**Fathers are Really Important!**

Violence crime is reported on the news on a daily basis and the constant barrage of reports can be overwhelming. It is difficult to understand how some can be so cold and callous as to inflict suffering and even death on their fellow man. When both the perpetrator and the victims are young people, the aftermath is all the more heartbreaking.

It would be nice to be able to identify the one key factor behind the madness but, alas, human behavior is simply more complicated than that. Drug and alcohol addiction, abuse and distribution bear the lion’s share of the blame for the incarceration rates we see in this country, but that still doesn’t answer the basic question: How can some innocent babies grow up without empathy for others that comes naturally for most folks?

Paul taught in Romans 1:28-32 that some who “did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer” developed depraved minds characterized by, among other things, greed, murder, deceit, insolence and a lack of mercy. One item on Paul’s list that stands out is “without natural affection” (v. 31). That phrase is certainly descriptive of a person who can walk into a room of strangers with every intention of doing them harm, without even a hint of concern over the suffering they are about to inflict on their innocent fellows.

The Scriptures make it clear that the way children are raised is a significant determiner for the way they turn out. Ephesians 6:4 emphasizes the importance of fathers in the process. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Both sons and daughters need a father to show them what a real man looks like. I’m not talking about a guy who can bench-press 280, I’m talking about a man who provides the leadership, resources and protection his family needs; a man who puts God first and everyone else a close second; a man who treats women with dignity and respect. Sons need a role model and daughters need to learn not to settle for selfish, abusive losers. In other words, *dad needs to shape up and be there.*

Secular studies point in the same direction. The British Psychological Society discovered that, among boys with no criminal convictions and no problems with their teachers, 55% lived with their biological fathers and 80% reported being close to their biological fathers. Of boys who were persistent offenders with convictions including sexual assault, theft and stealing vehicles, 4% lived with their biological father and 45% regarded no one as a father figure. Other studies have yielded similar results.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in three children live without their biological father in the home. While no single factor accounts for all of our problems, the simple fact is that we have a crisis of absentee fathers in this country and we are suffering the consequences. Programs designed to provide positive role models for young people are excellent and should be supported. But nothing beats a devoted father who is there for his family.

The millions of dads who are doing their best for their kids are often the unsung heroes. You can find them at the ballfield or the park or their own back yard, teaching invaluable life lessons with love and by example. Being a dad is not always easy, but when it comes to the welfare of our children, there is simply no substitute.

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