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FATHERS

June 20, 2002

Recently I read that British researchers had documented the desirability of both boys and girls being reared in homes where there is a father. These are not new findings. It has been known for years that an **involved father** has a profound influence on his children. It is also well known that children from broken homes have a higher risk of developing behavioral and mental problems in their adult life. The research demonstrated that children with an involved father were less likely to be delinquent, they were more likely to pursue educational opportunities, and were in general healthier both physically and mentally.

The authors spelled out what they meant by involved fathers. An involved father spent time with his children, he read to them, he played with them, he taught them sports and he taught them values. All of these things are described in the various languages of love that Gary Chapman described in his book, *The Five Languages of Love*. Interestingly they did not include giving gifts and affirmation in the article.

I have to admit that I did not read the research report. I only read a news release. Even so I believe that it was reported accurately.

The article stimulated me to look back at my experiences fathering five children and asking myself did I do the right things. Here are some of my answers.

Inspecting my career as a father I realized that I did what an involved father should do. First I was involved in their care early in their lives. I have to admit that there were some things that I avoided, but I bathed them on occasions, often dressed them for bed and read them a bedtime story almost every night. They particularly liked Uncle Remus stories read in dialect. I also told them stories about some of my adventures as a boy and others about my stay in Panama when I was an intern. I often told them about current events in my life. I rough housed with my children. We played bull fighters and the bull (I was the bull) and also bucking bronco (I was the bronco). They loved this. When I went to medical meetings I always took the time to buy them new children's books and little novelty toys. When I walked in the door on my return they never failed to run up and say, "What did you bring me, daddy?" They would then open my luggage to get their gifts. I rarely failed them. If I had a difficult time finding opportunity to shop, I would buy something in the airport.

Being involved also means doing something with them on week-ends and vacations. We bought family tickets to the football games at the university and attended regularly. We family camped. We only had two of our children when we

began our camping careers. It was a disaster because we did not have the money to buy good equipment, but we did it. We learned a lot from that trip and did better the next time. In time we bought a pop-up camper and camped all over the US. We did a 10,000 mile camping trip to the west coast and most of the major national parks. When we drove into the driveway at home we wanted to turn around and keep on going. We had a wonderful time. Later we camped at the beach, in the Florida Keys, and in New England. You can have fun camping with your children. They also get to know you more intimately. Because we liked camping we continued to camp while we boated. We had a runabout to begin with, but later bought a houseboat that would sleep the entire family. From this we graduated to a cabin cruiser and finally to a sailboat. All of these could sleep at least five or six people. Living on a boat is like camping with a trailer. On our boats we were able to teach them so much more. Our children learned to fish, to water ski, to operate the boat safely, and to cook. They learned about nature as it existed in the lakes, rivers and oceans.

Knowing that Boy and Girl Scout programs were highly educational and character building, my wife and I were involved in scouting. All our sons became Eagle Scouts, and our daughters achieved the equivalent level in Girl Scouts. We took fifty mile hikes, we learned survival skills, all about nature and many other things. We took historical trail trips to learn about the history of our country. The boys learned to shoot guns and bows and arrows. Most of all they learned good manners, loyalty, trustworthiness, helpfulness, courtesy, and kindness. They learned to respect the environment and to honor their God and country. I want to add that scouts are not the only activities that have worth. Young Life, Awana and Youth for Christ are recommended. Our four oldest children participated in Young Life and we greatly benefited by their participation. I have to admit that they did not benefit from their participation in the youth group in our church. It was so poorly led that it could not have been of benefit.

My wife and I participated in their scouting adventures. I was a Cub Pack Leader, a Scoutmaster and Explorer advisor, she was a den mother and Brownie leader and did a lot of administrative duties. During my tenure in all of these I was able to help some of them come to know Christ as their Savior. That included one of my assistant scoutmasters.

Our children were affirmed by both their mother and I daily. Conrad Baars, a psychiatrist, wrote a book entitled *Born Only Once*. In it he described what he called the deprivation syndrome. People who suffered this syndrome had never been affirmed. Affirmation is unconditional love. "I love you because you are you." It is the same kind of love that God has for us. We have to love our children for who they are, and just as they are. Over and again I see people in my office who suffer from this syndrome. They all come from dysfunctional homes, often single parent homes.

One of the things we desired in rearing our children was that they be persons of integrity. We did, therefore, encourage truth telling. We punished lying when appropriate. I can truthfully say that today they are persons of integrity.

Responsibility was another virtue that we wanted them to possess. As they grew up we gave them as much responsibility as we thought they could handle. If they mishandled it, we let them suffer the consequences of their failure. This approach was especially useful when they reached their teenage years. To encourage responsibility, we had them take summer jobs and part time jobs during the school year. They all worked part time during their college careers contributing greatly to the cost of their education. Because they contributed, none of them finished college or graduate school with any debt.

I was not a Christian during the early years of my career as a father. My oldest was 15 when I came to know the Lord. But one thing was true as soon as my spiritual life began, I tried to learn all I could about how to be a Christian father. I guess I must have been successful. My youngest daughter once said to me, "Daddy, it was a good thing you became a Christian. If you hadn't we would be as messed up as (some of) our friends are." Certainly our youngest children were exposed to real Christianity and as mentioned above all came to know the Lord.

All of our children are now over 40 years of age. We have seen them succeed in life. To be sure, they stumbled occasionally along the way, but they are all confessing Christians and are rearing their children successfully.

I am sure the Britishers who did the research at the University of London were inquiring into the problems that exist in England today. Almost 60% of children born there are illegitimate and will grow up without a father, or if they have one he will be a stepfather. They have a rising incidence of delinquency. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck demonstrated years ago that most delinquents came from homes where there was no father. It is a certainty that the enormous rate of delinquency in our society, especially among blacks, is caused by fatherless homes.

If you are reading this and are a father with minor children, please take the time to inspect your role as a father and what you do to teach them how to live a life that has worth. It has been said that it is easy to produce a child, but it is difficult to produce a child of worth. **Fathers are absolutely necessary to accomplish this.**