A THEOLOGICAL NORMATIVE TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF FATHERHOOD
IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

by

Reginald Percival Stepney

Date: 12/17/2015

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

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This thesis examines the theological correlation between the role of the church, the identity and role of the African American male, and the effectiveness of fatherhood. The study begins with an in-depth analysis of how absentee fathers cause a crisis in the family. The absence of fathers from the home causes children to suffer financially, socially and psychologically, and therefore causes a disruption in the community as a whole. Focus on the Family founder and leader, Dr. James Dobson, confirms that “our very survival as a people will depend upon the presence or absence of masculine leadership in millions of homes.” In person interviews of African American Christian males and interpretation of the scriptures are just two of the methods used in this study to explore the theological norm of fatherhood. Collectively, the case studies and statistical data within this study explore attempts to remedy the crisis through governmental policies and networking within the community. The final chapter examines the role of urban churches and clergy in teaching effective fatherhood practices. Within the conclusion, it is made clear that the church is responsible for establishing the theological framework and principles for understanding the intended role of being a father. Another conclusion of this study is the acknowledgement of the African American community’s role in shaping and reforming the identity and role of the African American male as a father in the home. The African American community and the church must continue working in tandem to encourage organic social networks that will promote a model for effective fatherhood practices.
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INTRODUCTION

Families in black communities are in peril of collapsing. A vital factor contributing to this demise is African American fathers’ lack of presence in the home. Not only is a father’s interaction and presence within the family paramount for the stabilizing of the home, but the father’s presence has a direct and indirect correlation for reduction of some of the social ills in society. If the black community and society want to slow down and even reverse the collapse of the family in the African American community, then black fathers must understand the responsibilities associated with fatherhood. America as a strong nation must learn and understand fathers’ value and worth in the process of redemption of the family. In view of the father’s key role in the home, there are some questions that arise and challenges that need to be addressed. For example, we might ask: What are the roles and responsibilities associated with fatherhood in the black community? Who are the ones that will help African American males, and especially black youths in the inner cities, overcome some of the social ills that they presently face due to historical or social factors beyond their control? Who are the examples or models that young men in the inner cities are to look to or identify with in learning how to become a responsible man and perhaps a father? Who will help address the high rate of births in the African American community that occur out of wedlock? Lastly, what part does the black church or Black Theology play in giving a remedy to some of the crisis?

Shall the answer to understanding fatherhood in the black community come from pop culture, with its songs and movies that do not always show black males or black families in a positive light? When it comes to the political sector, the Republicans and the
Democrats are not always united or aligned with black community needs. Will help be offered from feminist groups that may have an agenda against the cultural male populace’s dominance in society? Will help be offered from news agencies that do not always show the black community in a positive manner? Will news agencies continue to seek after ratings at the expense of black lives that matter or will it fight for justice in black communities? Yes, all of these groups and sectors of society mentioned can play a role in helping the African American father understand fatherhood.

However, my thoughts contributing to the discourse in addressing the crisis facing African American fathers, the black family, and the black community, in this thesis will be offered from a theological perspective. I believe through the teachings, tradition and principles of the church, where theology is embedded, there is a way to help African American fathers understand fatherhood. It is faith, as well as the sacrament of marriage, that may enable black men to have a positive influence in their home and community. It is the church, therefore, that must make its voice heard clearly.

My ideal audience here is comprised of Senior Pastors seeking to support and encourage fathers through programs. Another audience is absentee fathers. I want them to know that their presence is needed to guide their children’s development for spiritual growth and to be a positive influence in society. Finally, my audience is young millennials who are learning to be new fathers, especially those who never had a father as a role model.

In this thesis, I first want to explore the crisis facing African American fathers in a historical and social perspective, as well as address the crisis facing marriage in the black community. Secondly, I hope to convey through theological norms that marriage,
fatherhood and the church form the foundation needed to understand fatherhood. The church must emphasize how marriage can be beneficial to both parties. In doing so, this will help work toward keeping marriage healthy. Thirdly, through the aid of biblical case studies and interviews with African American Christian fathers, I will defend the view that fathers are critical to the stability of the family. Fourthly, I will focus on the need for reformation for the African American male via outside agencies, father support groups and aid within the black community itself. Lastly, I will look at the role of the church, the body of Christ, and especially the role of the black church in supporting existing marriages and, ultimately, fatherhood, and investigate the church’s purpose in strengthening the weakened family and uplifting fathers by developing their skills so they can be a positive influence on their children and community. The influence on children and community can lead to a change in the way society views African American male children. The church’s involvement is required to advance a perspective on fatherhood that is theologically grounded—although such a theological position does not get the attention from society that it deserves. Nevertheless, the church should lead the conversation concerning the positive impact that fathers can have on the family and community, with the hope that society will begin to see that fathers are crucial agents for helping to alleviate some of its social ills.¹

LITERATURE IN REVIEW

Researchers have conducted years of studies and written dozens of articles about a problem in America that seems to be growing at epic proportions while negatively impacting the institutions of family and society. This major crisis in our society is called “fatherlessness.” Social science distinguishes between fathers who are custodial and noncustodial, and residential and nonresidential, and also determines how much interaction is required for the development and support of the child.1 With the alarming rise of this fatherlessness, the traditional two-parent home will soon become less than the norm, and even obsolete.

Social science describes the nuclear family as having the traditional components of a father, mother, and child.2 Each component within the unit plays a vital role in contributing to the family’s welfare and the development of a healthy emotional, functional, and stable unit, building up the wider society as well as the family’s specific racial and ethnic community. While each component of the traditional family contributes to the family’s development, the father is pivotal to the success of the family. One of the reasons for this has to do with the father’s distinctive role of leadership in the family. Dr. James Dobson, founder and leader of the organization Focus on the Family, notes, “The Western world stands at a great crossroads in history. It is my opinion that our very survival as a people will depend upon the presence or absence of masculine leadership in millions of homes. I believe with everything within me that husbands hold the keys to

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the preservation of the family.”  

Another way that the father’s role is critical can be seen in the financial support of the family as a breadwinner. Later in the paper we see what happens when the father’s support is withdrawn or substantially lacking. The father’s presence and interaction in the home are pivotal in the development of a child’s social, cognitive, psychological, and interpersonal-relationship skills. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are four benefits of positive relationships between fathers and their children. First, the father’s involvement is critical even for very young children. His presence contributes to the development of emotional security, curiosity, and math and verbal skills. Second, high levels of involvement by fathers in activities with their children, such as eating meals together, going on outings, and helping with homework are associated with fewer behavior problems, higher levels of sociability, and increased levels of school performance among children and adolescents. Third, it is the active involvement of the father in the child’s schooling, such as volunteering at school and attending school meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and class events that contributes to the child’s success. Fourth, father-child relationships affect daughters as well as sons. These four benefits are essential for the development of the child to be productive in society. Yet there is a fifth benefit that is paramount in the home and historically present in the African American community. The fifth benefit is the development of the child’s spirituality or his/her faith. This fifth task or challenge of the father is to set up parameters to see to it that the child has a firm theological framework to build a strong relationship with God.

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4 Ibid., 38.
Beyond the home, children and the communities in which they are imbedded suffer because of the father’s lack of involvement. The suffering of the children is manifest in their poor psychological, biological, cognitive, and social development. Studies have concluded that children who do not have a father in the home are at a higher risk of achieving low test scores in school and of becoming criminals, homeless, dropouts, sexually and physically abused, pregnant, and drug users. The statistics are startling for fatherless homes: 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes; 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes; 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders come from fatherless homes; and 85% of all youth in prisons grew up in fatherless homes. The statistics mentioned are alarming, and we can easily concentrate on the negative aspect of the data. However if we remove our focus on the negative and place it on the solutions for change we can help fathers see their need in the home.

Negative effects of fatherlessness are not limited to children. Some of society’s social, economic and political upheavals are both directly and indirectly related to fatherlessness. Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a report in 1965 concerning the family, stating that “A community that allows a large number of young men to grow up in broken homes, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any rational expectation about the future-that community asks for and

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7 D.H.H.S. Bureau of Census; Center for Disease Control; Fulton Co. Georgia jail populations, Texas Dept. of Corrections.
gets chaos”.\(^8\) Indirectly, the burden of fatherlessness is felt by society because of the billions of dollars the government has to expend for welfare programs, youth programs, child support reinforcement, family courts, and other federally funded programs to ensure children and mothers are taken care of due to the lack of support from fathers.\(^9\)

Unfortunately there are still “powers that be” in the political, economic, and judicial sectors that believe that Moynihan was correct in his viewpoints of the black community. The perpetuation of thinking negatively of African Americans is continued subtly through education curricula and IQ tests that are biased culturally.

Fatherlessness is a major problem in our society that cuts across all ethnic and cultural lines. In comparison to the rest of society, however the absence of custodial and residential fathers has a greater and more negative impact in the black community than in any other ethnic community. In the black community, the troubles associated with fatherlessness seem to be more visible and heightened, especially in the inner cities.

Research shows that 25% of all families and 60% of black families are single-parent families with most of the lone parents unwed.\(^10\) The literature further lists several factors documenting why there are high numbers of noncustodial and nonresidential fathers in the black communities. The factors that most drastically limit the fathers’ involvement in the home include, but are not limited to, imprisonment, drug usage, homicide, unemployment and underemployment, racism, prejudicial and biased government tax

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\(^9\) Ibid., 44.

laws and policies, divorce, unhealthy relationships with the child’s mother, mothers keeping the child away from the fathers, young teenage parents, the high birthrate of children born out of wedlock, health issues and the rise of the matriarchal dominance of the single woman. While these factors are present in far too many homes, they do not excuse fathers for being irresponsible in carrying out their parental duties nor sanction their lack of presence in the home. However the literature does highlight some historical, social, and economic trends and issues that confront the African American male more so than any other ethnic and gender group. Historian John Hope Franklin in his book *From Slavery to Freedom* sheds some historical light on what happened to blacks before arriving in America. “As the first known Africans arrived in the New World at Jamestown in 1619 there began a systematic process of dehumanization of persons and disintegration of families and community”. The harsh treatment suffered by the African America male was brutal, dehumanizing, humiliating and degrading. Fortunately through the support of the church and the extended family, and by taking ownership of their actions, the majority of African American males were able to rise from the ashes of victim to the status of victor. Some of the men did not let a crisis, a difficult path or a history of atrocities keep them from rising to social prominence. Dr. Samuel Proctor wrote an essay called *The Substance of Things Hoped For: The Faith Epic of African Americans* that Forrest Harris Sr. used together with some other authors in his book *What Does it Mean to be Black and Christian?* “What does it mean to be Black and Christian” is a question that challenges us to probe beneath the surface of quantifiable data, the time worn myths and stereotypes, and learn what lies beneath.

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CHAPTER 1: CRISIS IN THE FAMILY

Historical crisis in the African American community and family

The problems that the African American male has faced that demoralized his identity and manhood stem from obstacles that include, of course, slavery. These troubles can be traced as far back as the African male’s capture in West Africa to his enslaved voyage to America and his harsh treatment on the plantation.¹ The troubles that African American males faced due to slavery were not the only problems confronting the black male. Other obstacles included incarceration, racism, poor health, drugs, low education, inner city turmoil, unreasonable housing prices, politics, governmental interference and problematic parenting relationships. Sometimes these problems have led to suicide. An example of what can result when African American fathers cannot overcome obstacles was shared by a family member of Ollie Hartley: “Ollie Hartley leapt to his death from the roof of his 14 story apartment building in New York City. He was a young black male, and tired of America ‘taking his soul.’ He had struggled incessantly with a racist society to improve his manhood both to himself and to his wife and two children.”²

Studies have shown that the history of slavery is indirectly responsible in contributing to the demise of the African American male’s role in fatherhood.³ Too often the enslaved male was discouraged in the role of fatherhood, and was sometimes humiliated in front of his wife and children by the slave owners by beatings and lashings. He even had to watch his wife being raped by the plantation owners. Thus, any romantic

¹ Daniel Black, Dismantling of Black Manhood (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1997), 4.
² Ibid., 17.
gestures an African American man made towards his wife could have dire consequences, and plantation owners discouraged black men from being suitable mentors for their children by establishing slave laws that gave fathers no legal authority over their children. Courts leaned to the side of the plantation owners. Unfortunately, after emancipation, things did not get much better. For example, state child protection agencies disproportionately removed black children from their homes, and governmental and welfare programs set up laws for mothers receiving benefits, which discouraged fathers from helping or taking up residence in the home for fear that the needed subsidized benefits would be reduced or stopped.

