

Former Network Sportscaster Encourages the Fatherless to Find True Love

Note: The following is an interview with author, speaker and former national sports reporter Lisa Worley about her new book, The Only Father I Ever Knew.

One of the reasons you wrote this book is because you were fatherless all of your childhood. Can you tell us what happened in your own life?

My father was a well-liked physician in San Antonio, Texas, who was a competitive polo player on weekends. Every Sunday afternoon, with my mother and other family members watching, my dad would compete in polo matches against teams from all over the country and Mexico. One Sunday afternoon in early December, my dad suffered a massive heart attack, and died before he reached the hospital. He was only 39 years old. I was born two months later. My mother never recovered from that day, struggling with addictions and mental illness the rest of her life. My half-sister went through years of counseling to overcome what happened and moved to Pennsylvania to live with her mother. Years later, when I worked in New York City, and lived a few hours from my half-sister, I reached out to her and tried to have a relationship with her, but she refused. In my life, I ended up being an overachiever and learned about life through trial and error because I had very little instruction at home. I made many of the same mistakes fatherless girls make when they are looking for a father figure to love them.

Surprisingly, you entered a male-dominated career, television sports, before it was common for women sportscasters to be on television. You had some success in this field, making it all

the way to national television on HBO Sports, and for a short time, ESPN. Without a dad in your life, how was it that you chose this career?

I always had a natural interest in sports, even though I really didn't have a male figure in the household most of my life. (My grandfather was a competitive amateur tennis player). I watched NFL football every Sunday afternoon. I was a loyal Dallas Cowboys fan. I also faithfully tuned into televised NBA basketball games and favored the New York Knicks. Little did I know that I would one day be doing televised sports updates on the Knicks' broadcasts when working for the Madison Square Garden Network as an anchor. I also loved professional golf and later ended up playing recreational golf myself. In addition, I was overall very athletic. I started the girls' basketball and volleyball teams at our high school and played small- college basketball at Texas Lutheran College (Now Texas Lutheran University (TLU)). When national sports commentator Verne Lundquist, a TLU grad, came back to Texas Lutheran and spoke to our Homecoming Sports Breakfast, he talked about his career. A light went off in my mind, and it was at that point I decided to pursue sportscasting, even though there were only a few women, mostly former beauty queens, active in it at the time. I went on to graduate school at the University of North Texas because they had an excellent Radio, Television, Film program, then landed a paid internship at WFAA-TV, where Verne Lundquist worked at the time. I was later offered a job at the ABC affiliate in Chattanooga, Tennessee, then worked in my home market, San Antonio, two different times, with my national work and job at the Madison Square Garden Network in between those two stints in San Antonio.

Did you have a turning point in your life where God, the Father became real to you?

Yes, I was at the top of my television career, working for HBO Sports' *Inside the NFL* and the Madison Square Garden Network

when I lost both jobs in the same week. I blamed God for this, even though I had not had a close relationship with him for 17 years. We ended up moving out of the New York City area to Connecticut, where we joined a church. I participated in a Bible study there, and began praying and reading God's Word for the first time in a while. It was during this time of seeking God, that I felt like He said, "I gave you a national platform to glorify Me, and you didn't do it. I had to take it away from you to get your attention."

I was very repentant. It was at this point, with tears flowing, that I said, "I am so sorry. If you give me another opportunity to be a sportscaster, not only will I give you my career, I will give you my life." The next week, I received a call from ESPN, asking if I would do some freelance reporting for them. I ended up staying with ESPN for about six months until I received a job offer to return to my old job at the CBS affiliate in San Antonio.

I had a different mindset now. I prayed about decisions and felt like I was supposed to go home. As it turned out, my going home was not about covering the Dallas Cowboys' run to the Super Bowl, nor was it about reporting from the Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway. My return to San Antonio was about honoring and forgiving my mother, who by that time lived in a group home. My relationship with my heavenly Father also began to grow for the first time, as I continued in Bible study and began serving, first as a Sunday school teacher, and later in evangelical ministries where I spoke and led small groups. Eventually, I answered a call to attend seminary and transitioned into full-time ministry.

About one in four homes is without a father in the household. How does that affect children?

According to The National Center for Fathering, "Children from fatherless homes are more likely to be poor, become involved in drug abuse, drop out of school and suffer from health and

emotional problems. They are also more likely to be sexually active, compared to adolescents living with a father in the home. For little girls, a father is the one that encourages a girl to be confident and to have strong self-esteem. Without a dad in the household, girls will likely be more insecure.

As a little girl growing up fatherless, I (along with my mother) was extremely poor. My father did not prepare for his untimely death, and there was only life insurance on the house, so it was paid off, but there was no other money. Mother didn't feel she could work, so we lived off Social Security checks. We lived in a big house that was threadbare, and because of my mother's early drinking and Molotov cocktail of three different anti-depressants, she was emotionally absent when I was a little girl, so I definitely lacked confidence, and my self-esteem was almost non-existent. When I entered college, I was looking for love, and because I had no teaching on the birds and the bees, I became very sexually active and found myself pregnant in my junior year of college. I ended up aborting that baby because of something derogatory that the father said about me. I still regret that decision.

In *The Only Father I Ever Knew*, you clearly want the readers to understand about the various attributes of God as Father. What are some of the attributes you included?

I first want to emphasize that these are all attributes that I have experienced over the years. I include chapters about our heavenly Father's love, his provision and his plan—altogether 24 chapters describing our Father in heaven. However, one of my favorite stories is in the chapter, "My Father's Discipline."

