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God Attachment

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Part 1: Why God Fascinates: Chapter 1: Does God Matter: It takes a great deal of faith to believe God does not exist, but we all long for proof of His existence; a sign, a miracle. In our worst times, we want to know He hears our prayers, we want to know God cares for us. We wonder if a relationship with Him is really possible.

The ancient Hebrews taught each person that God is living and active. David trusted God to help him defeat Goliath. We all want the assurance that God will help us defeat our own giants. We may expect God to solve everything instead of using our God-given wisdom. Some treat God as irrelevant, but when soldiers are facing a battle they will gather to pray. Every time we pray, we are reaching out for someone transcendent. We want God on our side but our view of Him is limited by our own life experiences. Our religious development is often stunted early in life, but as adults, we need a more mature understanding of God. We search for answers in other religions or give up on religion completely. The founders of psychology were atheists who viewed any belief in God as a crutch or neurosis. They rejected belief in God or any belief that, if there were a God, He would care about us.

Chapter 2: A Universal Longing: As we grow older, we begin to question what happens next. We want to belong and we long to have a God who wants us. Albert Einstein said our best experiences are with the mysterious. We desire the mysterious God who gives our lives purpose.

If we believe in God, do we also believe He cares for us? Addressing the reality of God influences everything we think and do. Our perception of God is the real question we must face. Our beliefs dramatically impact our relationship with God. Scripture invites us to establish an intimate relationship with God, but our life experiences shape our ability to develop that relationship. We want to trust that He loves us and wants a relationship with us, but our relationship with Him is directly tied to our core beliefs about His character. Our attachment style affects all of our relationships and our ability to maintain intimacy. Even a firm belief in God does not translate into a connection with Him. We may truly desire an intimate relationship with Him, but we hold back from that connection.

Chapter 3: Crisis of Belief: A crisis can be both a threat and an opportunity. There is a threat to our belief system and the opportunity to allow change. At some point we all question the meaning and purpose of our lives. When we reach this crisis, we are forced to change our beliefs and our coping methods as we seek meaning and connection with God. We were designed to desire a purpose greater than ourselves.

We all experience pain, loneliness and disappointment, but we can use these feelings to examine our beliefs. Our church attendance or lack of it, is based on beliefs formed by the disappointments and hurts we have encountered.

Divorce, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, eating disorders and broken families plague our culture. Behind the statistics, we find hurting, broken hearts searching for security and hoping to feel safe. God seems distant and uncaring.

We recognize life is not what we had hoped but our response makes the difference in our spiritual lives. “Believe it or not, doubting and questioning are the path toward real faith.” (pg 38 Clinton, Straub) When we doubt and question, we begin to seek a clearer understanding of God and why we believe as we do.

We do not understand why God allows painful circumstances or His purpose for our lives. We struggle between our logic and our emotions. “Do I really trust that God is looking out for me?” (pg 39 Clinton, Straub) Mistrust of God leads to denial and a lack of intimacy with Him. We may believe in the God of creation but it is more difficult to believe He is involved in our daily lives. The challenge of faith is in how we come to trust Him for our present and our future instead of relying on ourselves. Without a purpose we lose hope, existing in survival mode, never realizing all we have to offer and never fully experience a full spiritual life. We do not question our beliefs or contemplate the nature of God. Blaise Pascal described the intrinsic longing of our souls as a God-shaped hole that only He can fill. This conscious and subconscious restlessness is part of our very nature. It is “hard wired” into our DNA. (pg 42 Clinton, Straub) Those with no spiritual or religious experience still display this desire to reach for connection with a higher power. God designed us with this longing in order to induce the pursuit of an intimate relationship with Him. At some point we must all decide if God is important. We are often forced to face this choice when we are in crisis. We seek “the divine for safety.” (pg 44 Clinton, Straub) We can choose to move toward God or away, but life “has a way of constantly bringing you back to the question of who He is in your life.” (pg 48 Clinton, Straub)

Part II How Relationship Changes Everything: Chapter 4: Human Hardware and Software: “‘Alone’ is one of the most powerful and tragic words in the English language.” (pg 50 Clinton, Straub) We were not created to be alone and we all long to be in relationship with one who cares about us. Our core relationship beliefs dictate our thinking, actions and feelings. We do not want to be alone but we are unable to simply change and make our relationships better. In today’s world, we have largely disconnected from familial and community ties that were more customary in the past. The result has been a dramatic increase in depression, anxiety, drug use and conduct disorders in many young people. People need close connections with others as well as moral and spiritual meaning to thrive. The lack of close bonding is the single common denominator in predicting mental illness, hypertension, coronary disease and suicide.

We instinctively seek to answer two essential questions: “Am I worthy of love?” and “Are others capable of loving

me?” Our response to these questions is the basis for our core relationship beliefs affecting our self-definition and all our relationships, including with God. Our core relational beliefs are formed from infancy through childhood. We form a model for relationships based on our beliefs regarding our worthiness to be loved and whether others are responsive to our needs or not. We may not recall the experiences which helped form our behaviors, feelings, thoughts and perceptions which shape our relational style. Erik Erikson referred to the initial growth stage as Trust and Mistrust. We develop trust when our needs are met and mistrust when they are not. The response to our needs are imprinted and later in life we respond to those imprints instinctively. These imprints shape our view of God, ourselves and others.