African American fathers have had to fight through economic woes that have hindered their role as primary provider in the family. Due to unemployment, underemployment or low wages, black men have not always been easily able to financially support their family. Therefore, if they could not contribute financially, they did not want to participate with the family in other respects. Additionally, economic hardship is a predictor of crime.

**Social crisis in the African American community and family**

Challenges that placed undue pressure on the black family, causing it to weaken, have included changes in social, cultural, and moral codes—one of the most significant being the growth of female-led households and their stigmatization. During and after

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4 Ibid., ix.
5 Ibid., 148.
6 Ibid., 20.
slavery the fact of single female-led households was not frowned upon. For, as Robert Mincy asks, “who knew why such a woman was now alone? Who would judge her for this status if her fiancée or husband was lynched? Or she was with child because she has been raped by the master.” Mincy also observed, “At certain times in the painful history of race relations in this country desertion and victimization were likely causes of single motherhood as moral failure. In any individual cases, who could know? Who would ask”\(^8\)? In response, the black community developed a tradition of embracing all its children, even fair skinned ones. The practice of single female lead households is complex and is accepted by the larger black community in direct tension with the middle-class black church, which thinks divorce and out of wedlock practices should be changed. The single female-led household can be even more complex when the circumstances leading up to the one parent home are taken out of context or the reason why there are so many single female-led households is misunderstood. The single parent home may have come into being because of death, incarceration, physical and emotional abuse and abandonment by the male. For the African American community to be condescending or negative without the whole story is to do an injustice to female-led households who have raised children to be productive and successful in society.

As a result, the nation has made it a low priority to study the demise of black community and its families. For instance, there are current social welfare policy reforms that have created barriers to black family maintenance or even family formation that go unnoticed by the general public and that prevent low-skilled women (mothers) from attempting to leave welfare and find employment to increase their income. As a result of

not being able to shake off the welfare grip, single black women become government dependent through a binding contract that will ensure a monthly check comes. On the surface the financial support appears helpful, but instead of assistance, the African American woman is kept from reaching independent financial freedom or of receiving support from the father. The policy states that the single mother does not work and that she could not marry an employed male (a man who is often the father of her children). As Andrew Billingsley points out in *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder*, it is a bitter irony that “The traditional family system that slavery could not destroy during 200 years of slavery may be dismantled in a few short years by the modern industrial transition.” In addition to the industrial revolution dismantling the family, it has barred the low-skilled African American male from reaping economic benefits from industrial high-wage skilled employment.

However, African Americans need not look simply on the outside of their community but also within in regards to fatherlessness. In essence, African Americans themselves are contributors to the problem of fatherlessness—and this also includes the church. Unfortunately, the church, which is supposed to be a proponent of fatherhood, has contributed to the problem, as some church leaders have turned a deaf ear to the cries of the fathers. Obviously fathers themselves have contributed to the problem. Fathers have stopped taking ownership and responsibility for care of their children. If in fact governmental policies mentioned previously are contributors to the demise of fatherhood, then it only stands to reason that those that contribute to the problem should have a hand in promoting and educating fathers as to the value of being a good father in the home. For

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there are still those who believe in fatherhood, who believe that there are things being done that may help to bring some solution to the problem of fatherlessness.

Another reason for the black community’s demise stems from a lack of concern for absentee fathers. The African American community should be first to offer solutions to the troubles in the black community because they have firsthand knowledge of the struggles that threaten to break down the community and weaken the family. The black community is not naïve about fatherlessness. The black community needs to work on its problems from within and not wait for outside assistance, especially when that assistance fails to account fully for what are deemed “black pathologies” and life.10

If the African American male is to overcome certain crises in order to be a theological force in the home, he has to see that all is not lost. He has to see beyond the hopelessness that seems to be weighing heavily upon him and see that there is hope for the future. If the African American male will be open to accept help that can be offered to him or begin to look within himself to see that he has God-given talents, fortitude and capabilities to hurdle over his obstacles, then there is the chance that the African American father can be reformed in order to make a significant difference in his children, home and community. The African American male can heal from society’s negative views of him and can be a viable asset to his community when he deals with the systemic problem of fatherlessness and not its symptoms.

As African American men struggled to support their family and failed to do so because of, for example, lack of education, lack of opportunities, and, of course, a deep history of discrimination and prejudice, it is hardly surprising that they found that crime

10 Ibid., 65.
could pay the bills. Unfortunately, as more and more black men found themselves incarcerated, the problem of missing fathers was only exacerbated.\(^\text{11}\)

**Crisis with youth in the inner cities**

These troubles that African American fathers face did not start in a vacuum. The troubles they are experiencing originated during the time of their youth. If there isn’t any earlier intervention to deal with problems of black youth in the inner city, there is the chance that their troubles will become adult problems. Also there is the likelihood that the chaos will be passed down from one generation to the next. The Bible said a seed will produce after its own kind. What needs to be done is to change the seed from a bad one to a good one. When there are no male role models in the home to teach youth honest and respectful morality, then there is the chance that a young male takes on vices such as stealing, killing, cheating, and pre-marital sex to compensate for the void in his life. To obtain the love that black youth crave they will join gangs and other deviant groups for acceptance. Another problem that occurs when there is no father in the home is the lack of seeing a positive male example in the home. In essence, who will teach the youth how to treat a young lady in the proper manner? Besides not having the proper guide on how to treat a young lady, who will encourage the male to stay with the teenage mother after the child is born? Who will be there to teach the young black male how to be a father?

\(^{11}\text{Ibid., 56.}\)
Crisis in male and female relationships

In light of the father’s significant role in being a role model to guide youth to find their well-being in society, the father’s absence can cause irreparable harm and lead to the breakdown of the family. The reasons for the father’s absence vary. There are times when the father’s absence is beyond his control because of death, divorce, or having to go to war. A father may also choose not to play a role in the lives of his children or to have a relationship with the mother of his child. Further, his lack of involvement can be the result of the mother of the child not wanting to have a relationship with the father or not wanting him to have anything to do with the child. Because the father has limited visitation he feels hopeless and so chooses to abandon the child and his responsibilities. In order to avoid this pitfall of fathers abandoning their children, mothers should reconsider the limited visitation rights and allow fathers to see their offspring more often. Hopefully with more visitations, the father and child interaction will benefit the child’s welfare. Unfortunately, the lack of cooperation between the parents can lead to a myriad of other problems in male and female relationships.

The problem that the Black male has to overcome in order to be a father with positive influence concerns his relationship with the mother of his child. If the black male accepts the negative perception of identifying women as mere objects of sexual gratification and not persons to respect, honor and love, these negatives images will continue to destroy the home and the community. Together with the problem of males viewing black females

as sex objects are other faulty perceptions the black male has towards the female. Here are some of the viewpoints carried by men:

1. Black men perceive that Black women have too much control and power in the home;
2. Black men perceive that Black women have more opportunities in society than Black men today.
3. Black men perceive that Black women have inadvertently helped keep the Black male down because of their low regard for them.  
   In order for there to be healthy relationships between the male and the female, both have to examine their views on sexuality and masculinity. Black women have to see themselves in a different light. June Lee said, “Black women must not allow themselves to be victimized by males who steal their purity for selfish gratification”. Also African American males and females cannot build healthy relationships by listening to exploitative music and media images that stereotype each other in a bad light.

When male and female relationship troubles and problems exist, these can easily spill over to the couple not getting married or having struggles in their marriage.

**Crisis in marriage in the African American family**

Unfortunately, not everyone subscribes to the notion that marriage is in his or her best interest. The reasons vary as to why people do not embrace the concept of marriage, but

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14 Ibid., 23.
15 Ibid., 24.
include individual ideologies, governmental and institutional policies and laws, individual choices, age maturity, educational background, gender issues, male-to-female ratios, economic earnings, and alternative lifestyles and choices that include cohabitation and domestic partners that in differing ways contribute to the challenge of getting married. These barriers can weaken the traditional family structure and contribute to fatherlessness. The reasons just mentioned are not the exhaustive list of why people are not moving toward marriage, but perhaps there can be changes made to show the benefits for marriage to make marriage more appealing and in the same junction make fatherlessness less attractive.

One other challenge to marriage and active fatherhood involves a shift in cultural norms in sex, marriage and childbearing. With the sexual revolution in the 1960s, sex outside marriage lost its taboo. Unfortunately, society has overexposed the population to sex through sex-appeal advertisements via cinema, television shows, magazines, and through lax sex laws that have encouraged sexual freedom without commitment or lasting relationships. Additionally, cohabitation became more commonplace, with unmarried couples living together and sharing and pooling resources. Traditionally such living arrangements were stigmatized in the black community, but cohabitation was seen as appealing because it provided many of the benefits of marriage but with less commitment and greater individual autonomy. Thus, increasingly many childbearing black couples (in fact, couples of all races) saw cohabitation as a viable alternative to marriage.

Cohabitation is the absence of a contract or covenant and is widely viewed as a perquisite

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16 Ibid., 17.
for marriage, opting for a more casual relationship with no boundaries or expectations for a future, whereas marriage is a more formal commitment and covenant with expectations of a lasting relationship. Unfortunately, cohabitation is a negative alternative to marriage and to fatherhood,\(^{18}\) as shown by these statistics. In 1997, 4.13 million couples were cohabitating outside of wedlock, compared with 0.5 million in 1960. Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu estimated that nearly half of American children will spend some time in cohabitating households. Wade Horn argues that cohabitation is a weak form of family, especially as cohabitating couples break up at a much higher rate than married couples. In *Fatherhood, Cohabitation, and Marriage*, Wade F. Horn, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services, summarizes the importance of fathers to children’s well-being. He explains that "fatherlessness is a significant risk factor for poor developmental outcomes for children.\(^{19}\) This connection has led some observers to view cohabitation as a substitute or at least an alternative to marriage. Horn argues, however, that marriage is the best option for children and that cohabitation is a weak family structure compared with marriage. Secondly, children that are born to cohabitating couples will eventually see their fathers less in their later years than in early childhood. Seventy-five percent of children born to cohabitating parents will see their parents separate before the child reaches the age of 16 compared to thirty-three percent of children born to married couples.\(^{20}\)

Due to barriers and challenges in marriage, questions arise as to whether there is anything that can be done for the support of marriage? What can be done about the

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 39.

\(^{19}\) Wade Horn, “Fatherhood, Cohabitation and Marriage”, *Gender Issues* 23.4 (Fall 2006), 25.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 41.
cultural shift in the traditional norm of marriage, sex and family? What efforts can be employed to make marriage more appealing or what public policies can be legislated or implemented to help make fathers want to take a more active role in raising their children inside marriage?

One challenge to marriage that seems to be a major focus in the black community, more than any other ethnic groups, and that poses a major risk to the institution of marriage is fiscal parity. Fiscal parity occurs when the male and the female are equally or near equally bringing in the same amount of money to the household. Marital unions based on fiscal parity are more stable when parity is maintained. This concept of fiscal parity exposes African American marriages to a double risk: one arises when one of the partners loses a job; the other arises when one of the partners manages to experience a significant increase in income. 21 It is not fiscal parity that may increase the risk of divorce; it is the perceived threat of black women earning more than men. The greater earnings by women will sometimes play on the male’s ego causing more problems in the home. Black women are more likely than whites or Hispanics to expect their male partners to have sufficient income before the marriage. Likewise it is reasonable to assume that African American males have similar expectations of the woman so he can have added support for the family. 22 Doors that were once closed to women in the labor, political, medical, law and ministerial fields that were considered a man’s position have opened up for women. The glass ceiling has been broken and some African American males are not able to handle the changing landscape for women.

