

[00:00:00.000] - Lisa Qualls

Each month, we host a workshop where we invite a guest expert to share their knowledge and expertise. This week, we're bringing you a recording from a recent workshop. We hope you enjoy it.

[00:00:15.000] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to our workshop, *Attached to God*, with author and therapist Krispin Mayfield. Krispin, I'm glad to have you here today. I first heard about this wonderful book, *Attached to God*, when one of my adult daughters heard about it, I think maybe on Instagram. And she got it and read it. She said, mom, you have to read this. It combines two of your great loves, attachment science and God. So she loaned me her copy and I kept forgetting that it was a loaner and I kept underlining and making notes, so I had to buy her a brand new copy. But the parents and professionals here, we all... Attachment is a big focus of our lives because of our children and for professionals for the families that they work with. You've taken your extensive knowledge about attachment and applied it to our relationship with God and is so beautiful. I know it must be helping people all over. Krispin, the floor is all yours.

[00:01:17.400] - Krispin Mayfield

All right. Yeah. Thank you so much for the invitation. I have just really benefited so much from the foster care community to learn about attachment. That's really where I started was in my master's program, I took a weekend class on attachment and attachment trauma, especially in kids from hard places like Dr. Karyn Purvis. And then I went on and got my training in emotionally focused therapy, which is by Sue Johnson, which is using attachment research for couples and families. And then as I was just going through all reading everything I could about attachment, I was like, oh, this actually feels like it's relevant to my relationship with God and how I experience God. And it turns out that there was research on that as well. And so that's where we'll go today is I'll talk about attachment and what it looks like in these different realms. And it sounds like you all are a little bit familiar or a lot familiar with attachment. And what I find in different communities is I've heard a lot of feedback of I'm an adoptive parent or I work in foster care and I thought I knew everything about attachment, but I never thought about what it could mean for faith or whatever. So we'll go over all this.

[00:02:48.560] - Krispin Mayfield

But just to start off, I think of attachment as just this inherent drive for connection. One of my favorite descriptions of attachment is from Bethany Saltman. She wrote a memoir about attachment. So she's just a writer, but wrote a book called *Strange Situation*. She wrote, When we lose track of our child and target, there will never come a moment when we say, Oh, well, now that my kid's disappeared, I get to sleep in on the weekends and give up the search. I think that just at its base speaks to that drive that we have to connect with other humans, connect with our kids, to keep that connection. We know that it is wired into our survival. When our attachment is threatened, it can throw us in a fight or flight or freeze. It's such a powerful drive. That's what I see with couples, is I see that when there's a threat to connection in a couple, then they go into fight or flight. Of course, we see that with kids. For those of us that grew up in faith, sometimes we are taught, yeah, there's this rupture or disconnection with God. And then we also go into fight or flight then and use some of the strategies that we know to try to keep that connection.

[00:04:17.150] - Krispin Mayfield

But just starting off with attachment, John Bowlby started off in the 1940s, and he published a paper called "The 40 Juvenile Thieves," and basically looked at these 40 youth that were involved in the criminal justice system. They'd all been arrested for shoplifting and found that there is this very high rate among this population that they've been separated from their mothers for a significant amount of time. And I think that this is probably one of the starts of trauma-informed care, where during that time, there's just this assumption that there are people that are good and people that are bad. And these are just bad kids that do bad things. John Bowlby was starting to ask, what if it's not what's wrong with you, but what happened to you? Bruce Perry uses that phrase. That's really where attachment started. That's why I was really drawn to attachment, was to understand that the things that we see, the outward behavior sometimes isn't just reflective of someone being bad, but it's actually reflective of their needs or their history.

[00:05:37.820] - Krispin Mayfield

I really like to think about it as house plants. So if you look at a plant, and if I was to go on vacation and leave a plant in a dark room for two weeks, and then I come back and it's growing sideways towards this little crack of light in between the curtains, right? So here's this plant that is tipped almost 45 degrees. I wouldn't say, Oh, there's something wrong with that plant. It must be broken, right? I would say, Actually, look, this plant is doing exactly what it's supposed to do. It is trying to get light. It is moving towards the light. And so even as it looks different than all the other plants, it's actually doing exactly what a plant was designed to do. And I think that's just a really good picture when we think about attachment and the ways that we try to get connection. And this drive for connection is, and I know I'm preaching to the choir because you all know that there are kids and adults learn these ways. If they learn this is the way that I get connection, or I deal with the pain of not having connection, it can look all these different ways. And if you don't know the context, if I'm looking at this plant and I didn't know that it was in this dark room for two weeks, then I would make some assumptions about what might be wrong with the plant.

