

Born to Win

The Power to Love

by Ronald L. Dart

A man can live without food...for a while. He can live on short rations for quite a long while. But sooner or later, the body will wither and, without nourishment, it will die. We know what that looks like because we've seen the pictures. We've seen pictures of starving children. We've seen pictures of faces that were little more than a skull with skin stretched over it, and eyes sunk back in the head of people who were dying of famine.

What is it that starves the soul? What food, taken away, causes the inner man to dry up and to wither and to finally die? I was reading Viktor Frankl's remarkable book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, and I was stopped in my tracks when I stumbled over the answer to that question. Viktor Frankl was a German psychiatrist, a Jew, who spent several years in the German concentration camp system. One morning when he and his companions were walking to work in *biting* cold—they were marching; they had their collars turned up against a biting wind; guards were around them, beating men with rifle butts if they were a little too slow—and the fellow marching with Frankl muttered beneath the collar of his coat where he was sheltering his lips against the bitter wind,

“If our wives could see us now! I do hope they are better off in their camps and don't know what is happening to us.”

That brought thoughts of my own wife to mind. And as we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another upward and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking of his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. But my mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.

Viktor Frankl - Man's Search for Meaning

He was a man who, when his body was dying slowly—day by day, week by week, year by year (because he was in that concentration camp for a *long* time)—nourished his soul with images of his wife. He said,

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth — that love is the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love.

Viktor Frankl - Man's Search for Meaning

And I thought, “That’s the answer to this thing.” And it’s not just a matter of some high and lofty thoughts about love. Love is the very thing that nourishes a man’s soul. It’s one of the things that keeps him alive, that keeps him going, keeps him from drying up and blowing away like a leaf in the wind. He said, “I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world...” Remember, this man is in a concentration camp, German guards on both sides of him, trudging up a mountainside, in bitter cold and biting wind. And he says,

I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for the brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when a man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way — an honorable way — in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment.

For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, “The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory.”

Viktor Frankl - Man’s Search for Meaning

And so he walked on. He said he thought of his beloved. He said,

I asked her questions, and she answered; she questioned me in return, and I answered.

Viktor Frankl - Man’s Search for Meaning

And finally they had to stop in the near-dark, and get their pickaxes out, and go to work. The guard says, “Can’t you hurry up, you pigs?”, and soon they had got back in the ditch, and they were digging away again; but he says,

My mind still clung to the image of my wife. A thought crossed my mind: I didn’t even know if she were still alive. I knew only one thing — which I have learned well by now: Love goes very far beyond the physical person of the beloved. It finds its deepest meaning in his spiritual being, his inner self. Whether or not he is actually present, whether or not he is still alive at all, ceases somehow to be of importance.

I did not know whether my wife was alive, and I had no means of finding out...

Viktor Frankl - Man’s Search for Meaning

(In fact, we now know his wife was dead at that time.)

...but at that moment it ceased to matter. There was no need for me to know; nothing could touch the strength of my love, my thoughts, and the image of my beloved. Had I known then that my wife was dead, I think that I would still have given myself, undisturbed by that knowledge, to the contemplation of her image, and that my mental conversation with her would have been just as vivid and just as satisfying.

Viktor Frankl - Man’s Search for Meaning

And then he puts a quote in here. He says,

“Set me like a seal upon thy heart, love is as strong as death.”

Viktor Frankl - Man's Search for Meaning

This is such a profound thing, coming from where it comes. It isn't as though...this is not a poet sitting off somewhere on the Mediterranean, looking at sunsets and drinking gin and tonic, and writing poetry about love. This is a man in the *deepest* depths of despair that a man could possibly be plunged into physically, emotionally, mentally. And yet he is talking about love in the most profound terms and says, finally, he at last really begins to *understand* love. He said later,

[...] I was struggling to find the reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious “Yes” in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, [*He's talking now about where he was: out in the dark, working.*] which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable grey of a dawning morning in Bavaria. “*Et lux in tenebris lucent*” — and the light shineth in the darkness. For hours I stood hacking at the icy ground. The guard passed by, insulting me, and once again I communed with my beloved. More and more I felt that she was present; that she was with me; I had the feeling that I was able to touch her, able to stretch out my hand and grasp hers. The feeling was very strong: she was there. Then, at that very moment, a bird flew down silently and perched just in front of me, on the heap of soil which I had dug up from the ditch, and looked steadily at me.

