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# God's Focus on the Fatherless: A Lens to Inform Spiritual Impact in the Local Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

GOD'S FOCUS ON THE FATHERLESS:  
A LENS TO INFORM SPIRITUAL IMPACT  
IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
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BY  
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by  
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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV).

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## ABSTRACT

This study concentrates on God's focus on and vision for the fatherless as an informal lens from which local churches may measure and implement ministry impact and outreach principles. As a pastor and a military chaplain, I see many young people who are fatherless to the third and fourth generation. The ministry of the present day Church is limiting its impact because it does not see the fatherless as God sees them. Here the question is asked, "What in God's exhortation of supporting the fatherless are churches to incarnationally infuse into their local outreach to the community?" The claim is made that discernment of the fatherless plight is close to the heart of God and provides his measurement for which spiritual impact will influence following generations. Much needed discernment and guidance is found by aligning our sight and will with God's. It is the prayer of this author that local church leaders will discover and embrace principles found throughout Scripture—of God's heart for the fatherless—first as their own truest identity, and after reflecting on their mission outreach, identify God's never-ending tenderness and compassion for the fatherless while establishing the framework and mission for present day ministry. The method of dissemination of the above research will be a popular book that will also function as a guide for study and self-evaluation.

## SECTION ONE: PROBLEM STATEMENT

### Introduction

The church has a need to understand God's heart and vision for the "fatherless" as a lens to inform ministry outreach. This study is a concentration on God's "fatherless" focus while identifying factors that create a lens of His expectations of the church through that lens. Fatherlessness, like death, is not easily repaired; it is often an uphill battle of a lifetime. Therefore, three preliminary questions are asked: 1. What are God's incarnational expectations for the church in His focus on the fatherless? 2. Why does God's "line of sight" focus on the fatherless as a priority by which the people of God are to be aware in their present situation? 3. Why is there a mandate to focus on fatherless principles while addressing ministry? The fatherless factor has a depth of abandonment, broken identity and often unspeakable pain, a long lasting effect on any society and the churches therein. These foundational questions are addressed throughout beginning with statistical proof of what fatherlessness represents in the United States. Though statistical data changes from year to year, one can be certain that the needs represented herein continue at epidemic proportions.

Throughout this dissertation the term "fatherless" can be interchangeable (but not limited to) with the disenfranchised, the aborted child, voiceless, widow, orphan, alien, prisoner, mentally ill, alcoholic, elderly, bed ridden, and stranger.

*Fatherlessness represents separation.* Twenty-four million children (one out of three) in America live in biological father-absent homes.<sup>1</sup> The trends have been tracked

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<sup>1</sup> David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1996), 19.



from 1960 to present and show no signs of abatement. The negative effects are devastating. Forty-three percent of United States' children live without a father (this does not contradict the statement above—both biological and geographical carry equal value impact).<sup>2</sup> Ninety percent of homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes; thirty-two times the average.<sup>3</sup>

*Fatherlessness represents violence.* Eighty percent of rapists who are motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes.<sup>4</sup> We can anticipate that statistics have not improved with ongoing measurable substantial subsets that shows uncontrolled anger continued trend is in the word, violence.<sup>5</sup> Violence includes suicide, runaways, behavioral disorders, rapists, high school dropouts, chemical abuse, juveniles, and prison inmates.<sup>6</sup>

*Fatherlessness represents self-denigration and poor self-esteem.* The US Department of Health/Bureau of the Census reveals that 63 percent of youth suicides are from fatherless homes. Eighty-Five percent of children who exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes, which is fourteen times the average.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy S Grall, "US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, U.S. Census Bureau," *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2007* (November 2009): 1-12.

<sup>3</sup> John Sowers, *Fatherless Generation: Redeeming the Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 36-37.

<sup>4</sup> The Furthering Fathering Corporation, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://furtheringfathering.org/fatherhood-stats.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Harper, Sara S. McLanahan "Father Absence and Youth Incarceration" *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 14 (September 2004): 369-397.

<sup>6</sup> "Fatherless Homes Breed Violence," accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.fathermag.com/news/1780-stats.shtml>.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Payleitner, *52 Things Kids Need From A Dad: What Fathers Can Do to Make a Lifelong Difference* (Eugene: Harvest House, 2010), 17.

*Fatherlessness represents less achievement and social skills.* Seventy-one percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes; nine times the average.<sup>8</sup> Kids living in single-parent homes or in stepfamilies report lower educational expectations on the part of their parents, less parental monitoring of school work, and less overall social supervision than children from intact families.<sup>9</sup> Children from low-income, two-parent families outperform students from high-income, single parent homes. Almost twice as many high achievers come from two-parent homes as one-parent homes.<sup>10</sup> Seventy-five percent of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes.<sup>11</sup>

*Fatherlessness represents a higher use of correctional facilities and personnel.* 85 percent of all youth in state operated institutions were found to have no father.<sup>12</sup> Only thirteen percent of juvenile delinquents come from families in which the biological mother and father are married to each other. 55 percent of men in state prisons and 63 percent of men in federal prisons reported being the parent of at least one child. 58 percent reported that they had children under the age of 10. Over half of all parents in state prison had never married.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John Sowers, *Fatherless Generation: Redeeming the Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 36.

<sup>9</sup> Meg Meeker, M.D. *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters: 10 Secrets Every Father Should Know*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> Mark E. Strong, *Church for the Fatherless: A Ministry Model for Society's Most Pressing Problem* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Payleitner, *52 Things Kids Need from a Dad: What Fathers Can Do To Make a Lifelong Difference* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2010), 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Randell D. Turner, ed., Sean E. Brotherson and Joseph M. White, *Why Fathers Count: The Importance of Fathers and Their Involvement with Children*, (Harriman: Men's Studies Press, 2007), 264-265.

*Fatherlessness represents a higher risk of chemical abuse.* Researchers at Columbia University found that children living in two-parent households with a poor relationship with their father are sixty eight percent more likely to smoke, drink, or use drugs compared to all teens in two-parent house-holds. Teens in single mother households are at a thirty percent higher risk than those in two-parent households.<sup>14</sup>

*Fatherlessness represents an economic and social disadvantage.* The National Fatherhood Initiative cites the *U.S. Census Bureau, Children's Living Arrangements and Characteristics* in concluding that children in father-absent homes are almost four times more likely to be poor. In 2011, twelve percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared to 44 percent of children in mother-only families. Another study points out that infant mortality rates are 1.8 times higher for infants of unmarried mothers than for married mothers. In a study of seven hundred adolescents, researchers found that “compared to families with two natural parents living in the home, adolescents from single-parent families have been found to engage in greater and earlier sexual activity.”<sup>15</sup>

*Fatherlessness represents a high rate of suicide.* A family structure index—a composite index based on the annual rate of children involved in divorce and the percentage of families with children present that are female headed—is a strong predictor of suicide among young adult and adolescent white males.<sup>16</sup> Fatherless children are at

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<sup>14</sup> U.S. Fatherless Statistics, *Fatherless Stats*, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://fatherhoodfactor.com/us-fatherless-statistics>.

<sup>15</sup> Meg Meeker, M.D. *Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters: 10 Secrets Every Father Should Know*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 19-25.

<sup>16</sup> Patricia L. McCall and Kenneth C. Land, “Trends in White Male Adolescent, Young-Adult and Elderly Suicide: Are There Common Underlying Structural Factors?” *Social Science Research* 23, 1994.

dramatically greater risk of suicide.<sup>17</sup> The *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* 2009 statistics continue to support and confirm all previous studies and trends on suicide.<sup>18</sup>

*Fatherlessness fosters destructive lifestyles and identity confusion.* The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that obese children are more likely to live in father-absent homes than are non-obese children.<sup>19</sup> Researchers claim that boys who grow up in father-absent homes are more likely than those in father-present homes to have trouble establishing appropriate sex roles and gender identity.<sup>20</sup>

The converse of the above is positive. Children with fathers at home tend to do better in school, are less prone to depression and are more successful in relationships. Children from one-parent families achieve less and get into trouble more than children from two parent families.<sup>21</sup> Children with fathers who are involved are 40 percent less likely to repeat a grade in school, 71 percent less likely to drop out of school, more likely to get A's in school, and more likely to enjoy school and engage in extracurricular

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *Survey on Child Health*, Washington, D.C., 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Injury Prevention and Control: Division of Violence Prevention, National Suicide Statistics at a Glance*, accessed January 1, 2015, [http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/statistics/reporting\\_system.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/statistics/reporting_system.html).

<sup>19</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative, *Father Facts*, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistics>.

<sup>20</sup> Fiona MacCallum and Susan Golombok, "Children Raised in Fatherless Families from Infancy: A Follow-up of Children of Lesbian and Single Heterosexual Mothers at Early Adolescence," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45, no.8 (2004): 1407-1419. Note: Although this paper attributes most fatherless issues to income and environmental factors, it establishes that there are identity issues in early childhood.

<sup>21</sup> *One Parent Families and Their Children: The School's Most Significant Minority*, conducted by The Consortium for the Study of School Needs of Children from One Parent Families, co-sponsored by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, a division of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, Arlington, VA, 1980.

activities.<sup>22</sup> The National Fatherhood Initiative cites in the *Journal of Family Psychology* a study that concluded father-child contact was associated with better socio-emotional and academic functioning. The results indicated that children with more involved fathers experienced fewer behavioral problems and scored higher in reading achievement. This study shows the significance of the role of fathers in the lives of at-risk children, even in cases of nonresident fathers.<sup>23</sup>

Fatherlessness is one of many multi-leveled social ills in sinful humanity's brokenness. Though seemingly overwhelming, we are not to let the problem of fatherlessness immobilize us or cause a myopic view to ministry. God addresses the issue of fatherlessness over and over again to communicate principles in order to reach out to the whole of human brokenness. Pastor Ashley Cooper comments on a view to ministry while reviewing an article in *Journal of Marriage and Family* on "The Intergenerational Continuity of Fathers' Absence in a Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Sample":<sup>24</sup>

This serves as a reminder to youth ministry professionals that we do not minister to adolescents in a vacuum. We must engage their families as well if we hope to make our greatest impact for the Kingdom. We need to be aware of the holistic needs of those in our ministries; their spiritual needs are great, but we must also intentionally plan for and minister to their relational, social, emotional, and physical needs.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Howard, K.S., Burke Lefever, J.E., Borkowski, J.G., Whitman, T.L., "Fathers' Influence in the Lives of Children with Adolescent Mothers." *Journal of Family Psychology* 20 (2006):468-467.

<sup>23</sup> National Fatherhood Initiative, *Father Facts*, <http://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistics>, (accessed November 8, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Pougnet, E., Serbin, L.A., Stack, D.M., Ledingham, J.E., & Schwartzman, A. E., "The Intergenerational Continuity of Fathers' Absence in a Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Sample." *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 74, no. 3 (June 2012): 540-555.

<sup>25</sup> Ashley Cooper, Review of "The Intergenerational Continuity of Fathers Absence in a Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Sample." *The Journal of Youth Ministry*, (Association of Youth Ministry Educators), 138.

God as Father has not abandoned his children or his church, but is present, clearly instructing us throughout Scripture with outreach principles.<sup>26</sup> Many churches have been founded on a single perceived lack in their community. The church can be short-sighted, limited in vision, and promote the elevation of a cause rather than God almighty and His salvific mission.

### **Vignette**

Skip was in the top bunk; buckled over, holding his stomach, and wincing in obvious pain. The church camp pastor had been notified along with the camp nurse. Through a series of questions from the nurse, we all eventually found out that Skip had been suffering from stomach pains all week. He had told no one.

It was Friday and camp was almost over. The camp of 300 or more teens would be going home Saturday morning after breakfast. Skip told the staff that he knew there was a chance he would have to go home early. He did not want to. As his camp counselor, I noticed that he initiated speaking to me and other leaders in engaging conversation and activities all through the week. The last thing he wanted to do was go home.

We found out later that Skip was having so much fun and enjoying the loving Christian environment, he wasn't about to reveal something that could send him home. True to his prediction of his being sent home early, it turned out that he had appendicitis and needed to go to a hospital right away.

Skip came from a well off family with lots of money. His dad was notified, and he sent a helicopter to the camp. From across the baseball field, I watched as the nurse

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<sup>26</sup> Mark 14:36 "*Abba*, Father," Note: Jesus Christ related to God as his Father. Jesus Christ in most denominations is recognized as our model in prayer and example.

helped the young camper into the helicopter where the pilot and another large man helped.

When the nurse came back, I asked if the man who assisted with getting Skip into the helicopter was his father. With her eyes to the ground, she said simply, “No.” In that moment, as a spiritual leadership team for these young people, we were saddened by Skip’s reality. Here was a child with a father, yet no father.

At the same time, as I thought back over the week, I was overjoyed. We, as ministers of God, were able to fill a void, share our joy in Christ, and show the love of an everlasting Father. We did it accidentally, by just being available. What if we did it intentionally?

All throughout the pages of the Bible, God exhorts us to pay attention to the fatherless and chooses to relate to us in the intimacy of a father. Perhaps we are to see what it takes to reach out to the fatherless and apply it to all the ministries of the church. What would ministry in the local church look like if we purposely lived out our truest identity, our DNA woven together with godly fatherhood principles? What is God looking at when He sees the fatherless? What does His heart expect from us?

## SECTION TWO:

### ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM

In this section, the unfolding discussion presents the negative impact of alternative approaches to problem of fatherless such as: prescriptive methodology for all churches—a “bleeding hearts” tendency that lacks relational vision; inspirational books about being fatherless that help local church ministry; a contrast of spiritual discernment; and the importance of a father.

#### **Prescriptive Methodologies for All Churches**

As an experienced pastor and chaplain, the presentation of multiple “one-size fits all” prescriptive solutions to church outreach problems is all too familiar. This unfortunate practice in ministry assumes one set of answers to one set of problems in one kind of setting. Realistically, this is not the case in any ministry. No one church is the same, instead as Janet Crawley identifies in her book, *Who Is Our Church?: Imagining Congregational Identity*, each represents a unique challenge of ministry in its human culture, demographic, history, and traditions.<sup>1</sup> Often problems morph, graft, multiply, and overlap, especially in the area of human relationships. Christopher Meade’s observation on our brokenness illustrates,

Large numbers of men and women, boys and girls, are wounded and broken. In addition, there’s a genuine hunger for family. But many have idealized what family is in a mental sense without having any practical understanding of it. Countless people don’t even know what a healthy family really looks like.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Cawley, *Who Is Our Church? Imagining Congregational Identity* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Meade, *Leadership Alive: Changing Leadership Practices in the Emerging Twenty First Century Culture* (Boise: LeadershipAlive.com, 2008), 70.



Answers to ministry problems are more effective in local communities when they, akin to family, are descriptive rather than prescriptive. Treating groups as individuals with special worth and specific need is far more effective than a blast of one ministry program answer for all. Many church programs come and go, but it is always Jesus Christ in human relationships that stay the course to wholeness. He is truly the head of the church.<sup>3</sup>

Because human brokenness is wide and varied its scope cannot be carried by any one person “called of God.” Our solutions steer away from a prescriptive model of ministry to form a list of factors that serve as a lens or prism of principles by which a local community ministry can adapt according to their specific context. The study focuses on the approximately forty-three “fatherless” passages and context to extract overarching themes, attitudes, and ministry principles that can then help form and guide a local church ministry environment (See Table #1). Furthermore, these fatherless factors establish an informal lens by which ministries can assess if such principles are being implemented within their local church ministry mission, vision, or objectives. The church is not a commercial business and is fluid in its spiritual outreach to varied and complex people groups with traditions, history, norms, and mores. A lens of fatherless factors is presented as an informal outline of evaluation so as to flex with local church decision-making processes. A church that approaches decision making from a business model will likely miss the heart of God in reaching the brokenhearted in their area.

This study is not about the one specific problem of fatherlessness. There are many excellent ministries in this area such as adoption, mentorship, church ministry models,

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 1:18-23 and 4:15, 1:22 emphasize the context. Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New International Version of the Bible (NIV).

counseling, etc... The scope of this particular study is centered on God's vision for, and thus the importance of, reaching out to the fatherless and how it informs outreach in all areas of ministry. Out of this study a list of priorities will emerge for ministry as a whole. Discernment for greater specificity in ministry expands as churches align their eyesight with God's.

When one starts to address ministry need, the humanness in us tends to overreach or "bleed" for one destitute group. Robert Lupton says it in a concentrated way.

Doing *for* rather than doing *with* those in need is the norm. Add to it the combination of patronizing pity and unintended superiority, and charity becomes toxic.<sup>4</sup>

As people get involved, they believe that they are the only one that can see this specific pain in the world. For people who give of themselves regularly, this is a kind of "snow blindness." It prevents one from seeing a bigger picture, one that comes from the heart of God. The church is God's program and it knows it can only see godly priorities clearly within the context of faith (dependence on God) and the definition of what is good.<sup>5</sup> For the church, goodness proceeds from the "being" or nature of God. His priorities guided from scripture, help us not be narrow in vision and small in hearts of compassion. The church can be unlimited in the width and breadth of outreach.<sup>6</sup> Churches can be built upon pain, bitterness, or pride to answer a human need. Even with the cover of religion, this is a foundation that needs to be replaced by desires of God's heart. Only with His

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Micah 6:8.

<sup>6</sup> Malachi 3:5.

character can one see clearly through the horrors one tends to focus on in a terribly sinful world.

### **Inspirational Books about Being Fatherless**

Another great body of knowledge that has value, but is specific to one's life experience or people group is the many books written about a personal experience of being fatherless. Many authors in this genre refer to God getting them through difficult times. Each book has great testimonial and inspirational value, but is limited in giving large ministry outreach principles. As a minister to a broken world, I do not refrain from reading or lay these books aside. These are the kind of books that are put in specific person's hands for personal healing, and as such are of great value. One such book is by Byron Ricks who wrote, *Searching for Dad*. In his story he writes about nine side effects of growing up fatherless and how to overcome them.<sup>7</sup> Another is *Longing for Daddy* by Monique Robinson addressing the unique needs of daughters without a dad.<sup>8</sup> Another great book that is a reflective and thought provoking meditation study for those working through the journey of being fatherless is *Healing the Wounds of a Fatherless Generation* by Varn Brown.<sup>9</sup>

Each of the books mentioned here captures the exhortation to address the fatherless in different specific lens. They are a resource to our biblical study for statistics, academic disciplines, ministry plans, and personal experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Byron Ricks, *Searching for Dad: Nine Side Effects of Growing Up Fatherless and How to Overcome Them* (Dallas: Brown Books Publishing Group, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Monique Robinson, *Longing for Daddy: Healing from the Pain of an Absent or Emotionally Distant Father* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Varn Brown, *Healing the Wounds of a Fatherless Generation: Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children and the Children to the Fathers* (Dallas: Inner Court Publishing, 2011).

Still others address a specific ministry church models to reach the fatherless (adoption, defining, and “how to” books for better fathering). Some of these will be used throughout scrutiny of the forty-three “fatherless” scripture passages. All are valuable while drawing on personal experience and extracting knowledge from God to address the great specific need of fathering or fatherlessness. In contrast, this study is focused upon God’s principled insistence (command) that looks at the fatherless as a way of informing outreach in the local church.<sup>10</sup>

### **Contrasting Views of Spiritual Discernment**

As one looks for books on God’s vision, one often finds God’s name high-jacked for an experiential “spiritual” design. Discernment and vision, likewise, are often buzz words to spiritualize human thinking. On the other hand, godly people, past and present, who love the Lord with all their heart define discernment and vision in mystical<sup>11</sup> and experiential<sup>12</sup> ways leaving the rest of us to wonder if we are somehow left out of God’s plan. Still others want the reader to learn the spiritual experience before cognitively grasping the parameters of discernment. In a book on spiritual awakening, Rose Mary Dougherty shares her approach to discernment:

No matter what your familiarity with the topic of discernment, I would advise you, as I have said so often in the Shalom Institute’s Spiritual Guidance Program, “Don’t get bogged down by concepts or analysis. Let this initial material ‘wash over you,’ and see what, if anything, remains with you as you come to the end of this reflection.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James 1:27.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *The Vision of God* (Escondido: The Book Tree, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> William Wilson, *God Vision* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Rose Mary Dougherty, *Discernment: A Path to Spiritual Awakening* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2009), 1.

In contrast, Tim Challies takes a more theological approach:

While the Bible makes it clear that discernment relates to decision making, my studies of this topic have led me to see that a definition that goes little further than this is simply too narrow, for biblical discernment looks beyond the *will* of God to the *truth* of God. We can only know God's will when we first know God's truth, for what God desires and requires of us must always be consistent with his character.<sup>14</sup>

My analysis of alternative views in this area of spiritual vision and discernment is to contrast the experiential and objective approach. The experiential is to be subject to the objective truth given by God the Father. The biblical context of how God sees "fatherlessness" is considered here to be an objective primary source for spiritual discernment. The series of priorities that come from God's focus on the fatherless result in the following factors: Irreparable, Fatherhood, Triunal, Compassion/Mercy, Authority, Relationship, Presence, Generational, Justice, and God Worth. (See Figure #1) These factors are the largest points of the observed context. They are revealed as most explicit by repeated emphasis, surrounding context, definition of words in context, connection to the word fatherless, connection to God's personhood, and connection with God's expectations and commands.

