

# A Biblical Worldview of The Effect of Absent Fathers

✧ **GABE NUNZIATA** ✧  
**Class of 2025**

**STONEBRIDGE THESIS PROJECT**  
**Completed in the Senior Year**



# Abstract

*The absence of fathers has far-reaching consequences for children, families, and society, contributing to emotional struggles, behavioral issues, and cycles of generational fatherlessness. Without a father's presence, children, particularly boys, may develop misguided notions of masculinity, struggle academically, and experience emotional and social difficulties. Studies indicate that fatherlessness increases the risk of violence, poverty, and criminal behavior, highlighting the urgent need for positive male role models. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including active father engagement, mentorship programs, and spiritual intervention. The Bible emphasizes the father's role as a spiritual leader, entrusted with guiding children in faith and character. Strengthening father-child relationships is crucial for fostering stability, moral development, and spiritual growth in future generations. Ultimately, as Christians, we all know that God is our one true and perfect Father.*

**I**n exploring the impact of absent fathers on families and society, it is crucial to consider the words of Barack Obama, who once said, "What makes you a man is not the ability to have a child; it's the courage to raise one," highlighting the essential role of fatherly presence and responsibility in shaping the lives of children. The absence of a father in a child's life is a complex issue that impacts not only the individual child but also families and society as a whole. In the United States, about 35 percent of adolescents grow up without one of their parents, and roughly 40 percent of children are born outside of marriage, both contributing to the rising numbers of fatherlessness ([Census.gov](https://www.census.gov)). While many children initially live in households with both parents, family breakdowns often start with divorce or separation, leaving many young people without the presence of their fathers ([ifstudies.org](https://www.ifstudies.org)). The consequences of this absence affect children's emotional, social, and academic development. Children of absentee fathers struggle with behavioral challenges, lower self-esteem, and poor academic performance. The lack of a father figure can negatively impact a child's understanding of masculinity, leaving many children to accept unhealthy views of men. Additionally, the absence of a father often creates generational cycles, with children who grow up without fathers being more likely to repeat this pattern in their families. The absence of fathers affects children, families, and society by leading to harmful behavioral patterns in children, misrepresenting masculinity in young men, and creating generational cycles of absence in families.

## **Biblical Introduction**

The Bible speaks directly about fathers' roles in their children's lives. God is portrayed as the perfect Father, offering love, guidance, and protection (Psalm 103:13). Scripture outlines the critical role fathers play as spiritual leaders in the family (Ephesians 6:4). Fathers are entrusted with the responsibility of guiding their children in faith and character (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). The absence of such leadership can leave a spiritual and moral emptiness in children's lives and can also harm future generations. In the Bible, fathers are called to be spiritual leaders and role models, helping their children grow their faith and

character. Children may struggle with moral and spiritual development without a father's guidance and support. The Bible also speaks of the generational impact of a father's actions, where the sins or blessings of the father can affect multiple generations (Genesis 17:7).

## General Background

**T**raditionally, society has viewed fathers as the primary providers and authority figures in the home. However, over time, fatherlessness increased as a result of significant social and economic shifts, including industrialization, war, and labor migration. The absence of a father can be defined by: physical absence, usually due to death, divorce, or work; emotional disengagement; or lack of economic support. Each of these types of absences creates a different set of challenges for children and families. The challenges of being raised without a father lead to emotional instability in children, a potential need for social welfare, and cycles of poverty and fatherlessness. Studies have shown that children growing up without a father figure often face difficulties in academic achievement, social integration, and mental health, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage. By acknowledging the critical role fathers play in their children's lives, society can work toward creating healthier families and a more stable future for the next generation.

## Terminology

Father absence is a general term that refers to situations where a father is physically or emotionally unavailable to his child. It can result from divorce, separation, death, or incarceration. Regardless of the reason, it leaves the child without the support, guidance, and presence that a father typically provides ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)).

Fatherlessness refers to growing up without a father, either physically or emotionally, or both. It is often used in conjunction with the major issues children face when they lack a father figure. ([fathers.com](https://fathers.com))

Single-parent families are households in which one parent, often the mother, assumes the roles of provider and caregiver for the children. These families typically arise from divorce, death, or solo parenting. Single parents must balance work, childcare, and other

responsibilities, which can lead to financial and emotional problems for them and their children ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)).

Toxic masculinity refers to a set of behaviors that encourage men to fit in with traditional and usually harmful ideals of masculinity. These ideas emphasize traits like dominance and aggression, while rejecting traits such as vulnerability or compassion. Toxic masculinity encourages men to suppress emotions, avoid seeking help, and prioritize power and control. ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/))

Father figures guide, care for, and support children when their biological fathers are absent. They include stepfathers, grandfathers, uncles, mentors, or other male role models who offer emotional and practical support. Positive father figures can help fill the void left by a biological father and play a crucial role in a child's emotional and social development ([fathers.com](https://fathers.com)).

The fatherhood crisis refers to the decline of traditional father roles and the decreasing involvement of fathers in raising their children. This crisis involves more than just physical absence; it also consists of a shift in attitudes toward fatherhood, which often reduces the expectations placed on fathers in family life. The term focuses on concerns about the long-term effects of these changes on children's well-being and society ([fatherhood.org](https://fatherhood.org)).

