

# The Portrayal of Fathers in Popular Media

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husband of his summer-camp romance and father of three uniquely God-designed children. He is a graduate of Word of Life Bible Institute, and he has earned a B.S. in Accounting from State University of New York College at Old Westbury and a Th.M. in Interdisciplinary Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. He serves as an adjunct professor for Trinity College of Florida and as an instructor of religion for Liberty University Online; he .

“Honey, what area am I in charge of in this house?” said the dad in *Good Luck Charlie*, a Disney Channel show we watch with my kids. Bob’s words were addressed to his television wife Amy, after she had corrected him in front of their daughter about not having the right to ground her because of her deception. Mom belittled Dad (albeit in a humorous way) and made sure he knew who the real boss of the family was: the mother. Sitcoms play out this scenario on screens all across America at an increasingly alarming rate. Buffoonish, ignorant, self-centered, and inept television dads must be shown their proper places in the home. At best, television dads are nominal or figurehead leaders of the home, but at worst, they are relegated to the intellectual level of the family pet.

This farcical portrayal of dads on television has deteriorated to the point that to not see the role of men belittled or ridiculed would seem ironic or nostalgic, harkening back to the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s where father

figures were generally portrayed from positions of wisdom and authority.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to this ridiculous portrayal, another extreme is often represented in which men are depicted as being physically aggressive, violent, and power-hungry. In the past, however, men on television were generally depicted as leaders, problem solvers, confident, and athletic.<sup>2</sup>

Given these observations, this article seeks to answer two main questions: Was the prevalent view of the imbecilic dad common in the early days of television, and what is the impact of the present-day portrayal of inept fathers on culture and home life and in the church? We conclude with closing comments on how this trend can begin to be corrected. We will look through the lens of the social sciences – observations on how an individual is influenced by the larger group<sup>3</sup> – and then highlight the particular role a father possesses based upon scriptural principles. We attempt to show that when society opposes the natural order that God created for the family, other aspects of life tend to fall out of order, as well.

## HISTORICAL GLANCE OF THE IMAGE OF DAD FROM THE 1950S THROUGH THE 1990S

In the book *Fatherless America*, David Blakenhorn notes that from 1960 to the 1990s the percentage of children not living with their biological fathers increased from

17.5% to 36.3%.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Census of 2010 now states that this percentage has risen to 39.2%, and when this figure is adjusted for those families only living with married biological fathers, the number raises even higher to 41.7%.<sup>5</sup> These figures indicate that our nation is replete with citizens raised quite differently than generations<sup>6</sup> born prior to 1970, in which over 80% of children were raised by their biological fathers. Interestingly, a similar trend can be observed regarding the role of fathers on television during this same period.

The relationship of this contemporary social phenomenon and the deterioration of the portrayal of fathers on television is investigated more thoroughly in the following sections. However, before this article explores the social changes due to increasingly fatherless home situations in America, a historical survey of the portrayal of fathers on television is necessary.

### PORTRAYAL OF SITCOM FATHERS FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1990S

Two influential studies were composed that looked at the portrayal of men and the portrayal of the family from the 1950s to the 1990s. The first study was compiled by Scharrer,<sup>7</sup> and the second was amassed by Olson and Douglas.<sup>8</sup> Both concluded that the portrayal of fathers in sitcoms had deteriorated from a father-knows-best to a father-is-unnecessary format.

#### *Scharrer Study*

Scharrer sampled long-running and top-rated domestic sitcoms from 1950 to 1990 and discovered that “the changing portrayal of father figures [went] from positions of wisdom and authority to roles in which their sensibility is called into question or mocked through foolish, humorous portrayals.”<sup>9</sup> Shows such as *I Love Lucy* and *Honeymooners* had a stereotype in which the fathers/husbands were the main bread winners and source of authority in the home, and although the male figure could be mocked (and at times ignored), the problem was resolved with an implied recognition that the man was the final authority. However, this stereotype began to change, with a clear demarcation coming in around the mid-1980s. During this time, research showed that “domestic comedies after 1984 depicted more dominance and less satisfaction and stability in

the family than those [shows] prior.”<sup>10</sup> There were two hypotheses that they set to investigate:

H1: The more recent the program, the more foolish the portrayal of the father character.

H2: Family-oriented sitcoms featuring working class families will be more likely to portray the father character foolishly than family-oriented sitcoms featuring middle to upper class families.

