

I know that "Father's Day" is looming this month, but my today's thoughts have nothing to do with that day, or why we celebrate it. There have been recent life events, conversations, and even sermons that have made me think more on this topic, so I have taken it as a sign that perhaps I have a few things to say on the matter.

I guess the best place to start is with my own father. I never knew his parents since they died before I was born. I can tell you my dad grew up poor, and was the baby of a large family, mostly sisters. He had one brother who also died before I was born. From the little bit I have been told, my father was popular in high school, playing basketball and football. I believe he was the captain of his football team. He taught himself how to play the guitar and liked to play and sing for his friends when they would hang out on the hillside behind his small, humble home.

He had a high school sweetheart, and everyone expected them to marry. All these years I thought they were not allowed to marry because of his being poor. I learned recently that it was due to their differences in religious upbringing. His family were Baptists, and her family followed another denomination that did not agree with Baptist teachings. I didn't really know much about religion growing up, so the division over his being poor was easier to relate to.

Out of high school and unable to marry his girl, my dad joined the United States Coast Guard. He found himself stationed in the Oakland/San Francisco area where he would meet my mother, whom by the way, bore a striking resemblance to his 'girl' from high school. Mom got pregnant with my oldest brother, and so they were married. Yes, in that order. Not long after, came my sister, my other brother, and then me. We didn't know it until after our mother died, but she had a baby before meeting my father. We assumed she was forced to give the baby up for adoption due to a strict Catholic upbringing. You can read more about that story on this website by clicking on "A Family Secret" under the Publications tab>Personal and Family.

Anyway, long story, short...from my perspective, my life was hell. My older siblings never understood how I could not remember any 'good times', but all I can remember is the fighting, the yelling and screaming, the three- and four-day benders when my dad would disappear and then show up stinking drunk. Of course, my mom was so steaming mad by then, rather than let him go sleep it off, she would lay into him, making the situation much worse. I saw my father hit my mom, and even tried to break her arm once. I was in the third grade.

Just like asking the question, "Which came first, the egg or the chicken?", I don't know which happened first with my parents...Did my dad start drinking, etc., so my mom let herself go, or was my mom a depressed mess and let herself go, causing my dad to drink? All I know is that my home was a miserable place to be. When I was in the fifth grade, apparently my dad went back home to visit family, and it was during that visit when he had an affair with his high school sweetheart. Of course, all these details came later, but the affair resulted in my having another half-brother, with whom I am in touch today. Later, when I was about thirteen, my parents divorced and my dad ended up marrying his girl from high school, acquiring a new replacement family where he was able to live a brand-new life. The life he had always wanted, I imagine.

If you were to compare my life story with my now younger brother's story, they are the complete opposite. I can tell you, however, that the sins of my father have affected my brother's life, and he bears the scars as well. I remember constant strife and anger, where my younger brother knew the best part of my dad. He received the love and attention that I had longed for my whole life. I felt totally abandoned. Unfortunately, my dad died young, at forty-seven years old. My new brother's happy life with my dad was cut short as well. What is perhaps even sadder than my feeling abandoned, is that my dad and his wife never told my younger brother that he was my dad's son. They never gave him a chance to know this, for whatever reason. That reality left a gaping hole for my brother to deal with at the time, and perhaps he still does.

I am not sharing this brief history of my father's life to get even with him, nor am I trying to bring shame to anyone in my family, living or dead. My point to all of this is simply to say that the choices we make affect so many people, in unfathomable ways. Our life decisions may appear to affect only ourselves, but it goes so much deeper than that.

A recent sermon at church hit home for me on this topic. The pastor shared how "Our faithfulness protects me and my family from failure." A father's role, by God's standards, is to protect, provide for, and to lead his family to know God and to follow his commands. I think most would agree that most families in church today are there because the mom is making sure of it...Not the father. If the father fails to be faithful, he is opening the door for the 'enemy' to enter his home and is literally putting himself and his family in danger. I know this to be true firsthand.

The scriptures also mention how the 'sins of the father' can carry on to the third and the fourth generations. Numbers 14:18 says, "The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations." Similar verses are found in Exodus 20:5, Exodus 34:7, and Deuteronomy 5:9.

So here I am. By my calculations, assuming 'my father's sins' are the starting point, I am the grandmother to the fourth generation of my father's life choices. When I think of the pain and suffering that has been endured by myself, my brothers and sister, and then the pain laid upon our children, and even my grandchildren, I am left speechless. It has to come to an end, doesn't it?

I love my family. We all have stuff... and we all know pain, only too well. I share these thoughts to express my hope for a brighter future for my grandsons, and for the grandchildren to come, if it be God's will. Do I dare hope that their children will have a more peaceful existence? Will they follow God and teach their children His statutes? This is my prayer. If Jesus doesn't tarry, I pray that my great-grandchildren will be the hope for a brighter tomorrow.

Blessings,

Lisa Jo