Viktor Frankl - Man's Search for Meaning

It's hard to imagine, isn't it, looking back over his *terrible* experience, how much that moment must have meant for him. And he had no way of knowing that his wife had died shortly after she had entered the concentration camp. She was no longer there to succor him, but she was alive *inside of him*—in his memory—and the love that he had for her was *so* strong that it carried him right on through his time of greatest suffering. And as he said, “Love is stronger than death.”

I was thinking about this when I read a piece from *The Washington Times* just a few days ago. The headline was: “Sexually-active teens more likely to be depressed, suicidal”. Here on the one hand I had a man struggling for his life, under the *harshes*t circumstances I could possibly imagine, who could still think of love, and hold up love, and cling to his beloved in all of that; and would struggle to live, to stay alive. (He did survive, by the way, the entire experience, and wrote a book which you can buy and read: *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl.) I had him on the one hand. On the other hand I had healthy teenagers, in the prime of life and energy, well-fed, free as birds...and they no longer wanted to be alive. What was it that made the difference between *his* life and *their* lives? I wanted to know.

The article was in a recent edition of *The Washington Times* (the June 9, 2003 edition). The article was by Cheryl Wetzstein, and she cited a recent study by the Heritage Foundation. Again, her headline: “Sexually-active teens more likely to be depressed, suicidal”. The researchers found that girls who had sexual intercourse were *three times* more likely to suffer depression than girls who had not. Now, I can't honestly tell you that I was *surprised* by that information, but nevertheless getting the numbers and seeing the headlines still caught my attention and made me really stop. Sexually-active boys, even, were *twice* as likely to suffer depression as they would be if they were not sexually active. And it naturally followed that suicide attempts are much more common among sexually-active teens. Now, the next time

you're sitting in the shopping mall, and you see a whole gaggle of teens meandering through the shopping mall, start counting them off. 1 out of 20 of those girls either has or will attempt suicide in the course of her teenage years. Some of them will succeed. If it's a group of girls who have all had sexual intercourse, 3 out of 20 of them will try to kill themselves during their teenage years. It's not quite as bad with boys, but it's bad enough. The *ratio* of suicides is worse; boys who had sexual intercourse were over *six times* as likely to attempt suicide as boys who had not, even though the numbers were lower than the girls. And I wondered, "What in the world is going on here?", as I read through the article. One of the gentleman who took exception with the trends, and was wanting to promote abstinence in school education, had this to say (his name is Kirk Johnson):

"A lot of the safe-sex curricula in schools today are very focused on physical health aspects", Mr. Johnson said yesterday. "We think the safe-sex message to adolescents fails to adequately communicate the emotional risks involved in early sexual experimentation. Clearly, having more of an abstinence message is going to alleviate those concerns."

Cheryl Wetzstein - The Washington Times

Well, he thought abstinence programs are the answer; and while I find it hard to disagree that abstinence should be taught, one wonders what else there is at work that's not being considered. There are other factors. And then there are those who oppose the idea of abstinence education. A Dr. Lynn Ponton, who is a child psychiatrist in San Francisco, said this:

"Normal sexual experimentation is different from dangerous risk-taking, and the fact that an adolescent is engaging in sex is not necessarily a dangerous risk", said Dr. Lynn Ponton, [...] "In fact, many of them say that's how they find themselves. Finding and developing your sexuality really encourages the development of identity in teenagers."

