



**THE FATHER ABSENCE CRISIS IN AMERICA**

There is a crisis in America. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19.7 million children, more than 1 in 4, live without a father in the home. Consequently, there is a "father factor" in nearly all of the societal ills facing America today. Research shows when a child is raised in a father-absent home, he or she is affected in the following ways...

Source: 2011 U.S. Census Bureau Data; research cited herein is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be used for any other purpose.

<b>POVERTY</b> 4X GREATER RISK OF POVERTY	<b>TEEN PREGNANCY</b> 7X MORE LIKELY TO BECOME PREGNANT AS A TEEN
<b>BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS</b> MORE LIKELY TO HAVE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS	<b>CHILD ABUSE</b> MORE LIKELY TO FACE ABUSE AND NEGLECT
<b>MOM-CHILD HEALTH</b> 2X GREATER RISK OF INFANT MORTALITY	<b>SUBSTANCE ABUSE</b> MORE LIKELY TO ABUSE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL
<b>INCARCERATION</b> MORE LIKELY TO GO TO PRISON	<b>CHILD OBESITY</b> 2X MORE LIKELY TO SUFFER OBESITY
<b>CRIME</b> MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT CRIME	<b>EDUCATION</b> 2X MORE LIKELY TO DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

**19.7**  
MILLION CHILDREN WITHOUT THEIR FATHER AT HOME

**National Fatherhood Initiative**  
Visit <http://bit.ly/fatherfacts7> for more facts on father absence

In honor of Father’s Day, I want to start off with a “dad joke.” Cigarettes are like squirrels. They are perfectly harmless until you put one in your mouth and light it on fire. Where would we be as a society without an arsenal of dad jokes? More importantly, where would we be as a society without dads?

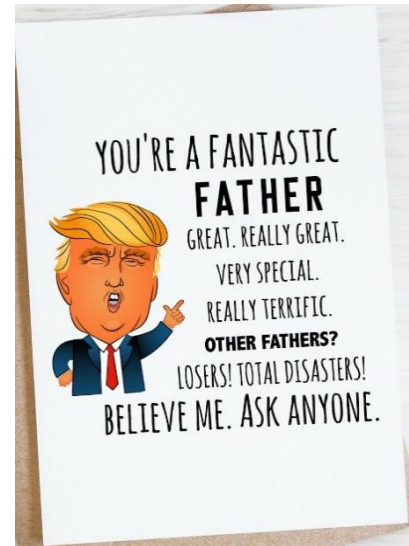
We don’t have to guess because the statistics on this question are readily available in the US Census Bureau. Children without fathers:

- Have a 4x greater risk of poverty
- Are 7x more likely to become pregnant as a teen
- Are more likely to have behavioral problems
- Are more likely to face abuse and neglect
- Have a 2x greater risk of infant mortality
- Are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- Are more likely to commit crime and go to prison
- are 2x more likely to drop out of high school

There are 20 million children in our country without fathers and it’s safe to say that the vast majority of social issues are related to the epidemic of fatherlessness. And understand that these statistics take into account all fathers. All of the very best and the very worst fathers are factored into these stats. Therefore, if your father is better than the average father, then the outlook for you is even better than these stats show.

But hopefully no one here is aiming at average or even better than average. In other words, what did you do to deserve your “World’s Greatest Dad” t-shirt or coffee mug? My family knows to never get me anything with “World’s Greatest Dad” on it. Though I wouldn’t mind getting this Father’s day card. 😊

As followers of the living Christ, we should not be aiming at average or even above average. Hopefully you remember the vision I laid forth when I preached through Ephesians 5. Can anyone tell me what that was? That vision was to be known in the community as the church whose husbands love their wives. The community may not know much else about us but if we were known as the church whose husbands love their wives, I am telling you this—eventually the gospel would be proclaimed loudly through this living witness. In a similar vein, the other vision I’d love to see come true is that we would also be known as the church whose parents disciple their children. And dads, this begins with you.



### 1. What should we do?

I am starting with the premise that we know we need to disciple our children but to make it crystal clear, let me remind you of some key passages.

Deuteronomy 6 is the classic go to passage for this topic. I won't take much time on it other than to remind you of two things. One, all discipleship is about loving "the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It's as simple as that. Second, you can do it all day, every day. This is not relegated to family devotions, though family devotions should be the core of what you do.

