Be Known, the Podcast

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Episode 77: How Our Attachment History Can Affect Our Relationships (Original Script written by Carianne Pritchett, LPC)

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This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_77\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, we are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of. And let’s see what kind of healing happens here.

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Welcome back my friend. I took several weeks off to focus on a conference and my family because we all just had the flu. I’m excited to be back today, though! We’re talking about attachment today. The concept of attachment is one that is really important for us to understand as we pursue healthier, more whole relationships in our lives. My friend and boss Carianne Pritchett, is a Licensed Professional Counselor, like me, and loves loves loves to talk about attachment.

I asked her to write today’s episode and share with you about how our attachment history can affect our relationships today. This concept is something we’ll address again in the future, but today, I just want to introduce the concept to you. Many of you may be familiar with attachment theory, but if you’re new to it, pay attention and start thinking about how your relationships in childhood have affected your relationships today. Some of my guest writers will also record for me, but I will read Carianne’s story for you today. So from this point, I’m speaking her words for you.

Here we go!

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It was my first semester of grad school.

I was newly married. In a new city. With a new job. Meeting lots of new people.

I remember sitting in class when my professor started talking about the importance of self care. She then looked at me and said, “Carianne, what do you do when you’re stressed?” At that moment, I wanted to say all the “right” things like “I pray or read my Bible or call a wise friend.” I was in a seminary setting after all. But, none of those things were true. At least not then. So, I honestly answered and said, “well, I run away.”

You see, the last time I got stressed, I got in my car and drove from New Orleans towards Baton Rouge.

By itself, this might not sound that odd - I mean, it’s not wrong for us to take a break when we need it - so let me give you a bit more context. It was late one night and my husband and I had just fought. I don’t even remember what we were arguing about, but I do know that I wanted to run away, not so I could avoid him, but so he would worry. I know I know, totally unhealthy. At the time though, I didn’t know how to handle conflict. I thought if he was angry with me, then our relationship was in jeopardy. So, I leveraged my presence - or in this case my lack of presence - as a way to manipulate his need for me. At least, that’s what I was subconsciously trying to do. Needless to say, it didn’t work. He was peacefully sleeping when I got back home - an hour and a half later.

Fast forward a few counseling classes later and I finally had words for what happened that night - I did not feel securely attached to my husband. So in an attempt to feel attached I tried to manipulate his emotions so that when I came back home we could cry together and have makeup sex. The problem was, I had done this push-pull pattern before so he was familiar with my cycle. And, that night, he decided to stop feeding into the dysfunction.

As much as I was annoyed at my husband that night, I was more annoyed with myself. Why was I overreacting and then avoiding only to come back home disappointed that my husband didn’t chase me?

Answer: It was because I had an insecure attachment style of relating. Turns out there are 3 different types of insecure attachment styles. Y’all, I’ve learned so much since then!

On a basic level, when someone talks about being attached, they are referencing their feeling of connection to another. A secure connection, or secure attachment, can bring so much joy and peace. For securely attached people, they can feel holistically safe even in the midst of intense conflict. I know, this seems like an oxymoron. And, yet, it’s one of the hallmarks of a secure attachment.

The theory of attachment began when John Bowlby, and later Mary Ainsworth, started watching how moms and their babies interacted. When a baby is born, the goal of the parent is to create a holistically safe environment for the child in order for the child to feel connected to the parent. Usually, we think creating safety means a parent is setting up a comfortable sleeping space, responding to the baby’s feeding cues, and changing dirty diapers. However, connection and safety are not just built on a physical level. Connection, even for a baby, can happen on a mental and emotional level as well. Eye contact, play, and gentle reflective cues are just as important for a baby’s safety and wellbeing. These points of connection create relational harmony and are especially important when a baby is dysregulated.

When, however, a parent constantly lives in a state of intense chaotic dysregulation or rigid perfectionism, then an insecure attachment can be formed. **Avoidant children** learn to flee from stressful situations and may stop engaging with a dysregulated parent because the weight of the parent’s emotional distress is too much for the child to handle. It’s almost like these kids give up on “being enough” for their parents. Sometimes these kids will try to “be enough” in other spaces, like art, academics, or sports. Many of these kids grow into highly competent adults who hate group projects and learn to trust no one. On the other hand, **anxious children** are consistently striving to be what the parent needs. Helpful. Selfless. Never asking for anything not because they don’t trust others but because they don’t want to burden someone else. Many times, anxious children learn how to be the emotional support for one or both parents. This is why boundaries are so hard for anxiously attached people.