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007) 54.



Figure #1  
Fatherless Factors

### The Importance of a Father

In the discussion about the fatherless, there are those who refute the necessity or importance of having a father—those who believe that having a father is *not* a necessary priority for a healthy and whole life.<sup>15</sup> A plethora of studies abound which focus on the similarities of the sexes, attempting to make them the same in an effort to define equality and value.<sup>16</sup> The research from heterosexual, homosexual, or lesbian viewpoints underlines a need to understand fatherhood in a variety of different domestic units.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> NCFR: Catalyzing Research, Theory and Practice, “Do Children Need Both a Mother and a Father? New Study Examines if the Gender of Parents Matter,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* (February 2010): 1-2. Accessed December 15, 2014, <https://www.ncfr.org/press-room/journal-news-releases/do-children-need-both-mother-and-a-father>.

Pamela Paul, “Are Fathers Necessary? A Paternal Contribution May Not Be as Essential as we Think,” *The Atlantic* (July 2010): 1-2. Accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/are-fathers-necessary/308136/>.

<sup>16</sup> “Men and Women: No Big Difference: Studies show that one’s sex has little or no bearing on personality, cognition, and leadership,” *American Psychological Association* (October 20, 2005): 1-2. Accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.apa.org/research/action/difference.aspx>.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen Perrin and Benjamin Siegel and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, “Promoting the Well-Being of Children Whose Parents Are Gay or Lesbian,” *Pediatrics*

Seeing each person as valuable is commendable<sup>18</sup> and the studies are excellent when they follow good research guidelines.<sup>19</sup> Some, however, have small data pools and are reactionary to laws and policies.<sup>20</sup> If one is willing to look, he or she will find there are many more studies on the uniqueness of motherhood and fatherhood.

In the biblical accounts, God consistently and more frequently presents Himself as a loving father. Jesus Christ views God as His father. Both men and women struggle with this and the abuse of patriarchy throughout Church history. The “Image of God” or the *imago deo* assumes humankind’s (male and female) inherent value.<sup>21</sup> For the present objective of God’s fatherless incarnational expectations in ministry, masculinity is considered a unique value. Joseph H. Pleck of the Department of Human Development and Family Study at the University of Illinois makes an observation about “essential father” studies.

In my view, this “essential father” (EF) hypothesis can be formulated at a broad level as a sequence of three linked ideas. First, fathers make a contribution to children’s development that is *essential*. Second, fathers make a contribution to children’s development that is *unique*; what makes fathers’ contribution essential is precisely that it is unique. Third, fathers make a contribution that is *uniquely*

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131, no 4 (April 2013): 1374-1383, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/3013/03/18/peds.2013-0377>.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Regnerus, “How Different Are the Adult Children of Parents Who Have Same-Sex Relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study,” *Social Science Research*, 41, no. 4 (July 2012): 752-770, accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X12000610>.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Sprigg, Senior Fellow for Policy Studies, “New Study On Homosexual Parents Tops All Previous Research,” accessed December 15, 2014, <http://www.frc.org/issuebrief/new-study-on-homosexual-parents-tops-all-previous-research>.

<sup>20</sup> Loren Marks, “Same-Sex Parenting and Children’s Outcomes: A Closer Examination of the American Psychological Association’s Brief on Lesbian and Gay Parenting,” *Social Science Research*, 41, no. 4 (July 2012), 735-751. Accessed December 16, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 1:27.

*male and uniquely masculine*; that is, fathers' contribution is unique specifically *because fathers are males and have masculine characteristics*.<sup>22</sup>

Beyond the point of contrasted studies, it is recognizable that many secular academic studies can align with theology in seeing value in the masculine. In God's sovereignty, God has chosen to relate to His beloved creation as a father.

### **Approach to Ministry**

Included in alternative solutions to the problem of fatherlessness and the church's understanding of her identity and mission is the view in one's approach to ministry.

There is an outreach that is solely an expression of the message of Jesus Christ. Then there is an outreach often referred to as the "social gospel," wherein justice is of primary concern. Richard Stearns, President of World Vision in the United States helps us navigate between the extremes.

There is a real problem with this limited view of the kingdom of God [*Tension between presentation of the gospel only vs social engagement only*]: it is not the whole gospel... Yes, it first requires that we repent of our own sinfulness and totally surrender our individual lives to follow Christ, but then we are also commanded to go into the world—to bear fruit by lifting up the poor and the marginalized, challenging injustice wherever we find it, rejecting the worldly values found within every culture, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. While our "joining" in the coming kingdom of God may begin with a decision, a transaction, it requires so much more than that.<sup>23</sup>

The conflict is in the extremes of presenting Jesus Christ "only" versus reaching out to social ills of our society "only." Those that understand they are "in" Christ and

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Pleck, *The Role of the Father: In Child Development*, ed. Michael E. Lamb (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 34. Note: Within the study Dr. Pleck shows that the word "essential" can be exchanged with "important."

<sup>23</sup> Richard Stearns, *The Hole in our Gospel: The Answer that Changed my Life and Might Just Change the World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2010), 17-18.



“are” Christ because of His perfect work on the cross can strike the balance of God’s priorities by doing both.

Among the three repeated people groups throughout scripture, the widow, fatherless, and stranger, none is historically timelier in exhortation from God as fatherlessness. As seen in the opening statistics of this section, its impact is so devastating, that we are to capture the principles of God’s vision of ministry to this people group to make an impact upon this present world. Stephen Marche echoes the earlier data and encapsulates the significant far-reaching impact of this people group:

Fatherlessness as a condition has been linked with virtually every social ill you can name (the big exception being lesbian families): Young men who grow up without fathers are twice as likely to end up in jail, 63 percent of youths who commit suicide are from fatherless homes, and 71 percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.<sup>24</sup>

God’s instruction to us concerning these hurting groups of people can show us the primary principles to measure and guide effective outreach in all areas of ministry.

In aligning our sight with God’s heart we see that fatherhood is crucially important. It is quite literally a foundational power to society. Dr. Ken Canfield, the founder and president of the National Center for Fathering, states,

A father has enormous power. About this, he has no choice. For good or for bad, by his presence or absence, action or inaction, whether abusive or nurturing, the fact remains: A father is one of the most powerful beings on the face of the earth.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Marche, “Why Fatherhood Matters: Because Society Crumbles Without Us,” *Esquire* 159, no. 6/7 (June/July 2013): 1-4, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://0-web.b.ebscohost.com.catalog.georgefox.edu>.

<sup>25</sup> Ken Canfield, Ph.D. *The Heart Of A Father: How Dads Can Shape the Destiny of America* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1996), 17.

Fathering comes out of the nature of God and it is a power that has His expectation of proper stewardship and priority.<sup>26</sup> The community of faith who trusts in a personal God then can show it as a priority as well.

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<sup>26</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 322.

## SECTION THREE

### THESIS

#### **Introduction**

The discernment of God's "fatherless" focus is communicated in Scripture to be at the center of His heart and thus, creates an evaluation lens by which spiritual impact can be measured and implemented for local church ministry. Furthermore, it is my belief that the local church is God's program to present the "abundance" of life.<sup>1</sup> The spiritual dynamic of the church is found when the impact of faith communities and God's desires align together in bringing about incarnational truth that changes lives. Reason follows then those tools, which bring a melding of comprehension of the heart of God with recommended guided discussion and will help followers of Jesus Christ increase ministry impact. The position of this paper assumes the person of God and His word is the ultimate authority in all aspects of spiritual vision, discernment, and family systems. As such, a principled list of priorities emerges (See Figure #1) from our observations of God's view of the fatherless and His fatherly concerns.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the analysis of God's observation of the fatherless this study looks to His scriptural references for insight and definition. The term, "fatherless," is found approximately forty-two times in the Hebrew writ of the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. (See Chart #1, Fatherless Scriptures) It is first necessary to define key terms that are quite large like fatherless, image of God, and shalom to provide a foundation for seeing God's early command to see outreach through fatherless eyes.

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<sup>1</sup> Jude 1:2.

### Term: “Fatherless”

The English transliteration is “yathom” or יתום a masculine noun with a short definition of “orphan.” Strong’s Concordance defines the word, “From an unused root meaning to be lonely; a bereaved person—fatherless (child), orphan.” An overwhelming majority of the biblical references to the “fatherless,” (orphan; noun; masculine) are contained in the Old Testament. Overwhelmingly, the rabbis of *Jewish History* agree to the dual definition of “yathom” or יתום.<sup>3</sup> J. Renkema Kampen, in an article titled, “Does Hebrew YTWM Really Mean ‘Fatherless’?” posits,

We may draw the conclusion that widow and orphan are each in their own way the very picture of weakness and vulnerability. A final observation: it is remarkable that Hebrew has only one word for orphan: *ytwm*. It is reasonable to suppose that in Israel as elsewhere in all times there were children who lost both Father and mother at an early age. I admit that it is an *argumentum e silentio*, but in the light of this sad situation it is unlikely that *ytwn* has only the meaning “fatherless.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Context shows both “fatherless” and “orphan” to be a correct meaning of the Hebrew word.

<sup>4</sup> J. Renkema Kampen, “Does Hebrew YTWM Really Mean ‘Fatherless’?” *Jewish History* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 121.

1) Exodus 22:22	16) Job 24:3	31) Isaiah 1:23
2) Exodus 22:24	17) Job 24:9	32) Isaiah 9:17
3) Deuteronomy 10:18	18) Job 29:12	33) Isaiah 10:2
4) Deuteronomy 14:29	19) Job 31:17	34) Jeremiah 5:28
5) Deuteronomy 16:11	20) Job 31:21	35) Jeremiah 7:6
6) Deuteronomy 16:14	21) Psalm 10:14	36) Jeremiah 22:3
7) Deuteronomy 24:17	22) Psalm 10:18	37) Jeremiah 49:11
8) Deuteronomy 24:19	23) Psalm 68:5	38) Lamentations 5:3
9) Deuteronomy 24:20	24) Psalm 82:3	39) Ezekiel 22:7
10) Deuteronomy 24:21	25) Psalm 94:6	40) Hosea 14:3
11) Deuteronomy 26:12	26) Psalm 109:9	41) Zechariah 7:10
12) Deuteronomy 26:13	27) Psalm 109:12	42) Malachi 3:5
13) Deuteronomy 27:19	28) Psalm 146:9	43) James 1:27
14) Job 6:27	29) Proverbs 23:10	
15) Job 22:9	30) Isaiah 1:17	

**Scripture Passages with the Word "Fatherless"**

**Chart #1**

God uses the fatherless term and logic repeatedly to teach us of our salvation and our priority in reaching out to the world. Notice what Exodus 22:21 says, "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt." Likewise, Deuteronomy 10:19,

15:15, 16:12, 24:18, 22 are foundational pictures of salvific actions that laid the ground work for actions that exist because of Jesus Christ's perfect work on the cross. The New Testament also is cited often because of the actions or ramifications of such great sacrificial love.<sup>5</sup> The grace given to us demands a saving outreach to the world. God's salvation plan is our catalyst to outreach.

Although the term, "fatherless," is scarce in the New Testament, important observations can be made from the incarnate Christ—God's love reach for us, in flesh.<sup>6</sup> We see that God sees with the eyes of relationship. God exists in relationship and illustrates it through the doctrine of the *imago Deo*,<sup>7</sup> trinity,<sup>8</sup> and the ecclesiastical relationships of His church in community.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the desolation of the fatherless is seen as unnatural and not a part of God's creational intent. The definition of "fatherless" with the meaning of "loneliness" implies a long-term relational ministry. Loneliness, along with bereavement, and comfortlessness are at the core of the word "fatherless." Pastor Monique Robinson comments from personal experience and biblical context.

The fifth dirge of Lamentations indicates that one becomes an orphan solely through the loss of a father, even if the mother is still present. "We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers are like widows," (Lamentations 5:3). The *New American Standard Bible* reads, "We have become *orphans without a father*," (emphasis added). The word orphan means, "to be lonely" and refers to a

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> James Strong, *The New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 421.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 1:10-11.

<sup>9</sup> I Corinthians 11:17-34. Note: A familiar "Lord's Supper" passage also emphasizes community.

bereaved person. And bereaved people need to grieve both their tangible and intangible losses.<sup>10</sup>

An early negative theme to the heart of God is first addressed in Genesis 1:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Through Christ’s example, God expects all Christian relationships to fill the ache of loneliness and embrace those who are disenfranchised.<sup>11</sup>

Since God relates to us as a father, the destruction of a normal fathering structure prevents an authoritative foundation on which to build spiritual truth. Without any loving relationship foundation, it is very difficult to present the love of God to a hurting individual. The destruction of God’s instituted personal relationship templates is contrary to the personhood of God. God exists in constant relationship. Over and over, in Scripture we find this to be the very essence of who God is. John 10:30 emphasizes, “I and my Father are one.”<sup>12</sup> The widow, fatherless, and displaced stranger attracts His attention, because of God’s relational nature. Healthy fatherhood relationships model and describe the characteristics’ of God. Dr. Paul Vitz writes of the psychological importance of fatherhood in relationship to faith:

In short, the defective father and insecure attachment hypotheses taken together postulate that whatever might weaken or harm the relationship of a child with his father or parents will in general predispose the child in adulthood to atheism or unbelief or to spiritualist beliefs without a personal God.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Monique Robinson, *Longing for Daddy: Healing from the Pain of an Absent or Emotionally Distant Father* (Colorado Springs: Water Brook Press, 2004), 51.

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 6:2; James 2:8-9.

<sup>12</sup> The context of John 10:30 in verses 31-39 show that the Jews readily understood this phrase as Jesus Christ claiming to be God.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 30.

The importance of fatherhood is specifically addressed by God, by its lack. God expects by His commands, that the people of God to step up to the task of fathering in all its principled aspects.

Each people group brings objective priorities of God in ministry. The “least” among us in our present world is the greatest in God’s Kingdom economy.<sup>14</sup> These people are His pinpointed reference and exhortation to us. James parallels, “to keep oneself from being polluted by the world,” with, “look after orphans and widows in their distress,” a statement that it is a pure form of concentration on God. The parallel implies that actionable ministry to the “least” gives a follower of God insulation of clarity from a spiritually delusional world.<sup>15</sup> God’s early fatherless mission statement, predates “the great commission,” is repeated throughout scripture, was lived out in Christ Jesus our Lord, and exhorts us to reach out in similar fashion in today’s local churches.<sup>16</sup> To narrow the study, the alignment of seeing the fatherless as clearly as possible through one’s finite lens with God’s line of sight has been chosen. The forty-three scriptures referring to the fatherless and the orphan will be cited throughout. (See Chart #1) Please note that God refers to other desolate people groups as well. God has called attention to these people groups to define His outreach to the world. Therefore, we too give them our close attention.

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<sup>14</sup> Luke 9:48. “Least” is often referred to in describing how God sees value in His Kingdom.

<sup>15</sup> James 1:27.

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 22:22-24; Isaiah 61:1-2a; Luke 4:18-19. Note: NT quote from Isaiah 61:1-2a; James 1:27.



### Term: Image Of God, (*imago Dei*)

Another term needed to understand the great value God places in His creation, is the “image of God.”<sup>17</sup> It is as foundational to understanding the “fatherless” as the doctrine of the trinity<sup>18</sup> because of its connectedness to all other doctrine. Knowing the person of God and His intent helps us to align our eyesight with an eternal God.

With image of God theology one is equipped with a template of restoration after repentance.<sup>19</sup> God is the master of restoration. The “image of God” is a template to remind us of our value and place in the restoration process. We were made to work with God and not against Him. Dallas Willard explains this detail:

In creating human beings in his likeness so that we could govern in his manner, God gave us a measure of *independent* power. Without such power, we absolutely could not resemble God in the close manner he intended, nor could we be God’s co-workers. *The locus or depository of this necessary power is the human body.* This explains, in theological terms, why we have a body at all. *That body is our primary area of power, freedom, and--therefore--responsibility.*<sup>20</sup>

In times of crises, the Spirit of God reminds believers of a person’s value with the theological truth of the Image of God. This truth brings balance and perspective to condemnation, grace, and righteousness. The Image of God theology delivers a concrete perspective of God’s value to those in crises as seen in Genesis 1:26-27.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychological Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 69.

<sup>20</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.

We are interested in the image of God to know how we are to view people, especially the disenfranchised as God does. The practical outcome will be how one views and values those who God directs to his or her path as described by Alexander, T.

Desmond and David W. Baker, eds. *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*:

Known in classical Christian theology as the *imago Dei*, this term refers to the idea that humankind, by virtue of creation and mandate, corresponds somehow to the creator. Interpretations of this correspondence range all the way from a sharing of characteristics and attributes-even in the physical realm-to a relationship in which the human race does not resemble God in any way but merely represents him.<sup>22</sup>

The *imago Dei* is defined theologically with context, comparison, and direct observation of the holy text. The classic text of Genesis chapter 1:26-28 has continuing derivative texts of Genesis 5:1, 3; and 9:6.<sup>23</sup> It is to be noted that a majority of scriptures citing the image of God are teaching about humanity's treatment of each other in human relationships. In light of this, the rarity of the "image of God" in the New Testament is explained by the NT authors accepting the foundational doctrinal truth of Genesis 1:26-27.<sup>24</sup>

Early on the Church Fathers wrestled with the differences between "image" and "likeness".<sup>25</sup> From our church history it is important to see the struggle in defining the "image of God". Many theologians start with the *imago Deo* in developing the whole of

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander T. Desmond and David W. Baker, ed., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*. (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 441-442.

<sup>23</sup> Note: NT texts that refer to the Image of God: 1 Corinthians 11:7, Colossians 3:10, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and Colossians 1:15. Strong references to the image of God such as Hebrews 2:6-8 and James 3:9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 445.

<sup>25</sup> Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Christian Theology Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 214.

their theology because the more consistent one is in the exact definition and description of who God is, the more consistent and correct one will be in all other areas of theology.

Millard J. Erickson provides an excellent articulation of three prevalent views of the image of God most expressed in modern day. Although the views are different in emphasis, all promote the fact that God sees us as special and of inherent value.<sup>26</sup>

The bottom line to all the back-and-forth of doctrinal historical thinking is that how humans view one another is crucial to seeing the “fatherless.” The Church is called to align our vision with the way God see’s people. One asks: How do I as a Christ follower see others made in His image?

Dr. William Baker does just this in breaking down the imperative theology of the image of God:

Prejudice and revulsion toward unpleasant traits in people frequently stifle the outgoing spirit that needs to characterize good evangelism. The most outwardly depraved and disgusting individual must be seen in light of what he might become through regeneration and sanctification to overcome this prejudice and revulsion. The image of God is marred in the best of us and so distorted that it is easy to consider a person as beyond hope. But all humans are created in the image of God. Some indeed will never respond, but the effort is always worth it.<sup>27</sup>

In the repeated passages of God’s exhortation to take care of the widow, fatherless, and stranger one finds a salvific formula. Quite literally as we reach out to the widow, fatherless, and the stranger we illustrate a mirror reflection of God’s great and loving salvation grace that was extended to us. The application of God’s exhortation is the

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<sup>26</sup> Millard Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2013), 171-178.

<sup>27</sup> William Baker, *In the Image of God: A Biblical View of Humanity* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 127.

remembrance of His salvation combined into actions of outreach.<sup>28</sup> Brandon O'Brien assistant editor for *Leadership Journal* and buildingchurchleaders.com emphasizes this truth:

It seems to me that the doctrine of the *imago dei* has less to do with who we serve and more to do with how.

I found a wealth of direction from Scripture on how to apply this new insight. If God is slow to anger and abounding in love (Ps.86:15), then I should be too (James 1:19). If he opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Prov. 3:34), so should I (James 4:6; I Pet. 5:5). In short, because I am called to display the image of God, I should imitate him, with the Holy Spirit's help. This is not an easier calling. In fact, it's much more demanding. And it does not provide concrete guidelines about what to do next in any given situation. But still, it's clearer than "treat him with respect" and more helpful than "don't slander" and "don't kill."<sup>29</sup>

In crises ministry a threefold teaching outline from chaplain to soldiers captures the main points of the *imago Deo*: 1. We have choice, 2. We are people of relationship, 3. and we are people of creativity. These traits or powers exist within the economy of a submitted relationship to God and not to man.<sup>30</sup> They are answers of value in a world that seeks temporal importance with categories, comparison, cash, and class.

As God's people we can breakdown the temporal chains that bind disenfranchised peoples and show one's value and inherent worth to their Creator.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Evangelism, Teaching/Instruction, Communion, and Worship are emphasized in Paul's letters to the churches.