[00:07:01.660] - Krispin Mayfield

And so that's the basis for me when it comes to talking about attachment. We're going to talk about attachment styles. And I don't really like the term attachment styles because that gives this idea that the attachment style is something that... First of all, that you is the whole of your personality, or the whole of how you relate or even who you are as a person. I find it much better, and in line with the research, that these are attachment strategies. These are ways of getting connection or dealing with connection. And so as we talk about this, I want you to keep that in mind. I have a friend, Jeffrey Olrick, who actually has done some attachment research, wrote a book for Zondervan called *The 6 Needs of Every Child*. And so really great work around that. But he talks about having done attachment research. He says that the categories are for research, but they're not for real people. And I think that's really helpful to notice that there are going to be all these different strategies that show up in different ways. So as we go through, don't be thinking like, which category do I fall in? But thinking about, are there times where I show up like this or where I use this strategy?

[00:08:28.240] - Krispin Mayfield

The other thing, as we're talking about this, I'm reminded of... I wish I could remember who said it, but it was I think maybe it was Dr. Karyn Purvis or one of her colleagues, talking about the idea of a good enough parent, and how kids who come from hard places need more than a good enough parent. There's just so much that our kids need. As we talk through this and I'm describing what creates these different attachment styles, I hope that you're able to be gracious to yourself. Because this is just general theories of how we think things work. And I know that if we have kids that come from trauma, whether it's like maybe they weren't with us at the beginning of their life or like with my kid, where it was like, I know she was or they were born to my family but had gone through this trauma, we're helping them heal. And hopefully by looking at these different strategies, both within ourselves and in those that we care for, we can say, okay, maybe I understand a little bit better what's going on or what I need or what this kid needs.

[00:09:47.810] - Krispin Mayfield

And I came up with my own terms. I feel like there's precedent for that in the realm of attachment science. Maybe you've noticed that is that people are always coming up, not always coming up with new terms, but they're the child terms, they're the adult terms, they're all these things. So I was like, Well, I'll just make it more confusing and come up with my own terms. So the first that I like to look at is an anxious attachment style, which goes with that ambivalent or preoccupied attachment style. And in adulthood, this looks like that person that's like, Are we okay? I want to make sure that we're good. I think about when I was in couples therapy with my wife and I told her, I said, I wake up every morning and make you coffee so you won't leave. And she's like, What the heck are you talking about? And I'm like, Yeah, I know that's not true, but in my mind, that's the way that my brain works. It's like, I'm this anxious part of me that's afraid you're going to leave, and so I have to perform. I have to make sure things are okay between us, which really was a great opening to process some stuff and couples therapy and create a more secure bond. But that's really the feeling of having this anxious attachment style. It's like all the connection is on my shoulders. And what they found in the research is this comes from parents, caregivers who are not consistently attuned. And so it's like, I go through times of connection, I go through times of disconnection, and it feels like it's up to me to keep you close. And

so if I get big enough or loud enough or perform the right way or behave the right way, then I'll get the connection that I need. But I have to do a lot of work to get that connection and keep that connection. And this really is a good description of how I was taught in faith growing up, which is, you're saved. There's nothing you can do to make God not love you. I heard all those messages, but I also heard a lot of messages of God is happy with you and close to you when you're behaving well and is distant if you're sinning. And so it puts this pressure on us to behave, to perform. It feels like the connection with God is on my shoulders. And we just see this language show up throughout, I think, throughout our faith communities. Even though we might say, yeah, we believe that Jesus' work on the cross brought a reconciliation that we don't have to work for. And yet we talk about things like, are you far from God this week or close to God? Those sorts of things. And for those of us that already either have that anxious attachment style or were raised to approach God that way, it just reinforces that message. And really what that tells me, when I noticed that in myself is, I need to know that God is going to stick around, that God likes me, that God... My behavior is not going to determine whether or not God sticks around. I think about Mr. Rogers saying, I like you just the way you are. And that being a really powerful statement and that actually being a pretty different picture than what I got from God growing up. And so it just makes a lot of sense. And what we find is that when you have that anxious attachment style, even with God, it puts you on edge. It creates this extra level of anxiety, this extra level of stress in your life. And it doesn't feel like, oh, God is there for me. God is like this parent that is taking care of me. Sometimes it can feel like the roles are reversed where it's like, I have to keep God happy if I'm going to keep God close. So that's that first attachment/insecure attachment style.