Explicit memories are those we readily recall and implicit memories are unconscious. The brain assembles both types of memory into our life story and colors our relationships with our attachment patterns. The goal of counseling is “to help people develop more coherent narratives as they come to an understanding of their lives.” (pg 57 Clinton, Straub) The secure base system is a way of understanding attachment relationships. From early childhood we have responded to emotions, events and others. The first component in the secure base experience is a sense of security and trust that the caregiver is available and accessible. The second component is exploration, in which children explore and build self-confidence. “Self-confidence is inherently relational...” (pg 59 Clinton, Straub) Following exploration, children desire to return to a safe attachment through proximity seeking and signaling. When reconnection is established, a safe haven is secured and trust is reinforced. This loop leads to healthy attachment. When any one of these components is missing or damaged, insecure attachment is the result. The loop continues whether healthy or not, and determines one’s style of relating and their view of themselves. When we feel unsafe, we will work to avoid attacks, gain approval and avoid failure.

Recording a timeline of significant events, emotional memories and feelings can help us recall our thoughts, feelings and possibly suppressed memories. By recalling our painful memories and wounds, we may also recall our reactions and immediate emotional responses. This leads us to discover the patterns of self-protection, distrust and controlling behaviors. “Seeing patterns provides us with the opportunity to make new, different choices” in our relationships with others and with God. (pg 61 Clinton, Straub) Recognizing our core beliefs and presuppositions allows us to change our inaccurate beliefs that God is distant, critical and conditional in His love. Our attachment style dictates our actions and feelings toward God and others, in every relationship.

Chapter 5: Your Attachment Style: “What is wrong with us? It seems like we’re going in opposite directions and we

can't connect with each other anymore!" (pg 66 Clinton, Straub) Opposites attract at first but later those qualities which attracted us can be annoying and upsetting. We cannot find peace and love until we understand why we think, act and feel the way we do. Understanding our own relations styles can help us communicate more effectively and our relationships improve.

We all have a relational attachment style developed from our response to the two crucial questions of "Am I worthy of love?" and "Are others capable of loving me?" We are not locked into these roles because understanding allows us the opportunity to retrain our thinking and behavior. Some people developed secure attachments as children, but many of us are anxious, avoidant or fearful in our attachments.

Those with secure attachments have a positive view of themselves and others. They believe they are worthy of love and others are able to love them. They are comfortable with both intimacy and independence.

Avoidant people view themselves as worthy of love but have a negative view of others. They are uncomfortable with closeness and tend to be overly self-reliant and untrusting of others. Anxious attachment creates a negative view of both self and an unrealistically positive view of others. They are fearful of abandonment and rejection because they feel unworthy of love. Those with a fearful attachment style have a negative view of themselves and others. They have difficulty with intimacy and avoid relationships but deeply desire love.

All people, secure or not, have periods of anxious or avoidant symptoms but the secure have healthy coping mechanisms and will seek out loved ones in times of stress. Anxious adults tend to be worried, clingy and needy in close relationships while the avoidant type tends to push others away, isolating themselves in times of stress and in close relationships. Fearful adults experience high levels of anxiety and avoidance, seeking acceptance and self-worth but fear their needs will not be met and are uncomfortable with intimacy in relationships.

The securely attached adult can perceive trustworthiness and express a full range of emotions. Unlike the anxious, avoidant and fearful types, the secure adult seeks and accepts comfort, is free to give and receive love and intimacy. The anxious person's internal message is that they are not worthy of love, the avoidant believes that others are incapable or unavailable to love them and fearful people believe they are neither worth of love nor will others be able to love them.

Anxious adults are preoccupied with love and acceptance but suffer from a constant fear of rejection or abandonment. Craving closeness, they may smother others with attention, trusting too easily and are vulnerable to criticism, which is seen as rejection. They have a deep, controlling fear of being unable to make it on their own and feel they must earn love.

Avoidant attachment develops when a child seeks to connect but parents are unavailable. Believing they are worthy of love, but others are unable to love them, they are untrusting and self-reliant to an extreme. They resist intimacy, preferring isolation to connection and do not feel they need others to survive and thrive. They have difficulty recognizing and identifying the emotions they repress. They withdraw in times of stress, focus on logic and work to prove themselves, maintain a business-like relationship even with family and have unrealistic expectations of others in relationships.

Fearful adults often come from abusive or neglectful backgrounds with very little safety or security. Survival becomes a lifestyle of feeling unworthy of love and unable to trust anyone to love them. Many express dissociative disorders, bipolar disorders, psychosis and borderline personality disorders. Their thinking is distorted, they rarely trust and do not know how to get their needs met. They move through the tendencies of the anxious and the avoidant styles, vacillating between isolation and trust, smothering and distant. They generally have a strong distrust of authority figures, including God. These are fragile people who work to keep their hearts shielded. They feel love and acceptance are unattainable, feeling unloved and unworthy of love. Their desire to connect, lack of self-confidence and self-reliance leaves them isolated and lonely.