Fatherhood programs are initiatives to encourage fathers, particularly those fathers who are absent or disengaged, to become more involved in their children's lives. These programs often offer counseling and educational support to help fathers develop stronger, more meaningful relationships with their children ([fatherhood.org](https://fatherhood.org)).

## History

Throughout history, the role of fathers has shifted significantly. In traditional family structures, fathers were primarily considered the main moneymakers, responsible for financial support, manual labor, and protecting the family. Fathers were also to be the leaders for their children's character development, setting an example of discipline, respect, and spiritual guidance. However, social and economic factors began to change this structure. The Industrial Revolution, which drew many working fathers into cities to find employment, resulted in less time spent with their children, as men often had to leave their homes

for long hours. Additionally, war service, particularly World War II, led to increased father absence, as millions left their families to serve overseas. The absence of fathers during these times had a profound impact on children, as they were forced to grow up without the presence of their primary male role model ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)).

**T**hroughout the 20th century, the structure and dynamics of the family underwent significant changes, contributing to a rise in fatherlessness. Divorce rates rose dramatically during this time, from approximately four per 1,000 women in 1900 to around 10 per 1,000 in 1941, and further to approximately 23 per 1,000 by the 1980s ([Census.gov](https://www.census.gov)). As divorce became more common, many children experienced the physical absence of their fathers, resulting in single-parent households that depended on mothers as the primary caregivers. A notable portion of fathers not living with their children were incarcerated, with over 10 percent of absent fathers in the U.S. serving time in prison ([fatherly.com](https://fatherly.com)). These circumstances made it more difficult for fathers to be involved in their children's lives and contributed to the growing epidemic of fatherlessness.

The concept of fatherhood continued to change during the 1980s and 1990s because of a shift toward a new understanding of the "ideal father." "As more women entered the workforce and gender roles became less rigid, fathers were expected to take a more active role in the nurturing of their children" ([ifstudies.org](https://ifstudies.org)). However, work often placed men in a position of struggling to balance their time at work with time spent at home with their families. This balance between career and family life, along with the rise of the "ideal father" concept, created confusion and pressure for many men. Fathers who tried to align themselves with these new expectations often found themselves instead disengaged from their children due to pressure, contributing to the problem of emotional absence ([fathers.com](https://fathers.com)).

James Dobson, to demonstrate how far we have drifted from the past, compares the view of family in the 1960s to the 1990s, "Truly, there were many rugged miles between the 'trees' marked 1960 and 1990" (Dobson 108). In the 1960s, everyone understood that a typical family comprised a husband and wife, with or without children. Most people agreed that the best way to raise kids was for the father to work to support the family while the mother stayed home to care for

the children. This structure would be considered a “normal” family, and having a child outside of marriage was considered shameful. By the 1990s, the concept of a traditional family became more confused, and people no longer agreed on what would define a “normal” family. At this time, about one in five babies born in the United States was born to unmarried parents.

The way Americans perceive religion also contributed to the increase in absent fathers. In 1960, people viewed religion as a positive force, believing that having a faith or belonging to one was beneficial for society. “Our children routinely began the school day with a simple prayer or moment of silence” (Dobson 105). Religious faith was a part of daily life, and most people believed it helped instill important traditional values. Today, however, public displays of religion are often challenged. “Any public display of religion...is immediately attacked by civil libertarian attorneys” (Dobson 105). Furthermore, people who wish to display religious symbols or pray in public spaces often face shame due to the increasing prevalence of secularism. This decline of religious influence in schools and American culture reflects a shift away from traditional societal practices that once emphasized family values, including encouraging fathers to remain active in their children’s lives.

Looking back at American society, it is clear that values have undergone significant changes over time, particularly regarding family, religion, and childrearing. The history of absent fathers is centered around the significant shifts in family structure and societal expectations over the centuries. While the notion of the “ideal father” has shifted over time, the absence of fathers, both physically and emotionally, continues to have lasting effects on children, society, and future generations.

### **Harmful Behavior Patterns**

**T**he current state of absent fatherhood is a pressing issue where consequences for both children and society include emotional struggles, violence, and school failure. A study by the Minnesota Psychological Association found that children who grow up without fathers experience difficulty forming secure attachments, which can lead to low levels of self-esteem and impulsive behavior. These issues can persist into adulthood, creating

long-term challenges for individuals in relationship-building and career paths ([mnpsych.org](http://mnpsych.org)).

Fathers are considered nurturers and guides who shape their children's lives with love and wisdom. "A father who is available and involved with his children becomes their pillar of strength. By being available, he can provide them with emotional support and help them achieve healthy adult lives. Without fathers, everything will go wrong, not just in the lives of the children but also with the mothers, the home, and society" (Haynes 17). A strong father-son relationship built on strong values "...helps boys learn responsibility and resilience, making challenges meaningful and guides them toward a positive path in life" (Peterson). Without a male role model to help shape their understanding of masculinity, some boys may turn to aggressive, competitive, and dominant behaviors as a way to validate their manhood. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development reports that boys without fathers run a higher risk of aggression, which in most cases culminates in problems at school and with peer relationships ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). Occasionally, this aggression can lead to further unhealthy forms of masculinity, where violent behavior is associated with being "tough" or "masculine."