[00:14:01.820] - Krispin Mayfield

We're going to move on to the second, which is shutdown attachment style or avoidant/dismissive, if you know the other terms. And on the outside, this is for adults, this is usually that person that's like, I'm not emotional, I don't need other people, I'm logical. And I work a lot with, usually one partner in my couples I work with tends to have this approach to emotions. I'm fine, I don't really need other people, I don't need closeness. And that's the story that they've told themselves. But what we know is that if you grew up in a home where your caregiver thinks that your emotions are too much, so if you're sad or scared or whatever it is or angry, right? If you grew up in a home where when you're experiencing one of those "negative" emotions, let's say you're feeling sad and you're crying and your parents like, stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about. What that tells your attachment system is, if I'm going to keep the people that I love close, if I'm going to keep my dad close or my mom close, I have to shut down this emotion. And so even though this person has told the story of like, I don't need anyone, I don't have emotions. This actually is the way that they've kept connection. The way that they've gotten connection is by shutting down those emotions so that they don't overwhelm the people that they love most. And by the time they're adults, they're like, this is just the way it is. And actually the brain... Oh, gosh, I'm trying to remember what part of the brain, but Curt Thompson talks about this in *Anatomy of the Soul*, that we find that that part of the brain shrinks, and it's the part of the brain that interprets sensations from the body into emotions. And so basically what it is, is your brain gets good at disregarding your own emotions because you have to choose, do I want connection or do I want to express my emotions? And what ends up happening is that then this gets passed on, because if you're that person that's like sadness leads to disconnection, then when you see your kid crying, you're like, I can't handle that. That's bad news. And so that's how it gets perpetuated down through the line.

[00:16:39.890] - Krispin Mayfield

But I see this a lot in the church as well. In my book, it was really important that I pointed out different ways that we've heard this teaching in the church, because I think sometimes people can say, Well, that's just your personal issues and you're interpreting that, you're putting that on God. It's important to me as I wrote the book to say, No, actually, here's some prominent Christian leaders that have perpetuated these things, whether they meant to or not. I'm not saying that they're bad. I'm just saying that I think that they have their own stuff that's coming out in the writing is my honest opinion. But I think a really prominent example of this is John MacArthur wrote, lack of joy is a sin for the child of God. And so that message right there is, if you are sad or if you're worried, you are sinning. And that has that same approach of like, if I want to be close to God, then I got to stuff these negative emotions down. I have to push those into the basement. If I really believed God, then I would feel happy. If I really believed God, I wouldn't be worried.

[00:17:59.900] - Krispin Mayfield

Even though we can look throughout Scripture and there are people with emotions all over the place all the time, people always complaining to God, you look through Psalms. But we've gotten this message often in the Church that if you want to keep God close, then you have to be happy. You have to be okay. You have to be calm. God is going to be offended by your negative emotions. One of the ways that we see this is people will talk about, do not be afraid. Taking that as God saying, here's how you should feel, don't feel fear. But in my book, I talk about how I have a seven year old, and we'll walk around the street and walk around the block, that was what we did during the pandemic, which can't go anywhere, but we can just take a walk around the block over and over and over again. But there were dogs in our neighborhood, and the dogs would ferociously bark from the other side of the street or from the other side of the fence. He would startle and get scared. I would say, Don't worry about it, it's okay, I'm here. I think that's what God said. It means when God says, Don't be afraid, it's a comfort. It's not telling you how you should feel. And yet in a lot of church communities, we've taken that in as like, if you want to be close to God, then you have to feel these certain ways.

