

Lessons from the Cinderella Man by Chris Garner

James J. Braddock boxed professionally in the 1920's and 30's. Quickly, he became a contender and was widely acknowledged as one of the best young boxers of his time, fighting for the light heavyweight title in 1929. His heartbreaking loss in that fight seemed to be an indicator of the future for both Braddock and the country. Several months later, the stock market crash brought on the Great Depression and James Braddock entered a five-year period of injuries and struggles both inside and out of the boxing ring. The financial difficulties of the period placed James and his young family in desperate times. A chronically broken right hand kept him from earning the money he customarily earned and eventually, he had to accept welfare just to feed and care for his family.

James Braddock persevered and in 1935, he became the heavyweight champion of the world, defeating a heavily favored Max Baer in a contest called one of the greatest upsets in boxing history. His fairytale rise from the bottom to the top of the boxing profession earned him the nickname of the *Cinderella Man*. Braddock's rise from the depths caught the imagination of the nation and inspired many to persevere at a time when few had much hope. The 2005 movie brings to life the struggle and determination of a family attempting to cope with the incredibly hard times they faced. James Braddock was a boxer, but more than that, he was a husband and a father. The movie very effectively illustrates several important lessons about marriage.

James and his wife Mae faced serious economic problems, the struggle to keep their family together, and finding time for the two of them. Together, they endured the toughest period of their lives; a time when many men and women simply walked away from family responsibilities. This story also exemplifies the roles of husband and wife. Mae stood with her husband and supported him when many wives would turn an accusing finger at their husband as one wife did when she berated her husband for not wanting to participate with a joint birthday party for several children. James fulfilled his role as leader in the home by handling the problem of their son's theft of food, rather than leaving it for Mae to deal with. He provided for his family in any way he could, walking long distances to find work and boxing injured to put food on the table.

The most poignant example of James and Mae's work together comes at the end of the movie. Worried about her husband Mae didn't want James to fight the ferocious Max Baer who had actually killed one man and possibly a second in the ring. James didn't want to pass up the opportunity to rise to the top of his profession, but more importantly, the fight would give his family financial security that would raise them out of the terrible poverty they had experienced. Mae's fear kept her from standing with her husband until she discovered that many people found hope in his determination and ability to rise above the circumstances they all faced. Mae went to James and in the locker room before the fight, stated, "You can't win without me behind you." Encouraging her husband, she continued, "Win or lose, you are the champion of my heart." Empowered by the support of his wife, James Braddock went out and accomplished the seemingly impossible task of winning the world heavyweight boxing championship.

Husbands are you the Godly leader of your home; providing for the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of your wives and families? Wives are you the anchor of your home, loving your husbands and children, as God would have you love them? Do you stand together as a team and rise above even the toughest circumstances? These are lessons we can learn from the *Cinderella Man*.