The third style of attachment, known as **disorganized**, is essentially a varying combination of the avoidant and anxious styles. While the intensity of this insecure attachment style can result in extreme outrage and/or acting out, it can also look like me . . . running away because you want someone to care.

Yup, I had a disorganized attachment style.

While I still get anxious and I still want to run away at times, I’ve learned much since that eye-opening car ride towards Baton Rouge.

First, I’ve learned how to recognize that God is consistent and stable. He is securely attached to Himself in the way of the mysterious Trinity. And, He is a secure base for all believers.

There’s much to be said about how God is and demonstrates His compassion and connection to His kids. Many theologians have handled this topic well and not so well. Over time, as I’ve sifted the not so well “truths” - aka man’s “Jesusfied'' lies - out of my mind and heart, the depth of God’s love and grace continues to build resiliency and relational security within my soul.

For instance, I used to believe that God could not control His sadness or anger if I acted in dishonoring ways. I thought that He was not capable of keeping His cool and, therefore, would change His mind about how much He loved me if I did something wrong. While I did not realize this is what I actually believed, I still behaved as if it were true, fearing that God would smite me at any moment. Yes, I get it, God is just and demonstrates righteous anger towards sin. But, y’all, this is why Jesus is so amazing. And, the gospel is such good news. Because God is also a way-maker and He wants us to experience His stead. fast. love.

As my view of God’s character began to change, I also began to realize what Paul meant when he said, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

“No” as in none. Nada. zip. Zero condemnation. Letting this truth resonate with my whole being has helped unravel shame’s hold on me. This is important because at the root of an insecure attachment style is shame - the idea that others can’t really love me or see me for who I am. Because if they do, they’ll either see that I’m not enough or I’m too much.

Forming a **secure attachment** to the Lord brings freedom to be honest about our shortcomings. When we are securely attached to God we can bring our offering to God and realize it’s not enough and that’s kind of the point. We can live in this tension of not being enough and still giving our all without feeling like we have to prove something to God, ourselves, or others.

While this might sound too good to be true, I think it is attainable.

God wants us to be securely attached to Him.

And, I also think God wants us to be securely attached with others too.

You see, when God made man, He said, “it’s not good for man to be alone.” So God created another person. I need you to really marinate on this truth - even though Adam had a perfect relationship, unhindered by sin and suffering, with God, God still saw the need to put Adam in a relationship with another human. It’s not that God was not enough, it’s that God knew all that Adam needed in order for him to fully thrive.

Brene Brown has a video called “The Anatomy of Trust.” You can find it on google (or link below). In this video she describes seven qualities needed in a relationship in order to build lasting, genuine trust. While she does not frame these traits as characteristics of a secure attachment, I don’t think it’s too great a leap to suggest that truly trusting a person and having a secure relationship with another are similar ideas if not one in the same.

I tell you this because this is one of many places to start. So read, learn, and curiously question yourself in order to grow in your understanding of why you do what you do. But know that in order to fully work on building a secure attachment, you have to include another. Because that’s the point, right? A secure attachment isn’t about self esteem or self worth. A secure attachment is about knowing and experiencing a trustworthy person, who will always be there through the good, the bad, and the ugly. A secure attachment looks and sounds a lot like, ‘I will never leave or forsake you . . . no matter what.’

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Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that understanding your attachment styles and history will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

I’m so thankful for my friend Carianne sharing more for us about attachment today, teaching us about attachment styles and how true healing from attachment wounds comes through a secure attachment with Jesus and even with others. In our next episode how to form secure attachments with others around us, so make sure you are on the lookout for that episode! We can’t even begin to cover all the ins and outs of attachment here on the podcast, but I’ll be sharing some resources in the next couple of weeks that may be helpful for you. If you’re curious what your attachment style is, find a counselor well versed in attachment theory to help you understand more about it.

If you haven’t already, please subscribe to the show on Apple Podcasts or Spotify and write a review! That helps others be able to connect with us here on the podcast, too.

To finish up, the transcript for this episode is on the podcast page on my website, [kerrahfabacher.com](http://kerrahfabacher.com).

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.