

Fathers: Now more than ever

By Greg Laurie

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Father's Day is a time to commemorate and honor the most important men in our lives – our fathers. And in these perilous times I think it's all the more important for us to do this, since without their leadership in our homes, we are doomed as a culture.

I don't want to come off as overdramatic, but our country is in desperate need of real fathers, today more than ever before. Most of our social ills today can be directly traced to the lack of fathers in our homes.

Consider some of our nation's most serious problems. Studies show that the most reliable predictor of these behaviors is neither income nor race, but the absence of the father:

Fact: 90 percent of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Fact: 85 percent of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes (Source: Centers for Disease Control).

Fact: 85 percent of all youths sitting in prisons grew up in a fatherless home (Source: Fulton County, Ga., jail populations, Texas Department of Corrections 1992).

Fact: 80 percent of rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes (Source: Centers for Disease Control).

Fact: 75 percent of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes (Source: Rainbows for all God's Children).

Fact: 71 percent of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes (Source: National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools).

Fact: Over 70 percent of teenage pregnancies are to children of single parents (Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Fact: 63 percent of youth suicides are from fatherless homes (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census).

Alfred A. Messer notes that "father hunger" often afflicts boys whose fathers are suddenly and permanently absent. Sleep disturbances, such as trouble falling asleep, nightmares and night terrors frequently begin within months after the father leaves home.

Children from fatherless families often have less of an ability to delay gratification and exhibit poorer impulse control (that is, control over anger and sexual gratification.) These children also have a weaker sense of conscience, or sense of right and wrong.

In short, innumerable studies indicate fatherless children are at a dramatically greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, suicide, poor educational performance, teen pregnancy and criminality. Without men around as role models, adolescent boys create their own rites of passage, perhaps getting a girl pregnant or dealing drugs or murdering a rival. And adolescent girls subconsciously seek to win back their father's love, often engaging in promiscuity and attention-getting behaviors.

Why are many men today drifting further and further away from family life? What is the cause of the "Fatherless Society" we live in? Is the notion of fatherhood itself becoming obsolete?

Researchers at the University of Newcastle in Great Britain claim they are on the verge of creating sperm cells from bone marrow. This would allow women to conceive children completely without men. According to these researchers, men might eventually become biologically unnecessary for women to bear children.

Meanwhile, Kay S. Hymowitz argues that artificial insemination is already redefining the family. In "The Incredible Shrinking Father," she explains our culture is fast moving to recognize a class of persons who never existed before – children without fathers. Or even children with two mothers.

Despite the world's technology and the rejection of the Christian view of marriage as the union of one man and one woman, Christians understand the potential impact of a godly father is almost immeasurable.

Fathers are the visible link their children will ultimately have to their Father in Heaven. The viewpoint our children will develop about God will come from fathers more than any other place.

The famous rapper Tupac Shakur grew up in a New York City ghetto. In 1996, he was gunned down in a

drive-by shooting. Of his life he said:

I know for a fact if I had a father, I'd have some discipline. I'd have more confidence. Your mother can't calm you down the way a man can. Your mother can't reassure you the way a man can. Your mother can't show you where your manhood was. You need a man to teach you how to be a man.

Men, your influence upon your kids is enormous. The Scriptures say, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Take the time to share your life with your kids. Tell them you love them and you're proud of them. Be there for them and show them the character and heart of a godly man.

British preacher C.H. Spurgeon once wrote, "A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you, and were helped by you, will remember you. So carve your name on hearts and not on marble."

Men, I am calling on you today to be the fathers God has called you to be. You cannot even think about deserting. You are on the front lines. Our wives, our families, our communities and our country need you.