-giving bond with them.

2. Neil L. Andersen, “Children,” *Ensign*, October 2011.

3. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995),
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+family&rlz=1C9BKJA_enUS865US865&coq=proclamation&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l3.4721j0j4&hl=en-
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MY JOURNEY



I will not leave you comfortless:

I will come to you.

—John 14:18

I'm not certain what prompted my need to understand how people form relationships, but it has always puzzled me. Why are some people so easy to get along with, while others are so difficult? Why do some marriages succeed, while others fail? These and similar questions perplexed me. One thing I came to understand is that perplexity is like the match that lights the flame of learning. Without the match (without perplexity), no real learning occurs. Asking a question to solve the perplexity is like striking the match, but at the beginning of this particular journey I could not even form the question. I could just feel an unsettling sense of discomfort.

My earliest memory of this quandary began on the way home from my summer job when I was fifteen years old. I had just obtained my driver's license and had purchased a used car, so I was the go-to friend when someone needed a ride. Shawn, an acquaintance at work, asked if I could give him a ride home that day. I agreed. Even though we did not know each other very well, on the way home he began to divulge how frustrated he was with life, that he was planning to quit his job, leave his parents' home, and move in with another family member. Then, in a voice without any emotion, he said, "And I'm thinking of leaving the Church. I just don't think I believe in God anymore."

I had to hold a little tighter to the steering wheel so I could keep the car on the road. I had never known anyone who had chosen to leave the Church or even someone who did not believe in God. I kept driving, but I felt like we needed to stop and talk more about his plans. I had a strong urge to convince him to rethink everything, but he was determined and I could tell my urging would not make any difference. He had made up his mind. I dropped him off at his home and never saw him again. He quit work, moved out of his parents' home, and left the Church. After I dropped him off I kept thinking about how different Shawn was from me. I could never think of cutting ties with my parents or the Church, and certainly not God. I was puzzled at how he came to such a troubling juncture in his life. I was perplexed, but I couldn't strike the match yet because I wasn't sure how to ask the question.

A few years later I was called to serve in the French Polynesian Mission, where I served with nine companions in the first six months in Tahiti. As soon as I began to adjust to one companion, I was transferred and assigned a new companion. I found that forming a healthy, effective companionship did not happen automatically. I

served under two mission presidents, each of whom had profound influence on me during my mission and throughout my life, and their wives had as much positive impact on me as did they. Forming these relationships with companions, my mission presidents, and their wives became central to my happiness as a missionary. My world was broadening. I could no longer associate only with my family members and friends of my own choosing as I had done back home. Not only did I need to meet new people, as we did while tracting, but I was required as well to form meaningful relationships with those I taught and with whom I served. Questions began to emerge in my mind about how best to form good relationships—not that I asked such questions systematically at that early stage in my life, but the questions were always there in the background. So the perplexity was becoming a bit more focused.

Following my mission I found my eternal companion. There was no perplexity there. Ours was a courtship without the ups and downs that many experience. We knew quite soon after we began dating that we would marry. I remember one occasion after only a few weeks of marriage that helped define our relationship. I was sitting in the kitchen of our one-bedroom apartment, reading a textbook for one of my courses when my wife came through the door. I greeted her as always, but her response gave me pause. “Is there something wrong?” I asked. Responding almost too quickly and too confidently, she said, “No, nothing’s wrong!” Sensing that she wasn’t telling me the whole story, I asked again, “Are you okay?” She again seemed to respond a little too sharply, “Nothing’s wrong!” The words seemed right, but I could sense that something was actually wrong and she didn’t want to talk about it.

I invited her to sit with me at the table where I was studying. Then I implored, “I think I must have done something, and I actually need to know what I did so I can fix it.” After a long pause, she divulged what I had done earlier in the day that had hurt her feelings. I apologized, and then the conversation became even more interesting. She explained how her parents, when they were at odds with each other, would not communicate with each other for a few days. Her mother would bake her famous apple pie, and then her father would know he had been forgiven. No discussion, just a peace offering. I suggested that this was not the way I wanted to relate to her as my wife. I wanted to know how she was feeling, even if those feelings were negative and especially if I was the cause of her frustrations. We both agreed, and that short interaction helped develop a pattern for communication that strengthened our relationship throughout our marriage.