*<sup>4</sup> "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).*

Ephesians 6 is wonderful because it is aimed directly at dads.

*Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).*

Finally, any passage that speaks of discipleship—which ultimately is the entire Bible, also applies to disciplining children.

*what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2)*

### 2. Who is responsible?

This is such an important question. It's one thing to determine that all children need to be disciplined but it's something else altogether to decide who needs to get it done. Here's a question I have never once asked in my entire life. "Who in the world is going to fix the potholes in the road?" Surely I have wondered *when* they might be fixed but I have never asked the *who* question because the answer is always the government.

So who should do it? we're going to rule out the government from the get go, so we are left with three options: the individual, the parents and the church.

Does your child have a responsibility to disciple himself or herself? Yes, increasingly so. It's like everything else you do as parents. One of your fundamental responsibilities is to train your children to become independent. Evangeline Esther Voeltner is officially the most dependent person in all of Grace Church, being that she is less than three days old. But as they have done with Lydia, Seth and Heather will teach her to become more and more independent as she grows. The same is true with the faith of our children. At some point, their faith either becomes fully their own or they will not have any faith at all. So increasingly it is their responsibility, but it is obviously not mainly their responsibility.

What about the parents? I am guessing you know that this is where I am landing. Parents are chiefly responsible to raise their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." The Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6 passages are quite clear about this. But even with this clarity, it is easy to depend on the church to do the heavy lifting. It is the church's responsibility to disciple children but it's a limited responsibility. It's a responsibility in the sense that when the Bible gives us any command to teach and disciple people, these commands also apply to children. So in this sense, it is as much the church's responsibility to disciple children as it is to disciple adults.

Here is how we lay out the strategy for family discipleship. Step one is to train all adults to be better disciples. This is our core mission as a church. Everything else is secondary. By the way, a key word here is "train." It's not enough to merely teach on this. Jesus said that we are to "teach others to obey everything I have commanded you." Teaching someone to obey is training them. It's more than laying out right and wrong and the principles.

### Discipleship Strategy for Families



- 1 Train parents to be better disciples
- 2 Train parents to disciple their children
- 3 Assist parents to disciple their children
- 4 Disciple children who are not disciplined at home

Step two is to train parents to disciple their children. Out of the four parts to our strategy, this may be the weakest one. Step three is to assist parents to disciple their children. This step involved offering programs or events where parents can serve together. I need to stop and give a shout out to Tony Baxter. Tony has been teaching Children's Church for at least fifteen years. Just let that fact alone sink in for a moment. Tony is now in his late seventies and still teaching Children's Church but for many years now he has been teaching with his grandson Darren as a helper. Think about all of the things this is communicating. One, ministry knows no age limits. Two, shared ministry is always better than solo ministry. Three, grandparents are vital to the discipleship process.

The final part of our strategy is to disciple children who are not disciples at home. This happens when there are children and teens in our church who do not have Christian parents or whose parents are not taking an active role in the home. You can see by the size of the arrows that #1 and #2 are our top two priorities.

So the church is involved at every step in this vital process. However, there are two main reasons why it is not the church's primary responsibility to disciple children. The first concerns what is called jurisdictional authority. Just before the start of this past Monday's elder meeting. Tim Farrell and I were joking with a young boy how it would be really beneficial for two elders to spank him. It was a total joke, but tell me why would this be wrong? It would be wrong because spanking would be outside of our authority. It's not our responsibility and it would encroach on the rights of the parent. That's not to say that we can't correct a child that is not our own. Many years ago, Jim Boisen called me after church and told me that one of my kids had said such and such to him. I won't tell you which child it was but I can tell you that a Y chromosome was involved. 😊 I was so thankful that Jim called and told me that, so we could take corrective action at home. It would have been wrong for Jim to have spanked my child, but it was right and good that he called me. In the same way, we can be involved in discipling other children but we must never usurp the parent's authority and responsibility by doing it instead of them. Every parent has a God-ordained responsibility over their own home. The church can assist must never usurp.

Also, the more the church provides all of the discipleship for children and teens, the more it removes motivation for parents to take responsibility. This is why Socialism fails 100% of the time. The masses are lulled into dependence on an increasingly corrupt government and the more they become dependent on the government, the less motivated they are to take care of themselves. The same thing will inevitably happen if the church takes the primary responsibility for discipling children and teens.

