

With Fathers Missing, Is There Any Hope for Black Families?

More than one and a half million black men in America are missing. Where are they? Where did they go? Incarcerated. Dead. Just-missing.

According to the *New York Times* analysis on its blog "The Upshot," more than one of every six African American men who would be between the ages of 25 and 54 are simply not present in society.

These men are not present to contribute to their communities, not present in the workforce, and not present as husbands or fathers.

"The State of the Black Family," an in-depth report released by Family Research Council in February, reveals that only 17 percent of black 17 year-olds currently reside in a home with their biological mother and father; the overwhelming majority (83 percent) have experienced the effects of divorce, premarital sex, and other forms of rejecting the nuclear family.

For me, this information elicits great concern and worry for the future of black children in this country. Regardless of race, men were created by God to contribute leadership, support, and protection to the family unit. Men are generally called to be fathers and providers for their wives and children.

Can you imagine living in a world where all the men are gone? This is the reality for most black communities. Children growing up without fathers; women and girls who choose to raise black children on their own or choose to abort their

babies in order to avoid the stress of doing it all alone.

What is to become then of an entire ethnic group that has suffered, even generationally, from the absence of its men?

We know that in many communities more black babies are being aborted than are being born. As a people, African Americans are decreasing at an alarming rate. It has been said to me in the past that if black people were likened to bald eagles, or any other animal on the verge of extinction, the entire race would be placed on the endangered species list.

The future looks bleak for black people in this country, if you look at the numbers alone. But I have an eternal hope in God's promise over the black community—for the restoration of its men to their rightful place as heads of the nuclear family, and more importantly to right relationship with Jesus Christ.

In promoting the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, President Barack Obama has said: "We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child—it's the courage to raise one."

I find it interesting that even in what has become the most pro-choice administration in American history, our President recognizes that men must *choose* to be fathers—albeit a profoundly difficult, selfless, and courageous decision. This is especially true for black men who have disproportionately experienced poverty, racism, and other forms of stigmatization in American society for hundreds of years.

However noble the intention, President Obama's fatherhood initiative fails to specifically address the plight of black men and fatherlessness in the black community. The initiative lacks communication of a plan outlining what it will take to turn this around.

There's a good reason for this: there is no remedy outside of prayer for revival in the black community and the church of God responding in faith-based urgency with appropriate understanding.

Here's the truth—the black community is and has been in crisis. Our children are dying. This crisis is no different from the Old Testament days, when a whole society watched as its babies were thrown into fires as acts of demonic worship. Where were the fathers? Why weren't their hearts turned towards the children?

Without prayer, the hearts of black fathers will not turn to their children. Without the church stepping to the front with a willingness to disciple young black mothers and black children, this cycle will continue to repeat. My fear is that we can only repeat so many times before we are no more.

I am full of hope today. God has called the black community to shine with restorative hope in this country. When it happens, it will be a sign of God's faithfulness—a sign that He can do anything. However, it is imperative that as a nation, and especially as people of God, that we see the black community as a mission field of high priority and strive to diligently preach and live the gospel among them.

On this upcoming Father's Day, let us pray that the hearts of the fathers are truly turned towards their children. Let us pray that the heart of the church understands and responds with urgency to the crisis going on in the black community today.

Let each one of us pray for an opportunity to partner with the Lord in redeeming and returning what has been lost—the black men of America.

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