As I told you, I didn't have much supervision at home, so my heavenly Father had to step in occasionally to keep me from going down the wrong path. In high school, my friends and I decided to go swimming at our community pool, after hours. We had heard that a lot of kids had done it, so around midnight,

we climbed the wall of the pool to take a late-night swim. We were wearing bathing suits under our clothes, but before we could shed our outer clothes, we heard someone shout, "Freeze!" As it turned out, the police, led by well-known area policeman, Officer Roger Terry, were staking out the pool because there had been vandals there the night before. There was no mercy. The local police took us into the jail and scared the wits out of us, threatening to lock us up overnight. I cried the entire time. They eventually called our parents to pick us up. I'd never seen such stern faces in all my life. Even my mom, who struggled emotionally, was stone-faced.

This story has an interesting twist. Years later, I was sponsoring a couple of confirmation students at my church. There were two services that I had to attend with them and sat with the parents of one confirmand at one service, the other parents at the second service. The second service was on a Sunday morning and the mother of my confirmand, Caitlyn Terry, introduced me to Caitlyn's dad, Roger Terry. I realized it was the same Officer Terry who had arrested me in high school. During this unlikely scene that only God could write, I realized that my heavenly Father had turned my life around 180 degrees, so much so that I was now praying for the child of the officer who arrested me in high school. As I sat in the pew, singing one of my favorite hymns, "Here I am, Lord," Officer Terry saw me weep again.

In *The Only Father I Ever Knew*, you showcase 16 other stories of fatherless people besides your own. Why did you include these other testimonies and can you share about a couple of the people you included?

I thought it was important to share other people's stories of knowing God as Father, because I don't want the readers to hear it only from me. As I was preparing to write this book, God placed numerous fatherless people in front of me, and most agreed to share their testimonies because they had experienced

the love of their heavenly Father in different ways. I featured one of my friends, Dr. Lynnette Simm, in the chapter about forgiveness. She had a stepfather who sexually abused her for five years, starting when she was 9 years old. His secret life was eventually found out, and he was arrested and sent to prison. It was in prison that Lynnette's stepdad became a Christian. He came out of jail, repentant and a changed man. He sought counseling. Lynnette also went through counseling, and now Lynnette and her stepdad have a loving, normal relationship.

I featured another friend, Mary Ann, in the strength chapter. Mary Ann's father committed suicide when she was only 3. In the little town where they lived, everyone knew the story about Mary Ann's dad and never asked Mary Ann or her sisters and brothers to participate in sports or any activities because they knew they could not afford the uniforms. Mary Ann's mother protected her children from the truth about their dad until Mary Ann found out about her dad's suicide from some inconsiderate kids on the playground. Mary Ann's mom decided she'd had enough and moved the family, even though she had no job, to a larger city. The volleyball coach at Mary Ann's high school noticed Mary Ann had athletic ability and so asked her to join the team. She was a standout player, then received a scholarship to play volleyball in college. That school went on to win three straight national championships. As Mary Ann looks back, she realizes that her heavenly Father gave her, and her mother, the strength to carry on.

There may be someone listening who had a bad father relationship. Maybe their father was abusive, or he abandoned the family. Because of that, they may have trouble with accepting God as Father. What can you tell them so, like you, they will embrace God as the Father they never had?

We cannot equate God to humans. Human love fails, but the Bible says in Psalm 32:10 that the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Psalm 33:5 (NLT) says, "The unfailing love of the Lord fills the earth." He created us with a void in our heart that we either fill with unrighteous or material things or we fill our hearts with His love. I can tell you from experience, it's only the love of God that satisfies. Out of his love, we have free will to choose Him and his Son, Jesus, or to go a different direction. Our choice has consequences, but because of His love for us, we have a choice. If we choose wisely, we spend eternity with him in Heaven.

After spending five years in seminary, the one thing I realized is that my God, prior to entering seminary, was not big enough. Our heavenly Father is greater than our minds can comprehend. Creation as well as the intricacy of our bodies, points to an intelligent designer, one who designed us with a capacity to love other created beings and love God. I have a chapter in *The Only Father I Ever Knew* about creation. Out of God's love for us, He created this beautiful world for us to live in and admire. Did you know that there are almost 400,000 different plants in the world? There are about 8.7 species on earth, 6.5 million on land and 2.2 million in the ocean. Human beings are an intricate work of our brilliant designer God. Our brain contains 86 billion nerve cells, joined by 100 trillion connections. This is more than the number of stars in the Milky Way. Creation is enough for me to believe that God exists and that all of creation did not come together in a big bang, or from a single cell that mutated. So if God exists, and in His Word, He says He loves us, and wants to have a relationship with us, I believe that as well.

In Ephesians 3, Paul understands this amazing love that the Lord has for us and he prays for the Ephesians and for us that we, "being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17b-19).

God's love for us cannot be compared to human love. It is unfailing. He knows the number of hairs on our head. He is in constant pursuit of us. He just wants us to fully commit to Him so that he can begin to lavish us with His love. {eoa}

Lisa Burkhardt Worley is the founder of *Pearls of Promise Ministries*, helping women overcome past and current dysfunction. A former national sports reporter and anchor, award-winning author, co-author and co-editor of eight books, including the four-time award winning *If I Only Had ...Wrapping Yourself in God's Truth During Storms of Insecurity*, and *The Most Powerful P: A Child's Introduction to the Power of Prayer*. Working with *Roaring Lambs Ministries*, she co-edited and compiled *Stories of Roaring Faith*, Volumes 1, 2 and 3. Lisa earned a master of theological studies degree in 2008, graduating magna cum laude from *Perkins School of Theology*. She is also the co-host of international radio show, "A Time to Dream." For more information, visit .