

## *Hippies, Fathers, & War*

Late in the summer of 1969, I reached out my thumb hopefully beside a shady two-lane road in the redwood country of Northern California. My VW bug had died months before, and--as was commonly done in that more innocent age--I was hitchhiking home from visiting a friend in San Francisco. Every sedan that passed me up earned a muttered curse, as I waited and hoped for an old VW bus—the preferred ride and sure bet to stop.

A history lesson here for younger readers: The hippies were the sons of the World War II warriors. The Viet Nam War was then raging, and my father was a retired Navy officer. Like so many of my peers, I confused respect with fear, and couldn't talk directly to my parents about any inner pain. So I resorted to a passive-aggressive response. "Bring the war home; kill your parents," was the mantra of the day.

Like everything else in the old days, rebellion then was simple. You didn't have to drill holes in your nose, ears, tongue and lips, or burn tattoos into your skin. All you had to do to alienate the older generation and thereby distinguish yourself, was to avoid a haircut. At Duke University in 1960, the Dean of Students called out and reprimanded the guy next to me in freshman English class, for having hair that touched the top of his ear.

I was smart enough to realize that—bold and hip as it looked--a half-inch of hair wasn't worth sabotaging my education and future. But I didn't need a college education to know later how to "get back at the Establishment" with the least cost. My parents lived on the East Coast in an all-white community, so I ran to California and rented in an African-American neighborhood. Dad was in the military, so I dodged the draft and joined peace marches. He drove a Chevy, so I puttered in my VW bug. He ate Wheaties, I ate granola; he had short military hair, mine hung down to my shoulders; he lived in suburbia; I preferred whichever commune had a spare couch.

Meanwhile, back in the Redwoods, a long white Cadillac passed, and to my surprise, pulled over and crunched to a stop. Caught mid-mutter, I thought better of my curses and ran up to the car. Peering into the passenger window, I was shocked to see a gray-haired man complete with ponytail, tie-dye T-shirt and bellbottom jeans! Unsettled but grateful, I hopped in. Before long, we were laughing and trading radical political views. After some miles, my benefactor paused. "Say, my wife should have dinner on by now," he exclaimed. "Want to come up to our place and crash for the night?"

Having no other pressing plans, I shrugged. "Sure."

Hours later, as we sat organically-fed and chatting cross-legged on the floor of his A-frame cabin, my new friend lit up a joint and offered it to me. My body has never tolerated mood-altering substances well—one beer and I slide off the stool—so I declined politely. At that, my host's eyes misted.

"I...I'm sorry," he managed. "This is so sad. I can't help it—I just have to tell you that you remind me of my son.

"Really?" I offered. "Why does that make you sad?"

"Well, he's been such a disappointment to me."

I hesitated, wondering what sort of dastardly deed this young man might have committed to prompt such grief in his father. Did he rob a bank? Kill someone? "Why...I mean, like, what did he do?" Uneasily, I held my breath.

My host took a hasty drag on his joint, lowered his eyes and murmured, “He joined the Navy.”

Today, 33 years later, I stand at a California Motor Vehicles Department counter. “Hair: Blond, Height: 5’ 10”, Weight: 160.” The License Renewal clerk recites the data off my soon-to-expire driver’s license, then looks up, hands paused expectantly above her keyboard. “Is there anything there you’d like to change?”

“Well,” I laugh, “I’d like to drop a few pounds, but otherwise that’s the way God made me, so I’ll stick with it for now!” Chuckling later in my car, I adjust the rear-view mirror--and an advancing attack of gray hair forces me to think again. In a strange irony, I recall Bob Dylan’s old 60’s anthem of rebellion, “The Times, They Are A-Changin’.”

Biblically, history is the theater of God’s revelation. But for those of us who over thirty years ago warned, “Don’t trust anyone over 30,” history becomes an intrusion. Indeed, a simple glance in the mirror now warns us that the times have a-changed dramatically. Men who have dared to look instead into their hearts, however, have seen reflected there the genuine, timeless longing in a boy for his father--and can therefore spot the historical distortions of that pain which have come from denying it.

It’s time now to tell the truth. A young man’s effort to kill his father only leads him to hate his own manhood. Worse, it destroys the generation after him. As one 80-plus-year-old brother declared at one of my men’s conferences, “Whatever you don’t forgive your father for, you’ll do to your son.” Honor your father, as the Commandment promises, and you’ll endure in your destiny (Ex. 20:12).

In the 1960’s, God was speaking to a world tired of war, calling for a generation of spiritual warriors to overcome such strongholds as racism, sexism, materialism, and shame-based religion. But instead of confessing honestly “I need you, Daddy,” my generation masked our pain and anger behind righteous political principles and loosed a man-hating spirit upon the land. The awful legacy of that cowardice is the politically-correct value system, in which ideology has replaced relationship. We lost our war because we lost the boy—and with him, our hearts and the ability to be real. And so, we abdicated our occasion to be real men.

As “flower children,” my generation tried to escape adult restraint and recapture the innocence of childhood. But without Jesus, we couldn’t overcome our sin nature and access the true Father all men long for (John 14:1-14). In fact, we could only degenerate into the very insensitivity we sought to overcome in the older men—numbing ourselves with drugs, alienating with casual sex, and cursing those who differed from us.

Today, men may become Christians and join churches. But too often, we have merely exchanged politically-correct ideology for an equally lethal religiously-correct theology--striving to measure up to biblical principles, Christian standards of manhood, marks of a “spiritual champion.” We’ve all abandoned the little boy. His desperate cry in the wilderness terrifies men who don’t trust any Father to respond (see Ps. 27:10).

Old hitchhikers know that something good is always on the way. You’ll get there if you step out. And so even now, Jesus calls, “Let the little boy come unto me, and do not stop him--for to such as these belong the Kingdom of God” (see Mark 10:14-16).