

The Tragedy of How Father-Hunger Became a Joke in America

One evening I left an elders meeting early with a terrible pain in my abdomen. Driving home I found my body stiffening each time the car went over a crack in the asphalt. Every jolt was painful.

Arriving home, I went straight to the bedroom, but as I was about to crawl into bed, a loud voice in my head yelled at me: "This is *not* the flu!"

Half an hour later I was lying on a gurney in the emergency room, waiting to see a doctor. My pain was constant and I wanted relief. When a doc came, I assumed he'd give me some drug that would take the edge off my pain.

But when the doctor finally got to me, he couldn't figure out what was wrong. Most likely it was my appendix, he said, but my symptoms weren't normal for appendicitis. He had to be sure before masking the symptoms, so I sat there unmedicated, in great pain.

Or rather, I lay there crying. Not noisily—the little boy on the other side of the curtain had that covered. Something was stuck in his ear and he screamed and screamed. He was loudly miserable while I was quietly miserable. The pain that had begun early in the evening continued on deep into the night. My dear wife was next to me, but I'm afraid I was not good company for her.

What's the point?

Generally, people in pain are impatient. They just want to take something for it. But pain is given by God to tell us

something. If we remove the pain without finding its cause and working to address it, we can't be healed.

The same is true of non-physical pain.

The pain of father-hunger is all around us, shared by men and women alike. Comedians are often the guys most willing to be honest about our culture's pains, so I've developed a habit of listening to them. Somewhere in his spiel the comedian will vomit the pain of his father-hunger, and I say "vomit" because listening to stories of fathers abandoning their sons is sickening. The disease has bloody and awful themes.

The most perceptive cope by telling shameful stories about their dads, following up the stories with wry one-liners. If the stories and jokes are good enough, they make a living out of it. Cynicism may not be the only way to mask father-hunger, but it does an okay job for millions.

Masking pain won't heal us, though; we must do the hard work of diagnosis and the harder work of treatment. Pain must direct our attention to the underlying disease. Assuming God designed father-hunger to tell us something and lead us somewhere, we must ask what He is telling us and where He is leading us.

As we ask these questions, though, keep in mind that father-hunger is never new. It's as old as time. It's the result of the sins of fathers, and the sins of fathers are at the center of man's history. They stretch back domino-like to the very beginning.

So despite the temptation to feel this way, you aren't the sore thumb of history, solitary and splendid in your pain. You aren't alone.

Nor will you be able to deal with this pain by the usual means. Self-advancement won't heal you. College, grad school or seminary won't resolve your inner conflict. Counseling

won't take it away, either. Medication may dull it, but not for long. Drinking, video games and fantasy football drafts may take the edge off for a few hours, but when you wake up, late for work, the pain will still be there.

Doctors of the soul don't traffic in painkillers. Rather, they call us to look hard at our pain, trusting that it is God-given and will lead us to the disease and its cure.

"He created them male and female. He blessed them and called them Mankind in the day when they were created" (Gen. 5:2).

"I am as a child new-born, its mother dead,

Its father far away beyond the seas.

Blindly I stretch my arms and seek for him:

He goeth by me, and I see him not.

I cry to him: as if I sprinkled ashes,

My prayers fall back in dust upon my soul."

—George MacDonald, *Within and Without* {[eoas](#)}

The preceding is an excerpt from Tim Bayly's book, Daddy Tried: Overcoming the Failures of Fatherhood (Warhorn Publishing, May 16, 2016). Please visit [here](#).

Tim Bayly has been married to his wife, Mary Lee, for 40 years. They are the parents of five children and grandparents to 21 grandchildren. He has also spent almost as much time as a pastor, helping others grow in their walk with God. Through his own personal failures, the faithful example of his father and the firm, loving hand of his heavenly Father, he has learned a thing or two about fatherhood.