<sup>29</sup> Brandon O'Brien, "To Kill or to Love: That was the Question," *Christianity Today* (July 2009): 44.

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No, To Take Control of Your life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 45.

<sup>31</sup> Psalm 135:4; Romans 8:29; I Peter 2:9.

### Terms: Shalom/Community

*Shalom* (שָׁלוֹם) meaning God is our Peace is a spiritually holistic way of looking at God's world. It is getting back to His command intent or original design. Ken Wytsma explains,

Biblical *shalom* requires the active pursuit of what ought to be. Knowing God means spending time with Him, in His world, doing what He is already doing. God's ongoing work in His creation, His dynamic art, is to right that which is wrong. He wants to undo the effects of sin and to bring about *shalom*—isn't that why He sent Jesus?<sup>32</sup>

Shalom is basically a heaven on earth if all were living according to its concept. Shalom teaches godly responsibility to the created.<sup>33</sup> It is in the context of shalom that we are to reach out to the fatherless, widow, and prisoner. Many who talk of community are actually talking about shalom. However the concept of shalom is explained, the end result is to ultimately hear the heartbeat of God and align with His vision.

Sharing life within a grace-filled community takes intentional effort by all within God's family, with the ever-present goal of pressing toward the realization of progress in outreach. Dr. Lupton, a Christian community developer, fleshes out the work involved:

*God's shalom must be worked at.* The roles of peacemakers, communicators, gatherers, organizers and connectors are some of the most vital talents needed for the establishment of peace and prosperity and a prevailing sense of wellbeing that God desires for His creation. Shalom is not merely the absence of crime on the street, but it is also the prevailing presence of peace and goodness in the relationships of God's diverse family. It is achieved only by intentional effort.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ken Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice: The Call to Live and Die for Bigger Things* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 27.

<sup>33</sup> Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 36.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Lupton, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 120.

Shalom cannot be relegated to “idealism,” it is purposeful in individual and community actions.

Furthermore, to truly live in shalom or community is not to live in personal comfort. Jean Vanier reveals what he has learned in community by living with the mentally challenged:

There is a myth about community, just as there is a myth about marriage. The myth of marriage is “they lived happily ever after.” The reality of marriage is that it is a place where a man and woman are called to sacrifice their egos on the altar of their desire to create one body. Community also means death to ego, in order that people might grow to become one body, truly belonging to each other, not in a closed way but in a mysterious way where each one is growing in inner freedom.<sup>35</sup>

Shalom is to restore God’s order or original intent here on earth as God gives us the strength and guidance to do so. It is not the promise of a comfortable life.<sup>36</sup>

Understanding the broad terms above, we will now focus on the specific ministry lens’s (what God is telling us through the fatherless) that run through our 43 scripture passages. (See Figure #1 and Chart #1)

### **God’s Fatherless Factors in Ministry**

#### *The Irreparable*

Consider this: can you restore a culture or country to the alien? Can you bring a widow’s husband back from the dead? Can you clean up a relational mess between a child and his geographically separated father? Can you bring a boy’s dad back from the dead? Can you make up for lost time? Can you by yourself forgive, restore, repent, and give the fullness of life back to a hurting person? Notice that the forty-three “fatherless”

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<sup>35</sup> Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (Mahwah: Pauline Press, 1992), 32.

<sup>36</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12.

scripture passages point to the irreparable or unfixable people problems of our world. To address these problems is to enter into a brokenness that is beyond one's ability to set right. Often Christ followers demonstrate a lack of faith by tackling the small fixable problems of the world that brings temporary circumstantial relief, but does nothing for the Kingdom of God. *The "fatherless" exhortation is to provide outreach precisely to what the world, itself, cannot fix.* Daniel J. Bennett, Senior Pastor of Bethany Community Church in central Illinois observes our American Church tendency:

Worship of ease is not a malady that affects individuals only. Churches also go to great lengths to avoid putting themselves in places where they may be uncomfortable. Churches are sometimes so concerned with their own glory, prestige, and comfort that they are tempted to direct their resources to ministries that will glorify their own kingdoms instead of Christ's.<sup>37</sup>

A church can test this principle by looking at all their ministries and see if their mission board contains messy, unfixable, and hard contexts to reach out to. Even in outreach some churches are lulled into "contracting" out some ministry they believe they are inadequate to do.

Grace abounds in Jesus Christ's Church and three areas of well-intentioned efforts, limited resources, and negative terminology. All show that we are a broken people reaching out to other broken people. God will use well-intentioned people, limited resources, and limited terminology.

Churches, like people, start out with good intentions and sometimes lose their way. We all have that danger both individually and corporately. Even the famous Mother Teresa was in need of a direction reminder. *In An Authorized Biography*, Kathryn Spink

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<sup>37</sup> Daniel Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 125.

records these words--a *stern reminder*--written by Mother Teresa's own mother in 1934 from Tirana, Albania. She wrote,

*Dear child ...Do not forget that you went to India for the sake of the poor.*<sup>38</sup>

Churches sometimes do not have the resources for all that needs to be done in their community. God does not hold us accountable for everything. Just the mites, the fish, and the bread we have in our hand.<sup>39</sup>

One does not have to be in ministry very long to know that language and words fail in communicating Jesus Christ. When one is honest about the limitations of words, churches when reaching out to the broken need to be careful to choose words wisely. Benevolent organizations learn through their history to finesse' words and bring broken people to a place of wholeness. Mental institutions used to be called "insane asylums" and correctional facilities were called prison or jail. A charity foundation started "Home for Troubled Teens," targeting Level II Juvenile offenders. Now they call it, "Short Term Residential Services for Boys." "Unfixable or broken" is not a true description of people under God's power. The words, irreparable, unfixable or broken are purposely being over-used here to emphasize that Christ's Church is to reach out to those who others have proclaimed, "lost causes." God calls us to people that the world cannot explain nor give answers too. Steve Moore the President and CEO of The Mission Exchange explains the exhortation of meeting the challenge with the Good Samaritan.

I distill the single thought from the Good Samaritan in the following sentence:  
*God expects us to take the initiative, crossing boundaries and overcoming barriers, to show His mercy by serving others.*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 19.

<sup>39</sup> Luke 9:13-17; Luke 21:1-4; 2 Corinthians 9:7.

<sup>40</sup> Steve Moore, *Who Is My Neighbor?* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 34.



In an effort to show how much different our outreach is from the world's, we refer to the irreparable or unfixable to show the power of God in us and others. A factor in outreach includes the "unfixable."<sup>41</sup>

A fresh evaluation of local church ministry on a regular basis brings engagement, wrestling with old and new assumptions, new perspectives, and fresh vision. All churches are called to practice true and undefiled religion by reaching out to the "fatherless." Each church weighs the mission to the community around them to show how important this fatherless factor is to their church according to what God has given to them to steward. Such things as: physical location (inner city or urban), people groups (ethnic, gender, etc...), specific brokenness (drugs, alcohol, domestic, crime), and resources available can be considered. The "why" is considered in the "fatherless" James 1:27 passage:, "To keep oneself from being polluted by the world."<sup>42</sup> When a Believer wades into the muck as God defines it, the promise of this specific obedience is authentication of mission and clarity of address. To minister to the irreparable or unfixable is a heart attitude along with a plan of operation.<sup>43</sup>

### *Fatherhood*

One finds God pointing out in forty-three scripture passages that there is a lack of a father and God's resulting hate of this destructive consequence. His hatred is communicated by nearby parallel verses declaring "fatherlessness" as the judgment on

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<sup>41</sup> Dwight Croy, "Chaplain's Corner: We cannot fix the unfixable without a higher power," *Arctic Warrior* (May 2014), accessed September 21, 2014, <http://www.jber.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123410256>.

<sup>42</sup> James 1:27c.

those who treat the fatherless with disdain and contempt. Because God relates to us as a father, many from broken backgrounds have a hard time seeing the character of God from the fatherhood aspect. Our broken community has chosen dysfunctional family structures that give us a weaker foundation of presenting God the Father.

An absent father doesn't provide security for the child, nor can that absent father consistently and appropriately discipline. The fatherless child may come to the conclusion that since survival thus far hasn't included a father, survival in the future does not necessitate God the Father.<sup>44</sup>

Ministry in the local church reflects God as our Father so that further unfolding of His glorious person can heal the wounds of the downcast.

An obvious observation of God's compassion is that He has chosen to relate to us as a father.<sup>45</sup> A simple and undeniable fact throughout scripture, this needs to be included in our lens of ministry. John Eldredge explains how broken humanity's eyes have become to the desire and design of God in regard to fathering.

We aren't meant to figure life out on our own. God wants to father us. The truth is, he *has* been fathering us for a long time—we just haven't had the eyes to see it. He wants to father us much more intimately, but we have to be in a posture to receive it. What that involves is a new way of seeing, a fundamental reorientation of how we look at life, and our situation in it.<sup>46</sup>

Our observations of the fatherless and their perspective of God go beyond the dynamic of a personal relationship with Him and into its application to ministry outreach.

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<sup>44</sup> La Verne Tolbert, "The Relationship Between Fatherless Children and Their Concept of the Fatherhood of God," *Lutheran Education* 139, no 3 (2010): 200.

<sup>45</sup> Psalm 68:5.

<sup>46</sup> John Eldredge, *Fathered By God: Learning What Your Dad Could Never Teach You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 11.

Worth mentioning is the unattainable spiritual aspect about being a father. Our God is the perfect Father.<sup>47</sup> Who can match that? God sees this role we call fatherhood in its perfect form. God our Father chose to “father” us in relationship. That role is foundational in understanding God’s mind and heart. The word “father” represents initiation, identity, love, strength, and direction past causing the birth of a child. A child without a father will search the rest of his or her life looking for those very things.<sup>48</sup>

Fatherhood is often minimalized by society. Yet, fatherhood remains crucial to the fabric of societal strength. In the past a father was seen as an asset to the community; a person of authority in their own home, but extended toward the community.<sup>49</sup> Such is God our Creator—a Father to us individually and as a people who look to Him collectively. In scripture we find repeated references to God being a collective “father to the fatherless.”<sup>50</sup>

Part of God’s exhortation concerning the fatherless is that we have a communal responsibility. Americans as a culture and society place high value on individualism and compartmentalization *over* community and family.<sup>51</sup> The value of fatherhood extends past the given family unit and extends into the community. Society as a whole benefits from a multitude of responsible fathers who take their role seriously. Leading and being

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<sup>47</sup> Isaiah 9:6.

<sup>48</sup> Donald Miller, *Father Fiction: Chapters for a Fatherless Generation* (New York: Howard Books, 2010), 69-77.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Lamb, *The Role of the Father: In Child Development* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 11, 341-435.

<sup>50</sup> Exodus 4:22; Psalm 146; Isaiah 1:2-3, God speaks to Israel as a Father. Isaiah 9:6, Declares God as our “Everlasting Father.” Isaiah 64:8, Israel declares God as their Father. Matthew 5:16, Believers are ambassadors for their Father in Heaven.

<sup>51</sup> Phillip Gene Carnes, *That They May Be One: Spiritual Formation And Its Locus In Community*, 2009, 17. PDF. Accessed January 15, 2015 <http://www.phillipcarnes.com/publications/>.

responsible for one's own family is just the beginning of a father's influence in the world.

David Blankenhorn tells of the practical elements given by fatherhood:

Fatherhood is a social role that obligates men to their biological offspring. For two reasons, it is society's most important role for men. First, fatherhood, more than any other male activity, helps men to become good men: more likely to obey the law, to be good citizens, and to think about the needs of others. Put more abstractly, fatherhood bends maleness—in particular, male aggression—toward prosocial purposes. Second, fatherhood privileges children. In this respect, fatherhood is a social invention designed to supplement maternal investment in children with paternal investment in children.<sup>52</sup>

Blankenhorn further breaks down the paternal investment of fatherhood as follows:

Paternal investment enriches children in four ways. First, it provides them with their father's physical protection. Second, it provides them with a father's money and other material resources. Third, and probably most important, it provides them with what might be termed paternal cultural transmission: a father's distinctive capacity to contribute to the identity, character, and competence of his children. Fourth, and most obviously, paternal investment provides children with the day-to-day nurturing—feeding them, playing with them, telling them a story—that they want and need from both of their parents.<sup>53</sup>

The lengthy quote is intentional to attempt capturing the many strong outlines of the importance of the role of fatherhood. Creator God emanates the characteristic or the qualities of fatherhood and in reflection of him; the local church ministry is to have space for fatherhood in order to reflect God as He desires to be expressed.

Outreach to the disenfranchised is to have the powerful strength of fatherhood.

There is a longing for its strength whether in anger or lack thereof, or the frustration of the broken family. Dr. Kent Hughes gives pastoral advice reminding his reader of the power of fatherhood. He writes,

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<sup>52</sup> David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 25.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Men, as fathers you have such power! You will have this terrible power till you die, like it or not—in your attitude toward authority, in your attitude toward women, in your regard for God and the Church. What terrifying responsibilities! This is truly the power of life and death.<sup>54</sup>

Again, we are looking at God's vision of the fatherless and how that instructs our local church ministry. A fatherhood view is how God sees ministry outreach.<sup>55</sup> Jesus Christ consistently points to reliance upon His heavenly Father. Mothers do not need to be exhorted to be present; indeed, females are categorically socially ahead of males from birth. Both the birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ was revealed and known to women first. The great commission was also carried out by women taught by Jesus who held them in high esteem they equally paid with their lives as *Foxes Book of Martyrs* points out.

Women in Jesus's time were considered equal to men, though separate in their worldly responsibilities. They were allowed to choose their marriage partner, enter into contracts, buy and sell property, and speak at weddings.<sup>56</sup>

Yes, there are contextual instances where God refers to Himself in mothering or nurturing terms and Jesus refers to loving Israel as a hen gathers chicks under her wings.<sup>57</sup> It is plainly the exception and not the norm. Honoring ones father and mother in the Ten Commandments is God's clear declaration of both roles being of high importance.<sup>58</sup> God has chosen to show Himself predominantly as a Father. That fact alone emphasizes the

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<sup>54</sup> Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 47.

<sup>55</sup> Hebrews 12:9; Note: The word, "motherless" is not mentioned in scripture.

<sup>56</sup> Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard, *Killing Jesus: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 147.

<sup>57</sup> Ezekiel 16:22; Hosea 11:1-4; Matthew 23:37.

<sup>58</sup> Exodus 20:12.

tremendous responsibility that comes with fatherhood.<sup>59</sup> The importance of fatherhood to a generational influence is foundational. Fatherhood is central to our everyday relationship with God. Present day prophets like John Eldredge are raising a voice to be unapologetic concerning manhood. There are some strong characteristics of God that are missed in our local churches and our ministry can suffer for it. He responds to its validity in spirituality by saying,

All masculine initiation is ultimately spiritual. The tests and challenges, the joys and adventures are all designed to awaken a man's soul, draw him into contact with the masculine in himself, in other men, in the world, and in God, as Father.<sup>60</sup>

In one word, fatherhood, God emphasizes the importance of both masculinity and fathering. God is intentional in all His holy writ.

When God's eyes and heart look upon the fatherless, what does it tell His children concerning ministry? Thus far we see that fatherhood and masculinity are important. Outreach and ministry includes empowering the church and putting these concepts in spiritually practical action. Some churches capture "masculinity" and "fatherhood" into the word "mentorship," not to be mistaken as a term for political correctness or a reference for the latest religious "program." Our outreach lens needs to include the role of "fatherhood."

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<sup>59</sup> Loren D. Marks and David C. Dollahite, Edited by Sean E. Brotherson & Joseph M. White, *Why Fathers Count: The Importance of Fathers and Their Involvement with Children*, (Harriman, TN: Men's Studies Press, 2007) 337. Note: These authors emphasize that religion in fatherhood brings responsibility by its emphasis on three points, 1) A child is a gift from heaven, 2) fathers are accountable to God, and 3) fathering should reflect God and His attributes. Each belief promotes father responsibility and involvement.

<sup>60</sup> Eldredge, *Fathered By God: Learning What Your Dad Could Never Teach You*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009) 209.

### *Triunal*

A further observation of “the widow, orphan, and alien,” found in much of the Pentateuch, forms the “triunity” phrase, expressing the need of compassion in a complete community. God chose the extremely helpless, weakest, alienated, needy, and most likely to be outcast by a holy people to be a three part exhortation of outreach. God who chose Israel to be a holy people, set apart to be miniature examples of God’s just, merciful and restorative hand from the land and bondage of Egypt. As such, God commanded his people to bring the “incomplete” among them into “wholeness.”

In the absolute eternal God, we have the doctrine of the Trinity, yet also God is one. It is important to point out that in the Trinitarian relationship of God; it is an evident truth that He jealously protects right relationships because by His very nature, He is a relational being. This gives us insight as to the non-relational decadence of sin. One reason sin is destructive is because of its alienation of others in the pursuit of selfish ends. Within the paradigm of religion, the selfish nature of man often limits one’s sight to avoid an investment that is uncomfortable to some unused parts of the “image of God.” An example would be a person who has a passion to see the justice of God the Father meted out and in the process ignores mercy. Another example may be someone who greatly desires the unconditional compassion of Jesus, but while their interpretation of Christ’s love is being poured out, it may be done so without addressing a person’s worth and dignity. When Jesus healed the woman with the “issue of blood,” He went to great lengths to not only heal, but to bring her back into community, and even more so, to restore a relationship of fear and shame to one of confidence and human dignity.<sup>61</sup> Jesus

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<sup>61</sup> Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34 Note: Same story – great phrase added, “Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

touched the leper.<sup>62</sup> Jesus restored intimately one on one and then with family, and community. Jesus was not afraid to show God's power when needed, but also was not afraid to show the intimacy of a loving God.

God chooses to express Himself in a triune presentation in reaching out to the disenfranchised. Randy Woodley also observes this in relationship to the concept of God's priority of shalom.

The *disempowered triad* of widows, orphans, and strangers best represents God's concern for those who have few material goods (food, clothing, shelter) and those easily oppressed (justice). Shalom addresses God's concern for the socially marginalized.<sup>63</sup>

Woodley observed that this triad was to be a part of a holy people's thinking and further explains its worldwide implications:

God's intention was that Israel use their unfortunate circumstances, the time of slavery in Egypt when they had nothing, to check their attitude toward the poor and marginalized. The Creator's concern for shalom communities to be built on justice and care for the poor went past Israel and stretched to all the boundaries of the earth.<sup>64</sup>

Woodley has observed this repeated formula of God saving us as a major platform or theology to extend our hand to the broken.

Throughout scripture God chose to express His heart in triads. The three-part exhortation often correlates to the nature of each person of the godhead. If brought to an ultimate conclusion, then we, if made in the image of God, have a vested interest in this expression. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

<sup>62</sup> Matthew 8:2-3.

<sup>63</sup> Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 17.



with all your strength”<sup>65</sup> along with “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God,”<sup>66</sup> are triad actions in a community that reaches out in reflection of the person and nature of a triune God, “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> A defending father, a loving Jesus, a comforting Holy Spirit reaching out to brokenness is the nature of the loving reach of a personal God. God’s line of sight into our broken world is triune. We are to reach out and reveal God to a broken world in triune ways. A holy people reach out to more than one dimension of a person. Dr. Erickson emphasizes:

Furthermore, the perfect love and unity within the Godhead model for us the oneness and affection that should characterize our relationships within the body of Christ.<sup>68</sup>

God has directed us “to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.”<sup>69</sup>

The triune vision of God calls a local church to not only see, but to act and pursue with depth. Dr. Peter Penner, Director of Contextual Missiology explains our mission this way:

The missional Church—the whole Church in mission—has a triune mission, which is not limited to soul winning, as it is still sometimes understood. The missional Church must...Humbly fulfill the mission that all creation is already doing, that is, worship the Triune in words and deeds. It is through this triune mission—the same mission for which Jesus was sent—that the Church participates in the wider mission of God.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

<sup>66</sup> Micah 6:8.

<sup>67</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14.

<sup>68</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) 115.

<sup>69</sup> Romans 8:29.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Penner, “Discerning and Following God’s Mission,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* (2014): 36-37.

The emphasis by Penner is needed to present the gospel in depth and worship of God. Our actions toward the downcast are expressions of the gospel. It is Jesus Christ's church and He can manage it however He chooses.<sup>71</sup>

A God who sees triunally calls us to envision outreach from multiple directions working in unity, and depth. Our theology and paradigm of outreach, then is to include a triunal vision depth and unity.

### *Compassion*

Another word that needs greater fidelity in “fatherless” outreach is compassion. God sees with “racham”: compassion: רָחַם. The word compassion is also interchanged at times with mercy in the Old Testament.<sup>72</sup> Within the forty-three “fatherless” references, the word, “compassion,” is mentioned sparingly and implied mightily with the actions God expects from His people; furthermore, it can be exercised with all the “fatherless” factors observed.<sup>73</sup> Compassion, mercy, and encouragement are nurturing words. By God declaring what is lacking in the forty-three identified “fatherless” passages, compassion, mercy, and encouragement are needed from surrogate fathers to bridge the gap. These co-equal outreach words are often implied in church mission, vision, and philosophy of ministry statements, but the reality (temperature) needs to be checked often.

