

The power of an engaged father: male role models and mentors

The benefits of quality time with Dad are boundless

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In my recent book, “What Really Matters: Restoring a Legacy of Faith, Freedom, and Family,” I shared the following story about the late Minnesota Twins star [Harmon Killebrew](#).

In his induction speech, as he entered the baseball Hall of Fame, he said: “My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard.

Mother would come out and say, ‘You’re tearing up the grass.’ ‘We’re not raising grass,’ Dad would reply. ‘We’re raising boys.’”

Besides going on to a Hall of Fame baseball career, the late slugger was known for his character and humility — traits that were likely instilled in him by a loving and engaged father who was more concerned about his sons than the aesthetics of his lawn.

Study after study have produced irrefutable evidence of the difference an engaged father makes in a child’s life — whether it be a son or a daughter — and, on the flip side, the negative ramifications for children who do not have such a paternal influence in their lives.

So many of our current cultural ills can be tied to father absence. That is why I was encouraged to read about a study by Wendy Wang, the director of research for the Institute for Family Studies on how fathers are increasing their engagement with their children.

According to Ms. Wang, American fathers now spend an average of 7.8 hours per week taking care of children at home, up by 1% per week over the past two decades. The increase is primarily among college-educated, white or Asian dads in two-parent homes.

The benefits for these children who are experiencing quality time with dad are boundless. For a boy, an engaged father, like the one [Harmon Killebrew](#) had, is their first and best mentor.

As another baseball figure, the former commissioner of baseball Fay Vincent shared, his late father admonished him to “always be a gentleman.” Generations of other men from Killebrew and Vincent’s era heard the same message from their dads. They knew that being a gentleman meant decency, excellence in their work and valuing and preserving the family name.

It was about integrity over intellect and embodying goodwill in both the highest of highs and lowest of lows in life.

Gentlemen succeed in life professionally and personally, as they make great husbands and fathers and are solid contributors to society.

But as much as I was encouraged to learn that these fathers are spending more time with their children, there are still millions of children who are still suffering from the heartache of a missing dad.

According to Ms. Wang, fathers without a college degree now spend less time with their children than they did 20 years ago. Fathers without a college degree are three times more likely than college-educated dads to live apart from their children.

Ms. Wang adds, “College-educated fathers now spend almost twice the amount of time with their children as fathers without a college degree.”

The result is that the rich (the college-educated father and his children) get richer, while the poor (the non-college-educated father and his children) get poorer. Meanwhile, in our society the dividing line between the haves and have-nots is determined at the very beginning of life and the precious formative years of childhood.

For boys who do not have engaged fathers, the statistics are tragic. Cynthia Harper of the University of Pennsylvania and Sara S. McLanahan of Princeton University found that young men who grow up in fatherless homes are twice as likely to end up in jail as those who come from traditional two-parent families.

Girls who grow up without an engaged father often become severely depressed, self-destructive and sexually promiscuous as they seek to fill the void left by the absence of a loving and engaged father.

My advice to those fathers who have increased their engagement with their children is to “keep it up.” For those fathers who have chosen to neglect their parental responsibility, I would admonish them to re-examine their priorities and commitments — regardless of

their educational or economic level — and realize that the most important investment they can make is not in personal fulfillment, but in the lives of their children.

Let's start "tearing up some grass," as [Harmon Killebrew's](#) dad would say, and spend time with our children rather than placing our focus elsewhere. Our children, like [Harmon Killebrew](#) did, will greatly benefit as a result.

- *This column is excerpted from "What Really Matters: Restoring a Legacy of Faith, Freedom, and Family" by Tim Goeglein and Craig Osten. It is available at www.faithfultext.com. Timothy S. Goeglein is the vice president of government and external relations at Focus on the Family.*