Cheryl Wetzstein - The Washington Times

Now, with that stuff going on out there, why are you surprised that teenagers are more sexually active than they ever have been in history? Why are you surprised they're having some of the problems that they're having out there? Now, I read the article very carefully, and I found something missing. And I found that Dr. Ponton, who had her opinion on this particular issue talking about sex that's not *necessarily* dangerous, gave us no hints about what the dangers are if it *is*. Maybe it's not necessarily [dangerous] in some circumstances, what are the circumstances where it is? She doesn't even address this.

The one idea that kept Viktor Frankl alive during his *terrible* captivity is the one idea that is missing in these discussions of sex education in schools. (I've read a lot of them, and I *never* find it there, and I don't know why it is.) The idea is love. It's the contrast between Viktor Frankl holding his beloved in his heart in the most *incredibly harsh* conditions that a man can imagine, on the one hand; and on the other hand, a healthy, active, alive, vibrant teenage girl becoming so depressed she tries to kill herself. That's where I think I really came to understand what Viktor Frankl understood what he cited the passage, "love is as strong as death". And I began to realize it may even be stronger. That passage comes from the Song of Songs. It's found in your Bible—Song of Songs, chapter 8, verse 6:

- ⁶ Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.
- ⁷ Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot wash it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of his house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.

In other words, you can't buy it away from a person (I think this is what he's talking about) who holds love in his heart. For Victor Frankl, there was not enough money in the world, there was not enough water in the rivers, there was nothing that could quench the love he had for his "beloved", as he calls her. And that's where the difference is. It is *so strong* that it even survives and reaches beyond death. For as he was talking to his beloved, thinking about his beloved, cherishing his beloved, she was already dead—burnt to ashes, gone up in smoke in a German incinerator.

In school these days, they are teaching your kids everything there is to know about sex. They're learning about "safe sex". They're learning about sexual experimentation. They're learning what homosexual sex is. They're learning about heterosexual sex. They're learning all about condoms. It's been a long time, but I really think when I was a teenager all that talk about sex, when I was that age in class, would have been like pouring gasoline on a fire. I can't imagine what I'd have been thinking when I walked out of the classroom door for sure, but I can guess what I would have been thinking. I could have guessed what I wanted to do. "I've got to get out there and I've gotta find out about this. I've got to try this."

But the one thing no one seems to be teaching the kids (if they are, no one's talking about it very much) is that sex is an act of love. There is a drive in human beings for closeness, for intimacy, for love; and sometimes kids who have far too little love in their lives go looking for love in all the wrong places. I remember seeing a video some time ago called *The Lost Children of Rockdale County*. It was about an episode that took place in a school in Georgia where there was an outbreak of syphilis among the students there. It was *incredible* as they began to examine it—as the public health officials who have to follow up the trail on syphilis wherever they find it...the *large* numbers of students they found who were involved in sexual experimentation. And for some reason...and it's really amazing to me as I watched the program, and they began to interview these kids who were in this situation, that one of the factors involved in all of them was they were being neglected at home, they were not getting attention, and they were looking for attention, and they wanted somebody to pay attention to them. What they really were saying was, "I wanted somebody to look at me and say, 'You're important'"—to actually listen to what they say, to care about what they say, to respond to what they say and to what they do, to put their arms around them, to hold them, to *love* them. And so when that was missing at home, they thought, "Well, I will try to see whether I can find it *somewhere else*." And sex is supposed to be so wonderful, so powerful...and then it turns out to be awkward, and fumbling, and sometimes embarrassing, and sometimes painful. And in the end, it turns out to be loveless. It isn't terribly surprising that a kid who might already be on the verge of depression would find that life without love just isn't worth living, and that sex is just not enough to carry them through.

I don't know why kids are taught sex without love. Is it because love is a *spiritual* thing, something that cannot be weighed or measured and isn't a subject for science? Is it because love is really, in its basic nature, religious? Spiritual, it's a spiritual thing; and science can't measure spiritual things; and schools really can't *acknowledge* spiritual things. All we can acknowledge is the physical. And so maybe that's the reason.

