

# Are Dads Ever Good Enough? Family

A reflection for Fathers' Day by Paul Subritzky, national director of Promise Keepers (NZ)

**F**atherhood is both a challenge and an awesome responsibility. It contains the potential for enormous satisfaction, as fathers have the opportunity to build eternal values into their children's lives. Dr James Dobson, the renowned author and psychologist, notes that "if you are honest, trustworthy, caring, loving, self-disciplined and God-fearing, your boys will be influenced by those traits as they age. If you are deeply committed to Jesus Christ and live by biblical principles, your children will probably follow in your footsteps."<sup>1</sup>

Promise Keepers believes most men both want to and can be great dads. Yet often they lack encouragement and support for the role, and the message they often receive on Father's Day may not help. On Mother's Day women are often strongly affirmed in their roles and motherhood is celebrated, while on Fathers' Day men receive a "how-to" list for being better fathers and husbands. Instead of being recognised for their sacrifices and achievements as fathers, what they do, it seems, is never good enough.

Says Dr Dobson: "Many fathers have a poor concept of what they're supposed to do or how to get it done. Some have surrendered their authority at home and are either uninvolved or else trying to nurture their children in ways that are more

characteristic of mothers."<sup>2</sup>

But children need the combination of qualities and security that *both* parents provide. Studies from around the world show that "...violent crime, drugs and alcohol abuse, truancy, unwed pregnancy, suicide, psychological disorders - all correlate more strongly to the absence of a biological married father in the home than with any other single factor."<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, the effects of positive fathering are almost limitless.

"...Well-fathered children have high self esteem, do better at school, have fewer mental health problems such as suicide and depression, and do well in employment,"<sup>4</sup> notes Dr Warwick Pudney, a researcher at Auckland's University of Technology.

### What Fathers Do

There are unique things fathers give their children through what they say, but mostly it is what they do. They often provide more vigorous activities that teach their children the values of fair play, responsibility and letting off steam. Fathers can help guide them into new experiences and encourage them to risk and adventure as a balance to the nurturing that mothers provide. As Dr Pudney notes, fathers have

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