

Session 3—Foundations

Premise: *Engaging a younger man in a meaningful relationship will not only change his life and yours, but will build the Kingdom of God.*

(6) BOUNDARIES: Healthy boundaries protect both the spiritual father and son, providing clarity and respect within the relationship. They establish clear expectations and ensure that each person knows what's appropriate and what's off-limits.

Effective boundaries prevent the relationship from becoming too dependent or emotionally draining. It's important for spiritual fathers to remember they are guides, not therapists, and should avoid crossing lines that could blur the purpose of the relationship.

Some examples include establishing consistent meeting times, setting limits on personal sharing to maintain focus, and understanding when to refer the younger man to additional support if issues go beyond the scope of spiritual guidance.

“Setting and keeping healthy boundaries will help you maintain your rightful place as a spiritual father who is dependent on his Heavenly Father.”

“To force any beliefs onto our sons is spiritual abuse. Our role is to encourage, support, and admonish.”

“Good boundaries build good trust.”

Key Points:

- ⇒ *Boundaries protect you, your family, and your spiritual son.*
- ⇒ *Boundaries can be physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual.*
- ⇒ *When you realize you have poor boundaries, it needs to be addressed quickly and humbly.*
- ⇒ *Respect any boundaries that your spiritual son sets for the relationship, too.*

Discussion:

1. Do you struggle with maintaining boundaries or asserting your needs?
 2. How do you typically respond when someone crosses a boundary? Do you tend to be a people pleaser? Do you grow cold and distant? Elaborate.
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(7) ATTACHMENT STYLES: This chapter highlights different attachment styles—secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized—that people may bring into relationships. Attachment styles impact how men approach and interact in relationships, especially mentoring ones.

Recognizing both your attachment style and that of your spiritual son can help you approach the relationship in a way that fosters trust and understanding. For example, an anxious attachment style may lead someone to seek constant reassurance, while an avoidant style may result in hesitancy to open up.

As a spiritual father, it's essential to create a relationship environment that encourages openness. By showing consistency, patience, and genuine care, a spiritual father can help develop a secure attachment, even if the younger man initially displays insecurity or mistrust.

“Having greater awareness of how past experiences still influence you will make you more effective as a spiritual father.”

“There is nothing final or fatalistic about how we attach to another person. We are not doomed to be locked in a cycle of broken relationships—especially when we are in Christ.”

Key Points:

- ⇒ An attachment style is a set of instincts we each have in our relationships—and each style is built on our past relational experiences, particularly in our formative years.
- ⇒ No matter what attachment style you or your son have, God can redeem and restore our broken places so that we can experience the security of His love, as well as meaningful relationships.

Discussion:

1. Do you personally identify with any of the four attachment styles?
 2. Is there one you think would be exceptionally hard for you to engage with?
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(8) EMOTIONS: Men are often conditioned to downplay or suppress emotions, which can hinder their ability to be open and honest. A spiritual father’s role is to model healthy emotional expression and provide a safe space for the younger man to process his emotions.

As a mentor, it’s essential to address emotions without being overwhelmed by them. A spiritual father should offer empathy and support but avoid trying to “fix” every issue. The goal is to encourage the younger man to acknowledge his emotions and understand how they relate to his faith.

The guidebook suggests practical tools like the Emotions Wheel, which helps men identify specific emotions beyond broad terms like “anger” or “sadness.” These tools support growth in emotional intelligence, which is crucial for a balanced spiritual life.

“The goal of our life should be to reclaim and sanctify our emotions, not reject them.”

“Usually, anger is a mask hiding deep feelings, and we want to help men remove it.”

“Shame is the gnawing sense that we are unworthy—that something is flawed within us—not because of our sinful behavior, but because we are undeserving of love.”

Key Points:

- ⇒ Men aren’t born emotionally closed off; these are learned behaviors, and they can be unlearned.
- ⇒ An inability to express our emotions brings with it an inability to fully express our faith.
- ⇒ The seven primary emotions are happiness, pride, sadness, loneliness, fear, guilt, and surprise.
- ⇒ Coaching your son to have a healthy emotional life is mostly about redirecting him to recognize and articulate his basic emotions so that he can take the right next step.

Discussion:

1. Do you struggle to express or discuss emotions? What is one thing you can do this week to help you grow in this area?
 2. Describe a time when you felt angry. What was the primary emotion underneath it?
 3. Where do you struggle with shame in your life?
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Resources:

- Chapters 6-8 in *The Spiritual Fathers Guidebook*
- www.spiritualfathers.com

Session 3 Supplement

ATTACHMENT STYLES

The first two attachment styles are high trust, which means they are more likely to seek out **engagement** (though one does so in a healthier way).

- **Secure Attachment Style:** Characterized by confidence in relationships, secure attachment enables individuals to feel safe expressing needs and emotions. Those with this style tend to form trusting and stable connections, as they are comfortable with intimacy and independence.
- **Anxious Attachment:** This style often leads individuals to seek constant reassurance and validation from others, fearing rejection or abandonment. Anxiously attached individuals may be overly dependent on others for emotional support, which can make relationships feel intense or unstable.

