

Week 3 – The Wound

Read

In the case of violent fathers, the boy's question is answered in a devastating way.

"Do I have what it takes? Am I a man, Papa?" No, you are a mama's boy, an idiot, a seagull. Those are defining sentences that shape a man's life. The assault wounds are like a shotgun blast to the chest. This can get unspeakably evil when it involves physical, sexual, or verbal abuse carried on for years. Without some kind of help, many men never recover. One thing about the assault wounds—they are obvious. The passive wounds are not; they are pernicious, like a cancer. Because they are subtle, they often go unrecognized as wounds and therefore are actually more difficult to heal.

My father was in many ways a good man. He introduced me to the West, and taught me to fish and to camp. I still remember the fried egg sandwiches he would make us for dinner. It was his father's ranch that I worked on each summer, and my dad and I saw a lot of the West together as we'd make the long drive from Southern California to Oregon, often with fishing detours through Idaho and Montana. But like so many men of his era, my father had never faced the issues of his own wounds, and he fell to drinking when his life began to take a downhill turn. I was about eleven or twelve at the time—a very critical age in the masculine journey, the age when the question really begins to surface. At the very moment when I was desperately wondering what it means to be a man, and did I have what it takes, my father checked out, went silent. He had a workshop out back, attached to the garage, and he would spend his hours out there alone, reading, doing crossword puzzles, and drinking. That is a major wound.

Never receiving any sort of blessing from your father is a wound. Never spending time with him, or getting precious little time, that is wounding as well. My friend Alex's father died when he was four years old. The sun in his universe set, never to rise again. How is a little boy to understand that? Every afternoon Alex would stand by the front window, waiting for his father to come home. This went on for almost a year. I've had many clients whose fathers simply left and never came back. Stuart's dad did that, just up and left, and his mother, a troubled woman, was unable to raise him. So he was sent to his aunt and uncle. Divorce or abandonment is a wound that lingers because the boy (or girl) believes if they had done things better, Daddy would have stayed.

Some fathers give a wound merely by their silence; they are present, yet absent to their sons. The silence is deafening. I remember as a boy wanting my father to die, and feeling immense guilt for having such a desire. I understand now that I wanted someone to validate the wound.

My father was gone, but because he was physically still around, he was not gone. So I lived with a wound no one could see or understand. In the case of silent, passive, or absent fathers, the question goes unanswered. “Do I have what it takes? Am I a man, Daddy?” Their silence is the answer: “I don’t know... I doubt it... you’ll have to find out for yourself... probably not.”

Every man carries a wound. I have never met a man without one. No matter how good your life may have seemed to you, you live in a broken world full of broken people. Your mother and father, no matter how wonderful, couldn’t have been perfect. She is a daughter of Eve, and he a son of Adam. So there is no crossing through this country without taking a wound. They may come from other sources—a brother, an uncle, a coach, or a stranger. But come they do. And every wound, whether it’s assaultive or passive, delivers with it a *message*. The message feels final and true, absolutely true, because it is delivered with such force. Our reaction to it shapes our personality in very significant ways. From that flows the false self. Most of the men you meet are living out a false self, a pose, which is directly related to their wounds.

Reflect

1. Did you know your dad adored you? What did you do together with your dad when you were a boy?
2. What was your dad’s message to you in response to your question, “Do I have what it takes?” Did he answer a thousand times “Yes?”
3. What did your dad teach you about yourself as a man?

Scripture

Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,

because the Lord has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim freedom for the captives

and release from darkness for the prisoners,