



The Fatherhood Shortage

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We have a fatherhood shortage in America today. Although many have written on the crisis of literal “father absence” in our homes, I am speaking of something much deeper. I call it “fatherlessness”—having less of the father than our Father in Heaven wants us to have. Our purpose in addressing this topic is founded on this conviction: Men who are currently engaged in the marvelous enterprise of fatherhood with their own children can be made much better fathers if they focus on how to overcome any fatherhood deficits that they have encountered in their own homes of origin. It is not our intent to blame our Dads from the prior generation, but to become the best Dads we can become for the next generation.

Almost anyone who works with the dynamics of family life would concur that a significant percentage of adults struggle with various life issues that can be traced back to a loss of fatherhood at some level. This loss ranges all the way from the total absence of a father in the home to physical, emotional or sexual abuse by a father or step-father—and everything in between those two extremes. Some would say that Dad was “present” but not available—emotionally or intellectually. Regardless of the facts, many of us are walking around with this condition of “fatherlessness.”

In direct contrast to the familiar “blame game” of pinning every social ailment on the loss of fatherhood, God has made a way for those who came up short in the fatherhood department of life:

1 Cor 4:15: “Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”

Ps 68:4-6: “Sing to God, sing praise to his name...his name is the LORD....A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing...”

Symptoms of Being “Fatherless”

Although an entire book could be devoted to this sub-topic, the typical symptoms of “father shortage” in adults includes (1) an ongoing feeling of being hurt, bitter and unforgiving toward a father; (2) a deep sense of abandonment or rejection; (3) low self-esteem and low self-confidence characterized by chronic anxiety and fear of failure; and (4) difficulty receiving and accepting the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father.

The Earth-Heaven Connection

Our perception of the Heavenly Father often keys off of our perception of an earthly father (*Luke 11:11-13*). Distorted views of our Heavenly Father, due to the character flaws and limited capacities of our earthly fathers, create the most obvious barrier to fully receiving the awesome fullness of the Father's love for us. Earthly fathers provide our first perceptions of who a father is, who we are, and how we are to receive love in this life. Fathers have the power to shape the core of a child's life through their words, touches, and expressions--thus preparing them to properly respond to the Father's love later in life. Flaws in fathers in these areas can become powerful barriers to the Father's love.

Common Distortions of Fatherhood

Our warped understanding of the Heavenly Father is often shaped by one of four common distortions by our earthly fathers:

- (1) The **performance oriented father** gives love only as a reward for performance in areas such as chores, education, sports, etc. This produces a perception of the Father as one who *demand*s religious performance. The result is a Christian who only believes he is really loved when performing well. Their experiences of love are usually sparse and fleeting;
- (2) The **passive father** is not around home much, really “not there” even when he is physically present home, and is quite non--demonstrative with love. Fathers who travel constantly, are workaholics, alcoholics, divorced and left, died at an early age or were emotionally stoic fit into this category. The resultant perception of the Father is that He is *distant*, non--caring, non-involved and non-demonstrative;
- (3) The **punitive father** gives pain instead of love; pain coming through some degree of emotional, physical or sexual abuse. The resultant perception of the Father is that He is stern, harsh, punitive, unforgiving and unloving. Fear and anger often block the Father's love in the lives of Christians with such a perception; and
- (4) The **permissive father** gives excess pleasurable things to their children instead of giving himself with love. These things often come in the form of extravagant gifts. This type of Dad rarely says “no” and fails in giving loving discipline. This often produces in a child a feeling that if things are not going well financially or logistically that God has somehow withdrawn His love.

For those who suffer from some level of “fatherlessness,” which I believe includes most of us, the first step toward truth and wholeness is grasping how much God the Father really loves. The Bible is the best place to start this search for our identity:

1 Jn 3:1: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!...”

Rom 8:14-17: “...those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”

Ps. 103:8-13: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him...”

So, in summary, we would suggest that the first step in overcoming “fatherlessness” is to intentionally study God's word and read good books on the topic of God's love for us. By so doing, we get in touch with how a real Father looks, acts, and feels toward us.