**Mentoring the Fatherless: Will the Men of God Please Rise Up?**

I will warn you from the start: this is a call to action, for an alarm has been sounded! Fatherlessness is one of the greatest domestic and social problems plaguing our country these days; making up approximately 1/3 of all homes with children in them. There are approximately 15 million single mother households (compared to 2.2 million single father homes). These children are at a much greater risk of criminal and promiscuous behavior, substance abuse, to be abused physically or sexually, and teen suicide. They make up 71% of all high school drop outs and boys tend to drop out on a 4:1 ratio compared to girls. Financially, fatherlessness costs our nation $100 BILLION dollars per year ([Fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)). We simply cannot afford to give this less than our full attention any longer.

As a major advocate for single fathers (primary AND noncustodial), I will always believe that investing in the biological father’s involvement (outside of putting the children at risk) should be considered a top priority. Many are good men who just need someone [to come alongside them](http://www.crosswalk.com/family/parenting/single-parents/how-to-form-a-single-fathers-ministry-in-your-church.html) and help them get on track. Of course there is no “one size fits all” solution to any of this, and each case may be quite different from another. That being said, we can assume that a father’s presence in a young man’s or young lady’s life may not be an option. It is in these times that the Church must rise up and help to “fill in the gap” in the life of a youth.

The Bible is full of instructions regarding the Body of Christ caring for the fatherless. In fact, the Greek word *Orphanos* can actually mean orphan OR fatherless. In other words, a child may not have a father, but still have a mother…as is stated in James 1:27: *Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction…* (KJV). As my good friend and coauthor Dawn (Walker) Vanderwerf states in our book [*The Daddy Gap*](http://bookstore.westbowpress.com/Products/SKU-000905295/The-Daddy-Gap.aspx): “when we look at older translations of the Bible like the King James Version, we find 43 references to the fatherless and only a single reference to orphans. Even there it makes it synonymous with fatherlessness:

*We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.* (Lamentations 5:3 KJV)”

**Getting involved as a mentor**

* Most urban (and many rural) areas will have local and national program programs available to mentor through. A quick online search may reveal the big ones, but don’t exclude calling schools or churches individually. Many may have wonderful programs but a limited Web presence.
* Background checks will be required, so anticipate that before starting the process.
* A fair time commitment to mentor is 1-2 hours a week. If you are not ready to make that sort of commitment yet, then perhaps sign up for [Watch D.O.G.S.](http://www.fathers.com/watchdogs/) at a participating school in your area. Yes, it requires a full day at the school, but you only have to do one day (if you prefer) and honestly, it’s a blast!
* Depending on the program you select, make sure your schedule will be flexible enough to accommodate it. More than likely these kids have had too many broken promises made to them. I am not saying things won’t come up, but by all means, try to stay as consistent as possible. **Showing up** regularly on a set day and time will help bring that much needed stability into your mentee’s life.
* As in all other relationships in life, your words carry great weight. When working with your mentee, be sure to **speak in** to their lives by using plenty of words of affirmation. Recognize when they reach a certain goal, succeed on a test, or any other accomplishment- and then vocalize it to them with excitement!
* Depending on where you mentor, you may have the ability to share your faith in either a direct or indirect way. I personally mentor two boys. One is a 5th grader whom I am friends with his mom. They are Christians and I am welcome to talk to him about God any time. The other is a 3rd grader who I mentor on school grounds during school hours. Although he and his parents attend church, I still must watch what I say while school is in session. Whatever it looks like, do your best to **live out** your faith and let these kids see Christ in you.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 that we are to care for the least of these and those who are with great need- whether by their own doing or the acts of another. As He states, to serve them is to serve Him; to deny them is to do the same to Him. Ezekiel 22:30 points us towards the fact that God is looking for a man to “stand in the gap” on behalf of the land. So my question is, ***Are you willing to stand in the gap on behalf of a fatherless boy (or girl for you ladies) and serve Christ through the act of mentoring?*** Perhaps you’ve never mentored anyone before and you find it a bit intimidating. Let me assure you it is not! In fact, mentoring can be just as rewarding to you as it is to your mentee. Bonds can be formed and friendships can thrive as the months and years pass on. Mentoring only requires one hour a week to make an impact, but when given more time and attention, ministry becomes alive as you witness the Gospel revealed between you and your mentee.

*Matt Haviland is the founder of “*A Father’s Walk*” single dad ministry, the author of “*[A Father’s Walk: A Christian-Based Resources for Single Fathers](http://afatherswalk.wix.com/a-fathers-walk#!book/cqbe)*” and the coauthor of “*[The Daddy Gap](http://bookstore.westbowpress.com/Products/SKU-000905295/The-Daddy-Gap.aspx)”*. He currently lives with his wife and daughter in his hometown of Grand Rapids, MI and is the co-founder of the* [*Grand Rapids Single Parenting Expo*](https://www.facebook.com/GrandRapidsSingleParentExpo)*. For more information on the ministry and how to form a single dad small group in your own church, please visit* [www.afatherswalk.org](http://www.afatherswalk.org).