The results affirmed hypothesis one. There was a trend in domestic sitcoms in which fathers were portrayed as foolish. For example, the number of times a mother told a joke at the father’s expense increased from 1.80 times per episode in the 1950s to 4.29 times per episode in 1990.<sup>11</sup>

Hypothesis two was also confirmed. Sitcoms of working-class families portrayed fathers as the “butt of the joke” more often than shows with fathers in middle- or upper-class families. According to a novel measurement tool, the Foolishness of Portrayal Scale, Scharrer found that working-class fathers were twice as likely as upper-class fathers to be regarded as the butt of the joke (38.58 points vs. 19.17 points, respectively).<sup>12</sup> A numerical observation of all the sitcoms showed that in the ‘50s, the father made fun of the mother 58 times while the mother made fun of the father 19 times. Over the course of the next fifty years, each decade saw a change in proportion for parents making fun of the other, ending with 1990, where fathers made fun of mothers 81 times and mothers made fun of fathers 176 times.<sup>13</sup> This indirect relationship mirrors the trend observed in the ‘50s in a derogatory manner toward fathers. Aside from the type of jesting taking place in these types of shows, this reversal in how fathers were portrayed on television is significant. Shows such as



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*Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Good Times*, or *The Cosby Show* were replaced with *Married with Children*, *Roseanne*, *The Simpsons*, and *That 70's Show*. Wise fathers were exchanged for silly dads. Educated fathers were substituted with bumbling fools.

This shift in popular portrayals of the father in the media, has coincided with an increase in television media consumption. Currently, the average household consumes over 40 hours of media per week. Therefore, the current American generation of television consumers sees the role of dad as something to be mocked, leading to the implication (conscious or not) that traditionally authoritative, kind, loving, and wise fathers are no longer essential (or possibly even existent).<sup>14</sup>

#### *Olson and Douglas Study*

Another research group to tackle this issue was that of Olson and Douglas, who investigated whether the gender roles within the family from the 1950s to the 1990s as portrayed on television had changed. Their results showed that family satisfaction in the portrayed gender roles peaked in the 1950s and then again in the mid-'80s.<sup>15</sup>

The satisfaction scale Olson and Douglas used to correlate the gender roles showed that when the roles were more equitable (*The Cosby Show* and *Family Ties*), the level of harmony displayed within the family increased; however, as the gender roles grew less equitable (in television shows such as *Home Improvement* and *Roseanne*), the level of harmony displayed within the family decreased.<sup>16</sup>

Olson and Douglas also observed that even though television shows presented a negative portrayal of the family, particularly that of the father's ineptness, aloofness, or chauvinism, the ratings for those particular programs were unusually high. This result indicated that television consumers were supportive of the continuation of shows whose familial portrayal was less than ideal, even if studies demonstrated that they believed it was not an accurate depiction of their family or of American families in general.

Since the American consumer continued to watch these shows, families were freely choosing to view programs that did not align with their family values while at the same time increasing the likelihood that they

would adapt more negative portrayals into their own family structure at some point.<sup>17</sup> Davidson punctuated the findings of Olsen and Douglas by showing that connections can be observed "between commercials and gender role attitudes."<sup>18</sup> Thus, as more people watch a television show, the more likely they are to imitate the values and actions in real life. With the increase of media consumption in the home, it is not surprising that gender categories in America are changing – the influence of television programs that seek to destroy the stereotyped role of father is in full force. As a result, a question may be raised as to whether there is any correlation between the portrayal of fathers on television and the behavior that is exhibited in the U.S. society. David Hatch believes there is, citing that, with over 40% of American children not living with their dads and television shows not portraying a positive image of a father, television media should be partially to blame.<sup>19</sup> A large proportion of these media are delivered through intentionally designed, consumer-focused commercials, and although they do not carry a long narrative story, the underlying message from commercials can be just as powerful.

## **PORTRAYAL OF MEN IN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS**

Two influential studies were composed on this topic: one examining the portrayal of men and women in television commercials in 1971<sup>20</sup> and the other examining the portrayal of men in television commercials in 1999.<sup>21</sup> McArthur and Resko affirmed that commercials in 1971 portrayed men and women as fulfilling more traditional roles, while Kaufman, reviewing commercials in 1999, showed that men's roles were becoming progressively similar to those of women; however, male's achievement of female roles were limited.