As noted previously, we as created limited human beings tend to focus microscopically on the part of compassion that comes from our own limited experience.

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<sup>71</sup> Mark 9:38-41; Romans 8:31.

<sup>72</sup> Hosea 14:3; Zechariah 7:9-10.

<sup>73</sup> Zechariah 7:9-10.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)<sup>74</sup> started with the loss of life and a strong sense that justice should prevail. Food Banks and Pantries show a tremendous amount of mercy and compassion over and over again, but in and of themselves do not move individuals toward a self-worth that solves a greater portion of the problem. Robert Lupton has said, “Compassion beckons us into unexplored territory.”<sup>75</sup> He further explained God’s balance in exercising compassion:

Mercy is a force that compels us to acts of compassion. But in time mercy will collide with an ominous, opposing force. Injustice. Against this dark and overpowering force, acts of mercy seem meager. What good is a sandwich and a cup of soup when a severe addiction has control of a man’s life? Or a night in a shelter for a young woman who must sell her body to feed her child? Perhaps that is why the Bible places equal emphasis on both mercy and justice.<sup>76</sup>

Ministry and outreach has the element of mercy. Robert Lupton emphasizes rightly, “Mercy is the portal through which we glimpse the heart of God.”<sup>77</sup> God sees His creation through eyes of mercy.<sup>78</sup> The heart of God sees with mercy and compassion and balances it with justice.<sup>79</sup> The Church’s outreach is to be merciful so that the world will question its sanity and so fight for justice that the world will stand aghast at its authoritative God-driven determination.

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<sup>74</sup> Mothers Against Drunk Driving Website: <http://www.madd.org/>.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 40.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 2:4.

<sup>79</sup> Note: According to Strong’s Concordance, compassion and mercy are interchangeable in their meanings.

Compassion needs to be further defined in context because often it is only understood according to our own self-definition. Daniel Bennett, a pastor who equips the local church to care for orphans, describes this in a pithy way.

The problem with passionless compassion is that it sees the means—compassion—as an end. It focuses on good deeds without first focusing on the worship that should motivate a believer to engage in them. Compassion is a means to an end and not the end itself.<sup>80</sup>

In our human bleeding hearts of mercy we often forget the aspect of God's will in showing compassion.<sup>81</sup> God's Compassion comes out of choice, not feeling, not accidental, not circumstantial, and not because of another's conviction of the mission.<sup>82</sup> While we were a depraved mess, God chose to love us.<sup>83</sup> His compassion comes from who He is; His person. Likewise, we are to choose compassion based upon the character of God infused into our life because God chose to show us His great mercy.<sup>84</sup> Compassion is a part of the heart and head of God. Our compassion is based on God's will in reaching out to us.<sup>85</sup>

Not only is the beginning of wisdom fear of God; but God shows compassion upon those who fear Him.<sup>86</sup> Those who know God as their father will be inclined toward compassion and wisdom. Strong's concordance defines the Hebrew: *racham*: to love,

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<sup>80</sup> Daniel Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011) 48.

<sup>81</sup> Romans 9:15.

<sup>82</sup> Exodus 33:19.

<sup>83</sup> Romans 5:8.

<sup>84</sup> I Peter 1:3.

<sup>85</sup> Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Romans 5:8.

<sup>86</sup> Proverbs 1:7; 15:33; Psalm 103:13.

have compassion רַחֵם which is a verb. Our local Church ministries are to embed compassion into their outreach. Dr. Penner, President and Director of Contextual Missiology International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, Prague, Czech Republic comments on the importance of compassion:

I would suggest that instead of the two terms, “liberation and power”, the Church should use a term that witnesses to the motives of Christ and should be ours as well: compassion. Luther looked for this grace, mercy, and love; and this is what the world needs today—people desperately need to experience this compassion and belonging.<sup>87</sup>

A father’s compassion is to mirror God’s compassion.

Encouragement is an outreach that God expects us to be a participant in.<sup>88</sup>

Encouragement—Hebrew *kun*: to be firm כּוּן ; is a verb that means to be established. In the Common Greek of the New Testament encouragement more directly speaks of exhortation or charging another with truth.<sup>89</sup> *Parakaleó* means to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage παρακαλέω. It is a verb with the parallel words of encourage, console, summon, entreat, admonish, comfort.<sup>90</sup> Encouragement contains that which is true, positive, and moves forward.

True encouragement and compassion come from a fully invested person into another’s life. It is important to note that systems, such as governmental or non-personal involvement are cold and distant. These are systems for efficiency and not for

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<sup>87</sup> Peter Penner, “Discerning and Following God’s Mission,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 4, no 2 (January 2004): 39.

<sup>88</sup> Psalm 10:17-18.

<sup>89</sup> Hebrews 12:5.

<sup>90</sup> Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; Titus 2:6.

relationship. Margaret Stapleton captures welfare reform's struggle and frustration in the administration of help to the less fortunate.

Fathers, particularly low-income fathers, view the state child support enforcement systems at best confusing and at worst hostile, disrespectful, and unresponsive to them. Mothers too, frequently are not pleased with their treatment by the child support programs.<sup>91</sup>

Systems give way to efficiency and obligation to those who support (tax payers or donors). Value is displaced to those who have power to keep an amoral system in place. The local church can erode spirit filled encouragement by allowing a system or programs devalue the people it reaches out to.

An excellent methodology for encouragement is mentorship, whether formal or informal, it is the dynamic of what many churches have been doing for centuries. Dr. Leonard Sax who studies gender observed our need generationally.

One hundred years from now, scholars may look back at the disintegration of early twenty-first-century culture and conclude that a fundamental cause for the unraveling of our social fabric was the neglect of gender in the raising of our children-not only in our schools, but also in the disbanding of gender-separate activities across generations, and in the near elimination of single-gender communal activities: women with girls, men with boys.<sup>92</sup>

In our fast paced and compartmentalized society we neglect these basic dynamics of generational mentorship.

Leader-follower, disciple, or mentors, all are ways of following a pattern to more maturity in Christ Jesus.<sup>93</sup> Pastor Adele Calhon describes mentorship this way:

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<sup>91</sup> Margaret Stapleton, "The Unnecessary Tragedy of Fatherless Children: Welfare Reform's Response" *Policy & Practice* (March 2000): 47-48.

<sup>92</sup> Leonard Sax, *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 251.

<sup>93</sup> Romans 12:2.

Mentoring does not need to be simply a professional and structured enterprise. Parents can mentor their children in skills and behaviors. Teachers can mentor their students. Students and friends can mentor one another when they have a skill someone wants. More mature married couples can mentor younger married couples, and older parents can mentor younger parents. Mentoring is passing on what you have. It does not require for you to be responsible for more than you know.<sup>94</sup>

Purposeful and intentional encouragement is reflected in a program of mentorship.

There are specific benefits of a “fatherhood” kind of mentoring. Francis Pleban and Keri Diez in *Why Fathers Count: The Importance of Fathers and Their Involvement with Children* describe the benefits that our generations are crying out for:

The contributions of a father’s mentoring efforts can include protection against risk behaviors, development of a nurturing relationship, formation of prosocial behavior, and development of mastery.<sup>95</sup>

Mentorship labeled appropriately for the cultural community it reaches out to is an effective tool. One is tempted to diverge from our main topic because mentorship methodology crosses over into so much of the “fatherless” vision exhorted by God. In our ten major themes of “fatherless” vision, mentorship rises to the top as a key methodology to obey God’s command to pay attention to the hurting.

Our fatherless outreach lens includes compassion, mercy, and encouragement.

### *Authority*

Authority is another word for stewarded power.

Our forty-three “fatherless” passages are founded in the law of God, the Torah.<sup>96</sup>

By the nature of the word “fatherless,” God expects his institution of the family to be

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<sup>94</sup> Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 142-143.

<sup>95</sup> Francis Pleban and Keri Diez, *Why Fathers Count: The Importance of Fathers and Their Involvement with Children*, (Harriman: Men’s Studies Press, 2007), 313.

grounded in His guidelines. Our authority or power to father in the darkness of “fatherlessness” is given only by our Creator and Lawmaker, God our Father.

Authority is an unpopular word. Most see it as unwanted constraint to their life. Webster’s College Dictionary defines authority as “the power to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues: the right to control, command, or determine.”<sup>97</sup> Strong’s Concordance defines authority in reference to Jesus Christ: “a privilege, force, capacity, competency, freedom, or mastery; delegated influence – influence: - authority, jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength. The definition differs from Webster because it has the thread of stewardship of strength given. The Church does not conjure up its own strength. Strong’s Concordance defines in Greek the word authority, stating that *exousia* (authority) is a power to act (ἐξουσία, ας, ῆ). “It’s definition is expressed as power, authority, and weight, and especially: moral authority, influence.”<sup>98</sup>

The contexts of all our “fatherless” scripture passages show a lack of significant authoritative relationships in people’s lives. Each people group God points out lacks powerful support from another person or group: the alien lacks the support of a culture and set of norms; the widow lacks the support of a husband; the children lack the support of a father. The stewardship of authority is a foregone conclusion in order to bring power to the powerless. Authoritative actions that God expects the Church to take on behalf of the outcast people groups is justice, vindication, compassion, mercy, and encouragement.

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<sup>96</sup> Deuteronomy 10:17-20; Isaiah 10:1-4.

<sup>97</sup> Frederick C. Mish, ed., *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary: Tenth Edition*, (Springfield: 2001), 77.

<sup>98</sup> Luke 4:36.



We minister best with authority from God, given to Jesus Christ, and delegated to us through multiple mediums of local church outreach. Dr. Angus Paddison explains,

The authority, which Christians prioritize has its origins within the triune fellowship and is mediated to the world through the Son to whom all authority has been given (Mt. 28:18) and through the Spirit who allows us a share in the mission of the Son. This distribution of authority is through a host of mundane objects and institutions, each elected to participate in the authority of God—the practices of the church, tradition, Scripture, worship and preaching, although of course the precise individual status of these different sources of authority and the calibration among them varies across different Christian traditions.<sup>99</sup>

Paddison goes on, in his text, to warn churches of the danger of equating their authority with God's.

Churches are working hard at a possession of equality<sup>100</sup> and inclusiveness<sup>101</sup> in church doctrine and polity; both are absent from creation's power to grasp and maintain. Only in the context of a loving creator can these elements possibly exist and be defined. Often studies of "authority" have a social presupposition in mind when they decipher God's authority for us.<sup>102</sup>

The world understands power structures; the weak need a handle; and we all work together better when there is a community understanding of power. Sociology recognizes powers; the military recognizes power, as does the business community.<sup>103</sup> Theology is weak when one has no clarity concerning the personhood and power of God. Theology is

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<sup>99</sup> Angus Paddison, "The Authority of Scripture and the Triune God" *The International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 4 (October 2011): 448-449.

<sup>100</sup> Philippians 2:6-7.

<sup>101</sup> Exodus 19:5-6a; Deuteronomy 14:2; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9.

<sup>102</sup> Matthew and Christa McKirland, "Who's in Charge? Questioning Our Common Assumptions About Spiritual Authority," *Priscilla Papers* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 15-25.

<sup>103</sup> October 7 and 12, 1999 "Power, Domination, Legitimation, and Authority," *Sociology* 250 – *Notes on Max Weber*, accessed November 24, 2014, <http://uregina.ca/~gingrich/o12f99.htm>.

inconsistent when one defines terms based on feeling, passionate causes, personality bents, and human will. It is self-evident as the very articles written about authority in faith communities are written with a specific group of people in mind.<sup>104</sup>

Authority needs to be presented as an attractive stewardship of power. The fatherless lens of authority is God saying to us to be strong,<sup>105</sup> be a defender of the weak,<sup>106</sup> stand for justice,<sup>107</sup> be angry against sin and sin not,<sup>108</sup> be an encouragement. Defenseless and helpless people need a person of power to lean on for healing and then to be model of strength to give them back some power to call their own, dignity, and a correct self-worth.<sup>109</sup>

For too long, helpless people have been abused by those who have set themselves up to be an authority in their lives—including the church. If God’s people are to reach the hurting, voiceless, and powerless people of the world, we need to be responsible in our God-delegated power. Churches are to be examples of the drawing power of God transforming people’s lives. Good authority is grounded in who God is. A father to the fatherless: a steady guide, a source of strength, a clear direction, a faithful God.

Authority is such a potent word. One who has had many experiences in the local church tie his or her most negative experiential event to that particular word, “authority.”

A positive or a negative experience will define spiritual authority for that person. A

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<sup>104</sup> Dorothee Schaper, “Power and Authority in the Religious Traditions: A Protestant Perspective” *European Judaism* 46, no 1 (Spring 2013): 60-65.

<sup>105</sup> Deuteronomy 10:18-19.

<sup>106</sup> Psalm 82:3.

<sup>107</sup> Deuteronomy 24:17-21.

<sup>108</sup> Ephesians 4:26.

<sup>109</sup> Romans 8:37.

misuse of authority, especially among those who represent God in leadership can have devastating effects.<sup>110</sup>

Authority is a combination of power, responsibility, accountability, leadership, and intentional ministry. Christian writings avoid the word “authority,” and use words that describe it.<sup>111</sup> In a well referred to textbook on congregations, Jackson Carroll emphasizes the importance of authority in congregations:

To summarize, although individuals and groups can exercise leadership without authority, having authority is an important resource for leading congregations. The leader’s relationship to God or the sacred and her or his knowledge and skills are important grounds for granting authority for leadership. As these grounds are recognized formally, pastors and lay leaders are accorded the trust that is necessary for facing and responding with faithfulness to difficult and often “messy” issues that congregations confront.<sup>112</sup>

Authority is crucial in tough times, both individually and corporately. In the crucibles of trials and hardship, hurting people look to a power that can help and as created creatures, a proof that legitimizes that power.

The abrasive nature of the word “authority” to mankind’s earthly ears is that it involves a stewardship of strength and someone delegating that strength to you. This is a continual problem for the prideful, independent, and self-serving individual, which is in all of us.<sup>113</sup> God is the source of all power and as believers we are given permission to

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<sup>110</sup> Paul Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless: The Psychology of Atheism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 157-158.

<sup>111</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2011), 56. Note: Large section describing authority in a local church without using the word.

<sup>112</sup> Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1998), 173.

<sup>113</sup> Romans 3:23.

steward His power.<sup>114</sup> In the ecclesiastical communities of the world one power remains clear. All power belongs to God alone.<sup>115</sup>

The struggle that the American communities of faith have in their ecclesiastical polity with power and authority is that it looks and feels unspiritual and ungodly. The larger persecuted church has no time for such debates and has simply delegated authority given to those seen as called of God.<sup>116</sup>

The word “authority” calls us to look holistically at the stewardship of power. Jesus Christ was given power by God<sup>117</sup> and He delegated it to the disciples who also understood it was given.<sup>118</sup> Our prime example in the exercise of authority is Jesus Christ, the head of the church. The more we mirror Him the better we can carry our stewardship of authority. Nathan Shaw brings us back to Jesus’ example:

Some people carry authority in such a way as to make others feel very small. Is this true of you and me? If so, we are not following the example of our Lord. From what we read about Jesus, the opposite was true. Jesus did not look down on people. He confronted supercilious religious attitudes and those who were propagating them but treated people with the utmost solicitude and sensitivity.<sup>119</sup>

Our stewardship of authority is given by God, directed by Jesus Christ through His program, the living breathing organism of the church body.<sup>120</sup> We then choose our

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<sup>115</sup> Gordon Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 20.

<sup>116</sup> Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2002).

<sup>117</sup> Mark 9:7; Mark 11:27-33; John 1:1-4.

<sup>118</sup> Luke 24:49; Acts 8:20.

<sup>119</sup> Nathan Shaw, *Unto the Least of These: Expressing God’s Love to Widows and the Fatherless* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2004), 33.

<sup>120</sup> Romans 12:3-8.

spiritual leadership according to how they handle the stewardship and responsibility of power. Authority is given to both men and women. Both are of equal impact and value in God's economy. Roles and job descriptions are often argued within the context of denominational doctrine. Note that both sexes are included in the triunity of need.<sup>121</sup>

There is a cost to authority: it will wear down a person with responsibility.<sup>122</sup> God does not want us to be anxious for it.<sup>123</sup> Both sexes are different operationally and it can be argued that women have more collaborative skills in leadership than men.<sup>124</sup> The Bible and the Social Sciences support the theory that women have a strong business mind.<sup>125</sup> The secular worldview struggles with men and women's authority because of a belief that equality is not yet reached.<sup>126</sup> An equal view, or value of both sexes cannot be attained if differences are not elevated and celebrated;<sup>127</sup> and many are the psychological and

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<sup>121</sup> Exodus 22:22-24.

<sup>122</sup> Tetyana Pudrovska and Amelia Karraker, "Gender, Job Authority, and Depression," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 55, no. 4 (2014): 424-444.

<sup>123</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-12. A passage to help us understand what to look for in a spiritual leader.

<sup>124</sup> Jenny Hoobler, Grace Lemmon, and Sandy Wayne, "Women's Managerial Aspirations: An Organizational Development Perspective," *Journal of Management* 40, no. 3 (March 2014): 703-730.

<sup>125</sup> Dennis Tucker, Jr, "Women in the Old Testament: Issues of Authority, Power and Justice," *The Expository Times* 119, no. 10 (July 15, 2008): 481-486.

<sup>126</sup> Alice Eagly, "Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage: Resolving the Contradictions," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 30 (2007): 1-12.

<sup>127</sup> Dr. James Dobson, "Emotional Differences Between Men and Women: How Do Men and Women Differ Emotionally, and Are Those Differences Caused by Cultural Influences or Genetic Factors," *My Family Talk: Solid Answers: Emotional Differences Between Men and Women*, Excerpt from *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, accessed November 23, 2014, <http://drjamesdobson.org/Solid-Answers?a=65bf3af7-62d8-4a9e-8cd9-075fcc1d>.

physiological differences to be celebrated.<sup>128</sup> A broken worldview does not have the same capacity as God to see inherent value and equality.<sup>129</sup>

Jesus Christ pointed to the “least of these” as the way to view the economy of the Kingdom of God. Anne Graham Lotz an internationally known speaker has chosen a path that does not argue about culture, verses in the Bible, or societies expectations. She explains her position.

This space is not long enough to address the issue of ordination, which carries with it the right to marry, bury, baptize, and have authority over church members. I do not believe God has called me to be ordained, but I know many women who believe He has called them. Some of these women pastor in countries where the male leadership has been decimated by persecution and imprisonment and out of necessity they have stepped up to fill the void.<sup>130</sup>

Graham Lotz also explains that discrimination is a sin problem and declares that religion is not the problem.<sup>131</sup>

Authority is given to local church leadership by recognizing the multiple qualities God emphasizes from scripture, fervent in prayer and faithful to serving God by serving others.<sup>132</sup> Faithfulness is a reflective observation. Respected authority takes time and proof.<sup>133</sup> All authority is given and recognized.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> M. Farouk Radwan, “To Know Myself: Psychological Differences between Men and Women,” *2 Know Myself: The Ultimate Source for Understanding Yourself and Others*, accessed November 23, 2014, [http://www.2knowmyself.com/psychological\\_differences\\_between\\_men\\_and\\_women](http://www.2knowmyself.com/psychological_differences_between_men_and_women).

<sup>129</sup> Note: Our race on earth spiritually is to serve and not compete. Serving allows us to elevate God’s power, while placing people (both sexes) into authority.

<sup>130</sup> Anne Graham Lotz, “Jesus Calls Women to Serve and Lead: From the Bible to Contemporary Christianity, Women Have Been There as Examples of Faith,” accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2008/09/17/jesus-calls-women-to-serve-and/4015>.

<sup>131</sup> Anne Graham Lotz, “Women Like Me Are Abused Worldwide. Here’s Why: As a Female Preacher, I Have Firsthand Experience of the Way Religion Can Discriminate Against Women. But Religion Is Not the Problem,” accessed November 25, 2014, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2014/03/27/women-like-me-are-abused-worldwide-he...>

<sup>132</sup> Galatians 5:22-26.

Hurt people push back because they have been disappointed, abused, taken advantage of and are disoriented because life has disappointed them. Nathan Shaw points to the Early Church as a model to understand the experience of powerlessness:

I believe it is significant that, when it comes to appointing disciples to sort out the dispute concerning the widows, men were chosen for the job and not women. Having no husbands to look out for them, the widows were in need of the protection and authority of godly men. This is a key point for our understanding of the plight of widows and the fatherless today—particularly when these individuals have known only abusive authority from men, something that happens all too often. Those who are vulnerable need to be protected—not controlled or dictated to, but protected.<sup>135</sup>

Our negative use or memory of authority can be replaced with God's teaching and example of authority. His call to minister to the brokenness of this world demands the strength of godly authority.