Children growing up in father-absent homes score lower on standardized tests and are less likely to graduate from high school. According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, boys without fathers are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade and almost 30 percent more likely to drop out of school before completing high school. "The gap in academic performance is often attributed to the lack of a male role model for motivation and guidance. Without a father who can guide and motivate them, children often struggle to perform well academically; they miss out on support provided by a father, as well as the structure that comes with his presence" ([fathers.com](http://fathers.com)). Without the guidance and discipline a father typically provides, these children may struggle to develop the necessary skills for academic success. Such behaviors may limit their future opportunities and lead to poverty and inactivity.

### **Masculinity Misrepresented in the Home**

Growing up without a father makes children more likely to misinterpret masculinity and affects their view of what a man really is;



this affects both boys and girls, although in different ways. Without a father figure, boys often look to other sources for guidance, which may come from social media or peers. Usually, these sources offer a very unhealthy view of masculinity and mislead male children about their identity, which can lead them to become aggressive or even join gangs to demonstrate their toughness. “These boys are often dismissed as ‘just stupid kids,’ but their actions are more about seeking identity and authority in a confusing world” (Jordan Peterson). When boys primarily live with their mothers, they might struggle to find their self-government because they lack the guidance a father provides. Gangs can often seem appealing, offering a sense of belonging and a dysfunctional version of masculinity that society fails to present clearly. Additionally, when a father is absent at a young age, it can be particularly damaging.

**B**oys who experienced father-absence before the age of two were more handicapped in terms of several dimensions of personality development than were boys who experienced father-absence at a later age. For example, boys who experienced father-absence before age two were found to be less trusting, less industrious, and to have more feelings of inferiority than boys who experienced father-absence between the ages of three and five. (Corneau 21) This early absence leads to an increased likelihood of boys taking on behaviors such as criminal activity, violence, or other self-destructive actions as a way of making up for the lack of parental guidance and an example of healthy masculinity.

On the other hand, girls who grow up without fathers may be at risk in their relationships with men. Fathers shape their daughters’ worldview by protecting them and warning them about potential threats from men. Having never seen what healthy, respectful behavior looks like from their fathers, they may be uncertain about how a man should treat them in a relationship. Because of this lack of understanding, they often seek validation in unhealthy, usually toxic, relationships as a way of trying to fill a void. This can lead to cycles of unhealthy relationships or poor choices when choosing a partner, creating negative emotional problems that continue into further relationships ([doi.org](https://doi.org/)).

Additionally, the absence of a father figure has been shown to

correlate with higher rates of teen pregnancy. Research shows that girls without fathers are more likely to engage in early sexual activity, which increases the likelihood of unintended pregnancies. According to one study, "father absence was an overriding risk factor for early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy. Conversely, father presence was a major protective factor against early sexual outcomes, even if other risk factors were present" ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). In this study, conducted by the National Institute of Health, there was a true correlation between early sexual activity (defined as ages 16 and under) in girls and absent fathers. The correlation exists for those who experience early (before age five) and late (ages six through 13) fatherlessness. Girls who experience father absence at an early age are seven times more likely to become pregnant than those with present fathers, while those who experience father absence later are twice as likely. Additionally, late father-absent girls are 50% more likely to engage in early sexual activity than those with present fathers ([nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)). Without the guidance of a father, girls may lack the support needed to make responsible choices. These behavior patterns can lead to long-term difficulties for both young mothers and their children, including economic struggles and limited opportunities for education and personal growth.

**O**ne notable difference between teenage girls and boys is their approach to self-destruction. While boys may be more prone to outwardly aggressive behavior (often caring less about their impact on others), girls may engage in self-destructive actions. Boys must learn to control their impulses, and girls should not be left to fill an emotional void. "A healthy model of a man, husband, or father is essential, often drawn from traditions such as those found in the Bible or other scriptures" (Ben Shapiro). However, society has rejected these foundational truths, resulting in non-biblical guidance that can lead to destructive behaviors.

### **Generational cycles of absence**

Charles F. Kettering says, "Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his example instead of his advice." This quote emphasizes that the physical presence of a father is crucial in shaping who that child will grow up to be. Whether he knows it or not, a boy learns from his father through observation. "When a father wakes

up early to go to work, rain or shine, the son sees what it means to be a responsible young man who is willing to work regardless of the circumstances to support his family” (Ameen 10).

**R**esearch shows that approximately 20 percent of absentee fathers themselves grew up without a biological father. “The generational effect of absent fathers’ curses is very alarming because it causes children to inherit pain from fathers, who also inherited wounds, brokenness, and pain from their fathers. And more so, by the principle of modeling, the curse further trails down family trees” (Haynes 82). The distinction between biological and spiritual fathers is also important. While biological fathers provide direct support, spiritual fathers offer God-given insights such as guidance and mentorship. Regardless of the form a father takes, every child benefits from the presence of a father figure.

