

CHRISTIAN FATHERHOOD

My dad, who passed away in March 2007, once told me that his greatest regret in life was not spending more time with my brother and me when we were young. Even so, I never felt I had an “absentee” father. In fact, by today’s standards, my workaholic dad would have been considered a “Father of the Year” candidate.

Though he worked much of the time, I was blessed to have my dad around for my entire childhood (my parents divorced when I was 18). I was even more blessed to be able to spend my first seven years as a parent working from home. Unfortunately, my situation has been more the exception than the norm.

According to an “Executive Summary” published by the Population Resource Center in 2004, the percentage of children living in two-parent households decreased from 77 percent in 1980 to 68 percent in 1999. The study attributed this trend to “Increases in divorce and out-of-wedlock births.” The study also stated that the percentage of babies born to unwed mothers reached an all-time high in 1999 at 33 percent.

When did things go wrong?

The sexual revolution of the 1960’s and the feminist movement of the 1970’s insinuated a belief that men were unnecessary except for procreation purposes. With the first “test tube baby” born in July 1978, men were not even needed for that reason. The result has been a radical increase in the number of children being born and/or raised without a father.

The affluence of the 1990’s and beyond caused yet another parental phenomenon—the substitution of “things” for time and love. As much as a child may want the newest electronic gadget, what that child really needs is parental love and attention. The bottom line is that there will always be a way to make more money, but once the precious commodity of time is spent it is gone forever.

The need for a father figure

When I was a child, the person whose opinion of me I valued the most was my father. This continued, to a lesser extent, when I became an adult. I can see this need for fatherly approval in the eyes of both my son and my daughter. Both our words and our actions speak loudly to our children.

Some fathers may be causing problems to their children without intending to. A careless word or irresponsible action can cause a child emotional anguish and self-doubt. As a Christian father (or father figure) it is important to demonstrate Christ’s love for any young people we may have the opportunity to teach, coach, or parent. It is by our example that they will learn.

If a child grows up in an abusive home, that child's idea of a healthy relationship becomes extremely warped. Any child growing up in this environment will possibly suffer from clinical depression and/or low self-esteem. A boy who watches his father verbally and/or physically abuse his mother could be likely to repeat that behavior as an adult.

While much is made of the need for a boy to have a male role model, the need for girls is equally strong. A boy needs a man to show him how to be a man, how to treat the women in his life, and how to be a father. A girl needs a male role model so that she can learn how a woman should be treated. One reason why so many women stay in abusive relationships may be the lack of a positive husband-wife relationship to imitate.

You can make a difference

The good news is that over the last few years, the importance of a father in a child's life has been rediscovered. Many men are now working from home either by running their own home-based business or by telecommuting. Numerous books, both Christian and secular, are now extolling the virtues of fatherhood. While the attitude toward fatherhood has changed dramatically over the last decade, let's hope it is not too little, too late.

Don't look to the "next" guy or wait for the "right" time. Contact your church's youth director and children's minister. These departments are always looking for willing and able male volunteers. I urge every man to pray for God's direction to how he can help love and disciple the next generation.

The Bible commands us to take care of and protect "widows and the fatherless." With the seeming surplus of households without an adequate father figure, the need for Christian men to step in and fill the void is greater than ever.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Spend time, not money—remember that you can make more money, but you can't make more time.
- Treat others with respect—your children are watching you.
- Don't just tell your children that you love them—show it!
- Don't be afraid to cry—they know you're human and have emotions just as they do, so don't be afraid to show it.
- Never tell any child that he or she is “bad”, “stupid”, “ugly” or any other negative and hurtful label.
- Accentuate the positive—be honest, but always try and find something good to say about a child's effort, play, drawing, etc.
- Recognize the difference between discipline and punishment—discipline is corrective and done out of love, punishment is negative and done out of anger.
- You will make mistakes—learn from them.
- Don't let the devil get you down—give your doubts and fears to the Lord and ignore Satan's attempts to derail your ministry.
- Get involved. Volunteer in the children's ministry of your church, even if you have no children or if yours are grown.