Our attachment style is reflected in our relationship with God, but we do not have to remain in our faulty patterns. God is able to help us understand and overcome our deficits and become secure, as He loves us and helps us learn new ways of relating and accepting love. Scripture proves God's loving trustworthiness and His desire for relationship with us. Changing these patterns requires courage, tenacity and honesty. We must face our distorted beliefs, forgive past injuries and face our most deeply buried beliefs, as we recognize the pain and confusion from our early childhood perceptions. "The truth hurts but it is truly the gateway to real change." (pg 77 Clinton, Straub) We no longer need to live in denial and excuses but we grasp onto the very real hope for life change.

It is best to approach this work with at least one other person such as a friend, counselor or pastor, to give us insight, speak the truth and affirm us. We need to develop a support system that reflects a true image of a secure relationship. God's grace can become our security as we grow to "become loved, secure, creative, independent, caring people." (pg 77 Clinton, Straub)

The past affects our present life but it does not have to control us. We can allow God to make the past a part of our story of restored hope and allow Him to bring us healing.

Chapter 6: Meeting God One-on-One: Many of us have felt as though we were merely going through the motions as we

sing in church, our voices sing but our hearts are not invested. We pray but feel our prayers go nowhere. We desire a connection with God and with others that we cannot establish.

Counseling techniques are not enough to change our patterns. We need God's help. He created us with an innate desire to know Him. People will go to great lengths to connect with a higher power, from following a church that promises healing and relationship with God, to study of humanist, new age ideas of self which promotes man as the only higher power. People will try anything that promises "an authentic connection with the God of the universe." (pg 85 Clinton, Straub)

A great deal of research has proven there are both physical and psychological benefits in a relationship with God. He can provide the safe, secure haven we didn't have as children. "Connecting with God is about experiencing Him as a safe haven and a secure base." (pg 88 Clinton, Straub) We can learn to depend on God as our primary attachment figure. This requires an emotional, intimate connection beyond our cognitive belief in God.

In times of distress, people are more likely to seek proximity to God. Scripture promises that we can depend on God to be available and willing to support us as our safe-haven. Research has proven that those who depend upon God as their safe-haven have greater happiness, security, contentment and confidence in facing the future.

A misconception of God leads us to feel abandoned when we feel distant from God. He did not move away from us. In order to determine if God can fulfill the role of an attachment figure, we can complete an exercise regarding our thoughts and feelings. In four columns write Proximity, Safe Haven, Secure Base and Grief/Abandonment. In the Proximity column describe the times when you seek God and when you do not. The Safe Haven column should contain times you felt safe or not along with a rating from one to ten (ten being the safest). In the Secure Base column write how secure you feel in your relationship with God, in good times and in difficult times. In the Grief/Abandonment column discuss when you have felt distant from God and times you have felt abandoned. Rate, on a one-ten scale, how afraid you are that He will abandon you.

As children, our models for attachment may have been poor, so as adults, in times of distress, our true beliefs about God emerge. We often view Him in the same light as we viewed our primary attachment figures. We distance ourselves, blame others, feel unworthy of love and attack instead of feeling affirmation.

Parents do not protect their children from every stress, but teach them to cope with troubles with confidence and security. God allows us to experience pain to draw us to Him as our secure base. As we recognize our inadequacy and

level of need, we must learn to recognize God as our safe haven and our security, because of His grace and love for us.

Chapter 7: When Its Hard to Connect: Troubles reveal our true beliefs about ourselves, our safety and our view of God.

“We need assurance that He is available, attentive and accessible.” (pg 96 Clinton, Straub) We find it difficult to connect with God because He is invisible, we are separated by our sin, and we have faulty perceptions based on our attachment patterns. We view God in much the same way we viewed our parents. The anxious attachment style strives for perfection, dedicating ourselves to study of the Word and pursuit of God through pleasing Him in our good deeds. Ecstatic when we feel close, we are bitterly disappointed when He feels distant. The goal is closeness with God and find love and affirmation but we feel we cannot measure up.

Avoidant people like to keep God at a distance, focusing more on duty than relationship. We appreciate salvation but do not feel we can have an intimate relationship with Him. He is seen as incapable or unwilling to be there for us.

Those with fearful attachment styles feel that any intimate relationship is unsafe and insecure. We desire closeness but tend to be emotionally and relationally isolated. “The painful patterns of attachment certainly shape our perceptions of God in a negative way.” (pg 99 Clinton, Straub)

Connecting with an invisible spirit being is difficult. We cannot see facial expressions or hear a tone of voice. Connection with an invisible God requires faith in what we cannot see, as well as faith that Scripture is true and reveals the nature of God clearly to us.

