

No Matter How Difficult, Resolve to Honor Your Father

I can't remember very much of my early childhood. There are faded glimpses of memories, a picture of playing near a stream in the back of the house trying to catch tadpoles, playing football in the field across the street, falling asleep in the barber's chair, stubbornly refusing to eat peas because my hypersensitive sense of smell repulsed at their pungent odor.

One memory stands out with vivid clarity. It was the moment that my mother called my brother, my sister, and me into her room so that we could talk to our father on the phone. My father traveled a lot in his position as a purchasing agent for General Electric. We would talk on the phone occasionally; however, this call was different. The look on my mother's face was pity and sadness. I knew something was wrong.

My older brother took the phone, and within seconds he burst into tears. I couldn't imagine what was happening. My sister was next to put her ear to the phone. Tears began to silently drip down her face. I remember seeing her eyes glaze over, as if she were in a fog.

Then it was my turn.

As I took the phone, my father's deep baritone voice spoke matter of factly. "Son, your mother and I are not going to be married any longer. I won't be living at home. I love you little buddy."

I can't remember any more. At five years of age, I couldn't grasp what this would mean to me or how it would define me.

The next few years are a blur. The time frame is baffling.

My mother began to date a man who was once a business

associate of my father's. Obviously, I was too young to understand the dynamics of adultery, only to find out some of the distorted details later in life. For a child, everything was out of sync. It was as if the rhythm of my life had been interrupted. I would spend my childhood seemingly out of step with everyone, confused and dazed by the whole thing.

One instance seems to define my childhood experience. My mother had been to the grocery store. She treated us with single-pack Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. I knew that Reese's normally come two to a package, so after I enjoyed one cup, I asked for another. The strange man firmly interrupted my mother's "Yes" with a harsh tone and said, "No." He intimidated my mother, and she agreed with him. I didn't get to eat the second Reese's.

I was confused. Who was this guy? Who was he to determine my diet?

My mother married him. He was a strange man, but all of a sudden, he was supposed to be my father. I couldn't understand that.

He forced my mother to stop calling me by my given name, "Gary," and started referring to me as "Neil," which is my middle name. Then he dropped my name "Kennedy," and gave me "Roberson" as my last name. In one swift move, my identity was lost.

Every school year on the first day of class, my new teacher would call roll. "Gary Kennedy." I remember the embarrassment of walking to the teacher's desk each September to explain the stupidity of my life.

This identity theft impacted me more than you can imagine. My thoughts were constantly, 'Who are you?'

I had no heritage. I had no baseline. I had no father to tell me of his past and direct my future.

This confusion was only exacerbated by the constant strife in our home. Alcohol abuse, occasional physical abuse, and daily (if not hourly) verbal assaults were the norm.

My biological father remarried and focused his attention on raising his new wife's five children. I saw him only a few times during my childhood and on two occasions as a teen. My mother and grandparents implied that I was disloyal to my mother if I showed any admiration or love toward my real father.

I have rarely talked about this part of my life, but it serves as a metaphor for how a boy can struggle with his identity to become an authentic man. I am only one of millions of boys who have a similar story or even worse family dysfunctions.

Somehow I inherently knew that all of my training was wrong. I knew deep within me that I would have the same life that I'd seen modeled before me, unless I did something different. As Einstein famously defined insanity as, "to do the same thing repeatedly and expect different results."

I left home, just me, a 1966 Chevy pickup, a tank of gas, and \$35 dollars. I called a friend of a friend for my first job that lasted 6 months. I worked on a pipeline for another six months, then landed a job pumping water out of a strip coal mine for 12 hours each night, seven nights a week.

Within four years of manhood, I discovered that I was already a failure. I was repeating the pattern. Relationships were immature and destructive. I was utterly alone and depressed.

In my desperation, I came to Christ.

The first relationship I repaired was that with my father.

We meet at the local malt shop. Over a good greasy burger and fries, we reconciled. He told me about his life—his wife, their children, and his achievements since leaving me. He had

become successful.

He had rebuilt his life from a disastrous year in which he lost his family to adultery, he lost his job at General Electric, his father died, followed by his mother.

It was at that moment that I calculated how old he was when all of this occurred. He wasn't much older than I was sitting at that table. I suddenly and somewhat profoundly understood him. I understood his naivety. I understood his failed dreams. I understood him on a level that I could never had imagined. He was me and I was him—a sad young man who was struggling to make a life that mattered.

I looked across the table and simply forgave him. I also forgave myself. I began to shape my future from that table at the malt shop.

A few years ago, my father took down some old notes that he had gathered—notes that he had written over a lifetime—notes that would become the seeds of his novels. To date he has written 20 historic western novels under the pen name of Dusty Rhodes (I know the name is corny but it worked for him). He is an outstanding writer. He found his greatest success in writing.

I recently sat down with him on his porch in the mountains of Arkansas. We talked about life. We talked about a few memories. We talked about being a father.

As I was leaving, I took his hands into mine and spoke a blessing over him, "I acknowledge that you are my father and I am proud to be called by your name."

This Father's Day, I challenge you to deeply consider the man who is called your father.

As difficult as it may be for some, I hope that you can find the resolve within your heart to give him honor. For others,

you may be able to easily show gratitude and honor. For those who simply can't for various reasons, my heart is heavy for you. May God help you.

*FivestarMan was founded in 2008 by **Neil Kennedy**. Kennedy has passionately promoted God's Word for 25-plus years of ministry. He is known for practically applying biblical principles that elevate people to a new level of living. As a business, church, ministry and life consultant, Kennedy has helped others strategize the necessary steps to reach their full potential.*

For the original article, visit .