First our authority comes from God and His work in saving us, just as Israel was saved from Egypt.<sup>136</sup> Secondly, authority comes from Jesus Christ the head of His church.<sup>137</sup> Thirdly, authority comes from His commands from the word of God.<sup>138</sup> It is by God's authority that we live a godly life.<sup>139</sup> God holds leadership and outreach ministries

<sup>133</sup> 1 Timothy 3:6; James 5:16.

<sup>134</sup> Matthew 28:18; John 17:2; Romans 13:1.

<sup>135</sup> Nathan Shaw, *Unto the Least of These: Expressing God's Love to Widows and the Fatherless* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2004), 68.

<sup>136</sup> Exodus 22:21; Romans 1:16-17.

<sup>137</sup> Ephesians 2:19-21.

<sup>138</sup> John 14:23-24.

<sup>139</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; Hebrews 4:12.  
Priscilla Shirer, *Discerning the Voice of God: How to Recognize When God Is Speaking*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 146.

accountable for the authority that is granted. Godly authority is a factor in our fatherless lens.

### *Relationship*

In our forty-three scripture passages we see people unconnected and short-changed in the area of relationships. God's eyesight sees people as most important. Relationships on earth are to communicate who God is. Deuteronomy emphasizes not only the provision of food, but the inclusion of those without connection to be within the community during celebrations and special holy days. The word "satisfaction" in Deuteronomy 26:12-13 means to be full; suffice; have enough; *in the context of community*. Filling a belly is not enough. There is a connection to God first, then people and communities. Says, Neal Krause and David Hayward,

The finding from our study further indicated that awe of God is associated with greater life satisfaction. Moreover, the relationship between the two is wholly due to feelings of connectedness with others...So taken together, our study provided support for a conceptual sequence that begins with church attendance and wisdom, operates through feelings of connectedness with others, and concludes with relating connectedness with others and life satisfaction.<sup>140</sup>

Satisfaction for the poor is not just the meeting of physical need, but of connection that emulates a loving Father God.

When God looks at the fatherless, He sees the need of a fatherhood relationship. Ministry outreach is to involve committed and firm relationships. Dr. Henry and Richard Blackaby emphasize relationship as a priority in spiritual leadership:

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<sup>140</sup> Neal Krause and David Hayward, "Assessing Whether Practical Wisdom and Awe of God Are Associated With Life Satisfaction," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (August 2014): 1-9, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0037694>.



The ultimate goal of spiritual leadership is not to achieve numerical results, to accomplish tasks with perfection, or to grow for growth's sake. It is to take people from where they are to where God wants them to be. God's primary concern for people is not results but relationship.<sup>141</sup>

When God looks to the broken, He sees the need of restored relationship. It is on the basis of a restored relationship with a Holy God that we have the power to help others.

A father relationship involves remembering where one came from, commitment, and faithful follow through. Influence occurs with modeling, commitment, and time invested. Daniel Bayse in his handbook for helping volunteers build relationships with prisoners tells of five concepts that he claims if taught will end criminal careers. If we are on the freedom side of the bars, perhaps we take some of these for granted:

1. *Teach them how to love.*
2. *Teach them how to forgive.*
3. *Give them the gift of self-esteem.*
4. *Teach them the keys to freedom.* (a) respecting the rules of society and (b) taking responsibility for one's own actions.
5. *Teach them to dream.*<sup>142</sup>

Crowds, numbers, and excitement are not guarantees that there is no loneliness. The taste of the bonds of Christian kinship is a stark contrast to the world's controlling, manipulating, and shallow friendships. A rightly functioning father relationship-oriented church draws the orphan, widow, and the disenfranchised. Orphaned at age 12, John

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<sup>141</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 129.

<sup>142</sup> Daniel Bayse, *Helping Hands: A Handbook for Volunteers In Prisons and Jails* (Upper Marlboro: American Correctional Association, 1993), 55-56.

Fawcett captures the church's body life in pen and song during his faithful pastorate of 54 years in the same church:

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love: the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.  
 Before our Fathers throne we pour our ardent prayers; our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.  
 We share each other's woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often each other flows the sympathizing tear.  
 When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain; but we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again.

John Fawcett at one time tried to leave the church that he was stewarding as pastor, but found it was too painful to leave it for the reasons he wrote in this familiar song.<sup>143</sup>

With such emptiness of fatherhood in our nation, our churches need to reflect strength in the relationships that come its way. We can with God's power be surrogate fathers in the wake of the destruction of the family.<sup>144</sup>

We are to be intentional in our relationships to provide a picture of godly fatherhood. For men, it's not just making a baby that makes you a father, it is the constant, daily responsibility of loving, caring, disciplining, providing, correcting, and encouraging that creates stable individuals.<sup>145</sup> Some church programs seemingly are designed to keep fatherhood relationships at a distance. A program can add numbers, be entertaining, and cause a big commotion, but all the while lack long-term faithful relationship building. The church is to be different in programs and systems by always including the dynamic of relationship building. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert both

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<sup>143</sup> William Peterson & Ardythe Petersen, *The Complete Book of Hymns: Inspiring Stories about 600 Hymns and Praise Songs* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006), 266-267.

<sup>144</sup> Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 47.

<sup>145</sup> S.M. Ross, "The Effects of Fatherless Families on Boys," *Family Dysfunction*, October 29, 2007, accessed November 21, 2014, <http://www.relatings360.com/index.php/the-effects-of-fatherless-families-on-boys-6-40989/>

Associate Professor's at Covenant College. Brian is Founder and Executive director of Chalmers Center for Economic Development authored the following:

Poor people are often at the mercy of systems created by the powerful. Hence, poverty – alleviation efforts need to address both broken systems and broken individuals, using highly relational approaches wherever possible.<sup>146</sup>

Local churches need to regularly evaluate their systems and programs to make sure that they are not sterile and void of relationship dynamics.<sup>147</sup>

The lack of a healthy relationship as God intended is the foundational start of multiple problems that will occur in a fatherless life.<sup>148</sup> Pamela Thomas from experience and study, comments on the fears of a fatherless woman:

In no other area of a fatherless daughter's life do the emotional legacies of father loss come into play more dramatically than in her romantic relationships with men. The fear of abandonment triggers the fear of intimacy and sex; an inability to trust men; problems with self-esteem; difficulties with assertiveness and establishing appropriate boundaries; conflicting feelings relating to dependency, separation, and commitment; and sometimes inappropriate shame.<sup>149</sup>

In our world today there is a lack of real building, and investing in relationships. The master template for relationships is the church. It holds the power of restoration because it knows God intimately. Mercy Amba Oduyoye is a Methodist theologian known for her work in African women's theology. She is currently the director of the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana. Her passion is

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<sup>146</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 185.

<sup>147</sup> Sister Mary Rose McGeady, *Sometimes God Has a Kid's Face* (Washington, D.C.: Covenant House, 2010).

<sup>148</sup> Job 31:16-23; Psalm 10:14.

<sup>149</sup> Pamela Thomas, *Fatherless Daughters: Turning the Pain of Loss into the Power of Forgiveness* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 159.

to speak for voiceless African women; she speaks to the churches role for all the voiceless:

People who come to Church love and respect the Church. What they hear in Church should make them go out and be the Church, not just make them feel good about themselves. The poor and the voiceless who still come to Church, come seeking community, and the power to continue to live, and the opportunity for participation in the only place where they have been made to believe their humanity is honored.<sup>150</sup>

The living, breathing organism of the church is dynamic under control of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is to embrace the power of restored relationship. Jesus beckons us to open the door and enter into relationships based on the eternal one we have with Him. Dr.

John Sowers, President of The Mentoring Project writes:

Many counselors agree that healthy and loving human relationships are the most powerful behavior modifier in the world. Fatherless children lack these loving relationships and often feel lonely, flawed, and incomplete. It is in relationships where the fatherless generation has been wounded the most deeply. Thus, it is in relationships where reconciliation must begin.<sup>151</sup>

Families and churches are to be a well of strong relationships to which broken people come and quench their thirst. Our fatherless outreach lens includes healthy “relationship” building.

### *Presence*

The “less” in fatherless is our exhortation to draw near to the hurting. The fatherless lacks the presence of a father. The widow lacks the presence of a husband. The stranger lacks the presence of a friend. All people groups do well to have the presence of

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<sup>150</sup> Oduyoye, Mercy Amba, *The Stones Will Cry Out: The Charism of the Voiceless* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 122.

<sup>151</sup> John Sowers, *Fatherless Generation: Redeeming the Story* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 97.

loving relationships and a source of strength and encouragement. A loving presence sets relationships up for success.<sup>152</sup> God's action commands from scripture that to reach the fatherless demand a presence. *Presence matters. Presence is a choice.* Dr. Erickson observes this in the ungodly action of fatherlessness:

All father hunger springs from one main source: desertion. A father's abdication may be total or emotional or what the individual experiences as desertion. There are seven specific causes of father loss: death, divorce, single mothering, adoption, addiction, abuse and traditional fathering. The common element with all but one is the *father's choice* to absent himself.<sup>153</sup>

Observe that intentional presence and not just physical presence is a great need of the downtrodden.<sup>154</sup> Therefore, presence in ministry is to be intentional and not accidental. It is no accident that God points to those in society that represent the most need, demand the most effort, and take a seemingly incredible amount of time.

Gordon MacDonald causes us to take stock of people groups we surround ourselves with and ask questions of introspection:

I find it easy to be present—doesn't everyone? —to attractive people, advantaged people, visionary people, intelligent people, likeable people. I love being present to people who like me and find me witty and charming. My grandchildren fit this category.

But present to people who are weak, poor, sick, grumpy, unreliable, unthankful, and disrespectful? That's another story. My instinct is, all too often, to be absent. Sometimes I win; often I lose in this being present business. Because being present to people means that I must listen extra carefully, listen, and then respond. And that can be inconvenient and too taxing.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Bonnie Mackey and Wade Mackey, "Father Presence and Educational Attainment: Dad as a Catalyst for High School Graduations" *Education* 133, no.1 (unknown): 139-150.

<sup>153</sup> Beth Erickson, *Longing for Dad: Father Loss and its Impact* (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications, 1998), 55.

<sup>154</sup> Ken Canfield, Ph.D. *The Heart of a Father: How Dads Can Shape the Destiny of America* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1996), 129-130.

<sup>155</sup> Gordon MacDonald, *Building Below the Waterline: Shoring Up the Foundations of Leadership* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 12-13.

The spiritual practice and ministry of presence is slightly different than just relationship building. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”<sup>156</sup>

Dr. Robert Alden, my Old Testament professor, now with the Lord, wrote:

Most scholars agree verse 17 is a synonymous parallel instead of a contrast between friend and brother; both are there when you need them. Friends are sometimes even closer than relatives (cf. 18:24; 27:10), but hopefully relatives are also friends. Both, in any case, are needed for support and encouragement, especially during hard times.<sup>157</sup>

Presence is more powerful with a track record of faithfulness in relationship, proofs of commitment, and family connection.

Some brokenness in our communities simply have no answers, is beyond words, and overwhelms our comprehension. Chaplains/pastors are often called to this ministry of crises where a “Christ follower” is thrust into the chaos and the destructive forces of sin. Only the relationship connection that was invested in before the horrible “event” allows the person representing Christ into the crucible of suffering. Pastor Adele Ahlberg Calhoun comments on Christ’s example in such cases:

Jesus was never a lone ranger. He has always been a part of a divine community with the Father and the Holy Spirit. And when he came to earth, he continued to live his life in small groups. He began his ministry by choosing twelve disciples to be with him (Luke 6:13). Then he spent three years pouring himself into this small group. He taught them truth about God and about themselves. He modeled spiritual practices for and with them. He introduced them to the experiences of service, witness and healing prayer. And day after relentless day, in the messy, hard-to-control center of community, he gave them the gift of his full presence.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Proverbs 17:17.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 135-136.

<sup>158</sup> Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 149.

The ministry of presence is often the inconvenient and uncomfortable side of ministry. God wants us to see the “fatherless,” the hurt, the pain, the uncontrollable and overwhelming sense of loss in its many forms.

The outreach of ministry inserts God into unanswerable and unfixable crucibles of life. Those who are “called” to ministry are thrust into seemingly impossible God dependent situations.<sup>159</sup> Yet the downtrodden and broken hearted are depending upon a “God walker” in moments of overwhelming grief and turmoil.

Presence is powerful.<sup>160</sup> The ministry of presence is a handle to the overwhelmed and brokenhearted. The ministry of presence is a shepherding way of conducting our spiritual life.<sup>161</sup> The local church feels sensitivity to its membership and outreach. Dr. Mark Dever president of 9 Marks Ministry states,

So if a congregation has not set its eyes upon an individual for months, even years, how can it testify that that person is faithfully running the race? If an individual is missing in action but has not joined some other Bible-believing church, how do we know if he or she was really a part of us (see John 2:19)? We don’t necessarily know that such uninvolved people are not Christians: we simply can’t affirm that they are.<sup>162</sup>

A church’s report card can be its presence. The results measure intentional presence.

Presence and sensitivity to the broken and oppressed start with a very simple method; listening to people one on one. The practice of legitimate listening

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<sup>159</sup> Alicia F. Lieberman, Nancy C. Compton, Patricia Van Horn, and Chandra Ghosh Ippen, *Losing a Parent to Death in the Early Years: Guidelines for the Treatment of Traumatic Bereavement in Infancy and Early Childhood*, (Washington D.C.: Zero To Three Press, 2003), 26-29.

<sup>160</sup> Psalm 31:20; 139:7; Jude 24.

<sup>161</sup> Phillip Gene Carnes, *Like Sheep Without A Shepherd: The Shepherd Metaphor & Its Primacy for Biblical Leadership*, 2007. PDF. Accessed January 18, 2015.  
<http://www.phillipcarnes.com/publications/>

<sup>162</sup> Mark Dever, *What is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 97.

communicates strength and confidentiality. Space is given to acceptance, a person's value is magnified, compassion revealed, relationship desired, a hearing is earned, submission to another to learn, trust is built, and absence of oppression and judgments are the atmosphere. Dr. Leonard Sweet makes clear the point that churches are a place for listeners.

Communities of faith might better be called hearing rooms where God is given listening room. To hear the Gospels is to hear the voice of Christ, and with that hearing comes obedience.<sup>163</sup>

As God listens patiently with us, so shall we with the broken hearted and downtrodden.<sup>164</sup>

We too are to pay attention to the victims that have no voice on earth, but God's ears are attentive to their prayers.<sup>165</sup>

Listening is to be done correctly with right motivation.<sup>166</sup>

One's outreach lens is to include the time and space for intentional listening.

God's ears are particularly sensitive to the sound of the innocent.<sup>167</sup> Unsolved murders, abortion, hidden human trafficking, unknown abused children, saints of God who have died without anyone knowing; all is seen and heard by God Almighty.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 152.

<sup>164</sup> Psalm 10:14, 17-18.

<sup>165</sup> Psalm 102:19-20; Romans 8:26-27.

<sup>166</sup> Geoff Gorsuch, *Brothers! Calling Men Into Vital Relationships* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 29-30.

<sup>167</sup> Genesis 4:10; Revelation 6:9b-10.

<sup>168</sup> Hebrews 4:12-13.



God is very specific as to what He hears. Several times in scripture, God says He hears the “cry” of the widow and orphan and it will cause Him to be angry.<sup>169</sup> God expects his people to be a voice for the voiceless. We are to “plead” the cause of the fatherless.<sup>170</sup> Justice and vindication cannot be exerted for the powerless without intentional listening. Our outreach lens includes the power of presence, God’s power in us.

### *Generational*

It is not hard to see that we have a bad trajectory of fatherlessness in our present generation. Among children who were a part of the “post-war generation,” 87.7 percent grew up with two biological parents who were married to each other. Today only 68.1 percent will spend their entire childhood in an intact family.<sup>171</sup> With the increasing number of premarital births and a continuing high divorce rate, the proportion of children living with just one parent rose from 9.1 percent in 1960 to 20.7 percent in 2012. Currently, 55.1 percent of all black children, 31.1 percent of all Hispanic children, and 20.7 of all white children are living in single-parent homes.<sup>172</sup> Then there is the quieter side of the statistics, Fathers who are geographically separated because of war, medical illness including psychiatric needs, boarding schools, abortions, and children given up for

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<sup>169</sup> Exodus 22:22; Job 29:12.

<sup>170</sup> Jeremiah 5:28b.

<sup>171</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau. “Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present.” U.S. Census Bureau July 1, 2012, accessed September 15, 2014  
<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.xls>;  
<http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/fam1a.asp?popup=true>.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

adoption. All of these are contributing in some way to the care or lack of care in the next generation. God sees it all; He has said so.<sup>173</sup>

Sociologists and psychologists recognize the destructive nature to generations when there is a high rate of “fatherlessness.” Wade Mackey and Ronald Immerman write,

Without commenting upon desirability, it is argued that, when compared to alternative familial structures, those cultures which both minimize fatherless families and systematically restrict women’s roles to that of motherhood do and will have – across generations – a demographic advantage. And, in terms of cultural evolution, i.e. across generations, those cultures which emphasize triadic families of father & mother & children are positioned to systematically displace and/or to replace those cultures which emphasize the mother & children dyadic family.<sup>174</sup>

While secular researchers decry a lack of evolutionary development of the traditional roles of family structure, they recognize in statistical and generational facts that God’s institution remains a dominant norm.

God’s line of sight is generational. This speaks to a view of ministry that reaches beyond our lifetime and present knowledge. This was God’s message to Jonah who was nursing his puny present day woes and biases.<sup>175</sup> God emphasized His compassion along with His justice to be visited to the fourth generation.<sup>176</sup> He also emphasized the follow through of His covenant promises to “1000” generations even to the revelation of the Church.<sup>177</sup> We are not to only invest for here and now results in ministry.

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<sup>173</sup> Malachi 3:5; Hebrews 4:13.

<sup>174</sup> Wade Mackey and Ronald Immerman, “Cultural Evolution and the Nuclear Family: Whither Cleavage of the Father? *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology* 3, no.2 (2009): 155.

<sup>175</sup> Jonah 4:11.

<sup>176</sup> Exodus 34:7.

<sup>177</sup> Psalm 105:8; Ephesians 3:21.

Krista Petty writes for the Externally Focused Church Movement<sup>178</sup> on how “statistics show that most social ills can be traced back to fatherlessness.” She further points out the generational commitment needed:

But working with children, especially those in the community who may come and go out of the program, can be frustrating work. People don’t always get involved because they do not see immediate results. You have to pour your life into kids and realize that you may never see the results.<sup>179</sup>

Traditions,<sup>180</sup> affirmation,<sup>181</sup> storytelling,<sup>182</sup> remembering,<sup>183</sup> testimony<sup>184</sup> and a local church’s story<sup>185</sup> are the methodologies<sup>186</sup> of seeing generationally. Storytelling from individuals of faith or local churches can pass on God’s values from generation to generation.

God’s fatherless outreach lens includes influencing the generations.

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<sup>178</sup> An example of an externally focused church: <http://www.thevistacommunity.com/mission-vision/>.

<sup>179</sup> Krista Petty, “Fathering the Fatherless: Family and Community Ministries, *Baylor University of Social Work*, ATLAS (2007): 41-44.

<sup>180</sup> Leonard Sax, *Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men*, (New York: Basic Books, 2007) 171.

<sup>181</sup> Note: Affirmation has mistaken identity with flattery. Flattery is a falsehood. The practice of affirmation is a statement of that which is true first and positive second.

<sup>182</sup> Revelation 2:4.

<sup>183</sup> Deuteronomy 16:12. Note: Remembering is often commanded exhortation in the Bible. Joshua 4 - The children of Israel with the twelve stones to remember the crossing into the promise land. I Samuel 17 - David remembered that God delivered the Lion and the Bear into his hand before going against Goliath. Even greater things happened with the people of God who “remembered.”

<sup>184</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010) 130.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>186</sup> Tom Berlin and Lovett H. Weems, Jr., “A Lever For Change: Telling the Congregation’s Story” *Christian Century* (April 19, 2011): 10-11.

## *Justice*

In our forty-three “fatherless” scripture passages, there are more references to justice than any other factor. If there is a passage that sends a chill down our national backs, it is Deuteronomy 27. Within this passage we have a direct reference to justice being withheld from the alien, the fatherless, and the widows.<sup>187</sup> Justice is often not given to the defenseless. The poor and destitute lack money, reputation, a name or lineage and opportunity to reach for their own justice; their greatest need is for someone to step up and put their own means, courage, name, and reputation on the line. *Din* or judgment דין is a justice needed on behalf of another.

