

Haleluia! It's a Girl!

Healing the Father-Wound in Women

by Gordon Dalbey

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For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded. I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? (Jeremiah 8:18-22 RSV)

"It's not the mother who calls forth a daughter's femininity and makes her feel good about being a girl."

My wife Mary, a psychologist, spoke matter-of-factly—and left me puzzled. A church had invited the two of us to speak at a healing conference for men and women. "No problem," I assured the organizer. "Mary will speak on 'Mothers and Daughters' and I'll speak on 'Fathers and Sons.' That covers the whole picture!"

Listening now to Mary, I wasn't so sure. "Well, then, who *does* make a girl feel good about being feminine?" I asked her, confused. "The grandmother? The sister?"

DAD'S AFFIRMATION

Mary smiled graciously and shook her head. "When I was a little girl," she explained, "my mother would sew me really nice dresses. When she would first try it on me in front of the mirror, she'd brighten up and say, 'What a beautiful little girl!'"

"We'd both hesitate, then I'd say excitedly—almost on cue—'Let's find out!' That meant: 'Wait 'til Daddy gets home.' When Dad came home later from work, after dinner Mom would nod to me and say to him, 'Mary has a surprise for you!'"

"I'd race excitedly into my room, put on my new dress, and come dancing out into the living room. 'Oh, what a beautiful little girl!' Daddy would exclaim, beaming at me. And in that moment, I knew at last that it was true."

Significantly, Mary's father affirmed not only her appearance, but also her competence. As a high school graduation present, he gave her a typewriter, not a make-up kit.

"That affirmation from Dad," Mary declared to me years later, "—knowing that he saw me as both beautiful and capable—has stayed with me all my life."

FATHER'S POWER

Sadly, few women today have received that blessing from their fathers. In fact, few men appreciate a father's power to shape his daughter's self-image as a woman—partly because women haven't told us about it. That's because so few women have seen their dads exercise his power in a healthy way. Often, therefore, they can't recognize their own need for it.[1]

"What does a girl need from her dad?" as one father in his late 30's with a 7-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son once asked me during a men's retreat. "I was once a boy myself, so I know what my son needs from me. But with my daughter..." he sighed, shaking his head in frustration, "most of the time I'm in the dark."

A flash of insight struck me. "You're married to a daughter," I told him. "Your wife was once a little girl with a father—ask *her!*"

The next day, the man returned with his brow knit. "I asked my wife what a girl needs from her dad," he reported, "and she just said, 'I don't know.'"

Hesitating, I sighed. "And what does that tell you, brother?"

"I guess," he offered sadly, "she never got it." [2]

I suggested he encourage her to talk with him about her relationship with her dad, leave his tool box outside, and just be a good listener.[3]

WHAT DADDY COULDN'T GIVE

The Good News is that the God revealed in Jesus knows how badly His daughter hurts when her needs are not met, and even takes it on Himself. "The wound of the daughter of my people," as Jeremiah proclaimed, "is my heart wounded."

What's more, this "Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its true name" is powerful to heal—that is, to fill that emptiness in a woman's heart and give her what her earthly daddy could not. "To Him who by means of His power working in us is able to do so much more than we could ever ask for or think of" as Paul concludes (Ephes. 3:14, d20 NIV).[4]

Mary tells me, for example, that when a girl is born her father may wish she were a boy instead. That disappointment from Dad makes it hard for her to affirm her femininity. Later, as a woman, it can lead her to choose harmful male relationships which reinforce this negative view of herself as a woman.

WOUND OF ABSENCE

The father-wound, therefore, is often a wound of absence. That's why Jesus came, to reveal Father God's healing presence in this world.

“How can you say I have a father-wound?” I’ve heard many women protest. “My father wasn’t even there when I was growing up! And even when he was there physically, he wasn’t there emotionally.”

You can destroy a living organism in two ways. To kill a plant, for example, you can cut it down and smash it. But there’s another way: Just don’t water it.

Life requires input.

Abandonment kills.

Hence, country singer Reba MacIntyre’s hit, “The Greatest Man I Never Knew,” in which she laments as a girl living with her father “just down the hall,” but “we never touched at all.” Even as a seed requires water and sunshine to grow, femininity requires the father’s blessing and encouragement in order to blossom in a girl.

That’s where Father God comes in.

DIVINE TRUTH

At my “Daughters of the Father” ministry event, for both men and women, I remind that Father God gets what He wants, and pronounces His creation—including His daughters—as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). I then call upon the men there to give manly voice to this divine truth and joy by, on the count of three, together shouting out for the women present,

“HALELUIA! IT’S A GIRL!”

As that deep, booming masculine chorus fills and shakes the sanctuary, invariably the women’s tears begin flowing—testifying to the deep longing in so many for their fathers’ blessing.