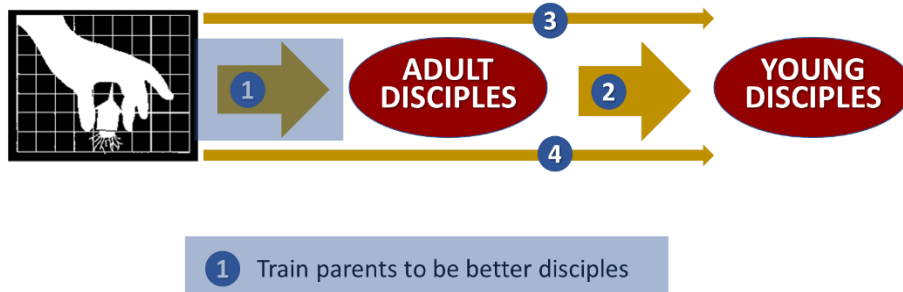


Having said that, we do want to prioritize #2 especially by providing you with resources. And right now, one of our chief resources is this guy. Our church hired Seth as what kind of pastor? Primarily as a discipleship pastor. Even his work in the worship arena is still fundamentally a matter of discipleship. This morning we have 2 free books to give the fathers that want one. We have a book for parents of children and one for parents of teens. Eventually, we would like to have a

long list of recommended resources and if necessary ,the accompanying training to go with them. Let me remind you that most weeks we send you a Table Talk that relates to the upcoming message. That is a ready-made, brief family devotion sent to your email. It even includes the worship songs for that week. If you know them, you could sing them *a capella* or you could listen on YouTube of Spotify. Speaking of music. Scott Kniprath has put together a folder of songs that his family uses in their family worship time. Stuff like this is gold and we plan to do more of it.

### 3. Personal discipleship is your top priority.

Here’s another way to say this. The best way to disciple others is to BE a disciple. Like all of parenting, these things are caught more than they are taught. It doesn’t matter how many family devotions you have, if your life does not come close to matching what you are teaching, you can



1 Train parents to be better disciples

actually do more harm than good. A struggling marriage will likely lead to struggling, weak discipleship in the home. This is why #1 on our strategy has always been our number one priority as

a church. If we are not doing this, then we cease to be a church.

### Marriage...?

### 4. We must do this TOGETHER.

Personal discipleship is your top priority but do not think for a minute that you are alone. We must do this together, In fact, this is how God has designed the discipleship process—that we lean on one another. I’d like to share some stories about how Grace Church and other believes have disciplined my own children.

Ryan was the very first person to ever play the electric guitar at our church. He was 14 years and he was on Melissa Jackson’s team. Oddly enough, Ray Olson happened to be preaching that day. Ryan got very comfortable playing the guitar on worship teams. When he was 19, he was asked to play guitar for boys’ camp at Living Waters. The boys camp director asked Ryan to also sing on the team but the problem was that Ryan has never done this before and did not see himself as a singer. He agreed to the request and this one experience gave him the confidence to sing which led to him becoming a worship leader. He learned to play bass at their church in la crosse two years ago and then just last week he played bass at their church in Minneapolis for the first time, and Monice played the piano.

Ironically, the same thing happened to Kellyn when Brant encouraged Kellyn to sing in addition to playing guitar. Just like with Ryan, this gave her confidence to become a worship leader. This sort of thing happened again and again with our kids. Chris and Sheila Eisermann had a big impact on all three of our kid’s worship involvement. I could go down a list and continue to name people who had an impact on their spiritual lives. Now a key factor in these stories is that

our kids were involved and actively serving. If they were not involved at all, there would have been much less opportunity to be impacted by others. We are very thankful for all who have impacted our family over the past eighteen years here, but it is an important reminder that we cannot do this alone. God has created us to be in community with one another.

