

A Father in the House

by: Ronald L. Dart

Several years ago I knew a young woman who was frustrated in her marriage and wanted a divorce. Her family pleaded with her not to do it, to seek counseling and to try to work things out. So many couples tough it out during the hard times and later they find themselves with good strong marriages. Her husband did not want the divorce and was prepared to do almost anything to keep the family together. They said, "Think about your little boy. He needs a father in the home." But she had married young, felt restricted, and wanted to spread her wings. Her reply considering the little fellow was dismissive, "Oh he will be all right." You know, I don't think she knew the risks she was taking.

Children without fathers in the home are almost twice as likely to be hyperactive as kids in homes with two parents. I don't think she knew that 63% of youth suicides are kids who grew up with no father in the house. I don't think she knew that 90% of all the runaways and homeless kids out there grew up in fatherless homes. 85% of the children with behavior disorders, 71% of high school dropouts, 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions, and 85% of youths in prison grew up in homes without a father.

Most Americans Believe Families Should Be Stronger

Fathers in abandoning their children and mothers who take their children away from their fathers have no idea of the price the kids are going to pay, but I think, it is because they don't want to think about it. It is not because the information isn't out there. At the same time a full 92%, nine out of 10 Americans, believe that our nation can only go forward if American families are made stronger. A solid majority realize that the institution of the family is weak and getting weaker. Over 25 million children today, right now, are being raised with no father in the home.

The most reliable predictor of crime is not poverty, it is not race, it is growing up without a dad.

Studies show that young girls whose parents divorce may grow up without the day-to-day experience interacting with a man who is attentive and carrying and loving. The continuous sense of being valued and loved as a female, seems especially a key ingredient in the development of conviction that one is indeed femininely lovable. Without this regular source of nourishment, a girl's sense of being valued as a female, just doesn't thrive.

Marriage is the Connection

Marriage is what connects fathers to the children that they bring up in the world. It is the marriage that makes the family and what makes fatherhood more than a biological event, it makes fathers out of what would otherwise be called sperm donors. Marriage involves a commitment that man makes to a woman and to the children that they are going to produce from that marriage.

Importance of the Family

What is really odd about all of this, is that there's a very strong consensus among American people about the importance of the family, while no one really has any idea what to do about it. And may not have the will, even if they knew.

What Can Government Do About The Family?

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan said, "The principal objective of American government at every level should be to see that children are born into intact families and that they remain so." Right! But what exactly is government going to do about it?

There is an old saying that "If the only tool that you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail." So recognizing the problem we face as a nation, the Senate assembled in June 2000 and passed a resolution naming June 17th. as "Responsible Father's Day." To show you just how effective that was, most people have never heard of it.

Congress was working on a Responsible Fatherhood Act. What did the bill offer? The legislation authorized \$25 million grant program to establish a public relations campaign promoting families and fatherhood. A fifty million-dollar block grant program to support programs that promote responsible fatherhood and married two-parent families and \$2 million annually to establish a national clearinghouse to assist states in designing programs and sharing information and success stories. The bill also provided states and cities more flexibility in utilizing welfare to work and temporary assistance to needy family funds.

\$77 million is what they planned on spending on this.

This enabled a number of senators to issue press releases. You can find them on the Internet saying that they were cosponsoring the bill and that they were pro-father and pro-family. I have little doubt that the program if it passed would do some good, but it is the clearest illustration of the limits and the approach of government in dealing with problems. All they could do was spend money on the problem and the money they're talking about, \$77 million. That's a lot of money isn't it? Well it would have amounted to about three dollars per kid living without a father in the house, which shows you just how much Congress can actually do about a problem like this. It was nice of the good senators to make the gesture and really about all that it is, is a gesture.

The first thing we all need to realize is this is not a problem Government can solve. We the people have created this problem, and we the people will have to solve it before it destroys our society completely. There's been a war against manhood, maleness, the father image, going on for a long time now and like fools we have allowed ourselves to be swept along by the assault.

Egalitarianism and Individualism

Robert Bork identified two dominant ideas that moved this war forward. One is radical egalitarianism as he calls it. Egalitarianism, from the word equal, "is a position resulting from, or characterized in the belief in equality of all people, especially in political, economic or social life." That is wonderful.

The only problem with it is, people aren't equal, which Bork recognized. People were not created equal, they do not continue to be equal. They are equal before the law and that is the best you can hope for, if we could even get there.