Children without fathers tend to repeat the cycle in their adult lives. “Children from father-absent homes are approximately 4 times more likely to be absent fathers themselves” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). In this way, a cycle occurs in which each generation has similar difficulties in relationships, behaviors, and life outcomes. The absence of a father figure not only creates an emotional and developmental breakdown in childhood but also sets the stage for a cycle that is difficult to stop. “Without positive role models, these young men may struggle to develop the skills necessary for healthy relationships, responsible decision-making, and career success. As they grow older, they are often more susceptible to poor choices that can perpetuate a life of instability and legal troubles” ([americafirstpolicy.org](http://americafirstpolicy.org)).

Incarceration illustrates the generational cycle of absent fathers. Sons growing up without fathers are also more likely to end up in jail or engage in crime because they lack the male guidance that can help them through the challenging times of childhood and early adulthood. “It has been reported that fatherless children are anywhere from three to 20 times more likely to be incarcerated than children raised in dual-parent households” ([americafirstpolicy.org](http://americafirstpolicy.org)).

The behaviors that lead to incarceration are rooted in the omission of the child’s basic need to be loved and supported by his father. “A father’s greatest gift is not necessarily meeting physical

or material needs; it is his companionship through life's joy and sorrow, guidance borne of experience, and the safety net of his unending devotion. When such an environment is in place, a child's future is secured" (Haynes 17). Silence takes the place of company and direction when a child grows up in a household without a father, denying teenage boys the recognition and support they need from their fathers, making it challenging for them to develop a strong sense of masculine identity. The challenge facing men today is to break this long tradition of male silence ([ifstudies.org](http://ifstudies.org)). The lack of a father's influence in one generation often impacts the next, making it crucial to address father absence as a cause of many social and personal struggles. "The challenge for men with missing fathers is to themselves become the fathers they lacked" (Corneau 176)

The controversy surrounding absent fathers is multifaceted, mainly focused on changing expectations of fatherhood, toxic masculinity, the new cultural demands on men, and social programs that affect the traditional family. The role of a father has undergone significant changes over the past century, leading to confusion between traditional and modern views of fatherhood. This shift in expectations has sparked debates about what it means to be a father in today's society and how these roles affect both men and their children.

### **Evolving Expectations of Fatherhood**

**T**he traditional model of fatherhood is currently being challenged by a newer, more involved approach to fathering, where men are expected to take on emotional caregiving roles in addition to financial and disciplinary support. While the newer model of the ideal father encourages an emotional approach to parenting, it has placed pressure on men to adapt to these modern expectations. On one hand, the traditional view of fatherhood emphasizes the father providing strength, authority, and financial support, reinforcing the idea that a father's primary duty is to provide stability and discipline. On the other hand, the newer view of fathering encourages men to be emotionally present, nurturing, and actively involved in their children's daily lives, which conflicts with long-standing cultural and societal norms ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)).

Furthermore, absent fathers, who may have grown up with the older model of fatherhood, find it particularly difficult to

adapt, leading to depression and self-doubt rather than increased engagement. Some believe that encouraging fathers to be more emotionally involved in parenting overlooks the natural differences between maternal and paternal instincts, while others argue that greater emotional involvement from fathers benefits children and strengthens family bonds. Trying to balance these responsibilities can result in confusion and frustration, causing men to disengage from their families. The challenge, then, is for men to find the balance that allows them to embrace their evolving roles without feeling overwhelmed or alienated in the process ([fathers.com](http://fathers.com)).

### **Toxic Masculinity and the New Cultural Demands on Men**

**T**he controversy around absent fathers is further complicated by toxic masculinity, as it often emphasizes outdated beliefs about male identity that encourage males to be emotionally detached, especially with their children. This view discourages affection or nurturing, leading many to withdraw from their roles. Jordan Peterson argues that these rigid expectations serve as a barrier between fathers and their sons, preventing meaningful relationships from forming (Peterson). When fathers believe that expressing emotions is a sign of weakness, they may fail to support their children. This emotional gap can create resentment and misunderstandings, ultimately contributing to parental disengagement.

Additionally, toxic masculinity also encourages men to believe they should have power and control in relationships, which is believed by Jordan Peterson to “slow down progress toward gender equality” (Peterson). If men view caregiving as primarily a maternal role, they may feel less inclined to take an active part in parenting, perpetuating cycles of absentee fatherhood. While some argue that redefining masculinity to include emotional involvement and caregiving will benefit families, others worry that such changes undermine long-standing male roles and expectations. This tension creates a conflict for fathers who must navigate differing societal pressures, making it even more challenging for absent fathers to engage in their children’s lives and adopt a new model of fatherhood.

### **Social Programs that Affect the Traditional Family**

Another key factor in the controversy surrounding father absence is the role social programs play in supporting the broken family.

