The 3 As: Attention, Affection and Affirmation

Wise people have observed that we all have legitimate, God-given needs for "the 3 As": attention, affection and affirmation. God intends for children to receive them from their parents first, laying a foundation of a healthy sense of self, then from their peers.

The Attention need is met by being there, listening, watching, engaging and interacting. Ever hear the famous line, "Daddy, watch me!"? One wise father told another whose daughter kept clamoring for him to look at her as she played in the back yard, "If you don't watch her now, soon she'll look for another guy to give her the attention she wants from YOU."

The Affection need is met both physically and verbally. We all need hugs and safe touch. And most boys need the rough-housing kind of physical affection from their dads that says, "You belong in the world of males." We need to hear the verbal affection of "I love you," terms of endearment, and other forms of communicating love.

The Affirmation need is met by validating people's feelings, efforts, skills and gifting. Noticing and commenting when they do things right—or even try. It communicates, "I am for you" and "I believe in you."

Jesus received the Three As at His baptism. His Father and the Spirit showed up [attention], and the Father pronounced, "This is My beloved Son [affection] in whom I am well pleased [affirmation]" (Matthew 3:17).

Much unhealthy, dysfunctional behavior is driven by trying to get these three needs met, usually without realizing what is driving us. Unfortunately, it's getting harder than ever to get these needs met because of two things proliferating in our

culture.

First, families seem to be growing more fractured and more dysfunctional than ever before. Fatherlessness is at epidemic stage. The National Fatherhood Initiative cites the U.S. Census Bureau's statistic that one out of three American children live in homes without their biological father.{1} Parents in the home are often stressed, overwhelmed, and so self-focused, whether on selfishness or mere survival, that many children feel like they are on their own. Plus, the people God intends to fill their children's emotional tanks with attention, affection and affirmation—parents—are often scrambling to try to get their OWN tanks filled. So there is a sense of disconnection at home.

Second, smartphone technology has moved into the hands—and heads—of the majority of Americans. Over half of adults own smartphones, and a recent report from the Pew Research Center revealed that 78% of young people ages 12-17 now have cell phones, and nearly half of those are smartphones.{2} That means continual connection to the internet. That means billions of text messages daily, which have virtually replaced phone calls for many people, especially youth.{3} The camera on most people's cell phone means that many people view life's experiences, from wedding processions to grade school concerts to street fights, through a 3-to-4-inch screen held away from the body.

In short, we're doing life through a screen.

And that screen is an additional layer of disconnection between people. Technology has created a superficial degree of counterfeit connection, and relationships are suffering. People think they're connected to other people through their phones, but in reality they're connected to their phones and a counterfeit kind of "life."

God knew what He was doing when He stressed the importance of

staying in connection, continually engaging with each other: I count 41 “one anothers” in scripture.{4} He knew what He was doing when He instructed believers to make sure and keep meeting together to encourage one another (Heb. 10:24).

God put needs for the Three A’s inside us, and He intends for us to meet them through connection to other people. Please, hug somebody. Tell them they’re important and valuable. Be there for them.

And you might want to put down your phone.

Notes

1. www.fatherhood.org/media/consequences-of-father-absence-statistics Accessed 09/10/13.
2. www.pewinternet.org/Media-Mentions/2013/More-youth-use-smartphones-as-route-to-Web.aspx Accessed 09/10/13.
3. www.businessinsider.com/chart-of-the-day-number-of-texts-sent-2013-3 Accessed 09/10/13.
4. www.mecf.net/one_anothers.html Accessed 09/10/13.

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Romantic Hyperbole: A

Humorous Look at Honesty in Love

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

It would be a great way to express my enduring affection for my wife. I would find seven romantic birthday cards and give one to Meg each day for a week, starting on her birthday. It would continue a sweet tradition begun before we married.

Each card would have a simple picture that would tenderly convey our feelings for one another. Inside would be an endearing slogan or affirmation to which I would add a personal expression of my love for her.

I didn’t foresee that Day Three would bring an ethical dilemma.

I carefully selected the cards and arranged them in an appropriate sequence. Day One showed a cute puppy with a pink rose. Inside: “You’re the one I love.”

Day Two featured a picture of a little boy and girl in a meadow with their arms over each other’s shoulders. The slogan: “Happy Birthday to my favorite playmate.”

Day Three depicted a beautiful tropical sunset: bluish pink sky, vast ocean, silhouetted palm trees. You could almost feel the balmy breeze. Inside: “Paradise is anywhere with you”, to which I added personal mention of places holding special memories for us: an island vacation spot, a North Carolina hotel, our home.

I completed the remaining cards, dated the envelopes, and planned to bestow one card each morning of her birth week. Then reality happened.

You see, I had agreed to go camping with her for Days One and

Two. Camping is something Meg thrives on—outdoor living, clean air, hiking, camp fires. It's in her blood. Camping is something I did in Boy Scouts—dust, mosquitoes, noisy campers, smelly latrines. It ranks just below root canals on my list of favorites.

We camped at a state park only fifteen minutes from our home. On her birthday morning, she liked the fluffy puppy. Day Two, the cute kids made her smile. So far, so good.

Meanwhile, I was tolerating camping, doing my best to keep my attitude positive. The food was OK; the bugs were scarce. After two days, I was ready to go home as planned. Meg wanted to stay an extra day. We each got our wish.

Once home and alone, I pulled out Meg's card for "Day Three," the one with the tropical sunset and the "paradise is anywhere with you" slogan.

Should I give her the card? I had chosen to leave the campground. "But," I reasoned with myself, "the slogan was true lots of the time."

I settled on a compromise, a post-it note on the envelope explaining, "You may find that this card contains just a bit of romantic hyperbole."

Might giving it a clever-sounding label defuse my hypocrisy?

The echoes of her laughter still reverberate through our home. I got off easy.

"Speak the truth to each other," wrote a Jewish sage. "Speak. . . . the truth in love," advocated a first-century biblical writer. Wise advice for just about any relationship.

"Romantic hyperbole" has become a humorous gauge of truthfulness in our relationship, a test for honesty. Neither of us enjoys every location on earth. She feels some sporting events are a waste of time. I can get bored at shopping malls.

But as long as we are honest with each other about our feelings, the bond seems to grow stronger.

That’s no hyperbole.

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