

Father SHOULD Know Best—But Does He?

The future of humanity hinges on whether we as Christians obey God's instruction to fathers!

By David Hulme

“Let me give you one piece of advice,” the older man said.

Through the window of the 747, Paris shone beautiful in the springtime sun. My traveling companion on the flight to New York had introduced himself as a businessman returning from West Africa, and we proceeded to talk for several hours.

But it was only when the discussion turned to families that the man saw fit to offer me his heartfelt wisdom: “Let me give you one piece of advice. Spend time with your children *now*.”

It is a common plea, I thought, that reflects a common problem: Most fathers, for whatever reasons, do not spend enough time with their children, and certainly not early enough. Many of us have made this mistake and have reaped the consequences.

However, the phenomenon of the father who, for whatever reasons, spends little time with his children is not cause for a mere passing regret before moving on to a more pleasant topic of conversation. The Bible tells us that



the world will face a time of terrible suffering largely because, believe it or not, most fathers are not being fathers now.

Does this seem like an overdramatization of the problem? Let's look at what the prophet Malachi had to say on the subject.

“The hearts of the fathers”

Describing our day, Malachi spoke of worldwide upheaval that would take place unless the fathers turn their hearts, concerns, emotions and intellects toward their children:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and

the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse [“utter destruction,” Revised Standard Version, margin]” (Mal. 4:5-6).

Here is a desperately serious warning for all of us. God says the end result of a father's lack of responsibility is, simply, utter destruction!

Just what is a father's family responsibility?

Fathers become fathers by taking up the reins of family leadership. Irrespective of modern opinions, the Bible teaches that a father is meant to be a loving authority figure, the head of his home, his wife and his children.

A father's responsibility in the home is vital — so vital that, in the absence of a father properly fulfilling his purpose, others try to fill the vacuum. The prophet Isaiah prophesied just what would happen when fathers in a society become ineffective:

“As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them” (Isa. 3:12).

Because husbands and fathers have abdicated their God-given responsibilities as leaders, guides and the ones who set and main-

tain standards, wives and children fill the void. The integrity God intended for the family unit is shattered.

Respect, untaught in the home, becomes a rare commodity, and "the child will be insolent toward the elder" (verse 5). The whole society is upset, confused as to where to turn for guidance.

One can scarcely open a newspaper or magazine without reading of some evidence of family disruption and disintegration. And God lays major blame exactly where it belongs, squarely on the father.

Paul wrote, 1,900 years in advance, a searing catalog of the sins of 20th-century humanity: "For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, *disobedient to parents*, unthankful, unholy" (II Tim. 3:2).

This is the heritage of children in the absence of God's laws.

Fathers vs. mothers

The most stable and productive societies have been those in which men and women have understood their God-ordained functions in the family and have taken a moderate, balanced view of life and its responsibilities.

For centuries of Western history, the pendulum has swung back and forth between societies dominated by women and societies dominated by men. Both extremes produce wrong results, because neither is what God intended. Under the influence of Satan, the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), we have chosen to rely on our own minds, instead of turning to God as the source of instruction.

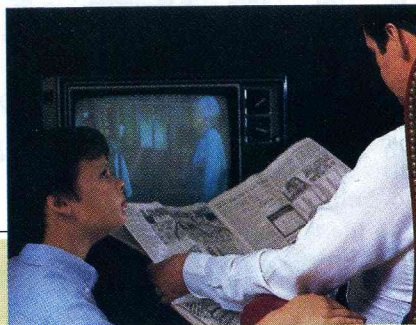
God has ordained a healthy balance between male and female responsibilities in child rearing, but with the father in overall control. The guidance and nurturing of children by their mothers is absolutely vital, but under the right leadership of the father.

Let's take a closer look at the

role of fatherhood today, identifying the problems and understanding just how God has decreed that fathers should shoulder their responsibilities.

Fathers must be present

Possibly the No. 1 problem among fathers today is simply not being there — not spending time



How many fathers come home, invade the refrigerator or liquor cabinet and use the television set as a barrier between themselves and their offspring, while telling themselves they are at home with the family?

with children before they have grown up.

The cases of the executive always off on business, the workaholic who rises early and leaves before the children are up and comes home after they have gone to bed, the man who spends his afternoons and evenings having a "beer with the boys," only tell part of the story, however.

How many fathers, while not exactly committing the error of not being around, come home after a hard day, invade the refrigerator or liquor cabinet and use the television set as a barrier between themselves and their offspring, all the while telling themselves they are at home with the family?

How many fathers bring home a briefcase full of papers and disappear "not to be disturbed," hardly seeing their children during the week? And the weekend? Well, it's for relaxation on the

golf course with "the boys" — adults, that is, not children.