For example, federal welfare programs have undergone significant expansion over the past few decades. Many argue that welfare support for single mothers may have the unintended consequence of reducing a father's desire or need to be involved in their children's lives by removing their sense of responsibility to provide for their family. The Institute for Family Studies says, "Some argue that focusing on reducing welfare dependency without addressing the root causes - such as low wages, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to education - fails to tackle the real issues contributing to father absence" ([ifstudies.org](http://ifstudies.org)). Welfare programs also sometimes discourage marriage, as some people might fear losing their benefits if they get married. In fact, research has shown that nearly a third of Americans reported knowing someone who has avoided marriage because doing so would have meant a loss of government benefits ([ifstudies.org](http://ifstudies.org)). As expectations of fatherhood continue to change, men find themselves under pressure to follow the emotional and financial demands of family life. Economic factors, particularly those having to do with welfare, only complicate the decisions that men make about whether or not to stay in their children's lives.

**W**hile welfare programs influence family dynamics, other factors, like changing views on sexuality and parenting, add to the controversy. Organizations like Planned Parenthood raise concerns about their impact on teens and traditional family values. It offers guidance on sexuality to teens, including easy access to contraceptives and abortions, often without parents' knowledge. Many people criticize Planned Parenthood and argue that such guidance goes against parental authority and promotes irresponsible behavior. In fact, Planned Parenthood's agenda intended to "...keep parents out of the picture by every means possible. Staff members for Planned Parenthood can then assume the parental role and communicate their libertarian philosophy to teens" (Dobson 13). This situation has prompted many to challenge what they perceive as a "disregard for traditional values," particularly concerning young people.

### **Biblical Worldview**

In the biblical worldview, the role of fathers is significant and foundational in the lives of their families, especially in terms of spiritual leadership. Fathers are called to be the primary spiritual

leaders in their homes by guiding their children in Godly ways. Genesis 18:19 says, "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (ESV). Fathers should provide for their families and lead them in the Lord's ways, as this verse shows. In Ephesians 6:4, Paul spoke about a father's responsibility, saying, "Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

**A**side from spiritual leadership, fathers are called to be emotionally and physically present in their children's lives. Psalm 103:13 describes God's love for His people and a father's compassion for his children. "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." This verse emphasizes the importance of fathers being emotionally available, offering both love and protection. They also serve as leaders in discipline, correcting their children with love and care. The presence of a father in the home offers security and stability, creating a strong foundation upon which children can build their emotional and social development. "The father helps the child establish an internal structure" (Corneau 17). The father's physical presence enables the child to observe the Christian characteristics and develop his own by emulating his father.

From a biblical perspective, the absence of a father leaves a spiritual emptiness in the child's life that is difficult to fill. Children are not only left without a male role model but also left without the spiritual guidance and wisdom that is meant to come from a father's leadership in the home. In Proverbs 22:6, the Bible emphasizes the importance of fatherly guidance, stating, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Without this direction, children may struggle to find a clear sense of identity or purpose, leaving them vulnerable to influences that could lead them down destructive paths.

Absent fathers also affect the way children understand relationships with men and, more importantly, with God. The role of the father, as outlined in the Bible, is a reflection of God's perfect love for His children. Fathers are called to model God's love, discipline, and wisdom in their households. When fathers are absent, children may struggle to understand or connect with God's character and His

divine purpose for their lives. 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 reflects the nurturing and encouraging role fathers should play, stating, “For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God.” Without this godly example, children may develop a distorted view of authority, love, and trust, making it harder for them to embrace God’s presence in their lives.

**F**atherlessness can lead to emotional instability, but the Bible assures us that God provides for those who are without earthly fathers. Psalm 68:5 beautifully describes God as “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows” because God sees and cares deeply for those who are fatherless. This passage speaks to the healing and provision that God offers, reminding those who lack a father that they are not forgotten. God provides emotional support, spiritual guidance, and love, even when an earthly father is absent. “The incredible thing is that our Heavenly Father offers us what an earthly father cannot offer. He provides a nurturing environment where the fatherless can embrace their identity as chosen sons and daughters. His spirit fills those who feel abandoned and rejected” (Haynes 72).

## **Solution**

The absence of fathers in many households has become a pressing societal issue with profound implications for a child’s emotional, psychological, and social development. Studies consistently show that boys growing up without engaged fathers are at a higher risk of academic failure, mental health struggles, and involvement in criminal activity. According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, 24 million children in the U.S. live without their biological fathers at home. Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive approach, including active fatherhood, support for broken families, positive role models, and a shift in traditional views of masculinity.

## **Active Fatherhood**

The best solution to the crisis of absent fatherhood is an increase in active father-son engagement. Research indicates that fathers, on average, “spend only about nine minutes per day actively interacting with their children, which is far below the level of involvement required to foster healthy development” ([Fatherly.com](http://Fatherly.com)). This small amount



of interaction often leads to emotional separation and can leave children, mostly boys, feeling unsupported. Active father involvement is not only about providing financial support; it's about being actually present and giving their children guidance. Fathers who engage meaningfully with their sons play important roles in helping them build confidence, navigate life's challenges, and develop positive character. These benefits come from the support and guidance that fathers can provide, which helps boys understand their emotions and make sound decisions. "By being open about his own imperfections, the father reveals to his child a real world in which he (the child) is not always expected to be perfect" (Corneau 18).