[00:19:25.420] - Krispin Mayfield

And then the flip side of that, too, is the spiritual bypassing, which is a term for when you feel something and you skip over it by turning to spiritual language. I'm not afraid, God's in control. But as a way of disowning or ignoring your own anxiety about something. Those go together where it's like, I feel like I should not be worried to be close to God, but also I'll just repeat Bible verses to pretend like I'm not afraid, instead of actually vulnerability engaging with the people in my life or with God about how I'm actually feeling. That's the second. Again, you can look at these and say you might do the performing for God to try to keep God close and also shut down your emotions. You can do both of those. You don't have to be in one category or another.

[00:20:25.120] - Krispin Mayfield

The third is I call that a shame filled attachment style. This would fit in the disorganized category or fearful category, fearful attachment for adults. And this happens when parents are abusive because our parents are supposed to love us and to help us feel loved. But if they don't, it creates this sense like there's something wrong with me. And so these will be kids that will have a lot of shame, have this feeling of like, there's something at my core that's broken. They'll criticize themselves. They'll act out in ways in accordance with how they view themselves. This same thing happens with God, where it feels like I'm not holy enough to be close to God. God really wants me to be perfect, but I can't be perfect. So at least I can criticize myself or I can beat myself up. I can prove that I really understand. I'm close to God by talking about how horrible I am. I beat myself up. I say, yes, God, I know I'm so horrible. But that doesn't actually help us feel loved by God. I think a lot about the prodigal son story, and how the prodigal son runs away, basically screws his dad over, sleeps in the pig pen and comes back and the dad just embraces him.

[00:21:56.610] - Krispin Mayfield

And that is a picture of the opposite of shame filled. It's not like the dad needed the son to be like, I know I'm really horrible and I know I'm terrible. And one thing that actually stood out to me as I revisited that story is that the son doesn't even seem sorry. If you read the story carefully, he basically says, if the servants at my dad's house have a better life than I have, maybe if I go apologize, then I can have that life and things will be better for me. He's actually approaching it from a, I don't know if you want to say manipulative, but he's just trying to get his needs met. It's not like, Oh, I feel so much sorrow. I need to go make it right with my dad. He's actually like, focused on himself. And still, the dad just sweeps him up, gives him a hug, doesn't make him change his shirt before he gives him a hug. But unfortunately, in the Church, we've gotten that message a lot that God loves you, but God doesn't like you. And a lot of that is around sin. I haven't quite figured out my theology of sin yet, but what we're often told in the Church is that our sin drives God away. And yet, if you look at the story, like Adam and Eve sin and then God shows up. And Moses kills someone and runs into the desert and then runs into God. And Jacob steals the birthright and then meets God in the wilderness. If you're familiar with the term proximity seeking behaviors, that's what kids do to get connection and get closeness. I like to say that maybe sinning is a proximity seeking behavior because if you look at what happens, or maybe we could use it as such, because if you see what happens, God continually shows

up even though people are sinning.

[00:23:57.280] - Krispin Mayfield

One thing actually around that, this is the last piece that I wanted to share because I found this so powerful around this idea of shame and the theology or the way that we end up relating to God, and also what we've learned in the adoption foster care community. Maybe you're familiar with the wordless book. My grandma would make these. They were felt books where you had a color on each page and it was like, introduce the gospel. The first page is a black page and that represents sin because your heart is sinful and black. Which by the way, in America, our white supremacist society set up this way. First of all, that's problematic. That wasn't going on in the biblical times talking about darkness and black and equating that with sin. But I just wanted to note that that's not very helpful now. But what we saw was this wordless book, what I grew up with, which was looking at that you have a black heart and that is sin, and that is the thing that drives God away. I traced the history of this. Turns out it was Charles Spurgeon, who was this preacher in the 1800s, well known, that it seemed like he either invented it or was the first person that used it on a broad scale. He used it at this particular point where he was preaching in this huge tabernacle in London. The first time that he used it was to a group of orphans. They brought orphans in from all over London, all these orphanages, to hear this gospel presentation. He used this color, this wordless book way of explaining the gospel. And so it's interesting because he's saying, here your heart is black with sin. And what really struck me is that as I was looking at the attachment research like Dr. Karyn Purvis or even clients that I've had, I hear this often where it's like, there's something at my core that drives other people away, that means that I'm despicable, that I'm not lovable. There's something at my core that is disgusting. Dr. Purvis has talked about kids talking about being all black inside. I had a client, I use this with permission, who said, It just feels like there's this gross ink at the core of who I am that is going to get on other people if they get too close. And if you work with kids with attachment trauma, you might know something about this. And it struck me because what Spurgeon was saying was like, well, this really resonated with all these kids. It must be true. It must be the sin in your heart that is that feeling, that core feeling. And I know a bit about that. I am an abuse survivor. And so I had this same feeling and I thought it was sin. And it was like, well, if I could just confess enough, if I could just stop sinning enough, then this feeling will go away. And that's the narrative that we've been given in the church.

