

Why We Need Fathers

There is a major difference between men who genuinely love their kids and males who sire children

☒ The Old Testament prophet and miracle-worker Elisha lay sick in his bed. The king of Israel heard of his grave condition, rushed to his side and cried: “‘O my father, my father’” (2 Kin. 13:14, NKJV).

Why is the king calling Elisha his father? They weren't related. But knowing the nature and character of a father, there is good reason for speculation.

Could it be that in the eyes of the king, Elisha's divine ability to perform miracles may not have been his most impressive quality? During a critical moment when the heart's deepest feelings emerge, the king doesn't call him man of God or prophet extraordinaire. He calls him what he knew him to be—father.

All across the U.S. there is a desperate need for men to take their place in the home. But there is a major difference between men who genuinely love their kids and males who sire children.

In fact, fatherhood is so special that God uses it as a metaphor to describe His relationship with us. Spiritual fathering is a rich blend of leadership, strength, courage, the ability to provide, compassion, wisdom and love found nowhere else in the human experience.

Though we must celebrate and appreciate brave single mothers who devote their energies to making sure their children are cared for, nurtured and developed, they are not fathers. There is a fundamental difference in the way fathers influence the lives of their children. I can remember how my father touched my life.

He was a factory worker stuck on the second shift. But on Friday nights he would come home, wake me up and carry me off to get our hair cut by a friend. Midnight trips to the barbershop did seem a bit unusual, but it was during those times that we would bond together. We'd sit and munch on a bag of goodies until his friend arrived.

But the real goodies were the words of wisdom my dad shared with me. He could make the world make sense with his stories, anecdotes and instructions. I actually thought he knew everything about everything.

My father spoke with authority, but he did it in a way that made me feel included and special rather than intimidated and fearful.

Sometimes I'd eavesdrop on his conversations with the barber. It was so exciting being in the middle of grown men talking business. But I discovered that he was also a father to his friends. They turned to him for counsel and advice.

Many years have passed since our last midnight meeting. My father now rests with the Lord. But I still remember his words, guidance and love. Some of the wisdom I'm credited with today is actually insight he passed down to me.

But the structure of families over the years has changed, and not for the better. Too many decisions, I fear, are made based on musical lyrics and people who are idolized in the culture.

The apostle Paul saw some similar problems in the church at Corinth. His observation prompted him to write: "Though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers" (1 Cor. 4:15).

We will never know why the king of Israel stood over the frail body of Elisha weeping and saying, "My father, my father." But we do know that walking on water, calling fire down from heaven and making axe heads float pales in comparison to the greater miracle—having access to and benefiting from a spiritual father.

I pray, Lord Jesus, that You send us more fathers and give us the wisdom to turn our hearts back to them.

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