22 Ibid., 66.
Due to such challenges in marriage, questions arise as to whether there is anything that can be done for the support of marriage. What can be done about the cultural shift in the traditional norm of marriage, sex and family? What efforts can be employed to make marriage more appealing or what public policies can be implemented to help make fathers want to take a more active role in raising their children inside marriage? The solutions to these questions will be addressed later in the paper. Problems in male and female relationships are fueled not only by internal struggles, but outside entities or social policies can also cause problems in the black community between male and female.

Crisis in public policy

One problem that impedes active fatherhood has to do with public policies on welfare and welfare reforms aimed at poverty by the government. In an effort to help single-mother households with resources and to lift them over the poverty line, the government unintentionally does more harm than good by taking subsidized money away from the household if nonresidential or custodial fathers do not help with child support. The problem with this sort of government subsidy is that it pushes fathers away who do not make enough money to assist with child support. Therefore, in order for the money to continue to come from the government greater than what the father can give, the father will stop giving any support. This scenario of government assistance versus the father’s contributions is a dilemma. Does the father abandon his child because of a shortage of finances or does he allow the government to continue to give aid to his family?\(^\text{23}\) The government sometimes discourages marriage because of tax policies that punish married

couples. Additionally, as Larry Reeves notes, “Among the ongoing threat to Black families is the government’s blind-sided thrust to jail African American males, many of whom are fatherless due to prescribed family court system that favors mothers over fathers, an economic system that keeps Black males out of the system.” Not only have these practices eroded the moral fabric of society but the divorce issue has placed fatherhood in jeopardy and the children suffer as well. “According to the National Center for Health Statistics, a child living with his/her divorced mother, compared to a child living with both parents, is 75 percent more likely to need professional treatment for emotional or behavioral problems and is almost twice as likely to repeat a grade of school, is more likely to suffer chronic asthma, frequent headaches, and/or bedwetting, develop a stammer or speech defect, suffer from anxiety or depression, and be diagnosed as hyperactive.

If there are going to be changes in the black community and family, or if the African American male is going to maximize fatherhood, he has to begin to build his understanding of fatherhood on theological principles.

26 Ibid., 2.
CHAPTER 2: THEOLOGICAL NORMS FOR FATHERHOOD

Traditionally in the African American community, the theological foundation of the scriptures, tradition, church experience and reason was taught in the home to shelter the black family from the harsh winds of economic struggle, social oppression and racism in society.¹ Scholars have found a correlation between commitments to Christian principles to one’s citizenship.² The Bible admonishes parents to train up a child in the way he should go and when he gets old he will not depart from it (Prov 22:6). Which parent has the responsibility to teach the Christian principles can be a question of debate, especially if both parents are rooted and grounded theologically and have the capability to nurture a child’s spiritual development. Parity among the sexes as disciplinarians, decision makers, and teachers of the child is today being accepted as the norm when those traditional roles were once left solely to fathers to handle. The concept of equality among mother and father should not be thought of as something new when that concept has been prevalent since the time of creation when God created mankind. It is not coincidental that God formed woman from the side of man, suggesting an interpretation that man and woman were to work side by side in their relationship. “Then God said, Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion...God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:26-27). It was not until the Fall in Genesis that equality between male and female became a matter of contention and continues to exist

¹ C. Anthony Hunt, The Black Family: the Church’s role in the African American Community (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Press, 2002), 30.
today in our society.\(^3\) But for the sake of argument, if the law and the mandate were
given to man to till the garden, and the woman was given to the man as a help meet (the
term help meet is used to describe one that works alongside another) it seems reasonable
that the responsibility for the instructions would be given by the male with the woman
assisting (Gen 2:15-18). Another role for the father can fall under the heading of being
“priest of his home.” In ancient Israel the priest would represent the community and
would take problems and concerns of the people to God. You can say he was an
intercessor for the people. Jesus Christ is the high priest for the body of Christ. He
operates in the threefold office, prophet, priest and king, and is considered as high priest,
an intercessor, for us. Ephesians 5:25 offers the principle and instruction to married men:
“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church.” This relates to marriage as the
man should operate in the office of priest. As the priest of his home, the father is
accountable to ensure that prayers are made on the behalf of his wife and children.\(^4\) This
perspective on fathers as the sole responsible person for ensuring the training of Christian
principles is not without problems and opens the door to challenge by feminists and
others who have trouble with the language of fathers as “priest of the home and in
scriptures”. Light concerning the critique of feminists’ views on fathers as head of the
family is shed by author Steve Goldberg. He wrote a paper titled, “Feminism: The
Influence of Postmodernism.” In this essay, he shares and explains the destructive effect
and influence that feminism has on the church and marriage.

\(^3\) Edward P. Wimberly, *Counseling African American Marriages and Families* (Louisville, KY:

\(^4\) Patrick Morley, “Exploring a Husband’s role as Prophet, Priest and King, *Charisma Magazine*
Sept 30, 2015, 10.
“Does history hold a bias against women? Members of the radical feminist movement seem to think so. Radical feminism has had incredibly destructive effects on marriage and family and its influence has also been felt on the church. Evangelical feminism teaches an egalitarian view of marriage and roles in the church, to the point where passages that clearly teach male headship are reinterpreted, explained away, or ignored altogether. As a result, many men are abdicating or being forced out of their God given roles as heads of their households.”

Also there are scriptures that refer to women being leaders and teachers in the home.

There are women like Phoebe in Romans and Deborah in Judges. In the book of Timothy, young Timothy was taught the faith by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (II Tim 1:5). However in ancient Israel it was the fathers who were prominent in addressing the training and teaching of the faith. John Miller states,

The new modes of fathering began emerging in Israel in wake of its experiences of God as redemptive father. Through the rituals of redemption of the first born, circumcision and Passover, fathers in Israel came to be involved with their families and children to a degree unparalleled in other cultures. In the course of time they also became teachers in their families. Thus the frequently noted pedagogical power of Hebrew scriptures itself bears potent witness to a new and more vigorous involvement of fathers as caretakers of children in the culture in which scripture was born.

Likewise, we find in Ephesians that fathers are told they are to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). Arguably Solomon, who was considered as one of the wisest men upon the face of the earth, shared that children should take heed of their father’s wise instructions. The instructions that were shared were to prevent sons from being caught in snares and traps set by evildoers in the world (Prov 1:10, 15-16). Fathers are to teach their child Christian principles and values like love, forgiveness, kindness and godly righteousness. While fathers are teaching Christian


6 John Miller, Calling God Father (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), 70.
principles, they should practice what they teach. In others words, the child as well as the father benefits from the interactions. Fathers get to be reminded that they too have to develop their faith and walk on this theological journey so that they do not get disqualified as teachers. Noted scholar Ross D. Park writes, “Fathers are no longer, if they ever were, merely a biological necessity. They are an important influence on their child’s development. And a close relationship benefits the father as well as the child. Children need fathers, but fathers need their children.”

Paul shares with the Corinthian community how he becomes all things to all men that he might win them. To the weak he became weak, and to those who are without the law, to them he became one without the law. Paul says that he disciplines himself, or he makes sure that he is following the principles that he shares with the Corinthian community, in order that he does not become disqualified as an instructor of the faith of Christ (I Cor 9:21-27). The father adds value to the instruction of teaching the principles of God to his children and his spouse when he models the faith before them. Fathers need to obey the commandments of God and, along with obeying the precepts, they are admonished to inculcate, teach, and nurture these precepts in order that they may be practiced in the family and in the community, a point made clear in both Old and New Testaments. As stated earlier, the father should obey God first and then teach and model for his children how to do the same.

Psalm 78:5-6 encourages fathers to teach the laws of God to the children:

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the next generation to come might know them, even the children which should be

7 John Miller, *Calling God Father*, 144.
born; who should arise and declare them to their children; That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

It was God who called fathers to exercise their gifts so that they would become excellent instructors, providers, trainers, protectors and leaders of the family. However, these characteristics were not associated with males in antiquity. It was rather pregnant females who were the dominant figures in the home. However, over many years of cultural development, the male became the dominant member in the home. Miller writes, “My observations of father-God relationship showed that God displayed or expressed qualities and attributes of being compassionately and effectively involved in the welfare of his children (Exod 34:6, Deut, 32:6, Jer, 3:19, Isa 63:16, Mal 2:10 Lk 11:2). The qualities adhere to God were later expressed in fathers”.

Fathers are important to God because of what He intended fathers to do on the earth. He wanted fathers to be actively involved in the lives of their children by bringing them up in the ways of God. Unfortunately, there are fathers who are falling short of the intent of God. However, to overcome the shortfall, God in his love for fathers gave a prophetic word to speak in the mouth of Malachi, the prophet: “Look, I am going to send Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Mal 4:5-6 CSB).

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9 Ibid., 36.
The role of the father

As noted earlier, the family is a vital component of society. Each family member has his or her particular role in the success of the family, but the role of the father is pivotal. Putting emphasis on the father as a crucial and key component of the family does not in any way belittle the mother as being less important, although, as I have mentioned before, there are some feminists who think the father should not be considered as being crucial. J. Hampton Keathley points out that “The role of mom is pretty well recognized by everyone (including the secular world) as vital to the family, but for some reason fathers have been relegated to the position of second class citizen, especially in our day with the active feminist movement.”10 Nevertheless, one feminist leader has gone so far as to say, “Fathers are a biological necessity, but a psychological absurdity”11—even though data shows that if the father is not in the home children and society suffer.

But fathers playing a role in their children’s lives should come as no surprise to any father who reads the Bible. However, I would be remiss to say that all involvement by fathers in the scriptures has been positive, as Jacob could attest with his sons, Abraham with Isaac and Ishmael, Saul and Jonathan, and David and Absalom to name a few. In contrast to the misgivings of biblical fathers about the lives of their children, biblical fathers had defined roles. In the Hebrew Bible fathers

1. Commanded - Jeremiah 35:6
2. Instructed - Proverbs 1:8
3. Rebuked- Numbers 12:14

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11 Ibid., 11.
4. Gave Blessings- Genesis 27:4, 41 and Genesis 47- Sanctified Job
5. Arranged marriages- Genesis 24:24
6. Established the faith- Joshua 24:15

If one man can cause social ills by not caring for his family, what are the wonderful outcomes that can result if one man makes a positive and fruitful contribution to his children? Fathers are important and needed in the home for several reasons. This necessity of fathers in the home reaches across ethnic lines; however, this importance in the home of African Americans does not get the proper attention it deserves. The reason why the importance of fathers is not highlighted is because so much concentration is placed on the negativity of blacks and not the great attributes of fathers.\textsuperscript{12} This negative view reflects and upholds the popular consensus in today’s society about stereotypes of black families and fathers.

Fathers are also instrumental in being spiritual leaders and teachers. When a father takes responsibility for his own spiritual life and the way he prays, goes to church, and practices virtue in the family, he is a good example. Then his leadership is authentic, based on his own solid relationship with God, and he is less likely to be concerned about any resistance his children may give him. He can lead family prayer.\textsuperscript{13} As John Miller notes, “From the beginning in Israel, it seems, fathers thought of themselves as spiritual guardians of their families and symbolized this through their priest-like roles in the family rituals as consecration of the first born (Exod 13:1), circumcision (Gen 17:9-14),

\textsuperscript{12}Roberta Coles, \textit{The Myths of the Black Father}, 30.
\textsuperscript{13} Al Rossi, “Spiritual Aspect of Fatherhood”, \url{www.oca.org} January 2013 (accessed October 20, 2015).
and weaning (Gen 21:8).”¹⁴ Fathers of faith are to teach their children about their faith in God. In the Old Testament, God told the fathers of Israel to hear Him, and fathers were to love God with all their heart, soul and might, and fathers were to teach the commandments and the statutes of God to the children. They were to teach the commandments everywhere, and anytime, and at any place (Deut 6:4-7). Joshua was an exemplar of what fathers were to declare about their faith and how the family was to follow: “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15 KJV).