In the verses related to the fatherless, vindication is prayed for on behalf of the downtrodden.<sup>188</sup> Perfect vindication, like revenge, can only come from an absolute authoritative creator.<sup>189</sup> God will manage His own glory. Yet, repetitively God has told us to “plead the cause,” “defend,” and “do justice.”<sup>190</sup> These phrases are examples of vindication in scripture. Although we as the created do not have an absolute handle on perfect justice and vindication, God expects His created peoples to steward justice on behalf of the destitute who are taken advantage of by world systems that do not have a foundation of God’s sacrifice as their motivation. Dr. Ken Wytsma president of Kilns College explains the balance this way,

God’s plan of salvation and restoration, both temporally and finally, are organically connected to the restoration and institution of justice. Justice cannot

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<sup>187</sup> Deuteronomy 27:19.

<sup>188</sup> Psalm 82:3; Psalm 94:6-7.

<sup>189</sup> Deuteronomy 32:35; Hebrews 10:30.

<sup>190</sup> Deuteronomy 24:17; Jeremiah 5:28; Jeremiah 22:3; Zechariah 7:10.

be divorced from God's heart and purposes-it permeates them. In fact, a central truth of the gospel is this: God's grace enacts and restores justice.<sup>191</sup>

True vindication is not done by a world system that has no view to the inherent value God places in His creation. The saints of God have an empathetic understanding that can administrate the justice of God as He has commanded us. Vindication is the action of "doing justice" and restoring the person downtrodden, a God prescribed value.

In order to fully grasp justice for the fatherless, violence is first defined. Violence is an unchecked and unauthoritative action that harms people made in the image of God. When a person acts on his or her own with no authority for one's action and harms another person or persons because of one's own self-interest, deranged or premeditated designs; this indeed is called rightly, violence.

God is perfect justice. We the created, therefore, cannot design our own parameters, but rather need to fall in line with His definitions. A lens of justice is needed in a paradigm of ministry outreach. To exercise justice is to put one's name on the line, reputation, and a more frontal approach to frankly, the world.

If the Church is committed to helping in the muck and mire of this world, we cannot ignore also the contrary actions of those already fatherless. Tough love and justice can be inserted into the depravity already displayed. The Church is to stand for justice in this sense as well. The trends all point to a magnification of America's fatherless problem (See Section 1 Statistics).<sup>192</sup> Of course the churches desire is to reach the "fatherless"

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<sup>191</sup> Ken Wytsma, *Pursuing Justice: The Call to Live and Die for Bigger Things* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013), 41-42.

<sup>192</sup> Paul McNulty, "Natural Born Killers," *Policy Review* 1, No. 71 (Winter 1995): 84-85.

before self-destruction, but we are to intentionally walk in grace with the individual until the point of no return which is God's call, not ours.

But there is more to do as a body of believers as well. Laws can be addressed. Injustice can be addressed. Opposing groups with large amounts of money, law, physical attacks, and the court of public opinion these groups are systematically working to destroy family base support systems that reach out to the fatherless. Churches who reach out to at risk youth along with Boy Scouts of America, Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children (KBHC), and Big Brothers and Big Sisters are the battleground of the Homosexual issue. A thread of systematic efforts against family support systems and the complacency that allows it is caustic to our national future. Simply, we allowed godly institutions to be dismantled by the selfish.<sup>193</sup> Alan Sears president and CEO of the Alliance Defense Fund along with Craig Osten as Vice-President are influencing the court systems for Christ; they state the following:

When local governments evict the Scouts, these boys lose the moral guidance and life skills they so desperately need. However, in the view of homosexual activists and their allies it is more important in some cases, to move the homosexual agenda forward than to save troubled boys.<sup>194</sup>

This concerted effort shows a depraved end state to the general public. God has already warned us about our judgment if we do not take care of the fatherless. However, if the pursuit is principled justice on behalf of the powerless, it remains a godly priority.<sup>195</sup> To

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<sup>193</sup> Alan Sears and Craig Osten, *The Homosexual Agenda: Exposing the Principal Threat to Religious Freedom Today* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 193-196.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>195</sup> Robert Lupton, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 119.

act justly is folded into walking humbly with our God.<sup>196</sup> According to scripture, to act justly is a part of what is good. Justice is a part of our outreach lens.

Defense is a woven factor in the Word of God when speaking of justice. In Scripture we see that God is a defender of the weak, poor, and fatherless.<sup>197</sup> This is the action of vindication that we see in the Psalms. Johnny Carr, an advocate of orphans sheds light to the global epidemic of misplaced children:

The 153 million orphaned and vulnerable children worldwide guarantee a continued market from which human traffickers can draw. For children living outside of families, no one will ever know they're missing. There is no moral outcry, no legal search, and likely no one who even cares.<sup>198</sup>

Scripture is clear, we are to look around our area of influence and defend those near us.

Carr provides a wider view, but closer-to-home view on human trafficking:

In all likelihood, trafficking is happening right now in your community...Take a preemptive strike at trafficking in your community by ensuring that vulnerable youth have a safe place and a support system to turn to.<sup>199</sup>

We are to take God's command seriously to take care of the fatherless, widow, and disconnected.<sup>200</sup> He expects our salvation to be worked out in this way.<sup>201</sup>

Justice not only represents defense, but also security and safety. Justice provides a sanctuary, a "city of refuge" when life is confusing and in turmoil.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Micah 6:8.

<sup>197</sup> Psalm 68:5-6; Psalm 82:3-4.

<sup>198</sup> Johnny Carr, *Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans Beyond Adopting* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2013), 24.

<sup>199</sup> Carr, *Orphan Justice*, 32.

<sup>201</sup> Philippians 2:12.

<sup>202</sup> Numbers 35:11. Note: 6 cities of refuge, 3 on each side of the Jordan for those who accidentally killed someone (manslaughter – in today's terms).

There is a lasting feeling of being secure in a father's arms. Anthony J. Showalter captured this feeling we have with God when ministering to grieving friends with Deuteronomy 33:27a.<sup>203</sup> He then wrote "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms."<sup>204</sup> John Eldredge, a needed voice for unapologetic masculinity, also shares the need for a world that is safe: "When a boy has this confidence, this security and safety created by a masculine strength over him, the whole world opens before him."<sup>205</sup> More and more in today's depraved world, our outreach and ministry is to be a place of transparent excellence in safety.

Leadership models of safe fathers in personnel and place are needed. An atmosphere of safety and accountability in our faith communities and physical complexes are the heavenly touch deeply hurting people need. Clergy, volunteers, and attendees at church are to feel a presence of safety. Linda Oxford is a Tennessee Supreme Court Rule 31 Listed Mediator and has over 30 years of experience as a therapist, trainer, educator, and consultant in the public and private sectors, she states:

Preventing clergy sexual misconduct and protecting vulnerable others require ongoing attention and activity on the part of church leaders and a capacity by leaders to effectively respond to present conditions and needs. Church leaders who focus their efforts on the primary prevention of misconduct, which involves efforts to avoid misconduct before it occurs, tend to be the most effective. Prevention of clergy misconduct requires visionary rather than reactive leadership, and efforts by the congregation are unlikely to be successful unless the leadership fully supports and leads the change effort.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Deuteronomy 33:27a.

<sup>204</sup> Kenneth Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 85.

<sup>205</sup> Eldredge, *Fathered by God*, 42-43.

<sup>206</sup> Linda Oxford, "What Healthy Churches Do To Protect Vulnerable Others And Prevent Clergy Sexual Misconduct," *Family and Community Ministries* 25 (2012): 107.



Our ministry outreach lens includes quantifiable security within the body life of a church, its facilities, and outreach relationship to its community.

### *Dignity/God Worth*

God worth not self-worth is how we are to treat all individuals. This is another way of affirming the image of God in all peoples and their groupings. The Hebrew way of helping the poor was handed down by God. Most of the fatherless scripture passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy are followed up with a program of helping the widow, fatherless, and alien by a system of work charity. Old Testament directives further expected connection and an invitation to be included in major community events, celebrations and holy days.

It is amazing that we in our compassionate governmental, ecclesiastical and non-profit charitable efforts often extinguish the dignity and self-worth of people. There are two kinds of people in poverty and want. Dr. Ruby Payne who is a leading expert on poverty mindsets, comments:

Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief systems. One of the key indicators of whether it is generational or situational poverty is the prevailing attitude. Often the attitude in generational poverty is that society owes one a living. In situational poverty the attitude is often one of pride and a refusal to accept charity. Individuals in situational poverty often bring more resources with them to the situation than those in generational poverty.<sup>207</sup>

We see how crucial it is not to let the destitute languish without meeting their needs and providing an avenue to meet those needs on their own.

The church with God's help is the only agency that can give with hope. Often we shortchange ourselves in our great commission and only give charity or only give a

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<sup>207</sup> Ruby Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Highlands: aha! Press, 1996), 47.

message of hope. They are to go hand in hand.<sup>208</sup> Dr. Wess Stafford, President and CEO of Compassion International, explains the danger of the church not reaching out in a correct fashion:

Unless there is an intervention of love and hope, these seeds of apathy lead inevitably downward to an even lower death sentence called fatalism. The very word stinks of death. It is the bottom-as low as a human being can sink. When the human spirit becomes truly fatalistic, it is almost impossible to retrieve. This is complete and utter poverty, the end of the road.<sup>209</sup>

It is hard to comprehend sometimes in our Western mindset, but giving can take away value of a person unless we rethink how we give.

In the midst of overwhelming want, we often meet one need, only to ignore another. The olives, grain, and grapes were left for the poor and they themselves were to work and gather for their own food.<sup>210</sup> If a poor, slave, alien, widow, or orphan needed to eat, there was provision, however, there were no handouts because a community was to see each other made in the valuable image of God. Work of your hands was considered something to be proud of. This concept does not have to be historically far away as noted by Robert Lupton in his book titled, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life:*

*Rethinking Ministry to the Poor:*

A food co-op owned and operated by the poor is certainly superior to a free lunch program, both in dignity and responsibility. A co-op, through the mutual efforts of participants, expands the food dollars of those whose incomes are meager.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> James 2:14-17.

<sup>209</sup> Wess Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore: Why the Least of These Matters Most* (Colorado Springs: Water Brook Press, 2007), 185.

<sup>210</sup> Deuteronomy 24:19-22 emphasizes that the poor worked for what they ate.

<sup>211</sup> Robert Lupton, *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life: Rethinking Ministry to the Poor* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 54.

Dignity as a value in our outreach lens is a start. A drive to be comfortable and no longer reminded of pain, messiness, and want is to be replaced by wading into the uncomfortable. Robert Lupton again drives us toward harder thinking:

When our one-way giving becomes comfortable and our spirits are no longer stirred to find the deeper, more costly solutions, good has become the enemy of best. When our feeding programs value order and efficiency over the messiness of personal involvement, good has become the enemy of best. When recipients remain recipients and givers are content to remain givers, good has become the enemy of best.<sup>212</sup>

As noted before, those who do not understand compassion, give with wrong motivation, value judgments, comparisons, and intentions. The Hebrew system was in place to maintain the dignity of those made in God's image. Part of the problem in standing up for the worth of an individual is that one often stands alone (even in Christian community) in seeing the individual as God's sees them. Brennan Manning describes the struggle.

Anyone who has ever stood up for the truth of human dignity, no matter how disfigured, only to find previously supportive friends holding back, even remonstrating with you for your boldness, feels the loneliness of the poverty of uniqueness. This happens every day to those who choose to suffer for the absolute voice of conscience, even in what seem to be small matters. They find themselves standing alone. I have yet to meet the man or woman who enjoys such responsibility.<sup>213</sup>

If our outreach is for us to feel our value, it is not godly seed. If we reach out to maintain the value of the individual and indeed see them as the same as us, then we are closer to seeing as God sees.

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>213</sup> Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 137.

The last, but not least our lens of fatherless evaluation is dignity and respect. If we are to give dignity and worth to an individual, what would that look like right now? There are food programs that do not allow for choice, a person in charge may hover around the person in need as they shop, names, items given and quantity of people helped may be required. Perhaps the best way to explain it is conditional love. Some of these things are government or donators requirements. Is our outreach embarrassing the *imago Dei*? As James says, do we have special seats for different kind of people?<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> James 2:1.

## SECTION FOUR

### ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The artifact is a book to facilitate study, which aids a discussion of God's heart for the fatherless and helps the community relationship dynamic look with fresh eyes at ministry within their geographical area. Commonly referred to as a popular book, the goal would be to make it readable for individual understanding and as well as useable for a Bible Study to aid a local church group in understanding a theology informed by God's passion for the fatherless as well as a framework for taking a fresh look at their actually outreach mission and practice. The information would serve as a catalyst for greater understanding of outreach for the local church. The format provided by Wipf and Stock Publishers will be utilized for the following Artifact/book proposal.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 West 8th Avenue, Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401, USA.

## SECTION FIVE

### ARTIFACT SPECIFICATIONS

The unfolding of God's focus on the fatherless sections serves as the frame upon which each chapter will be built. The academic portion of this project lends itself well for a book intended for popular press. The target audience for this book will be leaders and lay people in the local church who have a passion for ministry outreach and are ready for fresh, but timeless wisdom. Each chapter will provide thoughtful biblical content as well as a series of questions that are substantive, interactive, and reflective. For pastors and teachers, it is important also to include an illustration and reference guide page to help in teaching, preaching, and outreach. A popular "fatherless" book will do three things. 1) Instruct the people of God on how he sees ministry focusing on the fatherless. The ideal educational plan would be either 12 weeks consecutively or a two day workshop. 2) Advance discussion at the congregant level to promote change in local church settings. 3) Provide a study guide that will guide corporate introspection and recommend proactive positive steps toward change. The following is a breakdown of Wipf and Stock Publishers' specifications for a New Title Proposal:

2270 Seven Lakes South  
 West End, NC, 27376  
 910-603-0830  
[dwightthelight@aol.com](mailto:dwightthelight@aol.com)

January 11, 2015

To: Publishing House

Greetings,

There is a war of concepts going on in our congregations in America. In a post-Christian era that some define as post-modernism, polarization in discussions of the gospel being presented alone versus a pure social gospel are within congregational verbiages. This particular war has been going on for some time. The push to address the fatherless principles needed in our country has lost some steam due to a prolonged physical war on earth, overwhelming odds of solving the problem, governments addressing and rewarding only secular or physical efforts that are seen, and a lack of focus by not going back to the source of family institutions, God who speaks to us from his heart.

There are few tools at our disposal aiding people of God to arrive at a both/and answer to outreach in the world. The overwhelming immoral choices (abortion, domestic violence, sexual deviances) in our country weaken the drive to address "fatherlessness." The present day books reflect often an either/or thinking. One the one hand, we have introspective "How to" books, and on the other hand, we have social gospel emphasis that exist in extremes. God bless every one, as they inform my research. This continuum can only be brought together by discussion of both/and concerning God's love for the world, commitment to Christ, living the Word of God, and congregants taking actionable steps in a corporate way. All the books on the fatherless have their place in ministry, but very few empower dialogue from within the organization to facilitate homegrown change to outreach. *God's Fatherless Factors: An Outreach Paradigm for Local Church Ministry* will allow people to use their own resources, personnel, and collective wisdom to be proactive in Jesus Christ's church.

This book *God's Fatherless Factors: An Outreach Paradigm for Local Church Ministry* will scratch and itch that has been in our congregations for some time. It will be able to address biblically, fatherlessness. It will evoke discussion, change, and a safe platform in which to balance the presentation of the gospel with social engagement.

This 50,000-word study guide lends itself to use in churches who desire to base their congregational life upon the Word of God and allow the congregations to own change as the Holy Spirit uses the living word to address God's fatherless vision of outreach. A study that is proactive in using what already exists in congregations and not prescriptive in approach will be a welcome platform for dialogue and ownership of solutions in the local church context. A copy of the proposal and a first chapter will be sent you're your affirmative answer. I appreciate your time.

Sincerely,

Dwight David Croy

**1. Working Title/Subtitle:**

*God's Fatherless Factors: An Outreach Paradigm for Local Church Ministry.*

**2. Editor(s):** N/A

**Author(s) Name:** Dwight David Croy

**Address:** 2270 Seven Lakes South, West End, NC 27376

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**3. Biographical Note** (employment, degrees, credentials, etc...) or attach a c.v.

**Chaplain (MAJ) Dwight D. Croy (Retired)** after pastoring church for three years, enlisted as a Chaplain Assistant in 1986 and served in the 6<sup>th</sup> Army and Colorado Guard for six years consecutively. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Chaplain Candidate Program in 1989. In 1992 he was branch qualified as a Chaplain and came on to active duty in November of 1994. Ordained at Medford First Baptist Church and sent out; he is fully backed, prayed over and endorsed by the Conservative Baptist Association. He holds a Bachelor of Religious Education from Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland Oregon and a Masters of Divinity from Denver Seminary with a Christian Education emphasis. He recently received a Doctor of Ministry at George Fox University in Spiritual Leadership and Formation in May of 2015.

Chaplain Croy's most recent assignment has been to serve as the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, Operations, Training, Projects, and Mobilization Chaplain. He has ministered to six Army battalions, three brigades, and multiple



installations worldwide. He has had the privilege of serving Soldiers in two combat tours.

Chaplain Croy has been blessed to be married to Karen (Greeninger), for 33 years. They have two grown children. One daughter, Amber who is married to Adam Dierking resides in West End, North Carolina and one son, Jonathan Croy who is married to Mandy and resides in North Carolina. Amber Dierking is an English Major graduate and Jonathan is serving as a Station Commander in the North Carolina, United States Army Recruiting Office, after three combat tours. Dwight and Karen have one grandson, Caleb Russell Dierking.

Dwight has retired after a 28 year military ministry on 30 November 2014 and has a Doctor of Ministry through George Fox University and enjoys a grandson in North Carolina. February 9, 2015, Dwight teaches English to level II Juvenile boys 7-12<sup>th</sup> grade for the North Carolina Department of Corrections and the Moore County School District.

1. **Previous Books/articles published** (inc. bibliographic details) or attach a c.v.

Commentary - People are what make JBER joint missions

work...Commentary by Army (MAJ) Dwight Croy Chaplain 10/6/2011 -

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska -- "But we request of

you, brethren, that you appreciate those who ...

<http://www.jber.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123274992>

Commentary - Chaplain's Corner: God's community is still important

Commentary by Army Chaplain (MAJ) Dwight Croy JBER Chaplain

11/30/2011 - JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska --

"Therefore when you come together in one

...<http://www.jber.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123281716>

Commentary - Scriptures and examples of 'standing firm' in ...Commentary by Army Chaplain (MAJ) Dwight Croy 673d ABW 6/13/2012 - JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska -- One of the passages of Scripture that is enjoyable ...<http://www.jber.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123305903>

Commentary - What's your anchor when it comes to spiritual truth

...Commentary by Chaplain (MAJ) Dwight Croy JBER operations/mobilization chaplain 8/23/2012 - JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska -- Where do you get your spiritual ...<http://www.jber.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123315287>

Commentary - Getting help to avoid being victimized...Commentary by Army Chaplain (MAJ) Dwight Croy JBER Chaplain 10/10/2012 - JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska -- Have you heard of "mission creep?" <http://www.jber.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123321735>

**5. Have you published with us before?** *If so, please list your book(s) here:* N/A

**6. If your manuscript is a work of fiction or poetry please indicate here with**

**an** "X": ☐ fiction ☐ poetry. N/A

**7. Title Description:** God's Fatherless Factors: An Outreach Paradigm for Local Church Ministry

## 8. Table of Contents:

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## 9. Contributors:

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## **10. Market:**

### **Primary Audience**

- Pastors and Leadership in Churches and Para-church Organizations who would like to look at ministry through a fresh perspective.
- Church leadership that refreshes and relooks their ministry at a regular pace.
- Church members desiring to study the Bible and see ministry through God's fatherless perspective.

### **Secondary Audience**

- Para-church organizations that have the local church in mind as God's primary program for spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

## **11. Marketing Ideas:**

- The author would send some books out to key leaders of organizations who work in the fatherless, mentorship, fatherhood, economic coalition

areas. These books would promote dialogue between many non-profit organizations and local churches (internally and externally). Dialogue would be in the form of bible study, leadership retreats, and seminars. Endorsements from many non-profit organizations that work in the fatherless arena will post valuable books upon their websites and use them in leadership training. Adoption, Orphans, Youth Residential Homes, Boys' Clubs, Girls' Clubs, Military Chaplains, Urban Renewal, and growing churches to name a few would be engaged in dialogue about what is near and dear to their heart in ministry.

- Advertise in Christian Education publications and venues.
- Military experience in the content of the book would lend itself to military use and the author has access to these avenues. (As a retiree, I would have time to schedule and advise and teach at chapels and churches)
- Speaking Engagements in Churches (Author)
- Christian Book Sellers Convention
- South Korea (and eastern countries) have a huge need to study this issue (orphanages are a concern) Big Market. As God reveals, there could be a big market overseas where human rights are at a lower premium than ours.