Our biggest barrier to a close relationship with God is our own selfish, sinful rebellion against Him. We have all sinned, blocking our relationship with a Holy God. We are either selfish or self-righteous, seeking pleasure, power, success or wealth in place of God. The only answer to our sinfulness is “the extravagant grace of God.” (pg 103 Clinton, Straub) Jesus came to take our place in death as atonement for our sins.

Intimacy with God requires that we accept Christ, and His sacrifice, accept His grace, with faith and gratitude. When we are not able to connect with God, we attempt to fill the emptiness with other things. “The great calamity of life is to reach for something or someone other than God to fulfill the deepest longings of our hearts.” (pg 104 Clinton, Straub)

When power, wealth, sex or addictions take first place in our hearts, they become our idols and have a destructive effect on every area of our lives. Anxious people are addicted to approval, avoidant people seek power, success and control while fearful people seek control over their chaotic lives. We focus on ourselves instead of God, filling our lives with our idols.

Our distorted view of God leaves us in need of re-parenting. We need to be forgiven from our sins and we need an authentic relationship with God. We must recognize His love for us and His desire for relationship with us. To show His love, Jesus “stepped out of heaven to give His life for us.” (pg 107 Clinton, Straub) When we reach out for Him, we will discover He is always there for us. He promises never to leave us or forsake us. His love is not earned by our works. Knowing God begins in our cognitive understanding of His character as a true relationship grows in our hearts.

Chapter 8: Exploring Your Seeking System and What Happens When It Goes Awry: When life is not the way we want, we tend to look for any way to ease the pain and fill the emptiness, loneliness and anxiety. Work, career, fame, money, drugs, alcohol and even our good works, begin to consume more of our time, energy and emotions. We become deaf to everything else, particularly God. Our idols draw us away from God, leaving us more empty and unsatisfied than before.

Those who have overcome addictions tend to have one thing in common. When they come to God, they are more motivated, passionate and desirous of an intimate relationship with God than anyone else. Our Seeking System; the longing to know God and His purpose in our lives, is partially a biological chemical reaction. Dopamine neurotransmitters “generate passion, energy, joy, and the drive to seek reward and thrilling adventure.” (pg 115 Clinton, Straub) This is the same chemistry behind romantic love, joy and the desire for exhilaration. Our brain has an innate drive to seek pleasure, reward, joy and connection with another person. MRI’s indicate that Christians have increased levels of dopamine present in their brains. This indicates there is an expectation of receiving both reward and relationship. Intimate physical connection creates oxytocin which promotes connection and bonding. This is part of our brain's reward “circuitry.” (pg 116 Clinton, Straub) Basic chemistry shows the need for increasingly larger doses of any drug, including dopamine, to produce the same effect. Oxytocin reduces this tolerance effect. Dopamine creates the instinctive pleasure of love and attachment while oxytocin make the pleasure last longer. Unfortunately, the idols we use to stimulate dopamine do not produce the offsetting oxytocin, thus creating a greater need for pleasure, reward, and attachment. Our brains are designed for and are only satisfied by a deep, meaningful love attachment.

Addictions eventually become uncontrollable, resulting in denial, rejection of responsibility, blaming others and imbalance in every area of our lives. The need for pleasure and the avoidance of pain, anger, loneliness and anxiety only increases. The Bible warns us repeatedly not to lose heart, not to seek selfish pleasure and our brain chemistry reveals why God warned us so strongly. Apart from God we are lost, without purpose or identity, while our brains and our hearts yearn for the love and intimacy only God can fulfill.

Chapter 9: The Grand Delusion: “Until you understand your own capacity for foolishness and evil, your ability to care for others is extremely limited.” (pg 124 Clinton, Straub) Self-righteousness and superiority are destroyed when we recognize our faulty attitudes and behaviors but we can become more compassionate and understanding when others are imperfect.

Believing we are the only ones worthy of trust during difficulties, it is a struggle to trust God to take care of us. Rigid adherence to a set of religious rules and moral behavior keeps us living as the white washed tombs Jesus described. We may look good on the outside but inside we are dead. Religious bondage “hijacks the circuitry of love.” (pg 125 Clinton, Straub) The desire to be right before God becomes our means of salvation, instead of dependence on God’s grace. Religion isolates us from others, makes us feel superior, judgemental and lack compassion. Rules and regulations replace the truth in much of Christianity.

Our true motivation in initially seeking God is the desire for reward, pleasure and avoidance of pain. We want God on our side to give us the things we desire. Only the Holy Spirit can move us away from selfish motives into a true relationship with God.

The initial passion and romance in a relationship is selfish but the Holy Spirit allows us to grow closer, in an intimate and selfless relationship, creating a desire to serve Him. As we grow closer to Him, we have the pleasure of knowing Him and developing a clearer understanding of His love and grace.

David expressed his desire for God as a deer pants for water and he asks where he could go to meet with God. Moses asked God to show Himself, because he wanted to be in God’s presence and learn from Him.