#### *McArthur and Resko Study*

In 1971, McArthur and Resko looked at the portrayal of men and women in television commercials – a more manageable television segment since commercials fill approximately 20% of television air time. McArthur and Resko noted that by the age of 17, a viewer would have viewed some 350,000 commercials.<sup>22</sup> According to Callahan, "television commercials are specifically aimed

at creating values and self-identity that are based on the purchasing of particular material goods” (emphasis mine).<sup>23</sup> McArthur and Resko set out to discover what the characteristics were of adult male and female models in these 350,000 commercials that were “purchased” along with the product.<sup>24</sup> Were these commercials establishing stereotyped roles or seeking to change the perception of how men (and women) should be viewed? What they ascertained was that “Males comprised 57% of the central figures” of the commercials and that “70% of the males were portrayed as authorities” compared to “14% of the females [who] were portrayed as authorities.”<sup>25</sup> They also observed that the men behaved differently than the women in that their sex differences and were strikingly similar to the more traditional (not necessarily biblically accurate) roles of males possessing expertise while females made up more of the product users.<sup>26</sup> The final remark was that “male product users [...] were more likely than the female to be rewarded with social and career advancements,” while “female product users [...] were] rewarded with the approval of family and husband or boyfriend.”<sup>27</sup> In general, it seemed that the commercials in 1971 were affirming traditional roles rather than seeking to change the portrayal of gender roles.

#### *Kaufman Study*

Kaufman affirms that “men have often been portrayed as incompetent husbands and fathers on [television]” and that very little has changed at least through the 1980s.<sup>28</sup> In previous studies of commercials, women are viewed as nurturers – the central figure of care and support for the children – while men are “portrayed as dependent on women and childlike.”<sup>29</sup> This particular study looked at television commercials and how men and women were portrayed.

Men were more often shown as teaching, reading, and talking with their child than women. Men were also less likely to be seen cooking and cleaning or caring for a child that is talking, eating and playing, which is consistent with a way a mother might be portrayed. Husbands who were seen with their child and with no spouse present were more likely to be seen outside the home. One commercial demonstrated a father and son bonding moment when the

dad brought home a satellite system, and the prevalent portrayal was that the husband and children were waited on by the wife/mother.

Kaufman concluded both male and female roles were depicted differently in the selected commercials but that fathers were not generally pictured alone with their children but were pictured with their spouse present.<sup>30</sup> One interpretation of these depictions is that mothers are able to function in the role of a stable parent but that fathers, unless their spouse was present, may be lacking with respect to their parenting capabilities.

### **CORRELATION BETWEEN PORTRAYAL AND REAL LIFE**

Is there a correlation between what people watch and whether they imitate the behavior of the television commercials? Callahan cites two studies that found “compelling evidence that repeated exposure to media violence contributes to aggressive behavior, anxiety and desensitization to violence.”<sup>31</sup> Kaufman cites a similar study from Blakeney, Barnes and McKeough that asserts the same conclusion as that of Callahan.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps, then, this same principle applies with fathers. Perhaps watching television commercials or programs where the role of the father is minimized affects the way men are expected to behave as fathers, which subsequently affects the way men behave in a certain culture. McArthur and Resko certainly hint at this assertion. Based upon the findings a previous researcher, MacArthur and Resko state that “observational learning from the live and symbolic models (television) is the first step in the acquisition of sex-typed behavior.”<sup>33</sup> Considering that the percentage of children raised by their biological father in 1960 was still 82.4%,<sup>34</sup> as well as the fact that the portrayal of fathers in commercials until at least 1971 was more traditional, a strong correlation could be drawn between the characteristics of the sex-typed behaviors depicted in the media and the deterioration of the nuclear family in America.

### **CURRENT PORTRAYAL OF FATHERS**

In a recent meta-analysis, Furnham and Paltzer reviewed thirty published studies from five continents on the portrayal of men and women in television since 2000.

They concluded that “men were more likely to be voice-overs while women were presented visually more than men,” yet they noticed a trend in only Western countries in which gender-role stereotyping was in decline.<sup>35</sup> In other words, traditional roles for men and women are more prevalent outside of the U.S. and Western Europe.

Within the U.S. media, the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) conducted a novel review of 102 prime-time shows on the 4 major networks and the Warner Brother’s channel from November 1998 to mid-December 1998.<sup>36</sup> The NFI found that only 15 of the 102 shows had dads as central figures and that only 6 of those 15 shows portrayed dads as a positive role model. To state it another way, up to 64 million children under the age of 18<sup>37</sup> watched 97 shows out of 103 during the prime-time slots in which the role of the father was depicted as being devalued. Hatch also states that during the Saturday night programming, there was not one program “with fathers of kids 18 or younger.”<sup>38</sup>

The NFI, in an essay by Jamin Warren, reports that “Dads were 8 times more likely to be shown in a negative light when compared to moms.”<sup>39</sup> Concerning shows aimed at teens, where the role of parents is becoming obsolete, Weinman<sup>40</sup> asserts that producers spend so much money on the kids that they can’t afford two parents. Thus, they end up going with a single mom, or they simply “create a boorish father.”

