

The Family Man

Men were designed to take care of the people they love, even if it involves personal sacrifice.

How many of us alive now in the 21st century remember the phrase “good family man”? More importantly, how many of us understand what it means? Dr. David Blankenhorn, head of the Institute for American Values, points out in his writings that this phrase, which was once widely used in our culture as a true badge of honor, almost has gone into obscurity. A rough translation of the phrase would be “someone who puts his family first.”

It seems that contemporary culture no longer celebrates the ideal. Where do we see responsible masculinity represented? Bill Cosby modeled it on TV for a few years, but who else has been portrayed in the media as a good family man?

There just aren’t many. No, we’re more likely to hear about wayward athletes, or womanizers, or entrepreneurs who sacrificed all, including their wives and children, to make their startup company a success.

Let’s look more closely at what constitutes “a good family man” in today’s world. To put that in perspective, it might be helpful to examine four traditional roles that men have played at home.

The first is to serve as the family provider. No one disputed 50 years ago that it was a man’s primary responsibility to be the “breadwinner.” This is less clear today. Even though the majority of wives and mothers work outside the home, it is still a man’s charge to assure that the financial needs of the family are met.

The second contribution a father historically has made is to serve as the leader of the clan. This role became highly controversial with the rise of the women’s movement, but it was rarely challenged before the 1960s. It was often said in

those days that “two captains sink the ship” or “two cooks spoil the broth.” Dad was the final arbitrator on issues of substance.

Admittedly, this “headship” role was sometimes abused by selfish men who treated their wives with disrespect and their children like chattel, but that was never the way the assignment was intended to function. Scripture, which seems to ordain this leadership responsibility for men, also spells out the limits of their authority.

Husbands are told to love their wives as their own flesh, being willing to give their lives for them. They are also warned not to treat their children harshly or inconsiderately. That system generally worked well for thousands of years. The third contribution traditionally made by a father is to serve as protector. He shielded his family members from the outside world and taught them how to cope with it successfully.

He was the one family members came to when they felt anxious or threatened. If another man tried to abuse or insult his wife, he would defend her honor. It was his responsibility to see that the house was safe at night and that the children were home at a reasonable time. Each member of the family felt a little more secure because he was there.

The fourth contribution made by an effective dad was to provide spiritual direction at home. Although he often failed in this role, it was his obligation to read the Scriptures to his children and to teach them the fundamentals of their faith. He was the interpreter of the family’s moral code and sacred rituals, and he made sure the children went to church every week.

Admittedly, not many men in years past performed each of these four duties adequately. But there was a broad consensus in the culture that this was what they were supposed to do.

I’m sure some of my readers are bristling at even the

implication that this is how men should function today. With all due respect, however, there is timeless wisdom in these traditional roles.

Men were designed to take care of the people they love, even if it involves personal sacrifice. When they fulfill that responsibility, their wives, sons and daughters usually live in greater peace and harmony.

Boys are different! But many parents try to mold their children to fit a gender-neutral model. In *Bringing Up Boys*, Dr. Dobson explains why boys are the way they are, how to understand their emotional and physical development, and how best to motivate them into becoming godly men. For more information on this resource, go to