**5. Failure is inevitable.**

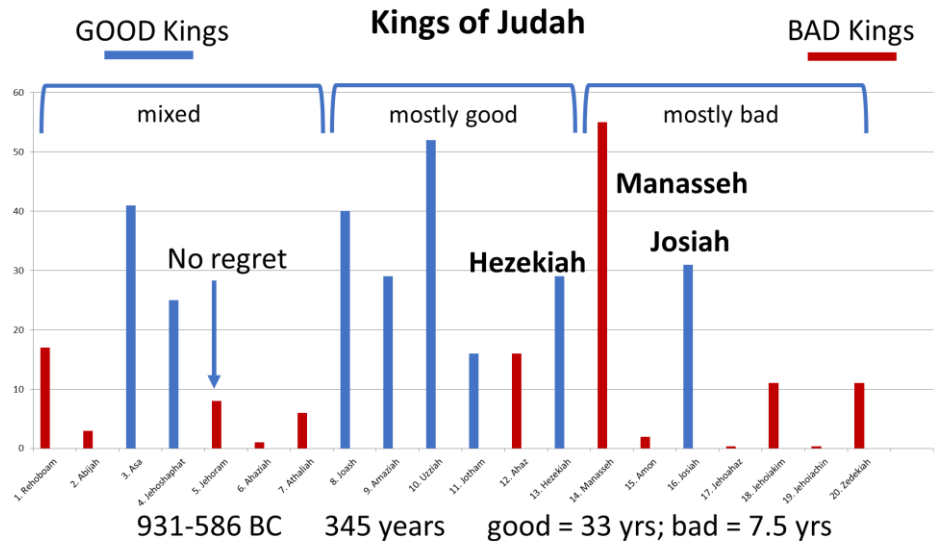
This is meant to be encouraging, by the way. How can failure be encouraging? It's encouraging in the sense that we need to accept that it will happen because it happens to everyone. I failed as a parent in my first week and virtually every day after that for the past 24 years. Failure is an inevitable, but doing nothing is not an option. Dads, I know it can be overwhelming to think about all that it means to disciple your family, but doing nothing will result in permanent failure. If you try and fail, that's OK but if you never try you are guaranteed to fail.

I know it doesn't help that the Bible is filled with examples of failure. The Bible focuses on four of David's sons and they are all failures for the most part. Amnon raped his half-sister. Absalom murdered Amnon. Adonijah tried to steal the throne from Solomon and Solomon got caught up chasing after the worldly pursuits of gold, power and women. Despite these failures God still said he that David was a man after God's own heart.

**6. It's never too late to start.**

Or I could say, it's never too late to start to fail. 😊 Everyone loves a redemption story, right? One of my favorites is ripped from the pages of the Old Testament. First, I'll put this in perspective by showing you a summary of the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. The first 100 years were a mixed

bag of good and bad kings. The next 100 years were mostly good but the remaining years were mostly bad. None other than Manasseh kicked off the decline and fall of Judah with a 55 year reign of terror. He was by far the worst king in Judah. He sacrificed his sons in the fire to Molech. He was as bad as you can possibly get.



At the end of his reign he was captured and carried off in chains to Assyria. This was enough to cause him to fall on his face in genuine repentance. It is one of the greatest conversion stories in all the Bible and many believers don't even know about it.

<sup>12</sup> And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. <sup>13</sup> He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty

*and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God (2 Chronicles 33:12-13).*

If that were not enough, Manasseh's grandson Josiah, perhaps inspired by his grandfather's repentance, led the greatest reform in all of Israelite history. No one came close to his reforms. He rid the nation of some forms of idolatry that had existed for 400 years. Here is the progression of his formative years.

8 years old—becomes King of Judah

16 years old—"he began to seek the God of David"

20 years old—"he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of [all idols]

24 years old—"I have found the Book of the Law"

Once the book of the Law was found—and we have no idea how long it was lost—Josiah did some of his own repenting.

*<sup>19</sup> And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes.<sup>20</sup> And the king commanded [his officials], saying, <sup>21</sup> "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book." (2 Chronicles 34:19-21)*

Notice that he led these massive reforms before the book of the Law was found. Even though he was lacking all that God required of him, he faithfully carried out that which he did know. He knew that worshipping foreign gods was sinful, so he put an end to it. But once he was made aware of other things he should have been doing, the first thing he did was repent and take action.

It's never too late for us to repent either. There may be some here today who are not yet disciples of Jesus and you need to repent of your sins and place your faith in Christ alone. To the rest of the dads, we all need to repent of our inaction, our failure to disciple our children and lead them to Christ. We can't do this on our own and we can't do it alone.

I also hope you can hear the joy in my voice and in our experiences as a family. It's hard and it's daunting at times, but it's worth it.

**Rich Maurer**  
**June 16, 2019**