[00:27:20.910] - Krispin Mayfield

But what we know from attachment science is that feeling of like, there's something really broken and defective about me. It doesn't go away by us changing our behavior and getting better. It goes away when we feel like we're actually loved because that's an attachment wound. I just found it so powerful. It was really transformative for me to be like, okay, so that bad feeling of there's something wrong with me that drives God away isn't because I keep on sinning. I know that Jesus's work on the cross did away with that. I don't need to worry about that. And yet I kept on feeling that way. It was really helpful to say, Oh, that feeling is there because you didn't receive love in the way that you needed it. And that is the way to healing and finding those loving relationships. It was just one of the most powerful parts for me.

[00:28:18.460] - Krispin Mayfield

We're running out of time. But the last thing that I want to say is, just as we talk through these things is that as you notice each of these strategies, if you're like, Yeah, I relate to this or that. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. This is just the way that you've learned to get connection. And it is a signpost to say, this is where this is what my need is. If I feel anxious all the time, then I need to know that God is going to stick around no matter what. If I feel like I shut down my emotions because I don't want to be too much, that is a signal that says I need to talk with God about, Is it okay to have these negative emotions? Are you going to be offended by them? I need to know that you can handle my emotions. If you have this feeling like there's something at my core that's broken and drives God away, then we know that that's shame and that shame is healed not through behaving better, but by letting ourselves be seen and loved and accepted. Thanks so much for listening and joining along. I think we're going to have questions now.

[00:29:31.640] - Lisa Qualls

We are. Thank you, Krispin, so much. For everyone here watching live and for everyone listening on the podcast, I just would really, again, encourage you get this book because I've read it, and what Krispin gave us in this short time is a very high view. There is so much more. I just would encourage you all to read *Attached to God* by Krispin Mayfield. Krispin, before we go to the Q&A, can you tell everyone where they can find you on social media, your website, the best way for people to find you?

[00:30:04.730] - Krispin Mayfield

Yeah. So I do have a website, [KrispinMayfield.Com](http://KrispinMayfield.Com), pretty easy. There aren't a lot of Crispins out there. I'm also on Instagram and Twitter. And again, if you just search my name, it comes up and *Attached to God* is on Amazon and anywhere else. So I still pop in to Barnes & Noble sometimes, and it's on the shelf still a year later, which is nice to see.

[00:30:29.320] - Lisa Qualls

Do you take them off and sign them?

[00:30:31.420] - Krispin Mayfield

I have a couple of times. My wife is always like, you have to sign it. I'm like, It feels weird. But she's also an author. And so we push each other to do that.

[00:30:42.200] - Lisa Qualls

Live dangerously, right? Well, thank you. And just for anybody listening, Krispin is spelled K R I S P I N, and Mayfield is exactly the way it sounds. So you can easily find him.

[00:31:00.940] - Melissa Corkum

We are so thankful for the amazing guests who share their wisdom and expertise with us. Adoptive parenting gives us both the challenge and the opportunity to keep learning new tools and perspectives.

[00:31:11.940] - Lisa Qualls

If you'd like to hear more from our guests and get support on this topic, all of our workshops, including the Q&A's, are available to folks inside our group coaching program called Reclaim Compassion. To learn more, go to [reclaimcompassion.Com](http://reclaimcompassion.Com).