

Fathers, Here's How You Can Lead by Example

How can the generation who grew up without understanding the love of earthly mothers and fathers be spiritual mothers and fathers to others? How can they help the emerging generation understand the love of the heavenly Father?

In 1981, we began Somebody Cares by reaching out to the lost on the streets of Houston. The youth we encountered almost always had one thing in common—the absence of a father.

Today, one of the ministries that is part of our Somebody Cares Houston network of ministries, continues the work we began in the 1980s. At one of their annual fund-raising banquets, some youth who had come to know Jesus shared their testimonies. The common denominator in their pathways to destruction was physical, sexual or emotional abuse, either directly from their fathers or indirectly through their father's lack of presence and protection in the home.

We have a responsibility to this generation looking for spiritual fathers. We must adopt this orphaned generation and direct them toward our heavenly Father, who desires to seal them with His Spirit of adoption.

Many in my generation simply didn't know how to be good fathers, including me. But those who are desperate for fathers are not expecting us to necessarily know how, but just to be willing. Willingness brings a release of God's grace, which enables us.

Learning to Lead

In spring 2004, during one of the think tanks we hosted for NextGen and GenEdge leaders of the emerging generation, we had some very insightful and candid conversations. What started as

a small gathering escalated into more than 60 leaders from across the country, including youth workers, college ministry leaders, worship leaders, seasoned pastors, marketplace ministers, ministry networkers, intercessors and others. As each of them spoke, I realized that the recurring theme was the need for spiritual fathers. I already knew that the younger generation was looking for spiritual fathers—that's why I invited those who are serving on the front lines to participate in out of the box ministries—what surprised me, however, was the leaders' need for spiritual fathers!

When we older men said that we didn't know how to be good fathers because we grew up in a fatherless generation too, they responded, "We're not asking you to know how, and we're not asking you to be perfect. We're not even asking you to give us anything. But would you journey with us? We want to know that there's someone who has gone before us, someone who can be there for us, just to give us advice. We want to know that we can call you. We want to know that you're praying for us. We don't need a lot of time; we just need to know we can connect."

Just like the generation they are leading, the leaders are looking for connection and covering. One young minister ordained by our organization, who considers me a spiritual father, said, "I was saved and raised in church, but then I backslid, recommitted and struggled for many years because I didn't have a spiritual father." As a result, his ministry is now centered on spiritual fathering. "If it isn't relational, we don't do it," he says.

A pastor shared insights about the marks of a father, which he relates to both natural and spiritual fathers. "A spiritual father knows how to discipline his children with mercy, grace and love," he said. In 1 Samuel 4, Eli did not correct his sons, even though they had been involved in immorality and had not been following God's commands concerning sacrifices and offerings. The result was the downfall of Eli's ministry. On

his watch, the ark of the Lord, which represented the presence of God, was stolen from the temple. In that same regard, a spiritual father is able to discern his true sons and daughters, those who are faithful, won't leave when disciplined and will protect the DNA and reputation of the ministry.

He also quoted the apostle Paul when he talked about the importance of a father's travailing prayers for his children:

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19, NIV).

Rusty Griffin, pastor of Christian City Fellowship in Sealy, Texas, put it this way: "Many times, there is a treasure inside a youth's heart, but he doesn't recognize it, so he runs after the treasure in someone else's heart. A spiritual father has to help him see the treasure in his own heart."

I remember when Ruben began coming to the ministry and was insecure about his reading ability. I encouraged him to get his GED, which he did. Today, Ruben and his wife run their own successful family-owned business.

"Some things will come to pass only if a father is pressing in through the pain of travailing, the pain of prayer and the pain of fasting. Lots of spiritual fathers complain about their children or the staff God has sent to them. As fathers, they know the destinies of their children, but they do not always go to war for those destinies."

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Doug Stringer is founder and president of Somebody Cares America/International. As an American of Asian descent, Doug is considered a bridge-builder of reconciliation amongst various ethnic and religious groups. He is a sought-after international speaker, addressing topics such as persevering

leadership, reconciliation, community transformation, revival and more. He is host of A Word in Season with Doug Stringer & Friends, with new programs posted weekly on the Charisma Podcast Network.