**F**or fathers to become more educated about the importance of spending time with their children, the public must be made aware of the significant role that fathers play in their children's lives. Extensive research supports that raising awareness about the importance of fatherhood and promoting greater paternal involvement can create a more supportive environment for boys, enhancing their chances for success in life. "Active father involvement has been linked to numerous positive outcomes, including higher employment rates and healthier relationships in adulthood" ([pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)). Although mothers have always been viewed as the first and most important caregivers, it is increasingly understood that fathers, too, have an equally important role in the development of their children. According to the National Fatherhood Initiative, children with involved fathers are 39 percent more likely to earn mostly A's in school and 45 percent more likely to hold leadership positions in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, children with actively involved fathers are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse, and less likely to become involved in criminal activities. Public awareness campaigns can help change the negative ideas around fatherhood by encouraging fathers to take a more active role in parenting.

In addition to raising public awareness, it is also necessary to make a positive impact in the community. "Local programs including parenting workshops, support groups, and fatherhood resources can teach men practical skills that they can apply to engage their children" ([fatherly.com](https://fatherly.com)). These community initiatives give fathers the ability to help build stronger, healthier relationships with their children and will

help fight father absence. “These programs provide a platform for fathers to learn about child development, effective communication, and how to provide emotional and financial support for their families” (fatherly.com). They also offer an opportunity for fathers to connect with other men who have similar challenges. Such initiatives can help reduce feelings of isolation and help individuals find a supportive group of people with similar situations. In communities where father absence is more prevalent, these programs are particularly important, as they also have helped men who may have lacked positive fathering models in their own childhood. Through mentorship, fathers can grow the confidence and abilities needed to fulfill their roles and support their children’s growth. These community efforts can also establish a norm that supports fatherhood, encouraging men to stay engaged and be present in their children’s lives, even given the challenging circumstances that come with it. “Investing in fatherhood programs and community support provides a practical way to tackle the challenges of father absence and create lasting, positive change for families and communities” ([ifstudies.org](http://ifstudies.org)).

### **Support for Broken Families**

**F**or single parents, especially mothers, it’s crucial to explain the father’s absence to their children. Providing clear reasons can help reduce feelings of guilt and low self-worth, allowing for healthier emotional development. Open discussions about the father’s role, even if he is not present, can help children understand their emotions better and develop a stronger sense of self. By addressing the reality of their situation, parents can help their children navigate their feelings and build positive identities.

The financial struggles of single parenthood can limit time for children to engage in extracurricular activities, education, and mentorship opportunities. “Nothing can be more challenging for a single mother than the pressure of having to take up the financial responsibility of the home” (Haynes 53). This creates a cycle of struggle, where children grow up without the balanced support of both parents, making it harder to stop the continuation of generational challenges like poverty. We need emotional and financial services and programs to support single parents, especially mothers. Financial support, such as government assistance or childcare programs, can reduce

the burden of balancing multiple jobs and household responsibilities.

However, secular welfare and support programs are not enough. The support that is ultimately required to overcome the “generational curse” of fatherlessness is faith. Only through daily prayer and engagement with fellow Christians can a broken family find true forgiveness and repentance. “Repentance is more than a feeling of remorse. This step is very vital in obtaining deliverance from generational curses...” (Haynes 84). In addition to seeking redemption through Christ, the absent father needs to acknowledge the harm done to his family, apologize to them, and resume a constant presence in the home. Placing the needs of his children and their mother above his own is required for repentance. The mother must also do her part to allow the family to overcome the issues resulting from the absent father. Her forgiveness is required to rebuild trust between the couple, and “trust is necessary to have reconciliation” (Haynes, 97). By addressing these challenges, the family can experience a more supportive environment that encourages faith and healing, healthier family dynamics, and experiences that will help reduce the cycle of generational poverty.

### **Positive Role Models**

**C**hildren raised without fathers often struggle with believing they are loved and accepted. And this can grossly sabotage true success later in life” (Haynes 65). This missing support must be addressed, and often, the single mother can not handle it alone. Mentorship programs are a valuable option that can help develop positive male role models for boys growing up without fathers. “These programs can match boys with adult male mentors who provide guidance, emotional support, and life skills training” (ifstudies.org). Mentorship has been shown to enhance academic performance, mitigate behavioral issues, and foster self-esteem among boys. Numerous studies consistently demonstrate that boys with male mentors are more likely to excel academically, develop enhanced social skills, and refrain from engaging in risky behaviors. Community organizations, schools, and after-school programs offer valuable opportunities for mentors to step in and help children who lack a father figure. These organizations can create orderly, supportive environments where boys can learn from mentors who serve as

examples of healthy masculinity, responsibility, and resilience.