Classic American male role models such as Robert Young in *Father Knows Best* and Bill Cosby in *The Cosby Show* were educated, wise, and possessed authority, but these types have been subverted by the foppish Ray Romano in *Everybody Loves Raymond* and the aloof Kurtwood Smith in *That 70’s Show*. By and large, contemporary prime-time fathers are foolish, clueless, and buffoonish. With around 40% of children living in homes without dads, this means 25-26 million of children in the U.S. are being “raised” by television dads – dads who are each depicted as a “dunderhead[ed], lay[ing] about, and clueless[ly] interlop[ing] in modern familial life.”<sup>41</sup> This caricature should come as no surprise because a significant portion of our society struggles with what it means to be a dad. Through humor, our American culture has purported that

being a father is, in effect, an unnecessary station. As Blakenhorn argues, “as our society abandons the fatherhood idea, we do not simply become more aware of children growing up without fathers, [sic] we also become accepting of that. In a culture of fatherlessness, fatherhood becomes irrelevant.”<sup>42</sup>

## SEX AND VIOLENCE

Another study on the portrayal of fathers came in a report titled “Boys to Men.” Although the focus was not exclusively upon the role of fathers, this research studied the images that the media sends children regarding the role of manhood. The study demonstrated the following about boys ages 10-17:

- They are more likely than girls to watch television programs and movies.
- When asked to choose 3 television role models, 80% of boys choose male characters compared to 57% for girls.
- They cite humor as being their top reason for choosing a role model (56% to 38%).
- They view “acting dumb” as positive (71%).
- They affirm that sexual activity on television is more popular.<sup>43</sup>

The study went on to show that children believed men on television were usually portrayed as confident (91%), violent (72%) and angry (69%).<sup>44</sup> Combined with the portrayal of the thick-headed working-class dad who lounges on the sofa (scratching his beer belly), or a middle-class dad who has to be consistently corrected by his ever-condescending wife, it is no wonder that modern children may not view the role of dad as being important in society.

Bayles and Warren identify “the core demographic known as the hip-hop generation” as those born from 1964 to 1984, and at the same time, they observed an increase of absent black fathers from the home.<sup>45</sup> This same demographic could be consistent with a number of different types of artists – singers, musicians, and actors/actresses – who did not have a proper father figure and who sought to express themselves in a way that would be viewed as “counter-cultural.” All the while, the issues

in the lives of these cultural icons could conceivably be viewed as a manifestation of the larger cultural milieu of striving to bring a sense of purpose and meaning that was lacking in their fatherless home.

In the last several years, a focus upon programs that ignore the home life or stereotype it as dysfunctional seems to be growing. A close friend of mine, who teaches at a local Christian school, once remarked that she noticed that more television programs emphasize the work place environment (e.g., *CSI Miami*, *Person of Interest* and the *Mentalist*) rather than the home. It would seem that life at home might be viewed as too boring or too painful, and instead, programs have chosen to stress the place where an increasing number of people in the U.S. find life to be more interesting – their job.

Thus, from the 1950s through the early 2000s, the social sciences literature demonstrates a clear correlation between the decline of the portrayal of fathers on television and the decline in the belief that the father is an essential part of the home. As opposed to the biblical model of male leadership in the home purported in Ephesians 5 and Deuteronomy 6, modern media has increasingly depicted the head of the house as second in command (or more often third in command after the wife and kids). His role is less important, and his representation is one of a bumbling fool, the butt of his wife or kids' jokes.

### **CONSEQUENCES OF THE UNNECESSARY FATHER**

Blakenhorn summarizes the idea that our elite culture has now incorporated into its prevailing family narrative the idea that fatherhood is superfluous, a distinctive social role that is either unnecessary or undesirable.<sup>46</sup> This thinking has initiated an epidemic of fatherlessness that has caused some ethnic groups to exceed the 60% mark of homes without a father.<sup>47</sup> Problems such as this inevitably have far-reaching negative ramifications for the family, society, and the church.

