

Ozzie and Harriet Was A Sit-Com (ZCC13) Genesis 1:25-31

25 God made the animals of the earth after their kind, and the livestock after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind. God saw that it was good. 26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. 30 To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food;" and it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (The World English Bible)

Some time ago, we disconnected our satellite and started using an antenna again. We don't watch much TV anyway and it didn't seem to be worth what it cost every month--though once ACC basketball came back around we reconnected.

One thing we gained with the antenna was a couple of TV stations that play shows from the 50's through the 70's. It is interesting to see how situation comedies have changed through the years--how both families and fathers were portrayed early and how they are portrayed later.

In the 50's there was always a mom and a dad--and two or three kids. The father went to work and the mom stayed home cleaning house in what always seemed to me to be their Sunday best. The kids went to school and had HORRIBLE problems like making a "B" on an exam or missing a fly ball and losing the game or going to the prom and having the same dress as another girl.

That model didn't fit the farm-family model I lived early in my life and I am sure it didn't fit lots of families, but that was the family we were spoon-fed from the TV week after week. "My Three Sons" and "Father Knows Best" and "Leave it to Beaver" and "Ozzie and Harriet" were just a few of the shows. Many of us are old enough to have seen those shows first-run--when they were on prime-time, but many more of you have seen them in syndication, so you know what I am talking about.

TV families had a very specific shape--one that, on some level, we were expected to squeeze into. We were expected to have that picture-perfect post-WWII TV-family shape. Mom was a home-maker who took care of the kids and nurtured them.

Dad made money so they could live their lives in comfort. Other than that, he was basically the "wait until your father gets home" guy when the kids acted up.

This "ideal" grew in strength until it became nearly the only acceptable shape of a family in many circles--especially in many religious circles. Mom is responsible for the house and kids. Dad provides. That pattern may look good on TV, but in practice, it is often very flawed.

Over time, many of us men moved into a king-of-the-family role and our family became our subjects. We became emotionally and/or physically absent. We became cold and aloof. Our job was to win the bread and as long as we did that, we were doing our duty. Otherwise we were optional. Our children didn't know us and we didn't really know them.

Fast forward to today and we see that families come in many shapes and sizes and models. Even the more conventional family of dad, mom, and kids has changed because many moms now have jobs. What has not changed is that many dads are still emotionally and/or physically absent.

Families take many forms, but on this Father's Day, I want to speak specifically to us dads. Dads across our society--but I do want to say since becoming a part of the Christian Church, I've seen things that are encouraging. I've seen younger fathers changing the patterns and being there for their children in ways that are refreshing and positive..

The passage we read a while ago seems to give a glimpse of the pattern God intended for his children--how God intended men and women to live and the relationship they were to have.

The man and the woman were to share "dominion" over creation. The word translated as "dominion" does not speak as much to ruling or dominating as we often think. It speaks to watch-care or responsibility. Mutual responsibility to take care of what God provided. I honestly believe that this is what God intended for us to be--equal partners sharing all responsibilities. If so, then raising and nurturing and "being there" for our children is part of a man's job.

It was only after the fall--after humans broke God's laws and were sent from the garden that things changed.

Scripture predicts what the new pattern will look like in Genesis 3:16-19.

16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bear children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." 17 To Adam he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and ate from the tree, about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' the ground is cursed for your sake. You will eat from it with much labor all the days of your life.

18 It will yield thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat the herb of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (The World English Bible)

God describes the mess they have gotten themselves--and in a sense--the rest of us into. The man will tend to rule over the woman--and she will allow it. The man will get caught up in his work and will demand to be treated as a king (there are still some places where wives address their husbands as "my lord").

I believe that, when we know what God intended for us, it is always the right thing to strive for it. It is always right to try and be what God wants us to be. We may never get back to the kind of partnership God intended, but we can work toward that end.

Men, breadwinners or not, we are responsible for the emotional and spiritual health of our children. If our children are to thrive (or even survive) in this world, we need to love them and nurture them and we need to do the same for their mothers.

Our children need us. If we aren't their role-models, who will be? Race car drivers who have a win at any cost attitude and who fight at any opportunity? Professional athletes who use illegal drugs to win and who seem to constantly be being arrested for assault and rape and even murder? Politicians who seem to think that telling the truth is optional and lying is the norm?

Our daughters need us. In my study of counseling and psychology I've learned that it is important for us to reassure our daughters that they are valuable and beautiful and important to us. Having a father or father-figure to teach them their worth literally helps positively shape their lives. Without that--as they get older, they may tend to jump into a relationship with any male who pays attention to them and says they love them.