Additionally, mentorship programs can address specific needs by offering tutoring, career guidance, and even emotional counseling, which can be especially crucial for boys who may be struggling with feelings of abandonment or low self-worth due to their fathers' absence. "By connecting boys with mentors who share their experiences or offer new perspectives, these programs not only help boys develop positive behaviors but also help create a sense of community and stability that might otherwise be missing in their lives. Through this, communities can play a vital role in addressing the absence of fathers by providing young boys with the mentorship and support they need to thrive, both emotionally and academically" ([ifstudies.org](http://ifstudies.org)). This helps break the cycle of fatherlessness by providing boys with the tools they need to grow into responsible, confident men, ultimately helping them succeed in all areas of life.

**A** spiritual role model is the final support mechanism that requires attention. Children's personal spiritual development suffers when fathers are absent. Therefore, it is critical that these children have a fellow Christian to teach them how to pray, worship, and forgive. No matter how much success a child attains in school or in their social life, they will hold onto anger and resentment if not taught to forgive. "God did not only promise to heal our physical bodies but also our hearts and emotions" (Haynes 70). A spiritual mentor or role model will provide the support and education needed to seek forgiveness and healing through Jesus Christ. Only then can the generational cycle be fully broken.

### **Change in Masculine Ideals**

Our culture teaches many boys to suppress their emotions and view vulnerability as a weakness. "The boys need to be made aware that it's acceptable to express themselves in emotions. Such emotion includes sadness, fear, and frustration. Encouraging boys to talk about their feelings and seek help when needed can reduce the stigma around mental health and promote healthier coping strategies" (Haynes 68). Helping boys learn to manage their emotions can help them build stronger, more positive relationships and navigate challenges with the resilience that is taught by a father. By breaking the cycle of emotional neglect and teaching boys that

they can be vulnerable, society can address many of the challenges associated with absent fatherhood, ensuring it does not persist for future generations. By teaching boys that it is fine to seek help, express emotions, and be vulnerable, society can work toward creating a balanced and healthy future.

## Conclusion

One of the most pressing issues in America today is the growing absence of fathers, a problem that is being influenced by government policies and a culture that often breaks down and mocks masculinity. “This absence significantly impacts children’s confidence and discipline, creating a void that mothers alone cannot fill” (PragerU). As Tupac said, “Your mother cannot calm you down the way a man can; you need a man to teach you how to be a man.” Without a father figure, children are five times more likely to live in poverty and twenty times more likely to end up in prison. “The statistics are alarming: in 1960, only 5 percent of children grew up without a father, but by 2015, that number had skyrocketed to 41 percent” (PragerU). This significant increase underscores a critical truth: fathers matter. Fathers must train their sons to be gentlemen, instilling values that promote respect and kindness. Without this guidance, boys can easily slip into destructive behaviors; they often face a choice to build or destroy. When a father figure is absent or lacks a community, boys may lack role models who demonstrate responsible behavior rather than harmful actions. A father’s presence is essential for guiding children toward healthier, more productive lives, which is important to address in our society.

“Having a father who truly understands what it’s like to face life’s challenges can create a bond of trust between parent and child” (Joe Rogan). This connection fosters a unique kind of love that is so intense that “it feels almost like a drug,” giving children a sense of security and belonging that is vital for their emotional development. “When fathers are genuinely present and engaged, they help their kids appreciate the importance of relationships and not take those bonds for granted” (Joe Rogan). This unwavering support not only strengthens their connection but also teaches children valuable lessons about empathy and resilience. Spending time with a father, whether in shared activities or moments of reflection, creates their

worldview. Such experiences are essential for children, allowing them to feel the presence of a trusted figure.

A father's story should not define his identity; instead, it's important to understand both the experience of being raised with a father as well as the negative effects of fatherlessness on children and society. This awareness can allow fathers to become more engaged parents. Fatherlessness is a significant worldwide issue, highlighting that "while every child has a biological father, the true measure lies in the father's presence and involvement in their life" (Kenneth Braswell). Recognizing this distinction should inspire men to be the kind of fathers who positively shape their children's experience.

## Works Cited

- "America First, Always." *Americafirstpolicy.com*, 30 May 2023, [americafirstpolicy.com/issues/fact-sheet-fatherhood-and-crime](https://americafirstpolicy.com/issues/fact-sheet-fatherhood-and-crime).
- Bible Gateway. "BibleGateway.com." Bible Gateway, 1993, [www.biblegateway.com/](https://www.biblegateway.com/).
- Braswell, Kenneth. 8 At The Table. "Single Mothers and Absent Fathers: Who's at Fault?" YouTube, 17 July 2024, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQeoA\\_xKkWE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQeoA_xKkWE).
- Corneau, Guy. *Absent Fathers, Lost Sons*. Shambhala Uuuu-Uuuu, 1991. Culpin, Iryna, et al.
- Dobson, James. *Children At Risk*. Word Publishing, October 1, 1990.
- Ellis, Bruce J. "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?" National Library of Medicine, [https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2764264/#:~:text=As%20expected%2C%20early%20father%2Dabsent,present%20girls%20\(Figure%201\)](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2764264/#:~:text=As%20expected%2C%20early%20father%2Dabsent,present%20girls%20(Figure%201)).
- "Father Absence and Trajectories of Offspring Mental Health across Adolescence and Young Adulthood: Findings from a UK-Birth Cohort." *Journal of Affective Disorders*, vol. 314, no. 1, 1 Oct. 2022, pp. 150–159, [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165032722007789](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165032722007789), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.07.016>.
- "Father Absence Is the Biggest Issue Facing Black America | PragerU." *Www.prageru.com*, 16 Sept. 2019, [www.prageru.com/video/father-absence-is-the-biggest-issue-facing-black-america](https://www.prageru.com/video/father-absence-is-the-biggest-issue-facing-black-america).
- Greenwood, Jeremy, and Nezih Guner. "Marriage and Divorce since World War II: Analyzing the Role of Technological Progress on the Formation of Households." *NBER Macroeconomics Annual*, vol. 23, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 231–276, <https://doi.org/10.1086/593087>.
- Grundmann, Matthias. "Historical Context of Father Absence: Some Consequences for the Family Formation of German Men." *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1 June 1996, pp. 415–432, <https://doi.org/10.1080/016502596385866>.