### **CONSEQUENCES IN THE FAMILY**

James Dobson, in his book *Bringing Up Boys*, has argued that dads are important to the nuclear family in ways that are different from a mom. The following

are just a few factors that Dobson identifies through empirical social sciences studies that had been published prior to 2001:

- The fact that there is an undeniable linkage between father and babies at birth.
- Infants as young as six weeks can differentiate between their father's and mother's voices.
- Infants are born with a drive to find and connect with their fathers.
- Toddlers seek out their dad when he is not present at home.
- Teenagers express fatherneed<sup>48</sup> in even more complex ways.<sup>49</sup>

Additionally, the NFI confirms Dobson's research with benefits that children receive from active and present fathers in the home. The following are just a small sample of these benefits:

- Infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for infants of unmarried mothers than for married mothers.
- Expectant fathers can play a powerful role as advocates of breastfeeding to their wives.
- Children who live apart from their fathers are more likely to be diagnosed with asthma.
- Middle school children who do not have a dad have a four times greater probability of having an affective disorder.<sup>50</sup>

In her book, *My Brother's Keeper*, Van Leeuwen found that for children who were exposed to the primary care taking influence of fathers, this influence became a "strong predictor of enhanced verbal and math performances and of independence and healthy assertiveness."<sup>51</sup> Van Leeuwen continues by affirming the importance of a supportive father: For daughters, she sees a father's influence as promoting the mastery of science, an area of study that many consider nontraditional for women. In addition, she sees this influence as being significant for valuing life with regard to reproduction and for resisting sexual temptation, which often results in unwed pregnancy. For sons, an involved father counteracts aggressiveness, helps reduce crime rates, and

reassures his son of “enough masculinity.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, fathers are extremely important for the emotional and spiritual health of their children. As Jenny Tyree found in a recent study, a father’s involvement before birth could be the difference between a positive well-being. For instance, father’s voice creates a bond with his baby in utero, his presence is noticed within weeks of the birth, his absence is noticed as well, and his engagement with his teenage children can ensure a stable home life and decrease the likelihood of his son or daughter suffering unnecessary emotional stress.<sup>53</sup>

My own life as a father and son concurs with this research. With two young daughters and a young son (and having lived in a home where both of my parents raised me and three other of my siblings), I have enjoyed the unique role of father. Within my nuclear family, my role as dad is decidedly different than my wife’s role. My kids recognize that I am the final decision-maker (from a complementarian perspective). They can trust my decisions to be generally beneficial for their lives, and when I have to be away from them on business for a few days, they greet me with great enthusiasm, but they never have expressed a fear that I would not return home. I felt these same feelings of security and love during my developmental years. For as long as I can remember, I loved and respected my dad and never once entertained the idea that he would leave. He was firm but loving and modeled for me what it meant to be a God-fearing man. Although Operation World has declared that approximately one third of the children in the U.S. will not have a Christian father,<sup>54</sup> the media’s lack of an emphasis on the role of the father devalues this role on a mass scale. If this trend continues, it is likely that even more children in the U.S. will not have a dad who exemplifies biblical values, which has been shown to have a stabilizing force in the home and in society at large.

### **CONSEQUENCES IN THE SOCIETY**

As has been demonstrated, the influence of dads in the home is paramount to its success and, if not corrected, has more far-reaching effects upon the culture as well. A brief overview of a number of different studies demonstrates how the decline in the role of fathers has negatively affected our culture.

### **INCARCERATION OF MALES**

Pew Research affirms that 41% of all births in 2008 were to unmarried mothers, which is an increase of 55% since 1990.<sup>55</sup> According to this research, 4 out of 10 children are potentially growing up without a father figure. Fatherless boys are generally not being taught what it means to be a man, how to interact with girls as boys, how to treat young ladies as a gentleman, or what it means to be a father. Instead, they may be learning to a certain degree that a father is not necessary for the proper training up of a child, and that adapting to society without a dad is without noticeable consequences. Bill Glass, a dedicated prison evangelist for over 40 years, has stated that 95% of all death row inmates whom he has encountered hate their dads and that not one of them had a genuine loving relationship with their dad.<sup>56</sup> In 1998, there were over 1.2 million people in federal prison or state prisons, and of the 3,452 inmates on death row, only 48 were women. Imagine how the numbers would have decreased if there was an involved dad in the lives of those male prisoners.

### **EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS**

The most significant factor for ensuring the success of a child is the involvement of parents, and in particular, educators recognize the unique contributions that dads make on students who do well in school.<sup>57</sup> If dads are not involved, not only will the child’s grades decrease, but if they continue without a father-figure, society will also produce less-educated citizens and a general population that is prone to depression and anxiety.<sup>58</sup> This cycle snowballs to the point where previous students – who eventually become fathers – have a low education level, further contributing to low educational success for generations to come; this process spirals downward to a functionally illiterate population (or at the very least to a more class-stratified society than what is currently the case for modern American society).