The other problem is radical individualism. Individualism is the pursuit of the individual, rather than common or collective interests, or egoism. Since we are all equal, they think, we are like interchangeable parts, you can lose or toss one dad out the window and bring in another one, or even toss dad out and bring in another woman. After all, we are all equal and it really doesn't matter whether there's a man in the house, right? Well not really.

If we were all equal, we could have uniformity, but this thing we call unity would not be possible. Unity depends on the pulling together of unequal parts to make a whole or a community, or more important, a family, if you will.

This is where those two ideas of radical egalitarianism and radical individualism play together. If we are all the same, if we are all uniform, then we have no need for unity. Each individual is the same and has no need of another.

Market Relationships

Therefore, the relationships we create are market relationships. Only as long as we agree. Only so long as it agrees with our temporary purposes. In other words, if our market requires we have a husband in the house or a mother in the home, in order to serve the children, we will do that but only so long as it seems to work for us. If it doesn't work for us, if it is not what we want, if it is not what we need at the moment, then we will change it.

There is nothing permanent in market relationships. Anyone who trades stocks knows that.

Enemies of Family and Church

Marriage then becomes temporary, church is temporary. All allegiances can be abandoned as our needs or wants change. But the church and a marriage are a union of unequal parts.

Radical egalitarianism and radical individualism are the enemies of both family and church, because we are not all equal and we all can not function as individuals alone in the world. Individualism involves the pursuit of an individual rather than the common or collective interests. Radical individualism involves a drastic reduction in the limits of personal gratification. In other words, if I want to smoke something, I can smoke it. If I want to drink something I can drink it. If I want to shoot drugs into my system, I can do it. I am an individual. I'm on my own. I don't have to have limits on my personal gratification, thus an abortion is a reasonable action, if not having an abortion would mean you can't enjoy a skiing vacation with your friends.

Divorce is a reasonable thing to do if marriage feels wrong for you, You need not worry about the children, They will be all right. They are individuals after all.

You know, It shouldn't take a lot of thought to realize that these ideas are totally contrary to the teachings of Christ and in fact, of the entire Bible, but the prevailing wisdom of the world makes it hard to see through what is happening and how it affects every part of our lives.

The Story of Ruth

Once upon a time a man, his wife and two sons were forced to leave their home and live in a nearby country because of a severe famine in their home land. His sons married young maidens in the new land. They might well have prospered there as a family except for the fact that the father fell sick and died and later his two sons died as well, leaving the three women destitute and alone. It's hard enough for women who are left without their men in the modern world, generally speaking it is a sure road to poverty for them, especially if they have children. In that world it was far worse than it is today.

The mother's name was Naomi and after considering her situation, she decided that it would be better for her to go back home near what family she may have there, and that she would fare better, perhaps at home than what she would in a foreign land.

The two girls were named Ruth and Orpah. Naomi tried to send them home to their own families. She said, "Go on back, things will be better for you there. I haven't any more sons and I don't have anything." She tried basically to send the girls back.

Orpah returned to her family but Ruth refused to leave Naomi and her refusal is one of the most beautiful passages in all of literature. I would almost bet that you have heard it. It is found in the book of Ruth, the first chapter and verse 16.

Ruth said to Naomi, "Intrigue me not to leave you, or to return from following after you, for where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God my God., {17} Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. The LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death part you and me."

It is interesting that this has made it into a lot of wedding ceremonies, where they say "Till death do us part." And this is actually between a mother and a daughter-in-law, in this case, and not really between a man and his wife, but it is really a beautifully worded statement of loyalty.

The two women returned to the land of Israel together and settled down to live a life of quiet poverty.

The book, by the way, is named after Ruth, but there are two heroes in this book, one is Ruth and the other is a man, a real man, a quite noble man at that, and I don't mean merely being in terms of rank. His name was Boaz.

Now they had a custom in Israel in those days that poor people were allowed to go into the fields and glean the grain that fell to the ground in the harvesting process.

A man who sent his servants out to glean every last grain from every last stock in his field was considered stingy.

They were supposed to leave the corners of the field and leave any grain that fell on the ground so that poor people could come and pick it up and take it home and would have something to eat. It was a kind of a welfare situation except for the fact that the people had to get up and go get it. Nobody was required to actually take it to them.

Ruth said to Naomi, (Ruth 2 verse 2) "Let me go into the field to glean the grain after him in whose sight I shall find grace." Naomi said to her, "Go my daughter."

