

The Crisis of Fatherhood

"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." Psalm 68:5 (ESV)

In 2003, the Idaho Observer cited statistics in an article that said children from fatherless homes account for^[1]:

- **63% of youth suicides.** (Source: US Dept. of Health & Human Services, Bureau of the Census).
- **71% of pregnant teenagers.** (Source: US Dept. of Health & Human Services)
- **90% of all homeless and runaway children.**
- **70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions.** (Source: U.S. Dept. of Justice, Special Report, Sept 1988)
- **85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders.** (Source: Center for Disease Control).
- **80% of rapists motivated with displaced anger.** (Source: Criminal Justice & Behavior, Vol. 14, p. 403-26, 1978).
- **71% of all high school dropouts.** (Source: National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools).
- **75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers.** (Source: Rainbows for all God's Children).
- **85% of all youths sitting in prisons.** (Source: Fulton Co. Georgia jail populations, Texas Dept. of Corrections 1992).

These statistics terrify me. They are so stunning and disheartening that instead of having my eyes opened by them I just want to close my eyes, my ears and my mind. I want to pretend they aren't true; that I cannot feel the truth of them all around me.

I believe many of us feel the same way. We cannot feel the sharp certainty of these statistics without feeling the hopelessness of being part of them. How many of us are single parents? How many of us live at the center of raising children without fathers or have been raised fatherless ourselves?

So many of us want to say it doesn't matter. While the fatherhood crisis continues in the world we do not want it to become a personal crisis of fatherhood. We want to say the presence of trustworthy, tender, strong and real adult men in the life of children just isn't that important. We say this especially when men engage in the reproductive process, but run away from real fatherhood. Many of us find assurance in the quotes and quips of our culture like, "Mother is the name for God on the lips and hearts of little children."^[2] Yet, isn't God a Father? Isn't he a good Dad that gives good gifts to His kids? It's too serious a set of circumstances for us to bear if just a handful of these statistics are true. So we look for alleviation by closing our eyes.

I've recently overcome the arc of denial in this area. God is calling me to see the truth; to lean in and to react. I want you to know that I personally feel and have felt the weight of fatherlessness and fatherhood in my life. I have four mind-blowing children that I don't deserve. They are 24

hour a day source of joy and fear because I am their dad. I am less than ideal for all of them, yet God, in His grace, in His fatherhood, gave them to my wife and me.

I am sure you feel that same way; less than ideal, less than equal to the task. When we turn our eyes to the raging fire of fatherlessness in our world, that feeling magnifies as we see all that is happening. We see the single moms struggling, courageously, to raise their children well. We see broken-hearted and lost children, acting out and searching because men haven't contributed selflessly into their lives.

Whatever we see in this crisis and no matter how this makes us feel, I believe we are called by God to overcome fear, lean in and respond. Where the ideal is lacking, God's grace abounds.[3] While we aren't the answer, we are called to answer. If you are ready to see and respond to the fatherhood crisis, here are some resources that may help:

The Mentoring Project:

www.thementoringproject.org

The National Fatherhood Initiative:

www.fatherhood.org

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse:

www.fatherhood.gov

The National Center for Fathering:

www.fathers.com

[1] Cited in "The Future: Set Adrift on a Sea of Fatherless Children," Idaho Observer, July 2003.

[2] William Makepeace Thackeray, taken from brainyquote.com.

[3] Matt Chandler, from the Village Church sermon series, "A Beautiful Design".