

Who am I?

How our identity is formed

	security belonging	self-worth value	significance function
parent-child relationships	1 st year 'I am what I belong to'	2 nd year 'I am what is valued in me'	3 rd -5 th years 'I am what I can do'
	touch	discipline	development

We all need to know who we are. We need an identity. The word 'identity' means 'repeatedly' so our identity is 'what is always there', 'what keeps coming through' so we could say it is 'who we really are.' The key factor in the formation of our identity is our relationship with our parents. The first five years of our lives are vital – that is when the concrete is still wet!

Security

A sense of belonging is communicated primarily through a mother's touch. That belonging gives security. Many years ago in an orphanage for babies it was discovered that the mortality rate was higher than in society at large. It was suggested that many of these babies were literally dying of lack of love so older ladies were hired to come in and cuddle these little ones. The mortality rate dropped. In that first year the child learns that he is accepted unconditionally - there are no issues of right and wrong or performance. That lays the foundation of our security.

Self-worth

This is formed within us by discipline. When a parent disciplines a child, that parent is saying, 'You are worth something. The way you are behaving is not consistent with who you really are so I will hold you to something better.' That gives value.

Significance

We can all do at least one thing really well and it is the responsibility of parents to help the child to discover it. Each child is different and must be encouraged to be so – and that includes different from the parents!

when these are lacking	security belonging	self-worth value	significance function
loss of identity	anxiety	anxiety	anxiety
seen in concern over	appearance	status	performance

If we put significance before security we will:

- a. Always measure our worth by how well we perform.
 - b. Assume that our acceptance by others is dependent on how well we perform.
 - c. Shield from others who we really are and how we feel about ourselves and instead present our achievements and abilities as our point of connection.
 - d. Lose the ability to be still and quiet within ourselves and to let who we are be what we give to others. ‘To be idle requires a strong sense of personal identity.’ (Robert Stevenson)
- Sadly, many marriages break up when the children leave home because the couple have been united in a task rather than in a heart relationship.

If we put self-worth before security

Self-worth is built into our lives when a parent loves us enough to discipline us. Someone believes in us. If security doesn’t come first, then we will instinctively try and compensate for that lack by an undue focus on what we feel will give us value. Rather than seeing discipline as love we will see it as a threat - an attempt by someone to take something from us. An insecure person feels that they are defending a vacuum. They always fear being exposed, found out. They fear discovering themselves. Every step forward in understanding contains a potential threat.

	security	self-worth	significance
negative identity	<i>defensiveness</i> <i>hostility</i>	<i>defensiveness</i> <i>guilt</i>	<i>defensiveness</i> <i>fear of inadequacy</i>
completed identity through spiritual integration	love Father	love Son	love Spirit

Deficiencies in our basic needs

The extent to which there is a lack in any of these three needs leads to a ‘negative identity’. Where there should be something ‘solid’ there is a vacuum and in this vacuum anxiety flourishes.

This anxiety expresses itself in a number of ways but particularly links with the specific lack. For example, we all want to belong so the clothes we wear and the way we look become a means of identifying with a particular group. That is natural but the concern becomes excessive according to the levels of insecurity. The anxiety that results from the lack of self-worth will express itself in relation to a position or role that we feel would give us value. If we never had significance built into our lives we can be unduly anxious about how well we perform in a given situation.

None of us can live comfortably with a negative view of ourselves so we cover it with defensiveness. Hostility, guilt and a fear of inadequacy sit beneath the surface.

God’s Big Second Chance

Whatever has happened in our natural family, when we are born anew into God’s family we have the opportunity for any missing ingredients to be built into our lives. When church operates with relationships at its centre then we discover:

- We are secure in God's love because we belong in his family.
- Jesus loves us so much that he gave his life for us but loves us too much to let us stay as we are
- We each have been equipped with a gift from the Spirit to serve one another – something we are good at!

Finding our way back

If we think of the three sections (security, self-worth and significance) as three rooms that we pass through in the early stages of our journey in life then it is helpful to think of our journey back to the heart of God as being a travelling back through those rooms. In the heart of God we find complete acceptance of who we are. We are loved just as we are. Because we live in a world in which these values are reversed we often start by looking for self-worth or security in the significance room. It is fine being put to work when you join a church – provided it goes further than that or else we will quickly think that acceptance and value is linked to how well we perform.