Ruth is taking off to find a field where she can glean behind the reapers and bring home some grain for her and her mother-in-law. {3} So she went out and gleaned in the field after the reapers and it was by sheer accident, I suppose, that she lit on the field, a part of the field, that belonged to Boaz, who was one of the kindred of her ex husband. {4} And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "Good morning gents, the LORD be with you." They said, "The LORD bless you. {5} And he said to the guys, "Who's that girl over there," pointing at Ruth. {6} The servant, who was the boss man said, "It is the Moabite damsel that came back here with Naomi, out of the country of Moab, and she asked, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." So she came and has continue from the morning until now. She has worked hard and took a little break in the house." {8} Boaz went over to Ruth and said, "Listen, my daughter, don't go and glean in another field, don't go from here, you stay here close to my girls. {9} Let your eyes be on the field that they reap, you go after them. I have charged the young men that they are not to touch you. When you are thirsty you go right over there to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn from the well."

This is really unusual treatment for a stranger in a field. {10} "She fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground and said, "Why have I found grace in your eyes that you {18} should take knowledge of me. I am a stranger."

You have to understand something here. She was a very different kind of person from the Israelites. She was a Moabite and the Moabites had very often been in very bad grace in Israel. There was a certain racism involved. I don't think the color differentiation was that great, but it was perhaps some.

Boaz answered, {11} and said "I have been told all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I know the whole story. I know how you left your father. How you left your mother. How you left the land of your nativity and you have come unto a people which you never knew before now. {12} The LORD recompense your work, and a full reward be given to you of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you are come to trust."

The Wings Of God

Now this is not just some idealistic gas that Boaz is spouting here. He is not just talking about some vague spiritual protection from Almighty God. The wings of God to Ruth, at this moment in time, looked a lot like Boaz. Boaz was the product of a system. A system in which the priests of God taught the men of God the law. The law pervaded their life. The law had to do with how widows are to be treated. It had to do with how poor people were taken care of. It had to do with responsibilities of a man for his family, his relationships, the responsibility of inheritance and how they went forth. It was a complete system handed to Israel by God, and when one came to live in Israel, one came trusting under the wings of God.

Then Ruth said, {13} "Let me find favor in your sight. My lord, for you have comforted me and you have spoken friendly to your handmaid, though I be not like unto one of your handmaids."

Notice it wasn't that she wasn't one of his handmaids, she wasn't like them. She was a Moabite.

"And Boaz said to her, {14} "At mealtime you come here and eat of the bread and dip your morsel in the vinegar," and she sat beside the reapers and he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. {15} As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her at all. {16} And also let fall some of the handfuls on purpose for her, leave them so she can glean them and don't rebuke her {17} So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out that she had gleaned: and she had a bushel of barley. {18} She took it up, and went home to her mother-in-law, and when her mother-in-law saw what she had, she was amazed. {19} She said "Where did you go today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took

notice of you! "And Ruth told her all about the one at whose place she had been working. She said, The man's name with whom I worked with today is Boaz,"

Boaz Was A Real Man

Boaz was a real man, a man with a sense of responsibility, a man who cared for women and a man who realized the responsibilities and obligations of family.

Let's continue in the book of Ruth verse 20 of chapter 2 . Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not left off his kindness of the living and the dead. The man is near of kin to us. He is one of our near kinsman. {21} Ruth said, "He told me, "You keep close to my young men, until the end of all my harvest."" {22} Naomi said to Ruth, "It is good, you go out and do that, and don't let them see you in any other field. You stay right there in the fields of Boaz."

So that is what she did, all the way to the end of the barley and wheat harvest and here we have a society in which men like Boaz looked to the poor and took care of women, and took special care of women like Ruth.

The Levirate Law

What follows is one of the great romantic stories in the Bible and it flows around one of the strangest customs of marriage you'll ever encounter.

There was a law in ancient Israel that seems very strange to us in the 21st. century looking back on it, but I think it had a great deal to do with maintaining family ties and with the responsibility of taking care of people in their own family.

One of the laws required that if a man married a woman and then died without leaving an heir, that his brother or next of kin was to take the woman as wife and raise up seed to his brother. The idea was that the inheritance of the land would stay in the family, that the family would stay close together, but there was always to be an heir coming along in the family so that the family properties and the family itself would stay intact.