There are case studies from stories in the Bible that support the necessity of fathers in the home. Of course this is not an exhaustive list of case studies but it gives a precedent for the necessity of fathers’ influence.

The church helping fathers

Once again we see that the church is viewed as an institution that can help develop the skills of fatherhood and help fathers play a positive role in their home and community. Unfortunately, men do not readily come to church. Therefore the church has to be intentional to make all the necessary efforts to reach out to fathers who are not attending some type of weekly worship service. In reaching out to these fathers, mentors can offer biblical instruction to help them who are inactive in the home and/or lack the necessary skills of fatherhood. Hopefully the assistance to the fathers will result in the

¹⁴ John Miller, The Contemporary Fathering Crisis, 9.
children’s having impactful lives and are great contributors in society. Fathers should be encouraged by the church in owning up to their responsibilities, and the church should provide a support system for fathers who may want to be at home with their children but circumstances do not allow this to happen. The church can help fathers show how to love, which is one of the ingredients needed to build a strong family and a healthy home. Fathers can be mentors to one other, especially if a man is a young teenage father or has been incarcerated for a time. In the church, fathers can see and hear testimonials of what it takes and means to be a positive, influential father to their children and a leader in their home.

Another thing the church can offer fathers is to teach them to be accountable to other males. The Bible tells us that iron sharpens iron (Prov 27:17). Accountability allows individuals into the private lives of other people so they can give the proper support and care when a person is not holding up his end of the responsibility. Some fathers are doing great things but occasionally they may be weak in a particular area, and accountability gives one access to that weakness in order to make it become strength.

If the church as a whole can enable fathers to change their ways and be more responsible and active in their children’s lives, then the black church should reach out to African American men, binding up the wounds of affliction given by the knives of racism and salving past and present hurt, anger and bitterness. Black men such as those I have interviewed want to be good parents to their children and wish to show themselves as strong to their family. Even if African American males are delivered presently from their troubled past or present scars brought on by overt and covert racism in America society, the church cannot think that this hurt is going to go away without some help, teaching
and instruction on how to deal with the pain and anguish African American fathers are feeling.

The removal of the grave clothes of the effects of slavery and racism parallels the Lazarus story. After Jesus called Lazarus and delivered him from the grave, Lazarus came forth out from the grave still bandaged with the clothes of death. Jesus responded to the crowd that was at the grave site, “Loose him and let him go” (John 11:44). In essence, Jesus did his part by delivering Lazarus, but it was left up to the crowd, the church if you will, to work with Jesus by the removing Lazarus from his visible bandage of grave clothing. A remedy that may help African Americans commence the process of healing and restoration can be found embedded in theological and biblical principles such as forgiveness, faith, prayer, love, reconciliation, hope, encouragement, redemption and salvation. The church has stories, principles and tenets that can be beneficial to fathers if they will implement them in their lives. Below are some of the stories that emphasize a number of the theological themes mentioned earlier:

1. The story of Joseph and his brothers is a story of forgiveness; a key component in it is the need of restoration for the family relationship to order to heal (Gen 48).
2. The rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem focuses on restoration. In spite of the walls being broken in the lives of fathers, there is hope that the walls can be restored if someone takes on the burden to see that the walls are rebuilt (Neh 1).
3. The power of prayer: God told Solomon, “If My people who are called by My name would humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways, then will I hear from heaven, I will forgive their sins and will heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14 NIV). The crisis of absentee fathers that directly and indirectly
affects the behavior of children, resulting in some societal ills, is an indicator that the land is in need of healing.

Besides faith-based institutions reaching out to fathers to assist them with skills and support, and providing them with biblical knowledge about fatherhood, there is another reason for the church to have an interest in fathers: fathers are important to God, and therefore fathers should be important to the church. One of the church’s missions is to see to it that the plans, thoughts and the intent of God be expressed in the earth. Throughout the Bible, God would express himself as being a father, and would ask us as his children to be imitators of him (Eph 5:1). God is a great father to us, and he expects no less from earthly fathers on behalf of their children. It is reasonable to think that most fathers who have left home or who are in the home but not actively involved with their children never planned to be in these situations. Custodial fathers who are not in residence due to certain circumstances and fathers who are poor husbands perhaps did not plan from the early onset of fatherhood to be considered absentee fathers or fathers shown in a negative way. Due to circumstances beyond the fathers’ control, (poor choices, pressures from employment and underemployment, relationship difficulties, governmental interference in welfare reforms, and unforeseen troubles) fathers went missing. Despite the growing problem of fatherlessness, there is still hope. By following the ministry of Jesus Christ, there can be restoration for and reconciliation to the ones who are lost (2 Cor 5:21). Deliverance offered by Jesus’ compassion is for all but definitely for those who are in need of His hope and care. On the Sabbath while in the synagogue, Jesus read from the book of the prophet Isaiah this statement, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the
brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18).

This message of hope is for all fathers who have not yet owned up to their responsibilities. It is a message needed for the African American male to be concerned because there are 70 percent of children who are born out of wedlock in the African American population.\(^\text{15}\) Throughout the course of history, African Americans have faced oppression and hardship, and in order to cope with these forces, black men have often adopted what is known as a “cool pose.”\(^\text{16}\) However, instead of reacting to the legacy of slavery in order to be “cool,” perhaps we could draw on the wisdom of our ancestors and our African heritage. Fathers were not always absent in the black community. For example, John Mbiti, an African Religion and Philosophy professor, states that in Africa fathers had a deep commitment to family (it was socially unacceptable for a man to avoid or disregard his role as a father); fathers were religious/spiritual men (considered on a level of a god or priest) and were leaders who represented strength, energy, stability and toughness; and finally, fathers were providers and were concerned about the needs of their families. John Mbiti writes, “Wherever the African is there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to attend a funeral ceremony, and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament.”\(^\text{17}\)

\(^\text{15}\) Coles and Green, *Myth of the Missing Black Father*, 11.
\(^\text{17}\) Daniel Booker, *I Will Wear no More Chains*, 75.
Even though religion and faith are what fathers need to help them become better parents, in taking ownership of their responsibilities, men do not readily migrate to a place of worship. This may in part be due to the fact that most churches are made up of women. Therefore, we need to discern what will draw men to church to reap its benefits.

The church has the capacity of making a difference in fathers’ lives and helping them have a strong impact in their homes. In preparing to write this thesis, I randomly selected ten fathers to interview. These fathers came from different churches, and I asked them questions concerning issues on fatherhood and the fatherhood crisis in our society. The men who were selected met the criteria of having fathers who were either residential fathers, custodial fathers, or absentee fathers. The fathers that I interviewed were residential or custodial fathers. I did not interview those who were absentee fathers.

**The church and marriage**

If the church is going to help fathers then it must convey to single fathers or fathers who are struggling in their marriage that it can help strengthen them. The church needs to be a proponent for marriage for several reasons. One is theological—God instituted marriage. In Scripture, from the beginning of creation, we encounter marriage as an institution: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth….” (Gen 1:28 KJV). And later, “the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” Further, “And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man…. (Gen 2:21-22). The

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book of Genesis is not the only advocacy for marriage, but favor for marriage is found throughout the Bible. The Hebrew text shares: “Marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled” (Heb 10:4); and in the gospel writings, when the religious leaders question Jesus on divorce, He responded saying, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh; so they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mark 10:7-10). If families are searching for answers to strengthen their marriage, the scriptures are a good resource for assistance in these types of queries.

Additionally, we can think about marriage as a relationship comparable to that between the church and Christ. This relationship can be found in the writings of Paul, showing the mystery of the church and Christ as symbolic to marriage between a woman and man (Eph 5:25), in that a man should be loyal, faithful and watchful over his spouse just as Christ is over the church. Christ saw to it that the church was to be kept and watched over by the giving of His life through His sacrificial death. By remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection through the sacraments, the church positions itself to continue the work of Christ amidst struggles that it may encounter while advancing the kingdom of God.

The everlasting covenant between God and his people models the marriage covenant between a man and wife. Our human marriage is fashioned to mirror God’s marriage to Israel and Christ’s marriage to the church in both purpose and permanence. David Atkinson writes in *To Have and to Hold*, “The primary purpose of marriage is to

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20 Ibid., xvii.
be found in the acceptance of God’s will that the covenant relationship of man and wife, both made in the image of God, shall be an image of his covenant relationship with his people.”  

21 Additionally, biblical scholar R. J. Ehrlich states, “Marriage, which is the supreme expression of the togetherness of male and female in differentiation and relationship, reflects the image of God and represents the covenant by which God has bound himself to his people, his church, to man.”  

22 Theologian G. R. Dunstan offers five comparisons between God’s covenant with his people and the covenant of human marriage. These claim that both:

1. are an initiative of love inviting a response and creating a relationship;
2. are covenants—as God’s covenant of grace is made sure by oath, so the essence of the marriage covenant is the vow of consent (a vow that guards the relationship);
3. are obligations of faithfulness;
4. include the promise of blessing to those remaining faithful to their covenant obligation;
5. required sacrifice.  

23 We can assuredly conclude that marriage is theologically grounded and that the church has a key role to play in marriage, family, and parenthood. However, the church is not without its critics and has been the subject of criticism in its failure to constructively attend to the alarming rise of the family structure weakening under the pressure of eroding family values. And although the weakening of the family is across the ethnic

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21 Ibid., xviii.
22 Ibid., xvi.
23 Ibid., xvii.
spectrum, the black family has received the most public exposure. Still, as I have already discussed, there are reasons why the black family has struggled more than others: The existing marriages of African Americans are struggling under the weight of poverty, unemployment of the fathers, disproportional incarceration of the African American male compared to other ethnic male populations, racism, and a historical past of slavery that is still traumatizing the black community. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argues that blacks are still having lingering affects due to slavery and that slavery is responsible for troubles and instability in the family.  

Churches or faith-based institutions are generally the primary organization that officiate first-time marriages. With so many first-time marriages being officiated by the church it can appear that they are acting as blessing machines with no teaching accompanying the marriages. In essence, it appears that churches are performing marriages without any clear strategic instructions on how to strengthen the marriage.

Some critics are saying churches are “ecclesiastical vending machines.” If you pay a certain amount of money you can rent the sanctuary and a preacher to perform the marriage without any premarital counseling, instructions or advice. A 1989 Gallup Poll asked first-time married men and women if they had received marital counseling, and less than fifty percent said they had. This data indicates that some who were married were not given tools or counselling to deal with problems/conflicts that could have been avoided or dealt with by a simple resolution. Because education or counselling is missing we may be setting couples up for failure. In 1997 a poll by Family Research Council found that

81 percent of married couples in Colorado got married in a church, but 60 percent said they had no premarital counseling, and of those who said they did receive premarital counseling, forty percent reported meeting with the pastor an average of 1.6 times.

Mainstream churches are not preaching on marriages, according to “Ethic and Religion,” a national syndicated column. Most of the churches are spending time on hotbed issues such as homosexuality, abortion, and health care, and not on sustaining and keeping marriages.26

There is a pervasive sense of hopelessness about marriages among the nation’s clergy. One reason for the hopelessness is because of the heavy battle ministers have to fight against outside forces that are assaulting the institution of marriage, like movies and television shows that tear down marriages by promoting cohabitation, sex outside of marriage, adultery, and non-family values. Another reason for the sense of hopelessness is that despite pastors’ efforts to promote marriages, many people are still getting divorced, and clergy are surprisingly giving up on the struggle.