The first man every woman loves is Daddy. His were the arms she looked to for protection and safety, his eyes for love and affirmation, his words for definition and value. A girl’s relationship with her father therefore shapes not only her self-image, but her expectation of what it’s like to be close to a man.

If Dad doesn’t engage her emotionally and affirm her, she can become desperate for masculine affirmation, and mis-focus her longing for his attention and love on other men.

It’s a recipe for promiscuity and abuse.

“When I was sixteen, my father died,” as a lady haircutter recently told me. “Right away, my uncle came to me and said, ‘You need to be especially careful now. Boys who know you don’t have a father will try to take advantage of you.’”

There’s a wise and caring uncle!

An unfathered girl grows up insecure in her femininity, doubting whether she’s “good enough” as a woman. She associates bonding to a man with abandonment and pain, and even seeks out relationships with men who make her feel “at home” by abandoning and wounding her as Dad did.

ENTER THE BAD BOY

Often, a woman’s father-wound draws her to a “bad boy”—ironically, because he feels safe to her. She doesn’t have to open her heart to him and be hurt again by another man, because he’s not after her heart anyhow. What’s more, from fights to cheating, the bad boy brings plenty of drama and emotional engagement—albeit negative—that she lacked with an indifferent dad.

When she meets a good man who loves her genuinely, however, she panics—because her heart opens to him and she must learn now to trust where Dad disappointed her. If she doesn’t know her true Father God’s love and His power to heal, she’ll run away from what she wants most.

Meanwhile, the men I meet around the world at my conferences want to be good fathers to their daughters. But they don’t know how.

Sisters, we men today need your help.

Please, gather with other women at your church and decide what a girl needs from her daddy and how he can provide it. Then call your brothers in the church together and teach them.

WHAT YOU MISSED

Because so many of you never got it, this process will likely stir deep pain and fear. But if you want to free your daughters to become confident and capable women, you must lead the way. Help us men give them what they need from us by crying out to Father God for what you missed.

It’s time to fight for our daughters. To do nothing amid the raging current of pop culture is to be swept away by it. Celebrity bad girls and prime-time sex are pre-empting the precious grace of our daughters’ femininity and seducing them into the world’s false femininity, which ignores their heart and character.[5]

Today, before our very media-driven eyes, the father of Lies is stealing our daughters’ feminine soul. An entire generation of girls—that’s over half the population—is being infected with the lie that they’re just physical objects, that their ultimate value lies in their ability to stir lust.[6]

This lie and its terrible wounding in young women today breaks Father God’s heart even now as in Jeremiah’s day. In Jesus, the Great Physician, He has declared that He is yet alive and active in behalf of His daughters—and their fathers.

It’s time men and women joined Him in this battle to rescue our daughters for His healing and fulfillment.

RESOURCES
at www.abbafather.com

- * "Fathers and Daughters: Healing the Wound" dvd/cd/mp3
- * chapter "Fathers and Daughters" in my book *Healing the Masculine Soul*
- * "When a Woman Finds Her Voice" in *Loving to Fight, or Fighting to Love? Winning the Spiritual Battle for Your Marriage* (book, cd/mp3 reading by Gordon and Mary)
- * "Woman up, Moms! Dads with Daughters Need Your Help" <http://www.abbafather.com/blog/>
- * "Sexual Bonding and a Woman's Heart" (Mary) in *Pure Sex: the Spirituality of Desire*
- * "Identity Theft: Beyond Performance and Perfectionism," in Mary's small-group workbook, *The REST of Your Life: Finding God's Rest in a Driven, Demanding, Distressful World*
- * "Grandma Never Robbed a Bank: Preparing Men to Bless God's Women's Movement"
podcast link at site Home Page
- * "Beyond Fig Leaves and Cooties" in *Sons of the Father: Healing the Father-Wound in Men Today*
- * "The Woman as Ally" in *Fight like a Man: A New Manhood for a New Warfare*
- * "Healing Emotional Wounds: Seeing the Past as Jesus Sees It" in *Broken by Religion, Healed by God*
- [1] see chapter "Fathers and Daughters" in my book *Healing the Masculine Soul*
- [2] "When a Woman Finds Her Voice" in *Loving to Fight, or Fighting to Love? Winning the Spiritual Battle for Your Marriage*
- [3] "Listen to Each Other: How to Stop a Fight before It Starts" in *Loving to Fight, or Fighting to Love*
- [4] "Healing Emotional Wounds: Seeing the Past as Jesus Sees It" in *Broken by Religion, Healed by God*
- [5] Mary's chapter "Sexual Bonding and a Woman's Heart" in *Pure Sex: The Spirituality of Desire*
- [6] "Identity Theft: Beyond Performance and Perfectionism," in Mary's small-group workbook, *The REST of Your Life*