It is well known that the first two years of a child's life are critical in so many ways, and especially in forming right perceptions of male and female roles. Absence of either parent at this crucial time can produce severe emotional and behavioral problems in later life.

Children emulate their parents. They cannot emulate what they do not see.

Fathers must be leaders

Predating social scientists by hundreds of years, God long ago explained that a father should be neither harsh nor permissive.

Notice Ephesians 6:4: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training [or, more accurately, "with discipline"] and admonition of the Lord."

Addressing Himself to fathers, God says, in effect: "Do not be so uncompromisingly harsh as to alienate, anger, discourage and frustrate

your children, but do raise your family with discipline, instruction and guidelines and in the recognition of God's governance of your lives."

Notice Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Jewish Publication Society).

There is an important difference between this translation and the Authorized Version's rendition of the verse. The JPS editors correctly included the word *even*, omitted in the King James Version. This omission permits a misunderstanding of the scripture.

The Jewish translation stresses that with right leadership and caring instruction by parents in agreement, a child reared in God's way will not depart from it, even in old age. In other words, the child's obedience will mature throughout life and up through old age. This verse cannot be used

to excuse delinquent behavior during the teenage and young-adult years.

Fathers must spend time

This world's economic and educational systems have removed father from the family for most of the child's waking hours.

In a study to determine how much time middle-class American fathers spend with their young children, microphones placed on the youngsters recorded their conversations. The average amount of contact with father was 37 seconds a day! Other studies showed a meager 90 minutes a week for children aged 6 to 10.

Sadly, much of the responsibility for guiding, instructing and disciplining children falls to the mother, who is usually more available during the day. But under such pressure, many mothers, unsupported by their husbands, allow their children to decide their own behavior well before they are capable.

The conspiracy against the family is completed by a social system that encourages even women with children to leave the home to seek outside work.

The long-term effects on children of this poverty of leadership in the home are everywhere to be seen in the explosion of the number of "latchkey" kids — young children entrusted with a house key because they regularly must come home from school to a locked, empty house — and the sad but all too common eventual effects of teenage drug abuse and juvenile crime.

Statistics from Canada show that one in every 10 children has an emotional or learning disorder. In Canada, too, young people up to age 19 account for 27 percent of first admissions to psychiatric hospitals and clinics.

But this kind of information has lost its shock value; it has become commonplace. We are

reaping the whirlwind of social disintegration. Devoid of the kind of leadership God requires of fathers, we daily prove that "a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15).

Spare the rod . . .

To the father God says, "He who spares his rod hates his son,



The family should function harmoniously in love, mercy and discipline, as God's Kingdom in microcosm. How well fathers fulfill their responsibilities will partly determine their place in that Kingdom.

but he who loves him disciplines him promptly" (Prov. 13:24).

In a world that, in the name of love, increasingly decries spanking of any kind, it is significant that God says such sparing of the rod equals hatred, not love, of the child.

Now, by correction and discipline are we to understand severe physical punishment? Clearly not! First, we instruct our children on the behavior expected. We make sure they understand. If behavior does not improve, then it may be necessary to emphasize the rules by spanking in moderation.

Physical correction of wrong behavior should never be done in anger, but out of deep love. It should be accompanied by a reasoned explanation of why the correction is necessary and reassurance of the parents' love.

Balance and wisdom in disciplining our children are the key-

notes. A child corrected in this way, in love, will show real love and respect in return.

The Bible reveals, too, that there is a time limit on effective child rearing: "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18, AV). "For his crying" is better translated "to his destruction." That is, if we do not correct our children, we are contributing to their eventual failure. We will not mold in them the pattern of life that guarantees God's blessings.

We are now experiencing "a generation that curses its father, and does not bless its mother" (Prov. 30:11). That predicament results from poor and inattentive training, where the father has not taken the initiative in rearing the children and, where he has taken the initiative, the mother has undermined his efforts.

An elect group

In Matthew 24:22, Christ spoke of an elect group being saved from such worldwide destruction as has never before occurred. That elect is the same group referred to in Malachi 4:5-6. They are the people who have been taught God's purpose for the family and who have responded positively. Because of their response, God says He will not "strike the earth with a curse," or "utter destruction."

The family, according to God's Word, should be an integrated unit functioning smoothly and harmoniously, in love, mercy and right discipline. It should be an embryo of God's Family — God's Kingdom in microcosm. How well fathers fulfill their responsibilities will partly determine their places in that Kingdom.

"The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him" (Prov. 23:24).

Fathers, just how well are your hearts turned to your children? □