The other two styles are low trust, and they tend to be **avoidant** when it comes to deep relationships.

- **Dismissive Attachment:** Individuals with dismissive attachment tend to value independence over closeness. They may avoid intimacy or emotional vulnerability and often find it challenging to rely on others, sometimes appearing emotionally distant in relationships. This style can be summed up in the phrase “I’m good.”
- **Fearful Attachment:** This style combines elements of anxious and avoidant attachment. People with fearful attachment often struggle with trust and may experience conflicting desires for intimacy and independence, leading to unpredictable relationship dynamics.

The matrix below shows these four styles and how they relate, as well as the approximate percentage of adults who have each one:

		Avoidant	Engagement		
Esteem	High	Dismissive (20%)	Secure (50%)	Self-Sufficient	
	Low	Fearful (5%)	Anxious (25%)	Needy	
		Low	High		
		Trust			

ASSESSMENT

It can be helpful to explore some of these patterns in your own life that might impact your relationship. Knowing how your past has impacted you will help you walk with a younger man as he may be dealing with the impact of his past.

Below are a series of questions that will probe our attachment patterns. Answer these questions honestly, and then reflect on those answers you either strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with.

ORIGINS

1. I had at least one parent with whom I always felt secure and loved.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. I don't remember feeling alone as a child very often.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3. I had at least one strong friendship growing up.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

4. As a child, I had at least one person I could turn to when I needed advice.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

5. I felt like my childhood dreams and development were celebrated.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

6. Growing up, I had an older man that helped me develop into who I am today.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

7. I was encouraged as a child to communicate my wants and needs.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

8. Discipline and punishment for me as a child were always done with love.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

If most of your answers were on the left "Agree" end, you had what is generally considered to be a healthy childhood. You were secure in your relationships with your parents and friends, your accomplishments were noticed and praised, and your mistakes were corrected lovingly. You are not typically suspicious of others (trust), and you were given a healthy view of yourself (esteem).

If most of your answers were on the right "Disagree" end, you probably had a more difficult childhood and may have felt lonely much of the time. This is not abnormal, but without further reflection—perhaps through conversations with your wife, pastor, or a counselor—you may have issues with believing the best about yourself or others.

RELATIONSHIPS

9. I have rarely had positive relationships in my life in which I felt safe, known, and secure.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

10. My wife (or girlfriend, ex, etc.) complains that I am closed off or unwilling to get too close.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

11. I have acquaintances but few deep friendships.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

12. I would do anything to keep my loved ones happy, and I tend to always put them first.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

13. I can't stand it when someone I care about is upset with me or disappointed.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

14. I often argue with explosive words in a loud voice; I just get so mad when someone is against me.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

15. I sometimes wonder if I care about people more than they care about me.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

16. I prefer to rely on myself and rarely reach out to others for help.

Strongly Agree

Somewhat Agree

Somewhat Disagree

Strongly Disagree

This time, the scale is flipped. If most of your answers were on the right "Disagree" end, you tend to have healthy, deep relationships with others. You are likely in the "secure" quadrant of the attachment styles chart. Your security in relationships will help you in your role as a spiritual father.

If most of your answers were on the left "Agree" end, you probably struggle with having satisfying relationships. Don't be ashamed; many men find themselves here. Realizing this can help you work on your relationships. Talk this over with your spiritual fathers small group, as well as your spouse, pastor, or a counselor. And pray! Allow the Holy Spirit to bring you the reassurance of your loving heavenly Father who created you.

You can use this tool to reflect on your habits and internal motivations in a relationship. Think about your tendency to avoid or engage in relationships (how you feel about others), and your own self-sufficiency or desire for validation (how you feel about yourself).

Please note that there is no right answer for how you attach to another person. But if you find that you lean in one direction, then it's worth reflecting on, especially as you seek to be mindful of your son's needs.

EMOTIONS WHEEL

This tool is designed to help individuals identify and articulate their feelings by offering a range of emotions organized into categories. It features core emotions in the center (such as “happy,” “sad,” angry,” “fearful,” etc.), with more specific emotions radiating outward from each core category.

How to Use the Emotions Wheel with a Spiritual Son:

1. **Identifying Emotions:** Encourage your spiritual son to use the wheel when he’s struggling to articulate how he feels. Starting with the core emotion categories, he can work outward to find more precise words that capture his experience.
2. **Developing Emotional Awareness:** As he practices identifying specific emotions, he’ll become more attuned to his emotional states. This awareness is foundational for spiritual and personal growth, as it helps in processing emotions constructively.
3. **Discussing Emotions:** Use the wheel as a conversational starting point. Ask him to share about a recent situation, then work together to find words on the wheel that resonate with how he felt.
4. **Connecting Emotions to Faith:** Emphasize that acknowledging emotions is part of the spiritual journey. Encourage reflection on how these emotions align with or challenge his walk with Christ, and pray together about his emotional insights.

This tool helps foster emotional intelligence, which is critical for navigating life challenges and building a stronger, more honest relationship with God and others.