Ultimately, human beings want approval. Parental approval is important to our development into well-rounded human beings. Do you remember the story of Jesus' baptism? Do you remember what happened just as he came up out of the water? (Dove and voice--"this is my beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased"). Interestingly enough, those who were present only heard a sound like thunder. So who was the approval for? It was for the Son, even the Son of God.

Our children seek the same thing. That is what makes many of our little-leaguers and pony-league football players run so hard, not the game. They want to hear, they NEED to hear us say "well done!"

Do they get it? I like to think I am better now, but when Tom, our oldest, was small--I was obsessed with making things perfect. "Here, let me show you..." "Here, just fix this thing right here..."

Over time, I have (PRETTY WELL) come to understand that if we say, "That's nice, but..." then all they will hear is the "BUT" part. Parental love--a father's love must be unconditional. If we don't give it, then our children will look for love elsewhere--often in the wrong places.

Men, popular society tells us that our emotional pain comes from something being wrong with past our relationship with our mothers--and that can be--but it may be that many of our internal emotional struggles are because we are grieving over the loss of our fathers--for some of us, even though they are STILL ALIVE. Some of them and some of us have failed to "be there" for our children. Sometimes we have been gone physically and sometimes we have been gone emotionally.

It is clear that, to a large degree, our daughters get their sense of womanhood from us--from their fathers or father figures. Our sons may have us as their heroes--but we are often gone or not available even when we are home. Fathers who are absent can't be heroes. Fathers who are absent can't teach their sons how to be men--how to be real men. None of that "boys don't cry" stuff. None of that, "don't get close to people or you will get hurt" stuff.

Men, our children and our grandchildren need us--even our great-grandchildren. It is painful admire someone who is not there. It is painful to love someone who will not, or can not express love back. Our children are sick of playing ball or building something or drawing something--only to have their father unavailable or unwilling to say, "well done!"

When we are not there for them, our families tend to fill those holes in their lives with other things. We make it easy for those who would sell them drugs. WE become pimps for sexual predators. WE fill gangs with our children--children who are only seeking a sense of approval and a sense of family. They are seeking us through drugs and alcohol. He is seeking us in fast cars and shallow relationships. She is trying to find us in negative relationships-- always with the wrong kind of person.

Many of us are also victims. We still long for tender touches--and yet we are afraid of tenderness. We need deep relationships and yet we are afraid to be vulnerable. We talk about sex and yet many of us have never known true love and real intimacy. We hide our emotions like they are weaknesses.

Men, we are not children anymore, but may still find ourselves seeking that relationship with our fathers. If your father is still alive, it is not too late to reach out to him. If your father is gone, reach out to your children or your grandchildren and develop a meaningful and deep relationship with them. If your own father was not there for you--overcome YOUR loss by being what you needed but didn't have. Give your children or grandchildren what you needed--what you may still be seeking.

Fathers, if you need to fix your relationships with your own children, it is not too late as long as they are still alive. I promise you that if your relationships are not healthy--whether they are small or if they are adults--you are missing something and have a void that needs to be filled. Most likely they have that same void. It may be that you, through your efforts, can fill both voids. That may mean swallowing some pride and admitting that you failed, but that is a small price to pay. If they are doing pretty well or if they are failing--either way, they need a healthy relationship with you.

If we have failed our children, I suspect that was not our intent. For many years, our society and even our faith-systems taught us that we were not an essential part of our children's emotional development. We provided what we thought was important. Maybe our jobs took us away--mine did, literally. Maybe our own fathers, our own examples, taught us that we shouldn't get too close to our children, or even our wives.

I challenge each of you to change that today.

Yesterday is over. We cannot change what was. We CAN change tomorrow and I challenge each of us: Let's choose to be good fathers and grandfathers--transforming our relationships with our children, young and old. We welcome them back, just as the prodigal son's father did--not as servants, but as honored and loved children. No, "I told you so!" We will reach out to them unconditionally. If our families and relationships are to be strong, it is time to forgive and be forgiven.

It is time to seek a pattern that works--one of mutual responsibility and submission for mothers and fathers. It is time for us to go back to the pattern of the garden--before Adam and Eve sinned and changed everything.

Men, if our children and grandchildren are to be healthy, we must nurture them with all our being. It is time to tell them "no matter what, you are my child and I love you..."

You may be a son or a daughter who has no father or grandfather--or even a father-figure--to care for you and love you unconditionally. Your father may have loved and nurtured you--but he is gone now. Or he may NOT have done so in life and he may be dead. Maybe your earthly father is alive but dead to your needs. It is important to remember that we have a father in heaven who is seeking a relationship with each of us. Right now he loves you unconditionally. He loves you so much that he sent his Son so that you can be his child. I challenge you today to accept his love and be a beloved child of God through the work and the sacrifice of Jesus, the Christ.