### **VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ABUSE**

As demonstrated by Wilcox in a 2008 study, an intact, two-parent home is the safest place for a child to grow up.<sup>59</sup> Mistreatment and abuse of children has been shown to significantly increase when a child is living in

a single-parent home, as he states that “The overall rate of child abuse and neglect in single-parent households is 27.3 children per 1,000 whereas the rate of overall maltreatment in two-parent households is 15.5 per 1,000.”<sup>60</sup> Within homes where there is economic security and protection from the father, a child is less likely to be abused. Wilcox further showed that homes with an income below \$15,000 were 22 to 25 times more likely to be abused than those living under a household income of over \$30,000.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the consequences to society when a dad is not present in the home are costly. More tax dollars are spent on prisons, drug addictions, child abuse prevention programs, and remedial educational training due to the absence of a father living with his children, compared to two-parent homes. Our society is seeing the fruits of these historical choices, and unfortunately, the consequences of this decline are not limited to those outside of the church.

### **CONSEQUENCES IN THE CHURCH**

The church has begun to see the breakdown of the family and the lack of influence an absent father can have on the family, society, and even the church.<sup>62</sup> In 2002, ABC conducted a poll that showed that a larger percentage of women attended church than men. Whether Catholic or Protestant, these percentages illustrated that churches were filled with a greater numbers of female congregants than male congregants. Approximately 44% of female Catholics attended, whereas only approximately 32% of active Catholic men attended. Within Protestant churches the numbers were only marginally higher at 50% to 42% active females to males, respectively.<sup>63</sup> The Barna Group confirmed this finding in a 2007 study, stating the following:

In a typical week, mothers are more likely than are fathers to attend church, pray, read the Bible, participate in a small group, attend Sunday school, and volunteer some of their time to help a non-profit organization. The only faith-related activity in which fathers are just as likely as mothers to engage is volunteering to help at a church.<sup>64</sup>

Although the Bible discusses the importance of women serving in the local congregation and loving their husbands and children,<sup>65</sup> it much more frequently addresses the importance of men leading, teaching, preaching, and encouraging and being positive role models in both the home family and the spiritual family.<sup>66</sup>

Unfortunately, the American trend of poor male role models has snuck into our churches. In churches we have been a part of in various areas of the country, we have witnessed a shortage of men in Sunday school classrooms, coaches for evangelistic recreation leagues, and those who faithfully attend at least one church meeting per week. When writing to his young disciple Timothy, the apostle Paul emphasized the fact that qualified men were to assume the office of elder/pastor.<sup>67</sup> One of the key qualifications was for the elder to be a father who managed his house well.<sup>68</sup> Paul declares that if an elder was not able to manage his own house well, it would be unreasonable to assume that he would be able to manage the local assembly of believers. The implication in Paul’s assertion was that overseeing his home would communicate to the other believers that he had taken seriously his first call as father, and because of his commitment as a father, he would then be capable of overseeing a larger church, which was designed to work as a spiritual family.

Paul continues his emphasis upon the special role of men in the church when he writes his second letter to Timothy pleading that the key to a healthy assembly would be Timothy’s ability to train other men.<sup>69</sup> Presumptively, fathers, not only single men, are included in this call to follow in the apostolic doctrine. Although there were influential women in Paul’s life,<sup>70</sup> he focuses his energy on the role of men within the church to train others and to uphold the integrity of the Gospel.<sup>71</sup>

The American church is suffering from delinquent dads who either do not attend, drop off their kids, send them with their wife, or worse, do not require their family to spend much time at all with believers in a corporate setting. These profligate men are implicitly (and most of the time, tacitly) teaching their sons and daughters that connecting to believers is not important, and if their children do not know Christ as their Savior, then they are also teaching their children that God is not a daily necessity for life as a believer.



Too often, wives and mothers are carrying the burden as spiritual leaders in their home, but this was never God's intension, as evidenced through Scripture.<sup>72</sup> In addition to these references, God initially established the role of Adam as the spiritual leader in the Garden of Eden. Revelation came from God to Adam only, and we can assume that Adam communicated this message subsequently to Eve after God formed her out of Adam's rib.<sup>73</sup> However, in contemporary American culture, just as Adam did in the beginning by shirking his role as leader of the home in the Garden,<sup>74</sup> fathers are shirking their responsibilities within the home, which has manifested in contemporary society through the abovementioned media outlets and subsequently makes its way into the church. The Bible's emphasis on male leadership seeks to break this pattern, as it was not the design from the beginning, and only through the power of the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of men will this goal ever be accomplished.

