

Bloodlines Are Important

When my father died, my brothers designated me to be "in charge"

By Jamie Buckingham

of the services—a graveside service at the cemetery attended by family followed by a memorial service at the First Baptist Church.

It was during the graveside service, as I stepped forward to commit my father's body to the earth "from whence he came," that I had this strange urging to ask the members of my father's bloodline to step forward and join me. I say strange for bloodlines had never had meaning for me.

Yet that early morning in the Florida cemetery, with the sun reflecting off the dew clinging to the green Bermuda grass and the mockingbirds singing in the Surinam cherry hedge, it seemed proper for my father's blood descendants to be the ones to lay hands on the casket as it was lowered into the grave. This included my two brothers—Clay, resplendent in his white dress uniform as an army general, and John, a kind, affable medical doctor—their children, my children and the children of our oldest brother who had died some years before.

It excluded our spouses, my mother and my younger sister, Audrey—who was adopted. For reasons I still do not understand it seemed important that my father's blood descendants—those formed by his seed—be the ones to officiate in that final and sacred moment.

I've never cared for bloodlines. I've always looked a bit askance at people obsessed with tracing family trees. Spiritual people, I thought, should not need the false security of dynastic succession. I don't know why I developed this independent attitude. Perhaps it grew out of an early and somewhat twisted evaluation of such groups as the Daughters of the American Revolution, people who traced their lineage back to the Mayflower, or those who not only bragged—but sometimes killed—to protect their Jewishness, or Irishness, or blackness.

But the older I grow the more important bloodlines become. When I talk to one of my brothers on the phone—and both live in different states—there is a nagging feeling which can be described only as homesickness. I want to spend time with them— simply because they are my brothers.

Interestingly, although Audrey is not of my father's seed, I feel equally attracted to her. After all, she was "chosen." I cherish the day last year when she drove up from her home in Fredericktown, Missouri, to the camp near Hillsboro where I was attending a leadership retreat. She asked one of the men in the lodge where I could be found. He thrilled her (and me) by saying, "I'll bet you're Jamie's sister. You look just like him."

Most Americans don't know who they are. Divorce has caused such havoc in bloodlines that last Christmas the shopping center Santas were instructed not to ask children about their parents because many children simply do not know who their parents are. "His, hers and ours" has become a cute—but tragic—phrase.

Typical of our American culture is our lack of roots. We are a Lockean nation, a people born as blanks who change our names, change our careers, move every three years, and are looked

upon as strange if we stay members of the same church all our life.

Those who work with mailing lists tell us that 20 percent of the addresses change every year—some move across town, many move across the country. Only a few never change addresses in a span of five years. We Americans are mobile to a fault. I've never moved without losing something. Have you?

Our heroes are actors and actresses—the original hypocrites—nobodies playing the role of anybody. We grow old and instead of moving close to family we buy a trailer in Florida or a condo in Arizona. Bloodlines are maintained by AT&T who advertise "reach out and touch someone." The bloodlines remain—but in our rootless, high speed society, they exist only in the heart—not in the flesh.

A lot of this got stirred up recently when I began a search for my family crest—the coat of arms. A friend thought it would be a good idea to include the crest on the envelope of my new newsletter to senior pastors—the *Buckingham Report*.

"Heraldry gives you a touch of class," he said.

But when I went to the library I discovered that Buckingham is not a name—it's a place. Not only that, the various dukes and earls of Buckingham were rather common. Like me. The second duke of Buckingham, who rebelled against King Richard, was executed on November 2, 1483, after being betrayed by a friend. Typical. The third duke opposed Cardinal Wolsey and was executed by the church on May 17, 1521. The fifth generation Buckingham, a viscount, was accused of philandering and was beheaded in 1680. Yikes!

By the way, the coat of arms for these infamous ancestors was the lion rampant. Quite a heritage.

For years I have proclaimed my deepest relationships are with friends—especially those who are in a covenant relationship with me. Yet, despite my attempts to assuage my ancestry, the bloodline keeps reappearing—linking me to a long chain of generations, beckoning me back to family.

It's in us all—this tugging. Why is it when I hear someone quoting James Whitcomb Riley—"When the frost is on the pumpkin and the fodder's in shock"—that I want to migrate, as surely as the robins, back to my father's Indiana? When I hear the plaintive notes of "Old Folks at Home," I start scouting around to find some kind of excuse to make a trip to the bluegrass area of my mother's Kentucky—yearning to visit the Barnes and Henrys in Mt. Sterling, munch on beaten

biscuits and country ham, and sit up late into the night telling stories about Grandpa Thompson. Why do I feel so much at home with Kentucky cousins whom I only see once every ten years?

It's more than sentiment. My father and mother live on in me. And I? I sometimes sit quietly in my chair watching my grown children play with their children, searching each face for signs of my genes. If genealogies were important to God, then why should I say otherwise. The blood tie still binds. . . and I am glad. ↵



Jamie Buckingham is editor-at-large of *Charisma*.