Most churches do not have any programs designed to help strengthen existing marriages or ways to help marriages headed for divorce. That said, according to David Larson there is not a single study proving that church counseling of marriages heading for divorce is effective.27 America’s divorce revolution has failed. The evidence of failure is overwhelming. The divorce revolution—by which we mean the steady displacement of marriage culture by a culture of divorce and unwed parenthood—has created terrible hardship for children. It has generated poverty within families. It has burdened us with

26 Ibid., 96.
27 Ibid., 111.
unsupportable social costs. It has failed to deliver on its promise of greater adult happiness and better relationships between man and woman. We believe it’s time to change course. The promises of divorce revolution proved empty, its consequences devastating for both adults and children. It is time to shift the focus of national attention from divorce to marriage.²⁸

Nevertheless, there is still hope: the church can bring good news, restoration and revitalization to marriages by implementing programs such as the one called “Marriage Savers.” Marriage Savers, established in 1986, is an organization whose goals include preparing couples for lifelong marriages, strengthening existing marriages, and restoring troubled marriages. Some of the things it has put in place to reach their goals are the following:

1. **Help Establish Community Marriage Policy.** (CMP) are programs in cities and towns throughout the United States and Canada, in which pastors, priests and rabbis join together to strengthen marriages with the conscious goal of pushing down the community's divorce rate.
2. **We Establish Marriage Savers Congregations** in churches and synagogues throughout the United States and Canada, in which mentor couples are trained to help other couples prepare for a lifelong marriage, strengthen all existing ones, and restore troubled marriages.²⁹

Marriage Savers also help faith-based institutions implement enrichment marriage retreats called Marriage Encounters that allow couples to deepen their marriage away from familiar settings.

In the late 1990s the Annie E. Casey Foundation consulted with some clergy focus groups to discuss ways for engaging church leadership on healthy marriage and relationships, and recommended that community colleges should be looked at as a resource to promote community marriage projects. Such locations, the Foundation argued, are safer and more neutral sites for recruiting a diverse population for marriage education.  

If fathers do not approve of marriage and rather cohabitate, as the world would wish to dictate as the norm, then the church has to convince fathers that cohabitation does not promote family values. Theologically speaking, cohabitation does not and cannot promote family and is not honorable. Marriage is honorable and the bed is to be kept undefiled (Hebrews 4:1). Also sexual immorality defiles the church. “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of kind that is not found even among the pagans; for a man is living with his father’s wife.” (1 Cor 5:1) The church is told to shun fornication as it is a sin that is committed against the body (1 Cor 6:18). Fornication and adultery hinder the purpose of what God intended marriage to be. The purpose of marriage is to have a safe place to create life and for two people to unite and become one (Gen 2:24). Socially speaking, cohabitation sends the wrong message about morality to children who are so impressionable. Many children have been

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30 Robert Franklin, Crisis in the Village, 80.
psychologically and emotionally scarred because of society’s lax view of cohabitation.

Lee June shared in regards to the negative effect cohabitation has on children:

Children take (their) belief and values from what they see and experience. Instructing a child in a set of religious beliefs will not develop in the child a spiritual value system by which to live when there is a gap between what they have been told and what they observe in their home environment … These children often grow up to repeat the sins of their parents … Many children, having grown up with the “live-in” mate of their parent, continue the vicious cycle of creating homes that lack the presence of both parents who are committed to a healthy marriage as well as rearing healthy children. Children that live with cohabiting adults live in an unstable environment.

Why not marriage?

The benefits of marriage can help support and build up parameters for a strong family structure to thrive. Also, marriage can help with stability for the father and support an environment of an intact-parent married home for the children’s social and financial development now and in the future. However, while social research and empirical data show the significance of marriage to fatherhood, the Bible is a strong source to theologically underpin the relationship between fatherhood and marriage. In Genesis we are told: “And the Lord God said it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him” (Gen 2:18 KJV); and in the book of Ecclesiastes: “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?” (Eccl 4:9-11 KJV).

With all the benefits that marriage brings to the table and how it can help society—and especially the black community—it is puzzling why there is reluctance to
marry when marriages in the past were considered favorably in the black community. Nevertheless, the marriage rate of African Americans is dropping; marriage is not a high priority among childbearing couples, especially in the inner cities.\textsuperscript{31} As a result, the family structure is weakening and eventually may collapse, causing everyone to suffer financially, socially and morally.\textsuperscript{32} Then the question becomes what are the barriers, challenges and/or obstacles that hinder marriage in the black community?


What fathers are supposed to do when interacting with their children can best be summed up in a case study of the prodigal son. This is a parable of a father’s interaction with his family that is symbolic of the characteristics and attributes of the Heavenly Father.

This is a story of a father who demonstrated unconditional love and wisdom to his two sons. The younger son, whom I shall focus on, went away to a foreign land, taking with him his inheritance. Unfortunately he squandered his inheritance with riotous living and as a result suffered. Realizing his mistakes and remembering the fair, loving, and forgiving father who raised him, the younger son made a decision to go home to ask for forgiveness. However, as he appeared in the distance, the loving father saw him and ran to him and embraced him. In response to his returning, the father threw a celebration for him and reinstated the young man back to his position as son. This father was an exemplar of what fathers should be in the home. The list below shows some of the exemplary characteristics that all fathers might benefit from in light of this story:

\textsuperscript{31} Clayton, Mincy, and Blankenhorn, \textit{Black Fathers}, 32.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 71.
1. Forgiveness: Fathers need to model forgiveness to their children when they go astray from teachings and instructions. When modeling and doing this act of forgiveness, children get to see how to act when on their own in society or at home.

2. Reconciliation: God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation that we need to show to our family first and then to others.

3. Unconditional love: A father needs to exhibit this love to show his children what the power of love can do for an individual as well as a community. Not only was unconditional love shown to the prodigal son, love was shown to the son who remained home. The father told the other son that what I have was always yours to use. It has always been here for you to take full use of the love that I always had for my two sons.

**Genesis 48:1, 2, 10, 14**

This is a story of Jacob blessing two of Joseph’s sons. Blessings in ancient Israel were passed on from generation from generation when fathers laid their hands upon the heads of their sons and proclaimed the word of God over their lives. This method of lying on of hands was a way to ensure sons were given an identity. It is the father’s words that are spoken over his child that can help establish his child’s future and set forth the child’s destiny to be positive and productive. It was God the Father who changed the name of Abram to Abraham stating he was the father of many nations. It was God the father that changed the name of Jacob (i.e. trickster) to Israel. “And he said unto him,

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what is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Gen 32:24, 26-28). If the father is not in the home to establish this process of identification and purpose then it could be the gang leader in the streets or the jail house that could push or influence a young man down the pathway of destruction. Some of the positive things that can be proclaimed by a father are:

1. You are more than a conqueror; you can do all things through him who strengthens you (Rom 8:37, Phil 4:13),

2. You are lion’s whelp and your hand shall be in the enemy’s neck (Gen 49:9).

Besides Biblical case studies that give credence that fathers are important to be in the home, the men that I interviewed showed the importance of fathers.

**Interviews with fathers**

It does not always have to be gangs that replace a father that is not in the home; it can be the church that steps in.

One of the fathers I interviewed was John Crowder. John is 51 years of age and is a retired Chief Patrol Officer of the Department of Corrections of North Carolina. He attends Victory Tabernacle church, located in Southeast Raleigh, NC. John’s father did not live in his home while he was growing up:

**Reggie:** John, do you think the church has a responsibility to fathers? And if so, what role if any did the church have on you being a father?
**John:** I think the church should have a big responsibility to fathers. The church teaches a man to be a man. The church teaches a father how to be in relationship with his family. Before I got saved I was looking for a church that was big on men being a man and church that was good on teaching on fatherhood, and I was directed to this church and it has changed me tremendously. The pastor at this church is strong on male and father relationships in the home. This church taught me how to be more patient with my children and my wife. For being in the church I believe as a father that I am to give spiritual guidance, protection and be a provider for my family.

I also interviewed Kamali Perry. Kamali is 35 years of age and a postal carrier. He is the father of a boy and girl. Kamali’s father was present in the home as Kamali grew up. He also attends Victory Tabernacle in Raleigh.

**Reggie:** Kamali, what is the responsibility of the church to fathers? Or does the church have a responsibility to fathers?

**Kamali:** The church has a big responsibility to fathers. There are a lot of fathers out here in the home that do not know how to be fathers to their kids or a husband to their wives. It is up to the church to teach those biblical aspects of being a father in the home and to his kids and a husband to his wife.

Another father I interviewed is Mike Henry. He is 43 years of age and works for TSA at Raleigh/Durham International Airport, attends a local church named Fulfilled Promise Tabernacle, located in Southeast Raleigh NC, and is the father of 3 boys and 2 girls. His own father was absent from the home.
**Reggie:** Mike what responsibility does the church have to fathers and what role does it play in your life?

**Mike:** The church has a large responsibility to fathers. The church teaches fathers to live right. The church is to feed me knowledge of how to be a father. In my case, I may have been doing things wrong as a father, and it’s up to the church to teach me how to do it right. It is up to the church to give me knowledge. The church is to support me in the role of being a father.

The case studies and the interviews with the fathers help highlight the necessity of fathers in the home. They show the negative outcome for the family when fathers are not there and the positive results when they are in the home. Fathers become better fathers when they are supported by the church. What the church does for fathers is give them the tools and training to help them fulfill their responsibility in fatherhood. Also, the church helps father see their failures in fatherhood. Once the failures can be identified, fathers can begin working on fixing their mistakes.
CHAPTER 3: REFORMATION FOR THE CRISIS

Marriage and fatherhood: a package deal

The concept of fatherhood operates well in a healthy environment of marriage. It is as if fatherhood and marriage come as a package deal. Research and studies agree that marriage and fatherhood are not separate from one another but interdependent. One study, in response to decreasing marriage rates in childbearing couples, public policy through marriage promotion incentives, and enforcing child support, indicates that marriage and fatherhood are a package deal.\(^1\)

However, before we get into the business of how fatherhood thrives in marriage and especially its benefits for the African American community, we need to look at marriage and the benefits marriage brings to African American men. Research data shows that married men are generally healthier, live longer, earn more money, have better mental health and are happier than unmarried men. The children of married men fare better in society, especially in education, and avoid risky behavior.\(^2\) In the African American community, black married men succeed more than unmarried black men. The 1995 March Supplement to the U.S. Census Bureau shows that 83 percent of working age (25-64) married men were employed as compared to 67 percent of men who never married. Seven percent of married black men are below the poverty level as compared to


19 percent of never married black men of the same age. The median annual income for
married men is $27,000 compared with $14,500 for never married men.\(^3\)

Research suggests that there is an observation that can be seen in the differences
between labor force participation and income and poverty level centers around how black
males view their worth when it comes to economic status. Men’s prestige, their value to
others and self-worth, are measured by their identity as a worker and their earnings from
work. In other words, work is important to men’s sense of their value just as
unemployment is central to the cultural devaluation of black men.\(^4\)

Another benefit that marriage promotes for the male has to do with how society
treats married men differently than bachelors. Certain assumptions are made about
applicants who are married than single men. Society expects married men to act
differently than bachelors when it comes to taking care of their personal and family
responsibilities. Automobile insurance premiums are more expensive for unmarried men
than for married men because the insurers believe married men are less likely to indulge
in risky behaviors.\(^5\) It is documented that married men and single men have different
accidents, illnesses, and deaths. According to Brad Wilcox, director of the National
Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, “Men who get married work harder and
more strategically, and earn more money than their single peers from similar
backgrounds. Marriage also transforms men’s social worlds; they spend less time with
friends and more time with family; they also go to bars less and to church more. In the

\(^3\) Obie, Mincy, and Blankenhorn David, “Black Fathers”, \textit{American Prospect}, April 8, 2002 32.
\(^4\) Dana Harman, “A Package Marriage”, \textit{Women, Gender, and Family of Color}, Fall 2013 117.
\(^5\) Robert Franklin, \textit{Crisis in the Village}, 55.
provocative words of Nobel Laureate George Akerlof, men “settle down when they get married; if they fail to get married they fail to settle down.”

Generally speaking husbands understand the assertions of the majority of society that believes married men are expected to be different from bachelors. Some of the assertions are married men are more likely to go to church and more likely to spend less time with outside friends. Married men are more likely to drop informal groups and join more formal organizations. Married men have a greater mindset to go to work. Married men are expected to be more reliable and accept new responsibilities that are not just about themselves but about their wives and children, if there are any.