It is often said that unhappy Christians have driven more people away from God than any atheist argument. We can seek God’s grace, protection and care or we can seek God through our duties and religion, using God as the back-up for our own self-improvement program. We can go through all the motions but we are really not seeking a relationship but success, or reputation. We end up feeling guilty, alone and separated from God. The path of grace is more difficult, requiring brokenness, humility and the sacrifice of our selfish desires. Giving up our selfish life can transform us into loving, forgiving people who are able to build strong relationships and resolve problems with love, compassion and honesty. Religion can become an idol just as addictive and devastating as alcohol or drugs.

A mature spiritual relationship must rid the believer of anything that replaces God in our lives. When our identity is centered in Christ, we can face disappointment and adversity without reward. We can love God simply because He is

God.

Those who understand faith in God realize the reward is not found in happy feelings but in a close relationship with God personally. The sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, gives us the opportunity for an intimate relationship with God in our daily lives. Every society in history has sought connection with the supreme being, until our modern western culture. With the myriad of other philosophies and religions being explored, the most radical belief today is following God. Well-known atheists throughout history have displayed some consistent personal characteristics. They had an absent or defective father inhibiting a belief in a loving, heavenly Father. They were well known for their ambition, arrogance and self-centered behavior. Voltaire, Nietzsche, Freud and Russell, prominent, outspoken atheists, were described as arrogant, intellectual snobs, cold and proud. Placing man in the position of god, atheists have a selfish, self-serving humanist view.

Jesus told a story of two men in debt, one who owed a great deal while the other owed far less. The lender forgave both debts. Jesus asked who would have been the most grateful and loving. The one who owes more and has been forgiven more so they will love more. The pharisee Jesus spoke to was an example of the self-righteous, religious, rule-driven people who have little love in their hearts. They have not experienced the redeeming, transforming love Jesus offers. Only the needy, hurting and broken recognize their need for a Savior. “Empty religion and self-improvement programs can’t provide the emotional connection we long to experience.” (pg 138 Clinton, Straub) We desire to know our loving heavenly Father and nothing else satisfies.

Part III: In Pursuit of Intimacy: Chapter 10: The Risk of Grace: “Brokenness begs for healing.” (pg 138 Clinton, Straub)

We want a God we can relate to, one we can use for our own benefit. We cannot fit God into our desires. Jesus came to earth with a message both comforting and threatening, to bring us life and the chance to know Him intimately. His grace changes everything.

Throughout scripture we are shown the grace God has poured on us. Instead, we choose to harbor our false beliefs that we are good people who just need a little help from God. God created us in His image but we are tarnished by sin. We live our own desires, believing we are in control of our lives, but we desperately need a Savior.

Obedience can replace faith, and self-sufficiency eliminates the need for a Savior, as we seek to earn God’s approval. We feel our obedient behavior earns us favor with God, instead of recognizing our need for a true relationship with God. All of our good deeds become a barrier between us and a true relationship with God. We feel good about our rigid obedience, never recognizing we cannot measure up to His Holiness and our desperate need of His saving grace. The

Pharisee who scorned the tax-collector was missing the point completely. God does not look on us with favor because of our rituals and study, He sees the humility of one like the tax-collector who was repentant and recognized his need for an authentic relationship with God.

Many feel unworthy of God's grace, feeling they are too sinful and evil. Those with fearful or anxious attachment styles often view themselves as such failures that God could never possibly love them. The parental messages of unworthiness, failure and conditional love have shaped our sense of unworthiness. Feeling unworthy of God's forgiveness prevents us from accepting His freely given grace and love.

Separated from God by our sin, our glorious hope is in the truth of God's love. He is our safety and security. We all long for an attachment with the Father who loves and forgives us, regardless of our sins. The Holy Spirit assures our hearts of God's love and grace, even for the fearful, avoidant or anxious. Scripture says we are engraved in the palm of God's hand. He sees us just as we are and loves us completely. Out of His great love for each of us, Jesus chose to sacrifice His own life to redeem us.

“Grace brings freedom, but in the grand paradox of grace, it also make us willing slaves of God.” (pg 146 Clinton, Straub) We obey Him out of our desire to please the One who loves and saves us. His sacrifice and grace for us should spur us toward worship and willing service to Him. Our human inclination is not toward slavery, but true freedom is found only in our complete surrender to God.

We are free and have been adopted into the family of God in spite of our flaws. Human nature tends toward selfishness, self-absorption and feeling entitled. As Christians, we live in the place between who we were and who we will become. We often fall into our old patterns and beliefs but the Holy Spirit is there to convict our hearts when we sin.

The anxious see guilt as proof of failure and possible rejection. The avoidant typically blames others and guilt devastates the fearful who do not fully understand the depth of God's love. Guilt and godly sorrow over sin can draw us closer to God as we confess and repent. The process of reprimand, repentance and restoration creates a stronger bond in our relationship with Christ. God does not excuse or minimize our sin but further proves His love as He reaches out for us, through the guilt, to bring us to the place of restoration.