Haynes, Ludlow. *The Absent Father*. Cornerstone Creativity Groups.  
April 26, 2024

"How Mass Incarceration Has Led to Absentee Fathers and Troubled Children." *Fatherly*, 3 Nov. 2021, [www.fatherly.com/life/mass-incarceration-absentee-fathers-troubled-children](http://www.fatherly.com/life/mass-incarceration-absentee-fathers-troubled-children)

JRE Clips. "Joe Rogan on Growing up without a Dad." YouTube, 20 Oct. 2018, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxVpl5u-yoA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxVpl5u-yoA).

Krumholz, Willis. "Family Breakdown and America's Welfare System." Institute for Family Studies, 7 Oct. 2019, [ifstudies.org/blog/family-breakdown-and-americas-welfare-system](http://ifstudies.org/blog/family-breakdown-and-americas-welfare-system).

Mazza, Carl, and Armon R Perry. *Fatherhood in America: Social Work Perspectives on a Changing Society*. Springfield, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, Ltd, 2017.

Mazza, Carl. *Fatherhood in America*. The Free Press, July 18, 1993.

Peterson, Jordan. "Jordan Peterson - the DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES of GROWING up without a FATHER." [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQuEmfHdlUw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQuEmfHdlUw).

Peterson, Paul E. "Government Should Subsidize, Not Tax, Marriage." *Education Next*, 10 Jan. 2015, [www.educationnext.org/government-subsidize-not-tax-marriage/](http://www.educationnext.org/government-subsidize-not-tax-marriage/).

Shafeeq Ameen, PhD. *A Message to a Fatherless Generation*. Xlibris Corporation, 8 July 2020.

"The Consequences of Fatherlessness." National Center for Fathering, [fathers.com/the-consequences-of-fatherlessness/](http://fathers.com/the-consequences-of-fatherlessness/).

"The Daily Wire." Daily Wire, 2019, [www.dailywire.com/](http://www.dailywire.com/).

US Census Bureau. "How Does Your State Compare with National Marriage and Divorce Trends?" Census.gov, 8 Oct. 2024, [www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/10/marriage-and-divorce.html](http://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/10/marriage-and-divorce.html).

Walker, Virgil. "The Pain of Fatherlessness | G3 Ministries." G3 Ministries, 26 Jan. 2021, [g3min.org/the-pain-of-fatherlessness/?srsId=AfmBOorHaId\\_oyWYl3vwPIhYjIAFoEmWdOApjlex-1XjFHqrXpMYFCy](http://g3min.org/the-pain-of-fatherlessness/?srsId=AfmBOorHaId_oyWYl3vwPIhYjIAFoEmWdOApjlex-1XjFHqrXpMYFCy).



## About the Author



Gabe Nunziata is the recipient of the 2025 Rosalie June Slater Literary Award for his senior thesis on fatherhood. He attended StoneBridge for 10 years. He served as a Property Prefect for three years, was a member of the National Honor Society and Key Club, and was a captain of the SBS Swim & Dive Team his sophomore through senior years. Gabe contributed to StoneBridge Swim & Dive three years in a row, earning state runner-up in the 100 Breaststroke and 200 Individual Medley in his sophomore year; state runner-up in the 200 Individual Medley and State Title in the 100 Breaststroke his junior year; and state titles in both the 200 Individual Medley and 100 Breaststroke in his senior year, as well as earning an all-time VISAA record in the breaststroke. He signed to the University of Tennessee to major in business and be a part of the NCAA men's swim team.

## About the Thesis Project

The StoneBridge thesis is the major capstone project for 12th grade students. Every SBS senior must complete and pass his or her thesis project in order to graduate. It represents the culmination of each student's high school career, as well as the fruits of a Principle Approach® education. The thesis is a 20-25-page research paper. The student selects a controversial issue (approved by the SBS faculty) and must present his or her perspective, as well as a solution to the issue, from a Biblical worldview. After the paper is completed, the SBS senior gives a 25-30 minute presentation and defense of his or her thesis before a panel of judges.



1629 JOLLIFF RD. CHESAPEAKE, VA 23321  
757.488.2214 | [STONEBRIDGESCHOOL.COM](http://STONEBRIDGESCHOOL.COM) |