With this awareness of expectations, it becomes apparent how marriage intersects with fatherhood. In other words, fatherhood and marriage are a package deal. And as a father, a man will hopefully be more keenly aware that he has responsibilities to ensure the promotion of his child’s welfare and development. Research shows that children benefit from an intact-parent married home. Fathers are in a better position to provide for their children financially and to socialize with the children, enabling them to have strong healthy and positive relationships in the future. In addition to fathers providing financial support and socialization skills as a help to children, such assistance enables children to do better in school, have fewer emotional problems, be more likely to attend college, and be less likely to commit crimes. In contrast to intact-parent married homes, unwed fathers are unlikely to stay connected to their children over time. A study by Robert Lerman and

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6 Ibid., 34.
7 Ibid., 34.
8 Wade Horn, “Fatherhood, Cohabitation and Marriage”, *Gender Issues* 23.4 (Fall 2006), 35.
Theodora Ooms claims that 57 percent of unwed fathers will visit their children once a week for the first two years of the child’s life, but by the time the child reaches seven and one-half years, only 25 percent continue weekly visitations. Other research shows that 75 percent of fathers not living with their children at birth never subsequently live with the child.  

Help within the black community

With all the historical, political and social circumstances that have inhibited the African American male from being a positive and productive contributor as a parent and an influential force in the community, it is clear that something needs to be done. What is needed to help the African American male overcome some of the dehumanizing and demoralizing problems he continues to face is a reformation of spirit and soul. Through the process of reformation the black male can receive the skills or tools to assist him in becoming a positive asset in the lives of his family and community. The first step on the road of recovery is acknowledgement of the need to reform and to renew the spirit and soul that was stripped away. Black men must take a personal inventory and discern the obstacles to effective and responsible parenthood and citizenship. This is a difficult challenge as it takes strength and courage to admit one needs help, let alone commence the process of spiritual reformation—a process not dissimilar from the 12 step program of Alcoholics Anonymous.  

9 Ibid., 34.

If he is to rise above the fray and hurdle over the obstacles, there are some things he needs to consider.

1. Black males need to turn off the negative noise of condemnation that has said they are too lazy to work, do not have the intelligence of other men, and that they are not leaders, but rather are shiftless, irresponsible and sociopathic.

2. Black males cannot accept nor chase roles that portray them negatively as pimps, players, hustlers, and sweet daddies.¹¹

In light of all the negative press from society that is heaped upon African American males, they are not free from culpability for their troubles as a black male or as a positive father. One of the downfalls of the African American male is that he wants to concentrate on his weakness rather than his God-given talents to fight through adversity. Jesse Jackson said in a sermon that Black men need to rise above the “grasshopper complex” wherein Israel assumed they were as grasshoppers against the giants and occupants heading toward the Promised Land (Numbers 14)¹². Israel forgot Jehovah was on their side. African American males must believe who is on their side encouraging blacks to fight on. Historically speaking, black fathers have a great cloud of witnesses of their ancestry that rose above the atrocities of slavery. The psychological and emotional upheaval placed on the slaves as black fathers who were dislocated from their wives and children, but still took the risk of punishment, whippings and even death to reunite their family when they saw the chance. With support from the church, extended family

¹¹ Lee June, “Counseling in African American Communities” (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Research and Development, 2002), 216.

¹² Ibid., 21.
members, the wives or mothers of his children, the African American male has a chance to be spiritually reformed.

Although African American fathers are not always shown as a responsible family member, there are some African American fathers who are taking care of their children. Not only are they taking care of their children, but they have a healthy relationship with the mother of the child. There are some African American fathers who are married to the mother of the child and by choice participate in three ways. First, they are supportive and active in the child’s development. Second, fathers through financial support aid the child. Third, they participate in the child’s intellectual and literary growth, guiding the child to be productive in society. The African American male by choice is being a positive influence and a positive role model in his home and community.

In many cases, a father is getting support from faith-based institutions, including the church. In the African American community, the black church tradition encourages social programs and groups that support fathers. What makes the tradition uplifting and supportive to fathers is that it addresses some of the moral and social matters that affect the African American male, black families and their communities. The support carried out by the church is through continued discovery of spiritual, human, and relational materials that have aided the church over time.\(^\text{13}\)

There are support groups outside the church that are assisting fathers to maximize fatherhood in order for them to have a positive influence in the home. One of the groups is the Responsible Father Initiative (RFI), which is designed to help fathers strengthen

positive parental interaction. This group helps by providing activities that develop and improve relationship, communication and parenting skills, and skills that contribute to the financial well-being of children. The financial piece is done by providing job training and other employment services. The RFI have activities that try to improve men’s relationship with their spouses, girlfriends and/or mother of their children. Responsible Father seeks other agencies that have a proven record of accomplishment in helping low-income fathers, and comprehensive fatherhood programs that integrate robust economic stability services with healthy marriage and relationship activities.\(^{14}\)

Another support group that is working on the issue of promoting and encouraging positive fatherhood is the organization called Women in Fatherhood, Inc. (WIFI). This group recently joined with another organization called the Open Society Campaign for Black Male Achievement that works to strengthen low income families and communities through support of positive father involvement.\(^{15}\) What makes this group stand out is that this is a women’s group giving voice to women who support the importance fathers. “In alliances with our counterparts in domestic violence and maternal and child health fields, we aim to help bridge gendered, partisan, and ideological divides in family support policy and programs geared toward fathers”\(^{16}\) The WIFI focus on helping fathers is not to choose fathers over mothers or to devalue the importance of helping children in disadvantaged situations. Hopefully through their efforts, the group will show that holistic fathers, mothers and children are a necessary part for strengthening the family.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 6.


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 11.
There are support groups that are specific to the black community. The black community comprises but is not limited to historically black colleges, black churches, black civic groups such as the NAACP, black barbershops and hair and beauty salons, and local black radio stations. The black community should be the primary entity that takes a look within itself to identify the problems and crises of the black family, which include single mothers as heads of households, teenage pregnancies, incarceration of black males, unemployment, high crime rates, black on black violent crimes, poverty, births out of wedlock, and the educational divide. These problems are certainly not an exhaustive list but they do form a cluster of concerns that in one way and another are not only affected by father absenteeism but also create the conditions where such absenteeism is likely to occur. For example, research shows that fatherlessness is one of the primary problems of the demise of children’s wellbeing in school and society, and at home, as well a generator of emotional, behavioral and psychological problems.17

Sometimes support does not come from an organization but from a movement or a theological theme known as Black Theology. Historically, Black Theology was instrumental in helping African Americans understand what it means to be black and Christian. In other words, the challenging question that earlier African Americans had when they began accepting the faith of white slave owners, as well as during modernity, was how do blacks accept the Christianity of their oppressors.18

Yet, before Black Theology there was the black church that has always been that bridge over troubled waters for black families: it has preached the social gospel and the good news that addresses the physical and social needs of the black community. The praxis of the black church, including its culture and language, is naturally comforting to the black community: its language and mode of worship dealt with black culture and Black Theology, and it advocated liberation and social gospel concepts to uplift the black community. Dr. Samuel Proctor said that the black church and Black Theology were not separate concepts nor were they independent of one another but interdependent. Black Theology in its informal setting was anything said about God in worship, preaching or hymns. A more formal way of speaking about Black Theology is when a community adopts the concept that theology is a vital reflection on the meaning of Christian faith for the African American family. ¹⁹ “Black Theology needs the Black Church because without the Black Church, Black Theology becomes an intellectual discourse irrelevant to the spiritual, social, and political life of African American people”. ²⁰ Besides Black Theology needing the church, the black church needs Black Theology. During the 1960s, the first self-identified black theologians were pastors and not many were scholars. Therefore, pastors needed to understand that theology cannot achieve its authentic Christian identity if it is separated from the worship life of the church community. Black Theology achieves its authenticity within the Black church.” ²¹

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²⁰ Ibid., 54.

²¹ Ibid., 55.
Governmental help for reformation

Another institution that can help with the process of reformation is the government. The government needs to take ownership of some of its public policies that have contributed to African American males’ challenges and obstacles in fatherhood. For example, a single mother is more likely to receive government assistance if she claims no financial support from the custodial father or from extended family members. This, clearly, has the effect of discouraging fathers from being financially responsible. Not only does such legislation need to be altered or eradicated, but economic institutions and laws need to be restructured so that quality employment and earnings are available to the black male, and he can financially support his family.

Policy makers and conservative governmental leaders and officials have been working on initiatives that promote healthy marriages and fatherhood. During his administration, President G. W. Bush supported policies that worked on welfare reforms. These policies had two components: one was to dedicate $300 million in federal funds to promote and support marriage, and the other was to encourage states to promote child support and commit the federal government to share in the cost. With this new political and legislative climate, fatherhood groups were sparked and began working in predominately black communities to support the initiatives and to get behind the policy

23 Hattery and Smith, African American Families, 33.
changes. Groups that were most appreciative of change taking place in the government included the Center for Fathers, Family and the Workforce Development (CFWD), the Natural Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership (NPCL), and the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization (IRFFR).\textsuperscript{26} Their goal is to encourage fathers to be married and to become more involved in their child’s lives.\textsuperscript{27} NPCL, a national intermediary organization, works through a federally funded demonstration project that combines child support enforcement and workforce development efforts in support of children. IRFFR is the oldest community based responsible fatherhood program in the country that helps disadvantaged fathers in the black community.\textsuperscript{28} The IRFFR runs one-on-one outreach centers in six cities. At the site, there is a one married couple that runs the program to help clients build healthy marriages. It specifically targets fathers in the marriage to give them counselling sessions on being a good father. These father-based groups and policy makers are making efforts to promote fatherhood by marketing positive and influential fatherhood roles through advertisements and monetary donations. Hopefully this goodwill promotion will catch fire in the black community and spur fathers to take care of their children.

\textbf{NETWORKING WITHIN THE BLACK COMMUNITY}

Fathers should not wait for governmental policies to force them to take action and should themselves be responsible for interaction with and the development of their children. As

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 58.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 59.
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previously mentioned, there are myriad problems, such as institutional racism, racial
laws, and cultural shifts that contribute to the epidemic of fatherlessness.

If the black community wants to get on the right road towards resolving the
fatherlessness crisis, changes must be made, changes that help remedy African American
males’ plight, solutions that help strengthen the family and the community.

The African American community must admit its mistakes, shortcomings and
failures for not helping fathers. They should be willing to find ways to create jobs and not
wait on the government to make up the shortfall in employment and higher wages. No job
or task no matter how small or laborious should be looked upon with contempt from the
community. However, the creation of jobs does not come without organization,
networking and support on the part of those who have some economic capital to help get
things started. Tavis Smiley—a radio personality, former nighttime TV talk show host
and author of *Covenant with Black America* and *Covenant in Action*—argues that blacks
should make ways for themselves to have a better way of living and to have freedom in a
racist society. In his books he lays out how the black community can begin to meet some
of its challenges to create a brighter future.

In the book there are ten covenants or strategic plans to establish a better future
and society in America. If the black community will adhere to the plans suggested in
the book such as strategic organization, volunteering weekly in the inner cities, and
becoming more involved in civic affairs, it will begin to solve some of the challenges.
*The Covenant with Black America* has goals and action plans and teaches how black

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Americans can become advocates for themselves or become voices in the political, social, and economic arenas in order to speak to and name the challenges black America faces more than any other ethnic group: “Our interest with this document was to create a national plan of action to address the primary concerns of African Americans today.”

Smiley says black America has to find and work on an orderly plan for organization: “At the banquet table of life, there are no reserved seats. You get what you can take and keep what you can hold. If you don’t take anything, you won’t get anything. And if you can’t hold anything, you won’t keep anything. And you can’t take anything without organization.” Additionally, Smiley points out, “This covenant is not revolutionary but evolutionary in the sense that it will be another catalyst in our struggle to make Black America better. I believe that when we make Black America better we make all America better. Yes, there is despair, but there is hope. We can turn our pain into power…. but not without organization.” Fathers, therefore, need to apply these lessons to themselves and their homes.