The less secure we feel, the harder we try to control ourselves, others and our circumstances. “Keeping our clamps on any threats, we are convinced, is the only way we can protect ourselves.” (pg 153 Clinton, Straub) We can release our control as we realize the depths of God's grace and love for us. Control seems to promise safety but actually feeds

distrust, self-absorption and anxiety. Grace allows us to relax in the safety, security and significance in our intimate relationship with the One who can give us peace.

Comprehending grace is a gradual growing process as we face our doubts, take risks and learn to lean on God's love to keep us safe and secure.

Chapter 11: Spiritual Oxygen: When we finally come to the place where we want God as much as a drowning person wants air, we will fully turn to Him. We all turn somewhere when we feel we are running out of oxygen. We look for affirmation, control, power, or money, but these things do not draw us closer to God. They are temporary substitutes for the needs of our eternal soul. The Bible tells us that it is possible to know God and that He is actually reaching out for us because He desires a relationship with us. In Ephesians, Paul prayed that through the Holy Spirit, that people would grasp how deep and long and high and wide the love of Christ is for us. The promise of His love is our great hope.

Having a relationship with God is similar in many ways to every other relationship. As we learn the character and traits of another, we become familiar and move toward closer connection and deeper communication. We begin to build trust and share in the celebrations and troubles, strengthening the bond. Many have different expectations of how a relationship with God works. Some believe it should just magically happen, with no effort, while others believe He should instantly rescue us from all problems. Our faulty beliefs regarding our relationship with God are rooted in our attachment styles. The anxious person may believe bonding should happen instantly, with no effort, they should always feel overjoyed with thoughts of God, they blame themselves for anything that goes wrong and they should never feel anxious about being abandoned by God. The avoidant feels God should immediately solve every trouble, God is to blame for problems, He knows how they feel so they don't need to tell Him, He should be more available to them and they should not expect that God will be there when He is needed. The fearful person may have a combination of many of these ideas.

Relationships with people and with God take time, effort and a willingness to trust. Pursuing a relationship with God will require facing our wounds, warped beliefs and learning new relational skills in order to find hope and healing. Having a traveling companion on this journey helps keep us going, encourages and comforts us while providing an outside, honest perspective.

Resolving our wounds and changing our attachment patterns is a step by step hike through the rough territory of facing our past, learning to relate to people in new ways and allowing God to use our painful experienced to draw us closer to

Him as we learn to be grateful for each lesson we have learned along the way.

This journey follows a logical progression of steps. We first learn to understand our attachment style and how our distrust, self-protection and control has dictated our lives and relationships. The pieces of our life story begin to form a more complete picture of why we act and feel the way we do. We begin to see the motivation behind our behaviors, either pushing people away because we do not feel safe or trying too hard to connect, we have scared them away. We can see where our sense of responsibility is warped by feeling we are responsible for every or we have avoided responsibility for fear they would ask too much of us.

Our ingrained, subconscious perceptions had created an illusion of safety through avoidance or control and our actions made sense to us at the time. By reviewing our life timeline and noting significant patterns and events, we can begin to see how they have affected our relationship with God and with others. Recognizing dysfunctional behaviors helps us make better choices now.

We have probably seen ourselves as victims for much of our lives and the victim role has become our identity. “Victims are inherently demanding and bitter.” (pg 165 Clinton, Straub) We can begin reframing our story and our identity as we see our lives from a new perspective and choosing to see our past in a different light, one that acknowledges our faulty beliefs as a cause for our behavior. We can grieve our losses and wounds, forgive and move forward into more appropriate relational skills.

Anxious, avoidant and fearful people have suffered major losses and are consumed by unrecognized grief. We have minimized, denied and excused our wounds instead of allowing ourselves to grieve. One necessity important to healing is relationship. We were wounded in relationships and we are healed in relationships. We need someone to walk with us, give us perspective, comfort us and rejoice with us. Grieving past wounds may seem an overwhelming prospect, but our gracious God allows us to grieve and process a bit at a time, providing us with comfort and peace as we grieve.

Grieving must include forgiveness in order to move forward in healing. As we grow closer to God, He shares His forgiving love, removes our bitterness and instills compassion in our hearts. Forgiving is often a painful choice. We must learn to place responsibility where it belongs and allow others to make their own choices as we move toward healthy connections, right thinking and changing our misconceptions. Reconciliation does not always follow with forgiveness but the doors are opened for healthy relations.

We live in a culture of instant gratification but transformation takes time as we learn to grieve, forgive and connect

with others. Spiritual growth requires time, reflection, meditation and the practice of spiritual disciplines. We need to be motivated toward pleasing God and growing closer to Him to commit fully to these practices. “Practicing these disciplines helps us live and breathe new life.” (pg 173 Clinton, Straub)

Studying the Word helps us know and understand the truth of God’s grace toward us. Take time to read a section of scripture through at least three times. Then go back and study each paragraph, take notes on the meaning of the passage and how it can be implemented in daily life. Discuss what you are learning with a friend. This helps solidify your thoughts and encourage your faith.

Prayer is a two way conversation with God, sharing your thoughts and taking time to listen and focus on Him. Some people find it very helpful to pray the scriptures. Another important aspect of prayer is confession. As David asked God to search him and know his heart, allow time for the Holy Spirit to remind you of attitudes and actions which are displeasing to God. Confess your failures, repent and ask the Lord to help you correct those things.