**12. Competing titles:** Most competing titles are introspective, reflective, informative, academic, what dad needs to do (How to books), fatherless women, and fatherless men (Introspective and personal healing books). All are excellent and are usable, but limited size and scope of learning in a Christian Education Context. A popular book of guided group study is needed in this area.



Closest in nature is:

- 1) Varn Brown, *Healing the Wounds of a Fatherless Generation: Turning the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children and the Children to the Fathers*. (Dallas, TX: Inner Court Publishing, 2011) Note: It charges men to be better fathers. One page in back of book with three questions for each chapter. Limited discussion aid and audience.
- 2) Nathan Shaw, *Unto the Least of These: Expressing God's Love to Widows and the Fatherless*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2004) Note: Excellent exhortation to the church, broad appeal, but not a study book.
- 3) Geoff Gorsuch, *Brothers! Calling Men Into Vital Relationships*. (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1994) Note: Bible Study for men, not broad enough for the whole church to be engaged in conversation on the fatherless.

### **13. Unique Features:**

- One of a kind thematic study on 43 fatherless passages of scripture
- It will be written with an assumption of a Christian Leadership Audience which is all Christians. Leaders influence other leaders. A book written for corporate change at a local church level would have expanding dialogue and therefore an expanding audience.
- A lens for a church body to take a fresh look at ministry – it invites the reader to look through God's eyes at ministry. Promotes Church polity dialogue at the user level.
- A study book that allows space for the local churches own ministry heart and story. The book will invite and encourage change without dictation.

- A study book that will allow a group with a foundation of discussion move toward positive godly change in outreach.
- A unique study book that fits readily into Christian Education Curriculum and could be the basis for two or three books in the same area.
- A study book with usable referencing of scripture, story illustrations, and simple study guide will make it desirable for adult Sunday School Teachers who spend an average of 40 minutes a week in preparation.
- A group that uses this book will see outcome (output) immediately and that will invite others to do this study together. It will address outreach systems that the small church deals with every day.

**14. Estimated Word Count** (40,000-50,000) Word Count (12 Chapters): Word Count with Appendices: 55,000 Word Count Notes: 5,000 Total Word Count: 55,000-60,000.

**15. Will your book project include tables, charts, graphs, illustrations, or photographs, tables or charts? If so, please indicate here the total number of tables, charts, graphs, illustrations, and images to be used in your book:** 2 (One Chart and One Table). It would also have Biblical Reference Guide, Sermon Illustration Guide, Study Guide at the end of each chapter, and a Bibliography.

**16. Estimated manuscript delivery date:** May 1, 2015.

**17. Possible foreword writers:** Allister Beg, Richard Blackaby, Billy Graham Children Evangelist Trainer – Chad A. Miller. Child Evangelism Fellowship CEF President Moses, Luiz Palau, Haddon Robinson, Major General Rutherford (US Army Active), Nathan Shaw, Pastor Greg Spires (Medford, Oregon).

**18. Individuals who may be prepared to endorse your book:** General Carver

(Ret), John Eldredge, COL Giammona (Active Duty – San Antonio), Major General Hicks, Ann Graham Lotz, Robert D. Lupton (Atlanta) Community Developer, Donald Miller of the Mentoring Project 2005.

**19. Note for Dissertations:** Recommendation by a committee member

(preferably the chair of the committee when possible): Dr. Loren Kerns, Dr. Clifford Berger, Dr. Philip Carnes, Dr. Dan Liroy, Dr. Donna K. Wallace.

**20. Other: Sample Chapter: See Artifact**

## SECTION SIX

### POSTSCRIPT

Gratitude overflows from my heart to my family, especially my wife, Karen, who for 33 years has encouraged me. Upon retiring from the United States Army after 26 years of service as a Chaplain, the pursuit and journey of a Doctor of Ministry has been a source of joy and spiritual growth. The journey is a small taste of heaven to come when God gathers the saints from all time and four corners of the earth. My cohort has been instructive, challenging, encouraging builders of my spiritual life. George Fox University has a great program and puts together great cohorts for maximum learning, fellowship, and accountability. The cohort expands one's view of the church, worldview and presents new challenges. It is my belief that the program exceeds what they pray for in educational professionalism and unknown repercussions will be seen in eternity. A special thank you to Dr. Phillip Carnes and Dr. Daniel Lioy who have been champion encouragers and have taught me the discipline of research and academics. They are largely responsible for getting me across the last hurdles. The program is blessed to have both Dr. Loren Kerns and Dr. Clifford Berger in leadership. They are leaders willing to learn, change, and put themselves on the line to bring together a gold standard program. Also a special thanks to Dr. Donna K. Wallace who was willing to take on a person who learned English in the nineteen sixties, a time of creative writing without the mechanics and hung-over teachers abounded in my public school education. Finally and not least, my heart is thankful to the great throng of saints who have gone before me. Among them are people who have poured their life into me and continue to have a spiritual effect upon this earth. God's

plan is large and beyond earthly comprehension and I look forward to the eternal  
postscript before His throne when we start to comprehend it.

## APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT

### TITLE OF BOOK

God's Fatherless Factors: An Outreach Paradigm for Local Church Ministry.

### FORWARD

The study of the fatherless' plight as seen through God's vision and perspective based on God's Name and Character for the purpose of outreach is motivated by several personal factors. This study grows out of generations past, present and future. My passion for reaching the fatherless is spurred on by my father's experience growing up, my experience in ministry, and a spirit of thankful admiration for saints of God who have not only been living models of faithfulness for me, but have invested into my walk with the Lord.

My dad, who is with his heavenly Father now, lost his dad as a boy of eight years old. He also lost his mother who was committed to a mental institution at about the same time of losing his dad. The social stigma resulting from his mom's reality was so strong, so shameful, that it was rarely if ever spoken of; and I did not learn of it until my adult years. Despite the environmental chaos of being raised by other relatives, moving around the country, and having no steady father figure, my dad was touched by the saving grace of God in the Army and went on to raise a family of six children in a committed marriage of 50 plus years. My dad poured his life into the church and drew great strength from God's ecclesiastical program. The dynamic strength of the church is found when the people of God follow Jesus Christ in His great commission "to tell the Good News to all the earth"; and this my dad not only did with great passion, but he also very much

enjoyed it. My dad's great passion, however, was not an easy one. The administration, organization, and structure of the local church were not a source of strength. As he said many times, he learned that part by plenty of "hard knocks." He was a shepherd of God's flock faithfully throughout all the hard and easy times of a church family's spiritual growth.

The second motivating factor for the study of God's vision for the fatherless is my twenty-five plus years of ministry as an Army Chaplain. Although there are good news stories of the fatherless, there are many more that are devastating. If a post-traumatic stress element to professional pastoral counseling in the chaplaincy could be identified, it is predicaments of multiple young men and women who desire and thirst for a strong male guide in their life. The death of one's daddy is hard enough to explain to a child, but a dad who chooses to stay away is even harder. After a quarter of a century, I am convinced that local church ministries are the answer to such pain--not national, international, or government institutions. God's directive to meet the needs of the fatherless (orphan), widow, and alien provides insight and directives as to how the local church is to approach intentional ministry.

My final reason for applying God's fatherless vision as a framework to the outreach of the local church is a passion sustained by the saints of God who have gone before me. They have given their all as a "living sacrifice" to encourage me to grow in the Lord. My prayer warriors have been many. Their battles in the spiritual realm on my behalf are yet unseen and unrewarded. The power of their prayers was evident when, at the end of my resources, God empowered me to go further. The many saints of God are the embodiment of His program; they are the Church. Whatever comes of this study, I

pray that it will impact the Church to multiply God's glory and grace in the world the way that He desires.

The primary source for this body of research is the Word of God; focusing on the theme of "fatherlessness" throughout Scripture. Peer reviewed journals and respected authors are also cited in the academic portion of the study, whereas, life experience, or auto-ethnography, is relevant for the creation of the following artifact. The artifact is to be further developed into a popular book study guide for local churches to assist in rethinking structural and philosophical systems in order to be more effective in outreach. Fatherless elements or factors set the framework and serve as a lens through which local church leadership can evaluate their own God given ministries.



## CHAPTER 1

### GOD'S FATHERLESS FOCUS FACTORS

“But You, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.”

Psalm 11:14

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Hebrews 4:13

Skip was in the top bunk. Buckled over, holding his stomach, and wincing in obvious pain. The church camp pastor had been notified along with the camp nurse. Through a series of questions from the nurse we found out that he had stomach pains all week. He had told no one. It was Friday and camp was almost over. The camp of 300 or more teens would be going home Saturday morning after breakfast. Skip told the staff that he knew there was a chance he would have to go home early. He did not want to. He absolutely was having the time of his life. As his camp counselor I noticed that he initiated speaking to me and other leaders in engaging conversation and activities all through the week. We found out later that Skip was having so much fun and enjoying the loving Christian environment, he was hiding something that could send him home. The last thing he wanted to do was go home. It turned out that he had appendicitis and needed to go to a hospital right away. Skip came from a well off family with lots of money. His dad was notified, and he sent a helicopter to the camp. From across the baseball field, I watched as the nurse helped him into the helicopter. There was a pilot and another large man there to

help. When the nurse came back, I asked if that was his father. With her eyes to the ground she said simply, “No.” In that moment, as a spiritual leadership team for these young people, we were sad. Here was a child with a father, yet no father. At the same time, as I thought back over the week, I was overjoyed. We, as ministers of God were able to fill a void, share our joy in Christ, and show the love of an everlasting father. We did it accidentally, by just being available. But what if we did it intentionally? So often in the Bible, God exhorts us to pay attention to the fatherless and chooses to relate to us in the intimacy of a father. Perhaps we are to see what it takes to reach out to the fatherless and apply it to all the ministries of the church. What would ministry in the local church look like if we purposely put godly fatherhood principles in it? What is God looking at when He sees the fatherless? What does His heart expect from us?

### **Where is “Fatherlessness” in the Bible?**

Insight and discernment concerning fatherlessness comes from 43 passages of Scripture, 42 in the Old Testament and 1 in the New Testament. (See Chart #1). The English transliteration is “yathom” a masculine noun with a short definition of “orphan.” Strong’s Concordance defines the word, “From an unused root meaning to be lonely; a bereaved person – fatherless (child) orphan.” An overwhelmingly majority of the references to the “fatherless,” (orphan; noun; masculine) are contained in the Old Testament. The context shows both “fatherless” and “orphan” to be a correct meaning of the Hebrew word. We may draw the conclusion that widow and orphan are each in their own way the very picture of weakness and vulnerability.

The term “fatherlessness” is a repeated term throughout scripture contained in the commands from God in the law. It is God’s expectation that His holy people have a vision and will for taking care of the “fatherless.”

1) Exodus 22:22	16) Job 24:3	31) Isaiah 1:23
2) Exodus 22:24	17) Job 24:9	32) Isaiah 9:17
3) Deuteronomy 10:18	18) Job 29:12	33) Isaiah 10:2
4) Deuteronomy 14:29	19) Job 31:17	34) Jeremiah 5:28
5) Deuteronomy 16:11	20) Job 31:21	35) Jeremiah 7:6
6) Deuteronomy 16:14	21) Psalm 10:14	36) Jeremiah 22:3
7) Deuteronomy 24:17	22) Psalm 10:18	37) Jeremiah 49:11
8) Deuteronomy 24:19	23) Psalm 68:5	38) Lamentations 5:3
9) Deuteronomy 24:20	24) Psalm 82:3	39) Ezekiel 22:7
10) Deuteronomy 24:21	25) Psalm 94:6	40) Hosea 14:3
11) Deuteronomy 26:12	26) Psalm 109:9	41) Zechariah 7:10
12) Deuteronomy 26:13	27) Psalm 109:12	42) Malachi 3:5
13) Deuteronomy 27:19	28) Psalm 146:9	43) James 1:27
14) Job 6:27	29) Proverbs 23:10	
15) Job 22:9	30) Isaiah 1:17	

Scripture Passages with the Word “Fatherless”

Chart #1

Although the term “fatherless” is scarce in the New Testament, important observation can be made from Jesus Christ who came to fulfill the law. Jesus Christ lived out God’s expectations by addressing the “least of these” as a repeated pattern of a godly and pure life. God reached us, the broken of this world, through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ commissioned us. Based on His reach to us, we are to turn around and reach out in like manner to the brokenness around us.

### **The Principled Expanse of Fatherlessness**

Throughout this book the “fatherless” will often be interchangeable with the disenfranchised, the aborted child, voiceless, widow, orphan, alien, prisoner, mentally ill, alcoholic, elderly, bed ridden, and stranger. To narrow the study, I have chosen the alignment of seeing the fatherless as much as I can through God’s line of sight. The 43 Scriptures referring to the fatherless and the orphan will be cited throughout. Please note that God refers to other desolate people groups as well. God has called attention to these people groups to define His outreach to the world. It also gives us insight to the sensitivity of His heart. Therefore, we need to give it attention.

### **Descriptive vs. Prescriptive**

Have you ever noticed that God does not tell us how to peel fruit? Throughout this life God has given us, we have never felt micro-managed by him. He is faithful to model, repeat principles, and reveal his person through the Word of God. He gives us great latitude and opportunities to glorify Him through the discernment of the broken relationships around us, our choices can be worship as we delight in him. He delights in our creativity, and encourages our loving outreach to the world as his reflection. The next

few chapters will explore the 43 passages of scripture to extract overarching principles that are to be a part of outreach and are expected from a loving God to be reflected in the Christian community. Our emphasis will be on the long threads of consistent truth that run through the “fatherless” Scripture passages. The dominant principled threads will inform our view of ministry outreach.

### **Outreach Flowing through the Fatherless Lens**

This study is not about the one specific problem of fatherlessness. There are many excellent ministries in this area such as adoption, mentorship, church ministry models, specific counseling programs, etc... This study focuses instead on God’s vision or the importance of reaching out to the fatherless and how that vision informs our outreach in all areas of ministry. Out of this study a lens of priorities will emerge for ministry as a whole. Discernment for greater specificity in ministry will expand as we align our eyesight with God’s.

When one starts to address ministry need or needs, the humanness in us tends to over-reach or “bleed” for the one destitute group. Robert Lupton, founder and president of FCS Urban Ministries (Focused Community Strategies), says it in a concentrated way in his potent little book, *Toxic Charity*:

Doing *for* rather than doing *with* those in need is the norm. Add to it the combination of patronizing pity and unintended superiority, and charity becomes toxic.<sup>1</sup>

As well-meaning sincere people get involved, they actually start to believe that they are the only one that can see this specific pain in the world. For people who give of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2011), 35.

themselves regularly, this is a kind of “snow blindness.” It prevents you from seeing a bigger picture, one that comes from the heart of God. For the church, goodness or good ministry proceeds from the “being” or nature of God. It is because of who God is we that can navigate toward outreach ministry that reflects His heart. Tim Challies, Editor of *Discerning Reader* at [www.discerningreader.com](http://www.discerningreader.com) emphasizes God’s help in discernment:

While the Bible makes it clear that discernment relates to decision making, my studies of this topic have led me to see that a definition that goes a little further than this is simply too narrow, for biblical discernment looks beyond the will of God to the *truth* of God. We can only know God’s will when we first know God’s truth, for what God desires and requires of us must always be consistent with his character.<sup>2</sup>

Often churches have been built upon pain, bitterness, or pride to answer a human need. Even with the superficial cover of programing and religion, this is a foundation that needs to be replaced by desires of God’s heart and not our own. Only with His holy character can we see clearly through the horrors we tend to fixate on in a terribly sinful world.

### **Why the Fatherless Lens?**

Among the three repeated people groups throughout scripture, the widow, the fatherless, and the stranger, none is timelier in giving us exhortation from God as the pain of fatherlessness. Its impact is so devastating, that we need to capture the principles of God’s vision of ministry to this specific people group to make an impact upon this present world.

First, almost all the social fabric of our society is affected by fatherlessness. Stephen Marche encapsulates the significant far-reaching implications and impact of the fatherless.

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 54.

Fatherlessness as a condition has been linked with virtually every social ill you can name (the big exception being lesbian families): Young men who grow up without fathers are twice as likely to end up in jail, 63 percent of youths who commit suicide are from fatherless homes, and 71 percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.<sup>3</sup>

God's instruction to us concerning these hurting groups of people will show us the primary principles to measure and guide effective outreach in all areas of ministry.

Secondly, the power of fathering is an answer to fatherlessness. In aligning our sight with God's heart we see that fatherhood is crucially important. It is a foundational power to our society. Dr. Ken Canfield the founder and president of the National Center for Fathering said,

A father has enormous power. About this, he has no choice. For good or for bad, by his presence or absence, action or inaction, whether abusive or nurturing, the fact remains: A father is one of the most powerful beings on the face of the earth.<sup>4</sup>

Fathering comes out of the nature of God and it is a power that has His expectation of proper stewardship and priority. The community of faith who trusts in a personal God must show it as a priority as well.

Thirdly, the Word of God gives powerful guidance to combat the pain of "fatherlessness." The biblical context of how God sees "fatherlessness" is considered an objective primary source for spiritual discernment in outreach. Our study together will assume the person of God and His word as an ultimate authority in all aspects of spiritual vision, discernment, and family systems. A principled list of priorities emerges from our observations of God's view of the fatherless and His fatherly concerns. The series of

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Marche, "Why Fatherhood Matters: Because Society Crumbles Without Us," *Esquire* 159, 6/7 (June/July 2013): 1-4, <http://0-web.b.ebsconhost.com.catalog.georgefox.edu>, (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ken Canfield, Ph.D. *The Heart Of A Father: How Dads Can Shape the Destiny of America* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1996), 17.

priorities that come from God's focus on the fatherless are the following factors:

Irreparable, Fatherhood, Triunal, Compassion/Mercy, Authority, Relationship, Presence, Generational, Justice, and God Worth. (See Figure #1) These factors are the largest points of the observed context. They are revealed as most explicit by repeated emphasis, surrounding context, definition of words in context, connection to the word fatherless, connection to God's personhood, and connection with God's expectations and commands.



A fourth reason for a focus on the fatherless as a way of looking at our local church ministry outreach is to see if we are specifically addressing the deep wounds of people and not superficial surface needs or issues.

The fifth dirge of Lamentations indicates that one becomes an orphan solely through the loss of a father, even if the mother is still present. "We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers are like widows," (Lamentations 5:3). The *New American Standard Bible* reads, "We have become *orphans without a father*," (emphasis added). The word orphan means, "to be lonely" and refers to a bereaved person. And bereaved people need to grieve both their tangible and intangible losses.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Monique Robinson, *Longing for Daddy: Healing from the Pain of an Absent or Emotionally Distant Father* (Colorado Springs: Water Brook Press, 2004), 51.



A repeated theme from God is first addressed in Genesis 1:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone. The desolation of the fatherless is seen as unnatural and not a part of His creational intent. Being made in the image of God means that we are people of relationship just as God is; it is reflected in the truth of the trinity. God has made us for relationship. Tom Hanks in *Castaway* reflects well what would happen if we were left alone for long amount of time. We start developing a relationship with things like rocks, volley balls, etc...and start talking to ourselves. We were created for a relationship with God. With Him we are rejuvenated and we are refreshed by those who reflect His image around us. God and others keep us from fantasy, madness, and delusions. God expects us to reach out to those who are ebbing toward isolation, fetal positions, and even marring their own identity with abusive words and physical actions.

Fifthly, sin is powerful if one does not know the power of God through Jesus Christ. True brokenness brought about by selfish sinful mankind can be answered with the power of Jesus Christ lived out in us. The broken must know intimately the source of their healing and be convinced of the power of God that can be bestowed on others through our great Savior, Jesus Christ.

### **Are you ready to bring wholeness to the broken?**

Without you, yourself, believing that *you* have the “power of God for Salvation for those who believe,” the broken will be left with no answers. The stories of helplessness are real and those who minister to the downtrodden are in the front lines of spiritual battle. If one is not equipped with the Word of God, personal knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ, and a growing understanding of the heart of God, the result will be a spiritual battlefield casualty. Do not become just another good person

with sincere temporary moralistic humanistic fixes. God addresses the deep separation between man and God. The destruction that sin brings is the fruit of not letting God insert His Son Jesus Christ into our lives.

### **One Broken Story**

Once in a great while a haunting comes to the minister who counsels the helpless. If one is not spiritually alert it can catch him or her off guard. We must be ready in season and out of season to give a powerful account of what God can do. I remember one such time like it was yesterday.

A young attractive African American woman came to me for counseling. Her situation was all too common and it was redundant in the sinful actions of fallen humanity. She came from the streets; joined the US Army to make herself a better person and the family proud. Her great desire was to go into the big wide world and make bigger and better choices, changing a dictated and foreseeable destiny. She was committed to being different and not walk in the ways of her destructive siblings and the norms of the neighborhood. Nonetheless, her tears were many, she was pregnant, and the look, oh, the haunting expression. Wide and fearful eyes asking through the blur of tears, how!? How could this happen?