Another way the black population can help its men is to assist those who have been recently released from prison and are looking for jobs. The black community should assist with interpersonal and communication skills to establish or re-establish fathers in their roles within the family after absences due to imprisonment and not wait on the justice department to provide skills for our fathers. Another way that blacks can strengthen their community while fathers are imprisoned is to see to it that the children of incarcerated fathers are mentored and not left to develop without help. The black

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30 Ibid., 20.
31 Ibid., ix.
32 Ibid., 26.
community does have a system in place for mentoring when family members go missing or helping with single mothers of children born out of wedlock, and that system is the extended family. Grandparents, aunts and uncles sometimes step in to take care of children whose fathers have been taken out of the home or refuse to live up to their responsibilities.\textsuperscript{33} Another useful system in the black community is social fathering,\textsuperscript{34} which occurs when a coach, teacher, Sunday school teacher, minister, member of the Big Brother program, civic leader, leader of the Boys or Girls Club, and/or an extended family member becomes a father figure to a child.\textsuperscript{35} This extended family and social fathering falls under the guise of the African Proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child”. In West Africa, “the village” is the entire extended family. The black community should aid fathers in their efforts to help their children close the educational and technological gap rather than wait on the educational system to be responsible for closing the divide. What leaders in the black community can do toward closing, for example, this digital divide is to increase ownership of technological equipment among youth and low income families, and increase training opportunities and resources to develop digital literacy and advanced skills. The Career Communication Group (CCG) is one group providing help: it has developed the National Black Family Technology Awareness week, which educates and empowers African American families through technology. The CCG’s overall mission is to promote significant minority achievement in engineering, science and technology.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Robert M. Franklin, \textit{Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 43.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 44.


\textsuperscript{36} Tavis Smiley, \textit{The Covenant}, 227.
One may ponder who will be the one who gets things rolling in the black community, or be the “John the Baptist” calling on the black community to repent of their mistakes and shortcomings and to begin to work towards doing better. The people that come to mind are black leaders in the public eye—leaders such as black scholars, clergy, black entertainers, teachers, professors, politicians, and strong black fathers.\(^{37}\)

For example, one highly visible black leader who spoke for fathers doing better is President Barack Obama. When the President was just Senator Obama, he made a speech at his church in Chicago on Father’s Day urging fathers to take their responsibility as fathers seriously: “we . . . need families to raise our children. We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child—it’s the courage to raise one.”\(^{38}\)

Another black leader, well respected in the black community, was a father figure and a role model for millions of television viewers in the 1980s in the television sitcom *The Bill Cosby Show*. Bill Cosby, the entertainer, philanthropist, comedian, and black leader has harshly critiqued black fathers, chiding the black community for its acceptance of cultural mediocrity, moral indifference, poverty and parental irresponsibility. Cosby also chided the black church and black clergy for concentrating on “Jesus” and not the social issues that were facing Black America. Some in the black community saw a problem with Bill Cosby airing the black community’s dirty laundry in public and questioned what gave him the right to do so. One person who was critical of Cosby was radio personality and Baptist minister Michael Dyson, who believes the crisis facing the

\(^{37}\) Robert Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, 45.

black community is due to governmental problems, discrimination and economic shortfalls due to unemployment.

In contrast, Bill Cosby believed he had the right to speak out because of his advocacy for children whose parents are not taking responsibility for them. He also gave a substantial amount of money to black civic groups and charities to help alleviate the poverty situation.\(^{39}\) Unfortunately in regards to Bill Cosby, there must be a disclaimer stated here to address his black leadership role model status. Recently his reputation as a reputable spokesperson for the black community has been tainted because of the publicized allegations concerning his character. Bill Cosby has admitted to immorality in having extramarital affairs and has been allegedly accused of sexual misconduct with other women.

Other advocates within the black community that have been making family and fatherlessness a priority to resolve are Black Colleges and Universities. These educational institutions have been encouraging healthy black families to stay in that condition and improve their weaknesses and also have encouraged African American males to be great mentors and role models to youth who are fatherless and also to be good fathers in the home. In 1998 Morehouse College held a conference sponsored by Morehouse Research Institute to bring to the forefront the issue of absentee fathers and the challenges that fathers face in economic and cultural terms. Morehouse College, an all-male institution, has not been the only historically black college trying to make inroads regarding the problem of fatherlessness. There is an all-female college in the Atlanta area that is trying to make strides to resolve the fatherlessness crisis in America. It seems fitting that

\(^{39}\) Robert Franklin, *Crisis in the Village*, 33.
Spelman College would be instrumental in working to discover resolutions since many of the females in the college will be or have been affected by fatherlessness as daughters and wives—not to mention that the women in the college may be future wives and mothers who will have to address the issue of fatherhood. Recently, because of the allegations of sexual misconduct by the comedian Billy Cosby, Spelman has halted the professorship named after Bill Cosby.\textsuperscript{40}

The conference sponsored by Morehouse wanted not just to address issues facing African American fathers at the local level but nationally and globally as well. “We gathered together because of our shared concern about the national trend of father absence that is affecting nearly all races and ethnic groups in the United States and because our concern about father absences in the African American community…. We gathered together because we believe that among the most urgent problems facing the African American community and the entire nation is the reality that 70 percent of African American children are born to unwed mothers and at least 80 percent of all African American children are expected to spend at least a significant part of their childhood years living apart from their biological father”.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} David Beasley, “Spelman Halts Professorship Bearing Bill Cosby’s Name”, \url{www.Huffingtonpost.com}, September 2015, 6.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 98.
CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND FAMILY

The black family and the black church are two of the oldest institutions in the black community. The two are intertwined with each other. C. Eric Lincoln, author of *The Black Church since Frazier*, wrote, “To understand the power of the black church it must first be understood that there is no disjunction between the black church and the black community. The church is the spiritual face of the black community”.¹ The black church was born out of the needs of the African American community. One of the needs was for liberation of black slaves from the inhumane treatment of the oppressors. To escape the harsh treatment found on the plantation, the slaves would migrate to the makeshift community in the woods. It was the church community which brought a sense of hope and deliverance.² Slaves were trying to understand what it meant to be black and Christian and serve in the Church of their oppressor that believed that slavery was theologically and socially acceptable. Peter Paris wrote in *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, concerning the oneness between the black church and the African American community, “There is no indication that Negro Churches were formed merely to start new churches, but these churches derived out the needs for the community”.³ Both institutions have some of the same goals for the community, such as preservation and stability within the black family.

The church’s mission as the people of God is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. The mission of Jesus Christ was to seek and to save those who were lost and to give his life for a ransom (Mark 10:45). Christ gave to the church the ministry of reconciliation to win and reconcile the world back to the Father. There are lost fathers in the world who need to be reconciled back to their families, and the church has a mission and mandate to see that those lost fathers be found. Also, the people of God have a spiritual obligation and a commission to encourage individuals to make the search for the kingdom of God a top priority, to discover the rich principles of the kingdom of God which deal with salvation, redemption, forgiveness, truth and love, to name a few. The church that is grounded in theology must ensure that the will of God is done on the earth by taking heed to its commission responsibility in prescribing godly principles to produce healthy marriages and strong families, and fathers who are present in the home, taking an active role with their children and wives. The church has to be a prophetic voice in society even as John the Baptist crying in the wilderness, “Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand requiring fruit meet for repentance”. (Matthew 3:3). The church has to proclaim what true religion is, pure and undefiled before God; to take up a cause for the widows, orphans (the fatherless) (James 1:27). Deep within the theological task of the church (and especially those of the African American churches who have been suffering from the scars of slavery and racism) is the command to bring healing to families that are suffering from fatherlessness. “The theological task involves holistically addressing the moral and social matters which affect the black families and communities.”

Also the theology of the black church in a contemporary context faces the significance of

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4 Ibid.,10.
appropriating ancient Bible stories and themes in ways that are relevant to the present realities of African American families.\textsuperscript{5} That is, the stories of the Bible have to have meaning to African American families to address the stories of their plight. It is critical for the church if it is to be recognized as one of the premier leaders in society that it promotes a better world and a nation that is moral and righteous through implantation of all its identifiable and descriptive parts, which include the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the illuminating Scriptures, and the sharing of the gospel.

Abraham Lincoln stated that “The strength of a nation lies in the house of its people,” thereby signaling a link between the nation and its families. Indeed, the family unit is an essential component in the fabric of American life,\textsuperscript{6} but what happens when families begin to fail? If a nation is to be productive, the family has to stand on the values of rightful living. In essence, a nation’s rise and fall is predicated on the righteousness of the family. “Righteousness exalted a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34 KJV). Consequently, it stands to reason that everything should be done by the nation to see that the family is strong. The nation has to be sure that family values are being taught and implemented in the home so the nation can be strong in the black community. The disconnection between the nation and the black family is nothing new but has existed since the arrival of the blacks from Africa on the soil of America. Peter J Paris said in his book, \textit{The Social Teachings of the Black Churches}, “From the beginning of the nation’s history up to the present, the black American experience has been characterized by racism – a phenomenon that employs race as a proscriptive principle for

\textsuperscript{5} C. Anthony Hunt, \textit{The Black Family}, 2.

denying rights and opportunities that is, a principle of societal exclusion”\textsuperscript{7}. The system of hereditary slavery as practiced in the United States for three centuries best illustrates that principle. Slavery established a societal condition wherein blacks inherited a birth status which excluded them from all the privileges normally associated with being human. Unfortunately, America does not always recognize this connection between family and the nation, and even when it does, it has not always acknowledged the black community as fully a member in this family. As Peter J. Paris has noted, slavery “was based on proposition that blacks were not fully part of the human race,”\textsuperscript{8} and so therefore could not possibly be part of the American family.

Lincoln’s statement about the nation can also be easily applied to the church, in that the strength and weakness of the church are predicated on how strong families are in the home. Therefore, if the church’s strength and weakness are parallel to the strength and weakness of the family, then is it not inconceivable that the church would try to do all within its power to keep itself thriving, functional, and healthy by seeing that the family is similarly healthy? The church must see that the family is important to its own survival. A way to see a healthy connection between the church and the family is to view communal life of ancient Israel. Israel thrived and was a strong nation as long as the people obeyed the commandments of God. Unfortunately, when Israel sinned and disobeyed the commandments of God, they went into captivity.

The family is important to the church and it is also as important to the one that created the church, namely God. The family that was created by God has throughout

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{8} Christopher Booker, I Will Wear No More Chains (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2000), 114.
history been instrumental in God’s plan of redemption for mankind, as made known throughout the Bible. It was the family of Noah that God used to attempt to save the world before the flood (Gen 6). God’s chosen people, Israel, that rose to be a mighty nation, first started as a family from the call of God to Abraham promising him that he will be the father of many nations. (Gen 12). God let Abraham, who was a family man, in on His plans before he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah:

And the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I am about to do?” Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Gen 18:17-19 KJV)

I do wish to add a disclaimer here. My use of Abraham as an exemplary father does not indicate that I am negating the problems that others may see associated with the language of Abraham the patriarch. The term patriarch had a negative connotation in the black community during the time of slavery. The white plantation owners use the language of patriarchy as way of ruling and wielding power over their wives, children and their slaves rather than being a patriarch that cares for his family.

If the church is to help weakened families become strong and healthy and to prevent existing families from falling apart and be functional in society, then the church must have a hand in defining what may constitute a functional healthy family. Unfortunately, the church has taken a back seat to society in defining a healthy, functional family. Changes in the family have some experts assigning the phrase “dysfunctional” to many families. Dr. Gary Chapman said to describe a family is to look at healthy functioning
families and not dysfunctional ones. Chapman notes, “When your local bank trains employees how to spot counterfeit bills, it does not show them samples of the counterfeit. It leads them to focus intently on the authentic bills.” In *Five Signs of a Functional Family*, Chapman gives us five points or characteristics that define a functional healthy family. These five characteristic are theologically based:

1. An attitude of service

To serve one another is an attitude that Jesus taught his disciples to have for one another. Jesus said he came to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:44-45).

