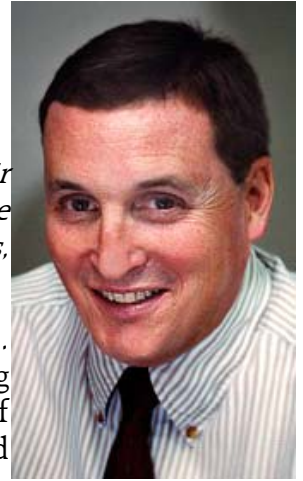


# You Can't Outsource Fatherhood!

by Mark Alexander, Patriot Post vol 8 no. 24; June 13, 2008

*"It is the duty of parents to maintain their children decently, and according to their circumstances; to protect them according to the dictates of prudence; and to educate them according to the suggestions of a judicious and zealous regard for their usefulness, their respectability and happiness." — James Wilson (1791)*

Just after the turn of the millennium, I was reviewing family social data from 1950-2000. Looking at historical trends pertaining to economics, crime and incarcerations, drug abuse, education, physical and emotional health, premarital sex, pregnancy out of wedlock, child abuse and generational patterns of divorce, I was not surprised to find that there was one grid that highly correlated with all the others.



Of course, I'm referring to the corollary between fathers in the home and the welfare of their children. Turns out that children greatly benefit from the love, affirmation, discipline and protection of both their mother and father — preferably under the same roof.

Indeed, social data since 2000 continues to confirm that correlation.

Father's Day has been observed for a century, and its inspiration, Mother's Day, has been celebrated in one form or another since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But perhaps these should be combined into a "Children's Day," because as any devoted parent can attest, there is no greater responsibility or privilege than parenting, and no greater reward than the blessing of children.

The good news is that there is a resurgence of men who are honoring their wives and children as responsible husbands and fathers. Unfortunately, many men still abdicate their responsibility as fathers.

Marriage is the foundation for the family, which in turn, serves as the foundation for society. In 295 BC, Mencius wrote, "The root of the kingdom is in the state. The root of the state is in the family. The root of the family is in the person of its head."

Broken marriages lead to broken families, which lead to broken societies. The most successful fathering is rooted in a healthy marriage. Thus, to be good fathers, we must first be good husbands.

Marital infidelity and the consequences for children were a concern for our Founders: John Adams wrote in his diary on 2 June 1778, "The foundation of national morality must be laid in private families.... How is it possible that Children can have any just Sense of the sacred Obligations of Morality or Religion if, from their earliest Infancy, they learn their Mothers live in habitual Infidelity to their fathers, and their fathers in as constant Infidelity to their Mothers?"

One of my mentors, Dr. Jim Lee, director of Living Free ministries, writes that the Christian marriage paradigm is built on a foundation of five principles: "First, God is the creator of the marriage relationship; second, heterosexuality is God's pattern for marriage; third, monogamy is God's design for marriage; fourth, God's plan for marriage is for physical and spiritual unity; and fifth, marriage was designed to be permanent."

When this paradigm is broken, the exemplar for children is broken, and the consequences are staggering. One of the greatest affronts to the Body of Christ, then, is also the most common injury to the family of man — marital infidelity and divorce.

Divorce, which typically results in the absence of fathers from their headship role within the family, is the single most significant common denominator among all categories of social and cultural entropy.

However, more than 50 percent of children born to married parents will suffer through their parents' divorce by age 18.

Currently, almost 60 percent of black children, 32 percent of Hispanic children and 21 percent of white children

are living in single-parent homes. And the consequences?

Consider these sobering statistics from the Centers for Disease Control, Department of Justice, Department of Health and Human Services and the Bureau of the Census: Children who live apart from their fathers will account for 40 percent of incarcerated adults, 63 percent of teen suicides, 70 percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions, 71 percent of high-school dropouts, 75 percent of children in chemical-abuse centers, 80 percent of rapists, 85 percent of youths in prison, 85 percent of children who exhibit behavioral disorders, and 90 percent of homeless and runaway children.

About eight percent of children in married-couple homes live at or below poverty level, while almost 40 percent of children in homes without fathers live below poverty level. The latter group risks a much higher incidence of serious child abuse or neglect.

Notably, the most common and severe wounds inflicted upon children are not necessarily physical. Children internalize emotional abuse and rejection — particularly rejection by their family of origin — parental separation or divorce, or dissociation from a chemically dependent or emotionally disabled parent.

Internalization occurs when children, in defiance of adult logic, believe they are somehow responsible for the harm that came to them, whether it was circumstantial, accidental or intended. In the case of divorce, children often believe they must have caused parental dissolution, or were deserving of it.

This internalized rejection often manifests in a condition known as Arrested Emotional Development (AED) — emotional development impeded during childhood and resulting in emotional disabilities carried into adulthood.

It is no small irony that divorced parents were, in all likelihood, themselves the child-victims of generational patterns of familial dissociation and dissolution. Daughters bear a particularly difficult burden in the absence of fathers. A broken father-daughter trust bond can disable the formation of a trust bond with a husband in later life.

Indeed, the sins of our fathers are visited upon generations that follow.

There is also a sobering financial component to all this: Beyond the private-sector costs associated with absentee fathers is a taxpayer assessment of well over \$100 billion annually for social-welfare services to families without fathers.

On this Father's Day, then, may we not only count the blessings of fatherhood, but also commit to honoring those attendant obligations every day. May we also examine the job we are doing as husbands first, and then as fathers.

Additional information about fatherhood can be obtained from Focus on the Family, the National Center for Fathering, the National Fatherhood Initiative and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

If you are interested in community-based marriage and parenting initiatives, the gold standard is the template designed by First Things First under the expert guidance of my friend, Julie Baumgardner.

(Editor's Note: To all those fathers who have been forcibly separated from their children, this call for fathers to honor their obligations, starting with marriage, does not discount the fact that there are many women who live in constant infidelity to their husbands, and women who subordinate the needs of their marriage and family life to their own desires — careers, social relationships and activities, substance abuse, media immersion, etc. Predictably, the vast majority of those women are, themselves, the victims of marital dissolution, or dissociation from a chemically dependent or emotionally disabled father.)

#### **Quote of the week —**

"Maturity does not come with age, but with the accepting of responsibility for one's actions. The lack of effective, functioning fathers is the root cause of America's social, economic and spiritual crises." — Dr. Edwin Cole