#### SUMMARY AND CLOSING COMMENTS

The portrayal of dads in the media has progressively devolved from a father-knows-best role to the dunder-headed dad who needs constant supervision from his wife (or even kids). In the 1950s, '60s, and '70s (and partly in the mid-'80s), dads were depicted as a more traditional wise leader who was capable of guiding his family. This trend changed significantly after the close of *The Cosby Show*, at which point dads have been portrayed more along the lines of Homer Simpson than Ward Cleaver. This article cites the numerous reports that found that the American family has deteriorated over the course of this same time period. Divorce rates are higher, single parents are more prevalent, and generations are being raised without the positive influence of a father. These phenomena have left an indelible mark in our culture, and America is seeing a rise in sons who do not know how to act as men and in daughters who long for male attention. The state of the local church is not much different than the larger American culture, as it is filled with similar family situations. The result of this cultural influence in church settings is a general lack of male leadership in the church.

As I (David) reflect upon my childhood, I am reminded that my dad modeled for me what it means to be a man of faith. Two times, my family moved from one coast to another coast with either a low salary or none at all. My dad believed both times that these moves were the will of God for our family. The first time, I was nine years old and simply traveled with my family, but the second time, I was fifteen. My dad included me in the discussion. He taught me that obedience to God was more important than financial gain and that God would always meet my needs. Later, as a man in my thirties with my own family, I believed God wanted us to relocate overseas to Costa Rica and then Spain as missionaries. My dad questioned me, as any loving father should, but in the end, gave us his blessing. I was able to relocate my family with relative emotional confidence because I had remembered that God provided for my dad's family while we were growing up and I knew he would provide for mine.

It is our hope that our children may follow our examples in trusting God because they heard about how their grandfathers and great-grandfathers believed God. Furthermore, when they encounter life's adversity, we hope they remember how Dad trusted God and persevered under difficult circumstances. May another generation be taught of God's mighty deeds and continue to follow in the well-worn path of obedience.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Katharine Heintz-Knowles et al., *Boys to Men: Entertainment Media. Messages About Masculinity: A National Poll of Children, Focus Groups, and Con-*

tent Analysis of Entertainment Media. (For full text: <http://www.childrennow.org/media/boystomen/boystomen-media.pdf>, 1999), 6, <http://www.eric.ed.gov>.

<sup>3</sup> Elliot Aronson, *The Social Animal*, Eleventh ed. (Worth Publishers, 2011), 6.

<sup>4</sup> David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (Harper Perennial, 1996), 19.

<sup>5</sup> "Living Arrangements of Children: 2004," United States Census Bureau, 2008, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-114.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Scharrer, "Sitcom Fathers: '50s to '90s."

<sup>8</sup> Beth Olson and William Douglas, "The Family on Television: Evaluation of Gender Roles in Situation Comedy," *Sex Roles* 36, no. 516 (1997): 409–427.

<sup>9</sup> Scharrer, "Sitcom Fathers: '50s to '90s," 23.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Linda V. Callahan, "Turning Down the Noise: Reading and the Development of Spirituality in Children," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 3 (2007): 253.

<sup>15</sup> Olson and Douglas, "The Family on Television: Evaluation of Gender Roles in Situation Comedy," 409.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>18</sup> Davidson Kaufman, "The Portrayal of Men's Family Roles in Television Commercials," *Sex Roles* 41, no. 516 (1999): 440.

<sup>19</sup> Hatch, "A Good Television Dad Is Hard to Find."

<sup>20</sup> Leslie Zebrowitz McArthur and Beth Gabrielle Resko, "The Portrayal of Men and Women in American Television Commercials," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 97, no. 2 (1971): 209–220.

<sup>21</sup> Kaufman, "The Portrayal of Men's Family Roles in Television Commercials."

<sup>22</sup> McArthur and Resko, "The Portrayal of Men and Women in American Television Commercials," 210.

<sup>23</sup> Callahan, "Turning Down the Noise: Reading and the Development of Spirituality in Children," 253.

<sup>24</sup> McArthur and Resko, "The Portrayal of Men and

Women in American Television Commercials," 210.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>28</sup> Kaufman, "The Portrayal of Men's Family Roles in Television Commercials," 442.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 452–454.