This virtue is needed in a family and especially between a husband and wife so that they model this behavior in front of their children.

2. Intimacy between husband and wife

The Hebrew writer says that the marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled. Intimacy creates closeness. Closeness is needed with parents in order to provide a healthy environment in which to raise children.

3. Parents who teach and train their children

The Bible shares with fathers that they are to raise their children in the admonition and fear of The Lord (Eph 6:4). The writer in Proverbs said to train a child in the way he should go and when he gets old he will not depart (Prov 22:15).

4. Husbands who are loving leaders

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Fathers are to lead and model the behavior they would want the family to exhibit in society. Fathers are called to show their families strong, manly love and forgiveness, virtues modeled powerfully in the father of the prodigal son (Luke 11:32). The behaviors seen in society can be traced back to some aspect of behavior at home, whether good or bad.

5. Children who obey and honor parents

The Bible states that when children honor and obey their parents, their lives are prolonged. This is a statement that has a promise connected to it (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:2). In Paul’s writings, he suggests that children should obey their parents in the Lord because it is the right thing to do (Eph 6:1).\(^{10}\)

Understandably, families can easily be confused, especially if they feel they are receiving mixed messages coming from Scripture and society, and are trying to be politically correct and not offend anyone. However, for Christians, if there is a fork in the road as to what is correct concerning marriage, the selected pathway is straight and hard. Jesus said we are to enter the gate that is narrow and the road that is hard. The wide gate and the easy road lead to destruction (Matthew 7:13). In other words, marriage is a challenge to keep and maintain. Marriage has to be worked at by both parties. A familiar proverb says, “Marriage may be made in heaven but the maintenance work is done on earth”. The Bible also declares what a family should look like, stating “that a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife” (and this wife is a woman according to the Bible, not the language of society in depicting that a wife can be a man), and the two shall become one flesh (Gen 2:26). Anything different does not constitute a

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., 53.
family. Yet no matter how a family might recognize itself, the church should act as a
guide and should show love and compassion to all families that are hurting. While
comfort is being administered to the family, the church can model the way that the family
was intended to be according to Genesis.

The black church and the black community connectivity

The Old Testament has been a bedrock and a pillar for the black church. Cain
Hope Felder author of Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class and Family, wrote, “It is
well known that the Bible has come to occupy a central place in the religions of the black
diaspora. Biblical stories, themes, personalities and images inspired, captivated, gave
meaning, and served as a basis of hope for a liberated and enhanced material
life”. According to Felder’s theory, African Americans resonated and identified with
Moses, who represented freedom and deliverance, and also identified with Jesus, who
was marginalized and disenfranchised, and urged us to set the captives free. The songs
and spirituals that spoke of freedom and of God were what the black community
gravitated towards in the church. As theologian James Cone notes about spirituals:

The divine liberation of the oppressed from slavery is the central theological
concept in the black spirituals. These songs show that black slaves did not believe
that human servitude was reconcilable with their African past and the knowledge
of the Christian gospel. They did not believe God created Africans to be slaves.
Accordingly they sang of a God who was involved in history, their history,
making right what whites had made wrong.12

11 Ibid., 2.
Another sign of the language of comfort is how the church is named: it is body of believers known as the children of God who belong to the *family* of God. In the black church the members are identified affectionately and respectfully as “Brother and Sister” to each other, and the older women are referred to as “Mothers.”13 Not only is there respect conveyed by the language and culture of the black church, but honor is bestowed by placing the mothers and fathers in certain areas in the church so as to recognize their authority and the respect that is due them.14

The black church tradition’s sole purpose was not just to be a single resource to remedy the harsh environment created by social ills. It also was to provide meaningful information for the black community in the areas of politics, education, economics and justice. This meaningful assistance over the years was seen through the development and progression of the urban church. The urban church had its initial origin from blacks in the rural areas in the South who moved northwards and started churches, commonly called storefronts because of their locations, and was led by clergymen who would become important figures in the black community. The sociologists C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya captured these experiences of the growth of the urban church in their book *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. 15

**Church progression in the black community: profile of the black church and clergy**

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14 Ibid., 28.

Through a series of personal observations, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and research, Lincoln and Mamiya examine the rise and development of the black church in America. They found that the black church experienced various social shifts, movements, and theological motifs, and was a significant influence on black communal life and culture. Navigating the changes was ecclesial leadership, primarily in the form of the pastor. Pastors were highly revered and usually by their charismatic leadership styles and prolific preaching motivated the people to become active in the community. Observable growth was noticed through the revolutionary and conscious movement of African Americans being recognized as a vital and productive social group in society, which eventually gave African Americans greater opportunity to hold political and public office. Understandably, there were other historical figures such as Harriet Tubman, secular civil rights institutions such as CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), SNCC (Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), fraternities and lodges, black leaders such as James Farmer and John Lewis, black intellectuals like W.E Dubois, and liberation theology leader James Cone, who had an influence on black culture besides the Black Church and clergy. However, it was the church that helped undergird and financially support these other groups, organizations and leaderships. As Eric Lincoln observes:

The most potent catalyst for the black consciousness movement, however, was the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr. beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. From the beginning, the civil rights movement was anchored in the Black Church, organized by both black activist ministers and laity, and supported financially by black church members.17

16 Ibid., x.

17 Ibid., x.
One aspect of Lincoln and Mamiya’s work is important here and I will discuss it below. It is the urban clergy.

**Urban clergy and churches**

As noted above, from 1915 to 1950 there was a growth of urban churches due to the migration of people moving from the south to the north in hopes of economic uplift and mobility, and also to escape the harsh and vicious rules of the Jim Crow system. As a result, urban churches’ membership increased immensely, and because of this increase the urban churches sought ways to handle the large masses by taking on debt in building new structures, adding on to existing structures or finding bigger buildings to rent.\(^{18}\) Unfortunately, those seeking a better life did not always achieve the economic success they expected; thus the urban churches were left to help members with the adjustment to urban life, assisting them with social programs provided by the church and clergy. Lincoln and Mamiya label the leaders involved in this social interaction as culture brokers, working in a “mediating institution, to help acculturate rural migrants to urban environment.”\(^{19}\) Also, as a result of the growth in membership in urban churches, these churches had to find areas such as rented halls, homes and basements to handle the large influx of people. Unfortunately the migration from rural to urban was not always seen in a positive light for urban Black Churches.

One negative aspect of the tremendous influx of migration was that leaders were overwhelmed by the growth, which brought undue economic problems and depression to

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 114.
these churches, which had to take on heavier debt in order to accommodate the increase.\textsuperscript{20} It is very difficult to preach or administrate when you are under a heavy load of debt. Because of financial woes many urban churches went into foreclosure and bankruptcy.

Lincoln and Mamiya not only concentrate on the negatives and positives of the black urban church, they also profile the urban clergy, showing how they differed from the rural clergy. For example, urban clergy made more money. The median income range for rural clergy was $10,000 to $15,000 while the urban income range was $15,000 to $25,000. However, many clergy took on non-church or secular occupations due to financial needs, which impacted pastoral care to members.

There was also an educational disparity between the urban and rural clergy. At one time 80 percent of urban and rural clergy were not college trained and 86.6 percent did not have a bachelor’s degree.\textsuperscript{21} Fortunately as time progressed and professional doors and educational opportunities began to open up to African Americans, urban clergy started to pursue seminary training and education. This was vital to the black church clergy if they wanted any future sustainability in the profession, or if they wanted to continue helping the community as social needs grew. Education was especially important as through education pastors became more acutely aware of social issues and problems in the community. As Lincoln and Mamiya note, “In our field of interview with black clergy the churches that sponsor most creative and innovated programs in the community and in the church usually have well educated, well-trained pastors.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 119.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 163.
The urban pastors were able to recognize problems with the absentee father because they understood some of the troubles associated with urban life. The identification of these problems armed urban pastors with ammunition to establish programs to support residential, custodial, and absentee fathers. The theological programs, such as Bible studies, father and son initiatives, and mentorships, were biblically based to add the missing components that fathers needed to be positive role models. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) Urban Initiative has partnered with the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI), an organization dedicated to increasing the number of involved, responsible, and committed fathers, to provide much needed resources to heal fathers and families. Inside Out Dad is a biblically-based reentry program that reconnects inmates with their children and introduces the inmates to the transforming power of the gospel.23 These are some of the programs that the urban pastors and churches provide.

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CONCLUSION

Empirical data demonstrate that there is a crisis in the traditional family that is weakening it, and that crisis concerns the absence of fathers in the home. Without a father in the home or an active father interacting with his children, problems ensue. Children are at risk of ending up in poverty, dropping out of school, becoming pregnant and suffering psychological, social, and behavioral problems. Not only do children suffer, but society suffers. There is a high cost on society, and tax dollars must be spent to take care of children and single mothers through governmental assistance programs. Sad to say, this problem of absentee fathers is often identified along ethnic lines and appears to be worse in the African American community for the following reasons:

1. Racism and post-traumatic problems stemming from a history of slavery that still afflicts the black community, especially the African American male.
2. African American fathers not owning up to their responsibilities. They are choosing to place the burden of parenthood on the mother of the child or extended family members.
3. Negative images and stereotypes placed upon the African American male from “white America” that black men live into. If they are told they are not good fathers or do not know how to be skilled in fatherhood, this can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
4. Many African American males do not have a father in the home to model, teach, and provide instruction in the various skills of being a father and a man.
5. Governmental laws and statutes allow incentives for single mothers to be recipients of welfare benefits that result in fathers judging that it is better for the family if they give no financial support.

6. An inequitable number of African American males in our prison systems.

7. A failure on the part of churches to reach out to absentee fathers and offer positive family programs and family and marital counseling.

Although there are problems stemming from absentee fathers, there is hope that something can be done to give fathers support and the fortitude to be the providers and pillars for their families. The need for help for fathers is beginning to be a top priority for churches, which are now recognizing the benefits that accrue when fathers begin to become more involved with the church and the family. Also, churches are now seeing how marriage benefits fathers, and with this in mind, are starting to set up marital retreats and programs to give married couples tools to enable them to work through problems to stay married. Among those that have been in the forefront of aiding fathers is the black church. Besides help from the Black churches, other organizations such as Promise Keepers and Focus on the Family are educating and making accountable fathers of all races. Additionally, the government is also contributing to helping fathers as it attempts to remove policies that promote and adhere to prejudicial statutes against the African American male.

The hope for fathers is not only coming from the outside, but from within the black community. Black leaders, scholars, entertainers and sports personalities, and black colleges are reprimanding African American fathers, insisting they can no longer play the
role of victim or use the historical incident of slavery as an excuse for not finding employment or living up to their responsibility of fatherhood.

I am aware of the claim of how society and feminist groups view the effectiveness of fathers. My claim of the necessity of fathers is based on a different premise. Fatherhood is a sacred motif. Fathers are important. They can have a lasting and positive influence on the family, which can result in the children’s development having a lasting impact in society. They should recognize their value not only from a sociological perspective but from a theological perspective. God has ordained and destined fathers to be the spiritual guardians and instructors of their homes. God wants the male parent to model the teachings and practices of Jesus Christ to their children. God wants fathers to teach their children His commandments. When men take on the responsibilities of fatherhood, the family benefits; when the home and family are intact, the church is fortified; and when the church is fortified, society and the culture have a chance to change. Fathers are needed in the home not to show all their good qualities, but fathers are needed in the home so that children can see their humanity. In other words, the family should be able to see their fathers’ mistakes, failures and errors in striving to fulfill their role as a father. Children growing up in the home get to see how to avoid pitfalls that the father had committed so they do not have to repeat them. Growth is learned through failures. When one fails, one can see how to make it better the next time. Fathers are not perfect, but if they follow the perfect God the Father, they are on the right road to becoming the father needed today.
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ABSTRACT

A THEOLOGICAL NORMATIVE TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF FATHERHOOD IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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