In thinking about this law and realizing that Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law, was exactly in that situation Naomi said to Ruth, this is Ruth 3 and verse 1, "I'm going to try to seek rest for you, so it can be well with you. {2} Boaz is our kindred, the one that you are working with, behold he winnows barley tonight on the threshing floor, {3} Wash yourself, put some perfume on, put some nice clothes on, go down to the floor, but don't make yourself known to the man until he is through eating and drinking and when he lies down to sleep, you mark the place where he lies, you go in then and uncover his feet and lie down at his feet, {5} and he will tell you what you have to do". Ruth said, "Okay, I'll do what you said."

Verse 6, "And Ruth went down to the floor and did according to all her mother-in-law told her. {7} And when Boas had finished eating and drinking."

Remember this is harvest time and everyone is having a good time.

"Boaz's heart was merry and he went to lie down at the end of a heap of grain. After he had gone asleep. Ruth came softly and uncovered his feet, and laid down at his feet. {8} Along about midnight, Boaz was startled and turned himself and behold a woman was lying at his feet. {9} He sat up and said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your handmade. Spread your skirt over your handmade for you are a near kinsman."

Now this is an odd expression to us. But what she is simply saying is, "Put your protection over me because you are a near kinsman and therefore, you are obligated to be my protector."

She is referring to the 'Levirate Law', that is, the law that required a kinsman to marry her and raise up seed to her dead husband

Now you have to understand, Boaz is not a young man, he is an older man, and she is a very young woman. And he would never have imagined that she would have wanted anything like this.

Boaz said, {10} "Blessed be you of the LORD, my daughter, for you have shown more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as you followed not young men, whether poor or rich. {11} And now my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do all that you require, for all the people of my city, know you are a virtuous woman."

And by her being there at night might've otherwise called that into question.

Boaz said, {12} "Now it is true that I am your near kinsman, but there's a problem, there is one nearer than I am, {13} You wait this night and in the morning we will see if he will perform the duty of the kinsman, and we will let him, if not, then I certainly will do it, as the Lord lives. Now you lie down until the morning." {14} So the next morning Ruth got up very early, {15} And Boaz had her bring her veil that was upon her and hold it and he filled it up with six measures of barley and laid it on her and sent her to the city, and said, "Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor."

When Ruth {16} got home to her mother-in-law, Naomi said, "How did it go, my daughter? Ruth told her all that the man had done. {17} And Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what will happen, for the man will not rest until he has finished this thing this day."

Some Legalities of the Past

The story in the fourth chapter of the book of Ruth is fascinating and it goes back into an ancient age and walks you through all the courtesy, all of the mannerisms, all of the approach they had to take, the legalities involved with the buying of properties, the selling of

properties, and this very serious responsibility of raising up seed to a dead man so his inheritance would be protected.

Boaz had thought this thing through very carefully. He goes out to the gate and waits for the guy to come by and he stops him and gets some witnesses and he approaches him initially about buying a piece of land that belongs to Naomi.

Boaz says in Ruth 4 verse 3, "Naomi has come back and wants to sell a parcel of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech, {4} And I thought to inform you saying, "Buy it before the inhabitants of the elders if you will. If not, then I am going to buy it."

The nearer kinsman said, "Well I would definitely want to buy that." Then Boaz plays his trump card. "On the day you buy the field of the hand of Naomi, understand you must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." {6} Then the kinsman stopped and said, "No I can't do that because I would mar my own inheritance. You go ahead and redeem it, I cannot redeem it."

Now this was the manner in former times concerning redeeming and confirming. To confirm all things a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbor. This was a testimony in Israel, so he did it. He took off his shoe in front of witnesses

Boaz Married Ruth

Boaz's bought the field and was able then to marry Ruth.

The Scriptures tells us in verse 13, that "Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. He went into the her and the Lord gave her conception and she bare a son, {17} And one of the women neighbors gave that boy a name, saying "There is a son born to Naomi" and they called his name Obed."

And here is the punch line, Obed is the father of Jesse, who is the father of David. Everybody knows that David is an ancestor of Jesus Christ in the human sense.

It is a little hard to get your mind around it. Here's a man who because he knew the law, because he knew what his responsibilities were, and he stepped up to the plate and fulfilled those responsibilities, forged a link in the genealogy, humanly speaking, of Jesus Christ.

If a man does not step up and do what he is supposed to do then history is changed.

It's hard to realize that the genetic code that flowed from Boaz and Ruth, who was not even an Israelite but was a Moabite woman, that genealogy, that genetic code, made its way to Christ.

You men have a choice, you can step up and be a father or just another loser.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: A Father in the House (01FIH) 3/6/01
Transcribed by: bb 7/4/14

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