Earlier experiences with my friendships and then companionships formed on my mission led me to ask more questions about relationships, but marriage brought a whole new dimension to my search for answers. Marriage was qualitatively different. My wife and I were together not only in mortality but for eternity. As our relationship matured, I noticed that if we had disagreed on something, which we did from time to time, or even if I sensed that we were not seeing something in the same way, even a small thing, I could not be productive at work. I learned that I could not walk out the door until we had talked through a problem we needed to resolve. My feelings were the same ones I felt during the earlier conversation at that small kitchen table in our first apartment. My perplexity was about relationships, and my specific questions at that particular moment all centered around marriage. It wasn’t a

question of how could we get along with each other; it was a question of how could we bring real joy to each other every day forever?

When children were born, my desire to help them know how to give and receive love became as important for me as was my marriage. As parents, we wanted to make certain that love flowed in every direction in our family—parent-to-child love, sibling-to-sibling love, and from each one of us in the family to extended family members and friends. Questions kept coming about how to help children love and be loved. When our children began to argue and “fight and quarrel one with another” (Mosiah 4:14), we would have them take a time-out and sit in the designated “mad chair” until they could control their emotions, forgive their sibling, and give each other a heartfelt hug. We found that helping children form healthy relationships was our top family priority.

As time went on, church callings I received caused me to continue to ask questions about relationships. How could I gain the trust of the fourteen-year-old young men in my teachers quorum? How could those I was ministering to know that I actually cared about them? Those were important questions, but I soon found that I did not need to worry only about how I was relating to others but how the ones I had been called to serve were relating to one another. As an elders quorum president, I became very concerned in one meeting when two members of the quorum began arguing over a doctrinal point in the lesson. As the argument grew more heated, I felt compelled to assume control of the meeting momentarily and share a verse of scripture that explained clearly that we should not have contention over points of doctrine (see D&C 10:63). My own perplexity about relationships was expanding to include questions about how I could help others with their relationship problems.

When I was called to serve as a stake president of a married students stake, my questions continued to mount. My stake members were mostly newlyweds, and so many were confronting the challenges that married couples face as they adjust to each other. Even though most couples in the stake were navigating these adjustments successfully, a few couples were considering divorce. I asked the bishops in my stake to refer such couples to me whenever possible. Their experiences adjusting to marriage were not at all like my own. Oftentimes their courtships had been rocky, and their marriages even rockier. I urged them to get professional help from family therapists, but their bishop and I were their sources for ecclesiastical help.

At this point my desire to understand more about relationship counseling peaked. I was not a trained therapist, but I began to study all I could about such counseling and to have discussions with friends who were professionals. After my release as stake president, I continued to search for answers that could help explain the origin and possible cures for relationship problems. I wanted to be able to help those who came to me for help with their marriages. Eventually I began studying attachment theory, a theory that asserts that many of our relationship issues as adults can be traced back to the ways we related to our parents as young children. I recognized that this was only one way of explaining relationship problems, but I found it useful in my efforts to help those who came to me for help. My questions had finally led me to something I could use to help others understand their own challenges and begin to deal with them. However, I soon found that this was only the beginning of my initial perplexity

with relationships. This is what I had learned thus far:

- Welcome perplexity.
- Don't force questions. Let them emerge on their own.
- Remain open even to the smallest particle of an answer.
- Let those you serve prompt your search.
- Listen to others while staying close to the Spirit.

We often speak of “experiential learning,” and in the end, this is the way we learn our most important lessons. Some of our experience is direct, and some is vicarious. We often see through another's eyes and come to understand their experience, which changes the way we view ourselves and others. Focusing on our relationships leads us closer to God and each other. In the next chapter, I talk about the concept of attachment and how it contributes so fundamentally to our joys and sorrows.

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