But why is it that man has the capacity for love...well, no, not just the capacity for love. Why is it that man has the *power* to love and the *need* for love? Rollo May, when I read his book titled *Love and Will*, said something that *really* set me back on my heels. He said that when men lose the power to love they often substitute *power over*. And my mind goes back to this poor man, struggling on in the cold, thinking of his beloved, holding onto her in his mind's eye in his heart, being *beaten and abused* by men who have *lost their power to love*. If you ever wanted a perfect illustration of what Rollo May said, you've got it right there: when men lose their power to love, they substitute power over.

Can't the schools at least *tell* the kids that sex is an act of love, and you shouldn't do it unless you are in love and are *sure* that you are in love? Can't they tell them it's dangerous physically, and emotionally destructive, to become intimate with someone who *doesn't love you*? It would drive me crazy as a father of a teenage girl to think of her having sex with a boy who wasn't deeply and profoundly in love with her. (Of course, I'd probably be ready to kill him in any case, but that other side of the situation would be more than I could handle.) Why can't schools teach that abstinence is not just a good program in school, it is an act of love for the one who will someday love you with a love that is as strong as death.

When men have lost the power to love, they often substitute power over. In the Nazis it created a culture of death that's hard to imagine. But you know, it also finds expression in other ways. Sometimes it even creeps into religion, where religious leaders come along who manifest *all kinds* of power, but the love is gone. The apostle Paul addressed this. He said in First Corinthians 13, verse 1,

1 Corinthians 13

NIV '84

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

So you've got this guru who stands up and preaches, and he has all kinds of faith. I mean, he can slap people on the forehead and collapse a whole row of people out there by his power, his personality. He can speak in unknown tongues and *really* be impressive. He can tell you prophecy. He can even tell what's going to happen in the future—sounds like he has all mysteries in his hand. But [Paul] says, "If I have not love, I am *nothing*." All that stuff is nothing more than the trappings of *religious* power. He says,

1 Corinthians 13

NIV '84

³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

All these things are out there, and if you can just cast it in your mind, in the framework of Viktor Frankl—in an Nazi concentration camp, holding onto his vision of his beloved which gave him a *reason to live*—compared with all the other things in life that we have, and yet we can be depressed and discouraged and ready to give the whole thing up. That contrast is powerful. Said Paul,

1 Corinthians 13

NIV '84

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Now, I want to tell you something. If I have a daughter in her late teens who's finally beginning to date, this is the kind of guy I want her to bring home. I don't want her to bring some macho guy home who

will slap her around when he gets upset with her. I don't want her to bring some rude, smart-aleck kid around the house. I want her to bring a kid to the house *who loves her*. And if he loves her, he'll be patient and kind. He won't be envious. He won't be boastful. He won't be rude or self-seeking. He won't be easy to get angry. And he surely won't keep any record of wrongs.

1 Corinthians 13

NIV '84

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. [...]

Love never fails. And you will see no better example than that—than this man in a German concentration camp, with his life hanging in the balance day by day, whose love for his wife (who was already dead and he didn't know it) never failed. *That* is an example to live by.

1 Corinthians 13

NIV '84

⁸ [...] But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. [*It's blown away.*]

¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Man is made in the image of God, and therefore man was made with the *power* to love. Take away his power to love, and you either take away his will to live, or you turn him into a monster (like the Nazis). Here we are: we're a people who can send a man to the moon, and we can't find a way to teach our children about love while we teach them about sex. You would think we could do better than that.

I'm Ronald Dart. Until next time, you were *born to win*.

Transcript of a *Born to Win*
radio program by
Ronald L. Dart.

Christian Educational Ministries

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791

Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 (242-5344) ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311

❖ www.borntowin.net ❖

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DATE: 6/19/03

ID: 03PTL