Daily, uninterrupted, silent time with God allows us to focus our hearts on Him, recognize His presence in our lives and relax in His love and grace. As we grow closer to God, we will begin to reflect more of His heart of love for others. When we touch the lives of others, we experience a greater sense of His mercy and grace. Just as Jesus pointed out, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

As we practice these spiritual disciplines, keeping our attachment style in mind will help us focus on areas which need improvement. The anxious person must learn to see ourselves as God sees us, learning to connect with Him in a more secure relationship. Avoidant and fearful people must develop a deeper trust that God will always be there for us and truly loves us. As we learn to connect with God, He changes our story, our identity and our motivations, giving us a new ability to give and receive love.

Chapter 12: Spiritual Rehab: Transformation of our beliefs and attachment styles is a process, not an instant cure.

Healing comes as we eliminate our faulty beliefs, draw closer to God and learn to recognize His character and find our place in Him. The process is more like rehab than a quick surgery. Rehab is usually difficult and painful and, at times, we may want to quit. If we continue to pursue our relationship with God, we will begin to see progress, which encourages our hope and builds our faith. Having a companion on this journey helps us overcome insecurity by living and relating in a secure attachment relationship.

Spiritual growth progresses through several stages, from a child-like focus on behavioral rules with some unrealistic

expectations of God, to the practice of spiritual disciplines and finally, a mature relationship in which we can feel secure in God's love and begin to reach out to help others. I John outlines the levels to maturity. We initially seek God for our own pleasure. As we grow, God gives us a clearer view of our own sinfulness, His grace and our need for His love and mercy. We become more joyful in our connection with God and are transformed in His image. Our former pains and obsessions fade as we become less self-centered and more God-centered. Our lives become more devoted to serving Him.

We will go through disappointments and pain but these experiences can strengthen our faith even as our beliefs are challenged and we practice trusting Him. We need the right person to travel this path with us, someone trustworthy, who can walk with us through the difficult times in a safe, secure relationship. The avoidant person must learn to develop trust, while the anxious and fearful need a safe connection, but we all need insight and new perspectives to experience God's healing love. A secure relationship provides a firm foundation that allows exploration of spiritual gifts and caring for others, while providing insights, truth and instills confidence.

Moving from anxious, avoidant or fearful to secure means learning that security comes only in a relationship with our loving God, facing our doubts and shame, recognizing the faultiness of our attachment beliefs and learning to internalize our new understanding of God's love and grace. It is a time of feeling torn between the familiar and the unknown, the need for connection and need to trust God, defeating the message that we are not worthy of love. Instead of gravitating to needy people to satisfy our needs, we can learn to care for others without seeking appreciation or approval.

Growing up with condemnation and isolation, the avoidant believes "I'm ok but you are not." (pg 189 Clinton, Straub) Other people are viewed as untrustworthy and we believe not even God will be there when we need help. We must face our isolation, self-reliance, and fear of failure. We need a friend to speak truth to us instead of pushing away those who lovingly offer insights and correction. Recognizing our true need for God and that He is not only capable, but desires to be there when we need Him. We must learn to recognize all of our feelings, which we have kept buried, and learn to risk involvement with others. As we trust God more fully, we will no longer need to aggressively control ourselves, others and our circumstances. We will grow and heal emotionally and spiritually as we begin to reflect a truer image of Christ's kindness, gentleness and compassion.

A life of abuse, chaos and abandonment places some difficult hurdles in our path of rehab, but as we experience God's healing love we can become the most appreciative and sincere of all. Facing the worst of life circumstances creates the most courageous people, as we overcome the fear of abandonment by God and depend on Him as our secure haven. God

promises to heal the brokenhearted, but we need someone to be the secure arms of Christ, showing the affection God has for us. As we grow in Christ, our mistrust and need for isolation dissolves. Bumps along the way may feel catastrophic but the voice of a trusted friend can lead us to face our fears. We will learn to recognize and identify our feelings, forgive others, and connect in healthy ways. Our feelings are no longer an enemy but an asset as we learn to control impulsive, compulsive behaviors. Our secure relationship with God allows us to be transformed into open, loving people.

God created us to be in relationship and connected with Him and with others. “We simply can’t thrive on our own.” (pg 192 Clinton, Straub) Although Christians are flawed, we can learn to trust a friend, counselor or group committed to authentic relationships. Romans 12:9-13 describes how our relationships should look. “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” (NIV) The New Testament repeatedly stresses the importance of loving, accepting and forgiving one another. The love, acceptance and forgiveness we experience with God will flow from our hearts to others.

We enter spiritual rehab as broken, needy, wounded people but through the growth process we build security in Him, begin to heal and open ourselves to risks and learn to connect in healthy new ways. The healing process brings life, strength and security. As we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are able to reach out to others and the cycle of love and attachment continues through us.