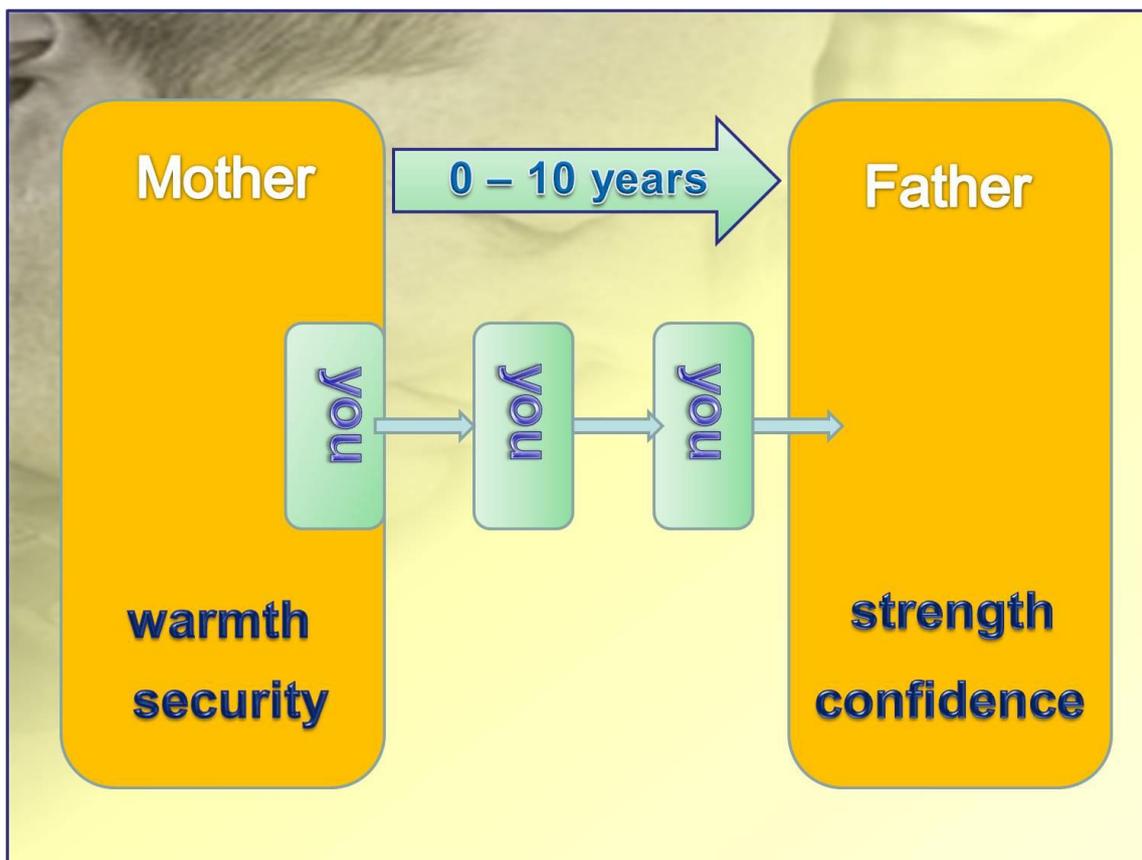
We may pass through the significance room into the self-worth room – and therefore feel the need to put our emphasis on the role we have (status). That can lead to real struggles in relationships. Our quest is to come to that place in God where we know we are loved for just being here. Once we are in that place, and know that we are loved and accepted regardless of role or function, we can live comfortably in all three rooms and from there reach out and offer others that unconditional acceptance, guidance and opportunity to serve the Lord.



From birth to puberty the child is in the process of being separated from its mother. Although both parents clearly have a major role to play in the upbringing of a child from the earliest age there is, nonetheless, a pattern of separation from the mother – to the father. How the father responds at that point of separation will prove to be one of the single most powerful influences in that child's emotional development.

If there is no father or strong male figure to give strength and confidence the child steps into a vacuum and will spend the rest of his or her life looking for such a relationship.

It is the father's task to affirm his son into manhood and his daughter into womanhood. Failure to do so leaves the young man or woman potentially vulnerable to unhealthy relationships. As the teenager grows into adulthood, that lack of affirmation can lead to uncertainty and confusion in relating to both men and women.



At the heart of this affirmation is a father's ability to let his child know that he or she is 'alright' – deeply 'alright'. It is an affirmation that who the child is - is enough!

Mothers – let your son and daughter go! Point them in the direction of their father.

Fathers – don't take the easy route and 'leave it to mother to sort out'.

Has the young bridegroom really left 'father and mother' so he can 'cleave' to his wife?

Can the wife really trust her husband to only want her best interests?

If a husband has not left his mother behind then his wife can unwittingly step into the 'mother' role.

If a daughter has not formed a good in-depth relationship with her father then she may struggle to leave mother behind if she steps into marriage – and she may well look to her husband to make up what was missing in her relationship with her father – including the need for discipline!

Any of our relationships can be influenced by this lack of affirmation and we can unwittingly demand affirmation from our friends or other significant people in our lives.

Affirming his child into adulthood is one of the most valuable gifts a father can give. Where it is lacking, God, as our Heavenly Father, can bring that affirmation into our lives by his Spirit, through his people.