

## Like Falling off a Bicycle

It was my first book signing and I was very excited. However, the taped interview made me nervous, especially with my wife asking the questions. She went right for the jugular vein. "How has the absence of your father impacted you in your marriage?" The room fell silent awaiting my response.

On June 9, 2001, my mother died. She was the central woman in my life for more than 25 years. It was a horrific experience; full of pain and loss. In December of 2007, just before New Years, my sister informed me over the phone our father died. My wife asked me then how I felt. I responded fine and went off to work.

"How has the absence of your father impacted you in marriage?" Everyone was still waiting for my answer. After 33 years, I finally had one.

Pretend that I am 5 years old and my father is teaching me how to ride a bicycle. That was the year he left. He grips the back of the seat with one hand as I saddle up awkward and uncertain. The bike begins to move and I go through the motions of peddling and steering. I lean to the left and to the right as I struggle to find my center. It doesn't matter. After all, my dad is holding me up and propelling the bike using his own super power. Though I lack confidence in my own strength, I am assured of his. In a short time the bike picks up speed. My peddling is steadier. My steering is getting better. It doesn't matter. I am not the one doing the work.

Suddenly I hear my father's voice, "You're doing fine son!" Only the sound is coming from several yards behind me. A glance over my shoulder confirms this. The bike begins to wobble then falls throwing me to the ground in defeat.

After 33 years without my father, I should feel nothing for him except like going to work. But the truth lies beneath decades of contempt. How do I feel? Like I have been riding a bicycle thinking my dad is holding on, only to hear him shout, "You're doing fine without me son!" At age 38, I looked back 33 years and realized that my father wasn't holding on; all the feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, and uncertainty come rushing back and a part of me collapses inside, just like that little boy on the bicycle.

I discovered that 33 years without a father doesn't negate the five years he was there. For five years, I had a dad who came home to his wife and children. This person who looked like me only bigger, stronger, and more capable, was the central male figure in my life. When he went to work, I longed to go with him. When he came home, I jumped on him and marveled at how he lifted me in the air. He was the provider and the protector of my mother, two sisters, and me. Someday when I was older, I would be like him.

Then he walked out the door one day. My mother sat there crying and someday came sooner than I expected. Now I was the man of the house, the provider, the protector, the central figure; and I couldn't even ride a bicycle.

"How has not having a father impacted you in your marriage?" It impacts me the same way being the man of the house since five years old impacted my self-esteem. I felt incompetent, unprepared and

every day was a reminder of what I failed to be. I could not provide for or protect my family. My mother had to work 12 hour shifts to make ends meet. I could not be the disciplinarian or role model my sister's and I needed when I had no discipline myself. Thirty three years one wife and two children later and I am shouldered with these responsibilities all over again. The difference is now I am a man, or am I?

Just five years with a father impacted my self-image. Without him I was groping for my identity. As long as he was alive, despite the decades of absence, I had hope that I might someday find my identity in my father again. That hope died with him.

A father is supposed to teach his son to be a man and prepare him to take on the role of a husband and father someday. He is supposed to protect and esteem his daughter until she comes into the full expression of her womanhood, then release her to choose her own husband. Finally, the greatest responsibility of a dad is to lead his children to their true father for all eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ. Sadly, that is his greatest failure. Thankfully, God's grace is sufficient to cover me in spite of the sins of my father.

How has not having a father impacted me in my marriage? It's like getting back on that bicycle with faith that Jesus Christ is still holding me long after my father let go.