Chapter 13: The Power of Wonder: The Psalmist wrote that the heavens, and all of creation, declares the glory of God. A sense of wonder at His mystery is an essential part of an authentic relationship with Him. When we marvel at His greatness, our faith in Him grows. During our journey to connection, we need to take the time to view His glorious majesty and stand in awe at His creation. “Our amazement at creation gives us a glimpse of the greatness of God, but it leaves us asking some hard questions.” (pg 196 Clinton, Straub) We are awed by the wonder of the entire universe and we still feel empty. Only the wonder of a deeper knowledge of God can truly satisfy the empty place inside that is reserved for God alone. As we marvel at the vastness and intricacies of nature, we can see a Creator who is both powerful and creative yet makes Himself known to us.

Recognizing His infinite power leads us to an understanding of His power to help us when we need Him while He is still concerned with the smallest details of our lives. He can be trusted with our hearts and our lives.

Prophecy foretold the death of Christ and Jesus told His followers to expect His death, but they did not comprehend the significance of His sacrifice for our redemption. God's plan had always been the crucifixion of Jesus who chose to go willingly to the cross. He chose to allow Himself to be tortured and killed in the most horrifying, excruciating manner of execution ever invented by man. This choice to take our place in death should bring a sense of the tremendous grace and love He has for us. The ruler of creation was executed so we could have the opportunity to be in a close relationship with Him. We must never lose the sense of wonder at the dramatic display of grace toward us, the awesome wonder that He reaches out to us, and pursues us, out of His infinite love for us. "The combination of His transcendence and His immanence convinces us that He is a safe haven, a source of security for even anxious, avoidant and disorganized hearts." (pg 206 Clinton, Straub)

The all-powerful creator who set the universe in motion allows us to come boldly to His throne room. He is too holy and glorious for us to look upon His face but He is loving enough that He reaches out for connection, making Himself available to His weak, flawed creation. The closer we grow to God, the more our relationship deepens and fills our hearts with His love, our desires change, our fears are banished and we find security and a safe haven in Him. Coming to fully trust God is a process and a challenge that requires risking our hearts and stepping forward, in faith.

When we recognize we are untrusting and are stuck in patterns of self-protection, we can begin to fight the messages we have learned and develop our trust. We may not understand what God is doing or why, but we can be sure that His love for us is leading us in the direction He desires. Spiritual maturity comes as we struggle with hurts and disappointments and begin to fully rely and trust God. Our doubts are replaced with faith as we continue replacing faulty perceptions with God's truth and we experience His unfailing love for us.

Chapter 14: Your Life Counts: The journey of attachment to God takes courage to face our wounds and faith that God is beside us. Our human nature seeks to fill our needs with approval, control and material things to make us happy. Our longing for comfort is unmet, we are empty, alone and self-destructive.

Choosing anything over God is sin, yet we have run after money, romance, drugs or material things. Jesus calls us to follow after Him, in every area of our lives. His love is unconditional and our response to that love should be willing obedience. Obedience out of love and gratitude are sure signs of spiritual maturity.

We discover more about God and begin to truly appreciate His love and grace as we connect more deeply in our relationship with Him. We will face times of trial as God prunes our hearts. Every event in our lives, our sorrows and

joys, are important to God and He reaches out to draw us closer to Him. We can turn to Him in our loneliness, confusion and suffering because He is there to hold our hand when we choose to cling to Him. Christ's sacrifice was a model for our courage to follow God in hard times and remain strong in our faith. We can cling to His Word, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39 NIV)

Jesus calls us to commitment in following Him, denial of self and obedience to Him. Suffering comes in every life, but we can turn to Jesus for our strength and hold tightly to Him in every circumstance. In this relationship, God opens our hearts, heals our wounds and fills us with His love in such abundance that it will overflow to all those around us. We will want to share His love and allow His grace to flow through us in obedience and love for others. God has gifted each of us with talents and abilities that are to be used to bring Him glory.

In our quest for God, we must face our faulty preconceptions, deepest fears, and our damaged hearts as we allow Him to heal us. Through painful self-examination, we see ourselves more clearly and recognize our need for God. We confess our failures and worship His glory while we come to know Him in an intimate, personal relationship of trust and security. We find the security to put aside our doubts and resistance rooted in distorted childhood attachment patterns as we depend on our Savior and friend to provide love and protection. He is reaching out to us, calling us to relationship with Him and we must respond. He knows us completely, in our fears and flaws, and loves us unconditionally. He is holding out His hand in invitation to join Him in a true loving relationship. "The choice has been and will always be simply ours to make. God will do His part if we will do ours." (pg 225 Clinton, Straub)

Summary: This is an excellent book with a great deal of helpful information that applies to nearly all of us. Identification of the attachment style of a client will be extremely helpful in treating relationship issues, as well as aiding in spiritual growth. I recommend it greatly to counselors and clients, as well. I believe this book will assist every reader. I will use this book as a resource and assign it as homework for clients. Each chapter has a short homework section as well as an online video which reinforces the message of the chapter. These are helpful tools which encourages the reader to delve into the chapter more deeply.