The fear almost took on a monstrous form dragging her back from whence she came. Her culture and her core faith belief presented a determined map that was far different than she was aiming at. A bittersweet curve ball was thrown across her life. "I was determined, I was sincere, I believed," she said, and in her misery, she described, "I was on my way and somehow my past and circumstances grabbed me, took hold of me, and forced me back into the same cycles as my parents, siblings, and my neighborhood." It was her Christian way of cursing the situation, through gritted teeth, tears and great anger. Somehow she may have thought by coming to the chaplain, life could be reset like

a computer. Sin would have its consequences that day, but as a servant of God, I was able to share with her the power God that would be able to address the brokenness of her life.

Who is the person in your ministry that God is bringing to mind? Allow these principles to inform your involvement. So I ask, are you ready to address that which is close to the heart of God? Military power, environmental concerns, saving animals, finances and nutrition to name a few are of the temporal. Understand the heart of God, enter into His concerns, His priorities are eternal.

### LEADERSHIP STUDY PAGE

Read Psalm 11:14.

- 1) Discuss within your group who represents the “fatherless” in your local church ministry?
- 2) Personalize Psalm 11:14 to your local ministry context.

“But You, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The \_\_\_\_\_ commits himself to you; you are the helper of the \_\_\_\_\_.”

Psalm 11:14

- 3) The people you have identified, are they in your ministry plan? Are they represented on your missionary prayer board?
- 4) If the dominoes of “brokenness” were lined up in a row to fall in order (1-100)? Would the brokenness that you have identified in your community be the first domino?
- 5) What eternal powers are you addressing brokenness with? (Salvation – Restoration to God through Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, Prayer, Strong mentoring relationships, testimonies of the saints; followers of Jesus Christ in your midst)
- 6) Pray to see the Spiritual Battlefield accurately. Hebrews 4:13

For Next Week:

- Read the next chapter.
- Read the “fatherless” passages.
- Pray to see as God sees your local church ministry.
- Gather Local Church Ministry Materials to be used in coming weeks (Mission Statement, Vision Statement, Church Phone Answering machine message, Ministry Philosophy, etc...)

## CHAPTER 2

### GOD’S FATHERLESS FOCUS FACTOR: IRREPARABLE

“Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.”

- Exodus 22:22-24

“The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

- Matthew 25:40

There are so many great causes and charities in the world and so many appeals for physical help, money, assets, and skill sets. Yet, God has set a priority in front of us like one puts a table setting in front of us. He has told us clearly about a need that cuts deep into His heart. Followers of God desire to know God’s heart and trust His discernment of our brokenness. The days are evil and increasing with closer and closer birth pangs. Now is the time to steward what God has given us on the eternal. As a people of God, should we not dwell upon the priority of brokenness that is always within His eyesight? For me, the answer is a resounding “Yes!”

The living church is God’s instrument of outreach into the broken world we live in. God has given us this repeated phrase throughout Scripture to help us know what to focus upon. Investigate with me the heart of God with this term the “fatherless.” We will use this word to find principles of outreach that God expects from the living body of

believers called the church. We will look at the 43 passages of Scripture that will lens and define our local church outreach. Our focus will be on the “fatherless”.

### **Commitment to the Irreparable**

Think on this, can you restore a culture or country to the alien (stranger)? Can you bring a widows husband back from the dead? Can you clean up a relational mess between a child and his geographically separated father? Can you bring a boys dad back from the dead? Can you make up for lost time? Can you replace the arm or leg of an amputee? Can you by yourself forgive, restore, repent, and give the fullness of life back to a hurting person? Notice the 43 “fatherless” Scripture passages point to the irreparable or unfixable people problems of our world. To address these problems is to enter into a brokenness that is beyond our ability to set right. Quite often we show our lack of faith by tackling the small fixable problems of the world that bring temporary circumstantial relief, but does nothing to advance the Kingdom of God.

Worship of ease is not a malady that affects individuals only. Churches also go to great lengths to avoid putting themselves in places where they may be uncomfortable. Churches are sometimes so concerned with their own glory, prestige, and comfort that they are tempted to direct their resources to ministries that will glorify their own kingdoms instead of Christ's.<sup>6</sup>

The church is God's instrument to reveal Jesus Christ living in us. The living church is called to do mighty deeds, not of wonder, but to take up that which the world chooses to ignore or not address because at the end of their effort there is no hope. Efforts in a temporal world all look futile. The world does charity for the now—charity efforts of the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011) 125.

world without Christ are truly humanistic, limited to this lifetime, and sacrifice is for the giver and not the brokenhearted.

A God walker, on the other hand, understands one's own brokenness and reaches out remembering the despair and destruction from which Jesus Christ saved her.

Unfixable to the world is really and truly unfixable, but to the saints of God who have been given power and authority to address the brokenness, the unfixable is made whole and the irreparable is made like new. The living church addresses the unfixable with the almighty power of God. With God the irreparable is eternally repaired, the unfixable is eternally fixed, the broken hearted are healed and lifted up.

The outreach that God expects requires a great deal of dependence upon our eternal Father. This dependence upon God started when we admitted before God our brokenness and spelled out to Him that our dark sin separated us from a Holy God. Dependence on God is called faith. That is why there is only one people group that can address the unfixable pain that has rippled through history. Unfixable situations, the irreparable, and destruction flow from when sin entered the world by our willful rebellion against God. Only the saints declared holy can reach out with the eternal answers of peace that passes all understanding, joy unspeakable, and grace undeserved that only comes through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This is a confidence for Christians to share: With God nothing is "unfixable." Sound familiar? By now, you should realize that the word "unfixable" is a way of showing the difference between the world and the Christian in addressing the deepest and hurtful needs that has the attention of our Father God's heart.

### **A Call to the Uncomfortable**

Yes, the nursing home can be a smelly place. Yes, when I go to the hospital, I do not know what to say. Yes, that Sunday School Class of boys is pure chaos. Yes, there are many uncomfortable places to show the love of Jesus Christ. But, that is where it shines the brightest. In our brokenness, we are more than conquerors. We should be where the world as a whole does not want to be. We have real abiding and eternal answers to those who are brokenhearted.

Look at your missionary board or list of ministries. Are there any ministries addressing messy, unfixable, hard, irreparable, or difficult contexts? Are the saints of God in that church involved with the difficult or uncomfortable? A way of testing is to see how much of our stewardship of time, talent, and money is exerted into the “unfixable.” The administration of support is to be coupled with involvement.

Missions are one area to look at. Look at how many times Paul was visited and supported by saints from the churches with money, visits, personal requests, and prayers. Ministry is not to be contracted out. Missionaries are accountable to supporting churches and supporting churches are accountable to them. Has the missionary been visited to offer encouragement? Does the missionary have a need that could be supported by sweat and labor from those who pray for them diligently? Does the missionary get the red carpet treatment and worked overtime when he/she reports to the sending church? Do we maximize the time and groups to be addressed for the missionary so that we have increased prayerful awareness of their specific ministry and how we can creatively contribute to it?



Parallel giving is another way of looking at ministries. Effort in prayer, time, talent, and money all need to be given together. Spiritual health comes to all who are giving and receiving.

A long time ago in this not so far off land of America, I was a teenager in a youth group in First Baptist Church of Medford, Oregon. Missionaries were a wonderment to me more than a calling of God. Frankly, in my micro-vision they were odd. Someone who dropped everything and served a bunch of people that nobody gave a thought to in normal life.

The wisdom of the leadership of that church sanctioned a youth mission trip to a missionary, supported by our congregation, in Northern California. Al was a missionary to migrant workers in the fields of agriculture. Wow! In one week's time, we played volley ball, told Bible Stories, shared our testimonies, made Bible backgrounds for flannel graph stories, prayed with, did fix up and cleaning work. We also, ate chocolate chip pancakes and cantaloupe every day. Conclusion: Missionaries were no longer a far off thought. Missionaries worked hard. Missionaries loved God by loving the people they gave their life to. Missionaries need support and specific prayers; not just, "Lord, bless the missionaries."

Collectively, our youth group learned that missionaries live for the eternal, and sang conceptually if not actually, "this world is not my home, I am just passing through." The deep abiding, sacrificial, and giving love of the missionaries was poured out upon special people of God's creation that world was not focused on. The spiritual seed was planted in lives and not the temporal and material utopia the world strives for.

Awareness of reaching out to the hurting can be taught to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders who sponsored a nursing home next to their church. My wife had the joy of teaching these loving actions, serving as Children's Christian Educator on staff. This included rolling them in (wheel chairs) to church, taking them back, caroling at Christmas, and bringing cookies on class visits. Investment: Time, muscle, and cookie supplies. Result: Wholeness and life abundant in the family of God.

Another way of testing our resolve to minister to the "unfixable," is in the area of time. What is the time commitment? Often we think in projects. A crusade, a revival, a Vacation Bible School, a 12 week Bible Study is focused on, completed, and then we are ready for another project. Disheartening still is the possibility of looking at individuals as projects like Eliza in the movie classic *My Fair Lady*. We often use the tools of investing in others' lives to insulate, separate, and distance ourselves from discomfort. It is even more ungodly, following our movie reference, if we are competing with other churches or ministries.

Parallel giving in time, talent, and money brings with it a building up of the saints of God and awareness.

All churches are called to practice true and undefiled religion by reaching out to the "fatherless" or the disenfranchised. Each church needs to weigh the mission to the community around them to show how important the factor is to their church according to what God has given them to steward. Such things as physical location (inner city or urban), people groups (ethnic, gender, etc...), specific brokenness (drugs, alcohol, domestic, specific kind of crime, etc...), and resources available can be considered.

### **A Positive Personal Result When You Reach Out to the Helpless**

James 1:27 says that when we reach out to the widow and orphan in their distress, we are able “To keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” Basically, when you wade into the muck of life as God defines it, the promise of this specific obedience is authentication of mission and clarity of address. Bottom line, the world will have less influence on you. Like a teenager who goes on a mission trip and opens themselves up to greater giving, they come back less enabled to be fooled by the world and its self-delusion.

### **LEADERSHIP STUDY QUESTIONS**

- 1) Have we reached out to the most broken in our area of influence?
- 2) Who are the people represented by the widow and orphan in our church and community? Exodus 22:22-24
- 3) Do we reach out as broken people saved by the blood of Jesus Christ or do we reach out from an impression of perfection?
- 4) Are we comfortable in our outreach ministry? Have we tried the uncomfortable?
- 5) Does our support for ministry outreach include our physical involvement? Is outreach ministry distant from us?
- 6) Is there parallel giving (of time, talents, and resources) in most areas of our outreach ministry?
- 7) Who are the “least of these brothers of mine?” Matthew 25:40
- 8) What will be the result of practicing true and undefiled religion according to James 1:27?

For Next Week:

- Read the next chapter
- Read the “fatherless” passages.
- Pray to see the “unfixable” in your local church ministry.
- Identify your churches purposefulness in reaching the broken, downtrodden, or irreparable people groups of your area.

## CHAPTER 3

### GOD'S FATHERLESS FOCUS FACTOR: FATHERHOOD

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”

- Psalm 68:5

“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,  
says the LORD Almighty.”

- 2 Corinthians 6:18

Fatherhood is God's norm for His kingdom. So when God addresses the “fatherless: it ought to cause us to pay attention. Since God points out in 43 Scripture passages that there is a lack of a father, it shows that He hates this part of the destructive nature of sin. Because God relates to us as a father, many from broken backgrounds have a hard time seeing the character of God from the perspective of a loving father. In our broken world our community has chosen an abnormal way of life that gives us a weaker foundation of presenting God the Father.

An absent father doesn't provide security for the child, nor can that absent father consistently and appropriately discipline. The fatherless child may come to the conclusion that since survival thus far hasn't included a father, survival in the future does not necessitate God the Father.<sup>7</sup>

Ministry in the local church must reflect God as our Father so that further unfolding of His person can heal the wounds of the downcast.

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<sup>7</sup> La Verne Tolbert, “The Relationship Between Fatherless Children and Their Concept of the Fatherhood of God,” *Lutheran Education* 139, no 3 (2010): 200.

### **Fatherhood is God's Choice Way of Relating to us**

An obvious observation of God's compassionate sight is that He has chosen to relate to us as a father.<sup>8</sup> A simple undeniable fact throughout Scripture needs to be included as one of our factors in "fatherless" outreach ministry. Fatherhood is counter cultural in today's world. God expects intentional fatherhood. John Eldredge states the personal fact and vision of God in regard to fathering.

We aren't meant to figure life out on our own. God wants to father us. The truth is, he *has* been fathering us for a long time-we just haven't had the eyes to see it. He wants to father us much more intimately, but we have to be in a posture to receive it. What that involves is a new way of seeing, a fundamental reorientation of how we look at life, and our situation in it.<sup>9</sup>

We are used to relating to God as our Father. Unfortunately, there are many who because of their broken frame of reference, have a hard time with this view. For our study, we will go beyond the dynamic of our own personal relationship with Father God and try to see fatherhood as God wants it displayed in ministry outreach. God our Father choses to Father us in relationship and this begs the question; should we chose to father the helpless in our ministry area of influence? God's role in fathering us is foundational in understanding God's mind and heart. The word "father" represents initiation, identity, love, strength, and direction past causing the birth of a child. A child without a father will search the rest of their life looking for those very items. Each person wants to know where they came from and how they got here. It is a normal question. Each person wants to be informed about their identity not just for physical health reasons, but for knowing how they fit in to the family and community as a whole. It is a start, a handle, to progress

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<sup>8</sup> Psalm 68:5; Luke 2:29.

<sup>9</sup> John Eldredge, *Fathered By God: Learning What Your Dad Could Never Teach You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 11.

in life. Each person wants to know about the love that brought them into this world. Each person holds valuable the people who raised them from innocent ignorance to a functioning structure of adult life. Each person wants to know about the sustaining strength of their heritage to live up to. Each person wants to find a moral fiber in their heritage because God has set eternity in their heart and it is a reflection of God the Father. How did I start? What should be my direction?

In a child's physical development they learn to be independent. First they roll over, then scoot, crawl, waddle, walk, and reach for toys, etc... Children are helped by strong loving hands and arms. Encouraging words and exclamations are expressed. Food, sleep, protection, and time are provided for by a mom and a dad. In general, the mom gives the child the strengths of nurturing; they are deep, life sustaining, and follow the child into adulthood. In general, the dad gives the strengths of empowerment; they are deep, life sustaining, and follow the child into adulthood. Each role is equally important to God. God made it this way and He knows what is best for His creation. Spend your time "bucking it," you move toward the chaos and destruction of a family. In today's terminology, anything different is a dysfunctional life style that does not represent the fullness of life that God wants us to have.

### **Fatherhood: A Preserving Salt in Society**

Fatherhood is often minimalized by society. Yet, it is crucial to the fabric of societal strength. In the past a father was seen as an asset to the community; a person of authority in their own home, but extended toward the community. Such is God our creator. A Father to us individually and as a people who look to Him collectively. There are repeated references to "the children of Israel: and God being a collective "father to

the fatherless.” Part of God’s exhortation concerning the fatherless is that we have left a community responsibility behind us. We are valuing individualism and compartmentalization over community and family. The value of fatherhood extends past the family and the individual father given. Society as a whole benefits from a multitude of responsible fathers who take their role seriously. Leading and being responsible for your own family is just the beginning of a fathers influence in the world. David Blankenhorn founder and president of the Institute for American Values informs us of the strength of fatherhood in society:

Fatherhood is a social role that obligates men to their biological offspring. For two reasons, it is society’s most important role for men. First, fatherhood, more than any other male activity, helps men to become good men: more likely to obey the law, to be good citizens, and to think about the needs of others. Put more abstractly, fatherhood bends maleness-in particular, male aggression-toward prosocial purposes. Second, fatherhood privileges children. In this respect, fatherhood is a social invention designed to supplement maternal investment in children with paternal investment in children.<sup>10</sup>

David Blankenhorn breaks down the paternal investment of fatherhood as follows.

Paternal investment enriches children in four ways. First, it provides them with their father’s physical protection. Second, it provides them with a father’s money and other material resources. Third, and probably the most important, it provides them with what might be termed paternal cultural transmission: a father’s distinctive capacity to contribute to the identity, character, and competence of his children. Fourth, and most obviously, paternal investment provides children with the day-to-day nurturing-feeding them, playing with them, telling them a story-that they want and need from both of their parents.<sup>11</sup>

The lengthy quote is intentional to attempt capturing the many strong outlines of the importance of the role of fatherhood. God the Creator simply states the importance by the implication of the word, “fatherless.” In our ministry, do we elevate the importance of

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<sup>10</sup> David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995), 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

fatherhood or have our churches become empty shells echoing the falsehoods and forms of godliness that our society dictates to us? Outreach to the disenfranchised needs to have the powerful strength of fatherhood. There is a longing for its strength whether in the anger of lack or the frustration of a broken family.

Dr. Kent Hughes with pastoral advice reminds us of the power of fatherhood.

Men, as fathers you have such power! You will have this terrible power till you die, like it or not – in your attitude toward authority, in your attitude toward women, in your regard for God and the Church. What terrifying responsibilities! This is truly the power of life and death.<sup>12</sup>

Again, we are looking at God's vision of the fatherless and how that instructs our local church ministry. Although there are other minor biblical metaphors of God revealed to us, a fatherhood view is how God sees ministry. He has placed His Son, Jesus Christ, as head of the church. God has approved Jesus Christ as the doorway to redemption. Fatherhood is central to our everyday relationship with God. Does our local church ministry include the aspect of fatherhood? If we are to have a ministry that represents fatherhood, then it also should be comfortable with masculinity. Present day exhorters like John Eldredge are raising a voice to be unapologetic concerning manhood. There are some strong masculine characteristics of God that are unused in many churches and our ministry outreach can suffer for it.

All masculine initiation is ultimately spiritual. The tests and challenges, the joys and adventures are all designed to awaken a man's soul, draw him into contact with the masculine in himself, in other men, in the world, and in God, as Father.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 47.

<sup>13</sup> Eldredge, *Fathered by God*, 209.



In one word, fatherhood, God emphasizes the importance of both masculinity and fathering. God's challenge regarding the "fatherless" is not cultural and it is not sexist, it is a revelation as to how God wants us to proceed as a holy people to reach out to a spiritually dark world. Is there space in our ministry area for manhood?

### **Space for Fatherhood**

My father who should not have succeeded at fatherhood except for the power of God in his life had space for manhood. As pastor, shepherd, and preacher of the highest order in my eyes, he loved God's people. In modern thinking, no dad at age 8, a mother in a mental institution, never staying in a school for more than a half year and on his own at an early age should not have bode well. The world has no answers for such brokenness. For all the heaviness of life he could have focused on, he chose joy. In my adult years, I have come to realize that first his joy was rooted in his Savior, Jesus Christ. The second source of joy was being married to my mom and a father to six children who experienced what he never had. With a son on both ends of four girls, camping was our economical family vacation of choice. Fishing trips and men's roundup were also common in the Northwest. My dad loved people, so it was not common to point out that this was a "guy" thing and that was a "girl" thing. Depending on the church, he would steer his six member tribe into Boys Club, Kings Sons or Kings Daughters back before AWANA became popular. Pit Bar-B-Q's were popular in attracting men. He brought us along to men's prayer breakfasts. He encouraged us to be involved in the youth groups and Sunday School, always taking a special interest in what we were learning. Reflecting back, the church body ministered to my dad by modeling other father-son relationships. He pastored a church, but depended upon men spiritually leading and being responsible

stewards of their families and church body. A service he always put great time and effort into was the Lord's Supper. All the elected spiritual leadership of the church sat in the front and served the congregation. It was always understood that the special "benevolent" offering only taken at this service would be distributed by the discerning men of the church and applied to the needs of our own congregation. The communion service always had a special family feel to it. This is what I mean when I say a space for fatherhood. In this world's value on words of "inclusiveness" and "accommodation," do we have space in our fellowships for fatherhood, motherhood, and the celebration of children? We are not representing God favorably if we think spirituality is blending distinct roles together to the point of meaninglessness. There are broken people who do not know what a father looks like. There are searching people who have not experienced a mother. There are devastated people who have not seen children as Jesus sees them. Broken people gravitate and cautiously approach a strength that may heal their wounds. Fatherhood for all time will represent strength. Is it the godly strength that God expects to be applied to the wounds of the downtrodden?

#### LEADERSHIP STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1) Have we provided a "fatherhood" representation of God in our worship and outreach?
- 2) What kind of brokenness is addressed by fatherhood? Psalm 68:5
- 3) Do we have programs and methods that help strengthen the fathers of the church and our view of God as a Father?
- 4) Do we have a testimony of strength in our church that represents God the Father?
- 5) Is the strength of family represented in our congregation? 2 Corinthians 6:18

For Next Week:

- Read the next chapter
- Read the "fatherless" passages.
- Pray for fatherhood to be seen in your local church ministry.
- Identify your churches celebration of fatherhood, motherhood, and children.

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