<sup>31</sup> Callahan, "Turning Down the Noise: Reading and the Development of Spirituality in Children," 254.

<sup>32</sup> Kaufman, "The Portrayal of Men's Family Roles in Television Commercials," 440.

<sup>33</sup> McArthur and Resko, "The Portrayal of Men and Women in American Television Commercials."

<sup>34</sup> Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Adrian Furnham and Stephanie Paltzer, "The Portrayal of Men and Women in Television Advertisements: An Updated Review of 30 Studies Published Since 2000," *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 51, no. 3 (2010): 217, 223.

<sup>36</sup> Hatch, "A Good Television Dad Is Hard to Find."

<sup>37</sup> "Living Arrangements of Children: 2004."

<sup>38</sup> Hatch, "A Good Television Dad Is Hard to Find."

<sup>39</sup> Jamin Warren, "Media and The State of Fatherhood," National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

<sup>40</sup> Weinman, "Wow! A Show with a Smart Father!."

<sup>41</sup> O'Neil, "Homer's Odyssey."

<sup>42</sup> Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Heintz-Knowles et al., *Boys to Men*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 11–12.

<sup>45</sup> Martha Bayles and Jamin Warren, "A Dad's (and Mom's) History of Hip-Hop," National Fatherhood Initiative, 2007, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

<sup>46</sup> Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> "Facts on Father Absence," National Fatherhood Initiative, 2009, [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

<sup>48</sup> Dobson cites Kyle Pruett's book *Fatherhood: Why father care is as essential as mother care for your child* (Free Press, 2000) at this point in his book and uses Pruett's coined term thereafter.

<sup>49</sup> James C. Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 55.

<sup>50</sup> "The Father Factor," National Fatherhood Initiative,

2008, 1994, www.fatherhood.org.

<sup>51</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *My Brother's Keeper: What the Social Sciences Do (and Don't) Tell Us About Masculinity* (IVP Academic, 2002), 105.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 206–207.

<sup>53</sup> Jenny Tyree, “Facts About Fathers,” Citizen Link, 2010, <http://www.citizenlink.com/2010/06/15/facts-about-fathers/>.

<sup>54</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World - 21st Century Edition*, Updated and Revised Edition, Revised. (Gabriel Resources 21st Century Edition, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Paul Taylor, *The New Demography of American Motherhood* (The Pew Research Center, 2010), 14, <http://pewsocialtrends.org>.

<sup>56</sup> Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys*, 60.

<sup>57</sup> Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement*, 1994, <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED375968.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> David Eggebeen, “Do Fathers Matter Uniquely for Adolescence Being?” *Institute for American Values*, no. 14 (2008): 4.

<sup>59</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, “Protectors or Perpetrators,” *Institute for American Values*, no. 7 (2008): 4.

<sup>60</sup> “Facts on Father Absence.”

<sup>61</sup> Wilcox, “Protectors or Perpetrators,” 5.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory Cochran, “Remembering the Father in Fatherhood: Biblical Foundations and Practical Implications of the Doctrine of the Fatherhood of God,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* (2011), <http://www.sbts.edu/family/journal/the-journal-of-family-ministry-12-electronic-archive/>; Kenneth O. Gangel and Jeffrey S. Gangel, *Fathering Like the Father* (Baker Books, 2003); Andreas J. Kostenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family* (Second Edition): *Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Crossway Books, 2010).

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<sup>64</sup> Barna Group, “The Spirituality of Moms Outpaces That of Dads,” 2007, [http://www.barna.org/barna-](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/104-the-spirituality-of-moms-outpaces-that-of-dads?q=fathers)

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<sup>65</sup> Titus 2:1-5.

<sup>66</sup> For leading in the church, see Elder leadership of men in 1 Tim 3:1-7; for father's leading in the home, see Eph 5:18 and 6:4, as well as Col 3:21; for teaching, see the relationship between male elders and teaching in 1 Tim 3:1-7; for being a positive role model, see Titus 1:5-9.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Tim 2:8–15.

<sup>68</sup> 1 Tim 3:5.

<sup>69</sup> 2 Tim 2:2.

<sup>70</sup> For instance, his specific greeting of Priscilla in 2 Tim and Phoebe in Rom 16:1.

<sup>71</sup> 2 Tim 2:2 and 2:14.

<sup>72</sup> Eph 5:21ff and 6:4ff.

<sup>73</sup> Gen 2:15–17.

<sup>74</sup> Gen 3:6.