

Catherine Cherry M.Ed. M.A., February 2, 2015

“Darkness into Light - Attaching in Love”

I am honoured to be here to pray and to share with you today.
Thank you for having invited me.

You have asked me to share about:
“looking for the signs of hope, of inspiration, in an otherwise dark time,” so the title of my sermon today is:

“Darkness into Light - Attaching in Love”.

I will talk about relationships as they move from darkness into light.

First I must clarify:

1. Love is not just a feeling. Love is about a deep level connection. Love is an attachment bond.
2. Note that in talking about God, I am not talking about faith or belief. I am talking about an alive and vibrant interpersonal relationship with God.

Thus we will be looking at:

- God’s constant call,
- examine spiritual darkness and human darkness;
- expand on how the journey of darkness into light can be explained by Attachment Theory.
- see how this movement takes place in couple therapy, as well as in our relationship with God.
- Throughout I will parallel the developments within these relationships to the scripture passages.

So let us begin.

It is important to remember the key in the darkness - God’s constant presence and desire for relationship.

The Sufi mystic, Rumi, wrote:

“To every call, God responds 100 times in every moment, “I am here.”
God is here, even in the darkness.

Yet let us look at the darkness in these dark cold days of winter.

We can consider **Spiritual Darkness**

- the cold dark days of one's heart
- life experience
- lack of seeing the light
- lack of hope
- the darkness resulting from sin - all our refusals of love, so that we are unable to love, we inhibit our ability to act in a loving way. Yes, this is an interesting way to view sin: When we refuse God's love, we close ourselves down such that we are unable, or less able, to love.

In this vein, the sin of the world, the evil in the world, is the sum of the all the no's to love.

We can consider **Human Darkness**

- the dark despair within hearts without hope
 - discouragement
 - a loss of creativity, of vision - loneliness
 - the depths of grief
- This darkness about which I am to speak, is the darkness of marital discord - that time when the ongoing life with a partner looks bleak, dark, and depressing.

I chose Dt. 28: 24 - 34 because metaphorically it expresses the feelings of those in this state of distress.

- *“You will grope about at noon as blind people grope about in darkness.”*
- *“You will be unable to find your way ...”*
- *“You will be continually abused, robbed, without anyone to help.”*
- *“ You shall become engaged to a woman, but another man will lie with her.”*
- *“You will plant a vineyard, but not enjoy it's fruit.”*
- *“(you) will be powerless to do anything.”*

- *“ ... abused, crushed, ... and driven mad ...”*

Such hard words.

Those in **marital distress** feel like the psalmist describes in Ps. 82.5:

*“They have neither knowledge nor understanding.
They walk around in darkness
All the foundations of the earth are shaking.”*

These readings exemplify through metaphor or concrete words, the sufferings of couples in relationships that are in difficulty.

Where is the hope? Where is the light in the darkness?

To answer these questions I am going to turn to William Bowlby, and Sue Johnson,(whom I love to quote).

Bowlby was a researcher who studied mothers and their young children.

He discovered four main patterns of relating: When their mother left the room the infants could be:

(Sue Johnson found parallel patterns in couples)

1. **Securely attached**

Child: Could express some upset, could signal Mother, be comforted, & return to play.

Couple: *Secure relationship - positive sense of self, can be close and be different, comfortable interdependency.*

2. **Anxiously attached**

Child: Extremely distressed, lacked confidence in Mother's return, clung to or expressed anger to the Mother on reunion.

Couple: *The individual in the couple pursues and acts clingy or angry, even uses aggressive attempts to control or to obtain a response from the loved one.*

3. **Avoidently attached**

Child: Showed signs of significant psychological distress, but showed very little emotion at separation or reunion; remained focused on tasks and activities.

Couple: Avoidant withdrawal - the individual in the couple withdraws as an attempt to contain the interaction and regulate fears of rejection and confirmation of fears about the unlovable nature of the self.

4. Disorganized

Child: Infants who expressed the symptoms of disorganized attachment experienced pain because their parents are both the source of, and the solution to, fear.

Couple: Fearful avoidant - seeks closeness followed by fearful avoidance of the closeness.

These patterns of coping with our primary attachment figures influence us the rest of our lives. We continue to play them out in our couple relationships and in our relationship with God

Dr. Sue Johnson is a psychologist working at the University of Ottawa who started “Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy, or EFT”.

In her research she discovered that “Seeking and maintaining contact with others is an innate, primary motivating principle in human beings across the life span. Attachment and the emotions associated with it are the core defining features of close relationships.”

(And I would add, in both human relationships and in our relationship with God.)

“The fear of isolation and loss is found in every heart.”

Spiritually, in the 4th century, Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless, Lord, until they rest in you.”

Attachment provides a **safe haven**. Contact with attachment figures is an innate survival mechanism. Their presence provides comfort and security, while the inaccessibility creates distress.

Can you see where I am going with couples and as regards a relationship with God?

Couples who are inaccessible, inattentive to each other, and end up in distress - in the darkness.

Individuals who do not have a sense of God as a safe haven also experience distress and darkness.

Attachment offers a **secure base**. The presence of such a secure base encourages exploration and an openness to new information.

Can you see where I am going with couples and as regards a relationship with God?

Individuals in a Couple who are not a secure base for each other block new information by not attending to the experience and feelings of the other. They lack a sense of felt security and have greater struggles with stress and conflict.

Individuals who do not experience God as a secure base find openness and new ideas stressful, and so tend to fundamentalism and conflict.

The building blocks of secure bonds are:

emotional accessibility and responsiveness.

Thus emotional accessibility and responsiveness are necessary for couples and for any deeply connected attachment between individuals, or between individuals and God.

This explains the need for prayer, for quiet time, for listening to God. How else are we to have a secure bond with God unless we are emotionally accessible and responsive? This is a relationship. Just like couples, we need to spend time with God, and respond to Him.

Otherwise we live in the darkness.

Concretely, how do therapists trained in Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) help **couples** move into the light?

Well, very simply put, therapists help them:

- become aware of their patterns of relating, their cycle

- move beyond the angry pursuit and protective withdrawal and get in touch with their deeper feelings of hurt, abandonment, inadequacy, etc.
- speak to each other from this deeper place and express these feelings, their attachment needs, their needs for connection
- this leads to an emotional engagement and bonding, a deeper and more **solid attachment**
- From this **secure base** and **safe haven**, the two involved solve the issues they had struggled with when they arrived.

Our couples have grown in love. They have moved into the light!

Paraphrasing Is. 42:7

“The captives are free, the blind see, and those who lived in darkness are freed from the dungeon.”

We can go through a **similar pattern with God** in a move from darkness to light.

- It is helpful to become aware of our pattern of relating
 - our movements towards God - attaching to him;
 - and our movements away from God, withdrawing, distancing.
- it helps to be very authentic and speak to God about our deep feelings and our longing to be close and attached.
- since this is a relationship, it is important to listen to God, and God’s desire for a relationship with us
- this leads to an emotional engagement and bonding, a deeper and more solid attachment
- God becomes our **secure base** and **safe haven**.

Isn’t that wonderful! In our love relationship with God we have moved from darkness into the light.

You have asked me to share about:

“looking for the signs of hope, of inspiration, in an otherwise dark time.”

That I have done.

We looked at:

- God’s constant call,
- we examined spiritual darkness and human darkness;
- expanded on how the journey of darkness into light can be explained by Attachment Theory.
- we have seen how this movement takes place in couple therapy, as well as in our relationship with God.
- and noted the parallel between the developments within these relationships to the scripture passages.

Thus we have seen how

Attaching in Love turns Darkness into Light