

Father-Hunger in Knoxville

Jan 2003

Like many of you, I want to be a good father. I have four boys and much of my life revolves around nurturing and discipling them.

Part of my desire to be a committed father grows out of the pain I carry because I never had that modeled for me as a boy. My parents were divorced when I was young and, to this day, I occasionally feel pangs of what psychologists have come to call "father-hunger."

Father-hunger is a built in hunger for a father. It's an ache inside to be physically held, valued, guided, cherished and loved *by your dad*.

Father-hunger exists in epidemic proportions across Knox County. There are approximately 10,000 households in our county where children will go to bed tonight with no father in the home. Over 4,000 of these exist in poverty.

Fatherlessness is a serious community issue.

Research shows us:

- 85% of all youth sitting in prisons come from fatherless homes.
- 85% of children exhibiting behavioral disorders at school come from fatherless homes.
- 70% of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from fatherless homes
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes, and
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes

Knoxville's public housing is full of children without fathers. Approximately 75% of the apartments are listed as female-head of house.

In one section of our community called the **Empowerment Zone**, over half of the 9300 children live in single parent homes (most are single mother homes).

And the situation is not improving. In the last decade, Knox County has seen a 27.2% rise in single parent families (one in every ten households).

Many of our shelters stay at or above capacity most of the year. Kids and moms are sleeping on floors rather than beds.

Father-hunger is a growing reality in our community.

The Bible describes how our heavenly Father feels about those who experience father-hunger. I'm deeply challenged by the fact that He *defines* Himself as "father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5)! Our Father cares deeply about Knoxville's fatherless. His "father" heart longs to embrace and encourage each one to full maturity in Him. After all, He carefully crafted each one. They are made in His image!

So what does father-hunger have to do with you?

Knoxville needs Christian men and women who understand the pain of father-hunger and respond as Father does.

We need men and women whose reality is being shaped by the white hot "father" love of our heavenly Father. Our city is crying out for people who, by virtue of drawing close to Father, gain His heart for the fatherless in this city.

When this happens, we begin to see the fatherless as OUR fatherless, MY fatherless, and YOUR fatherless. That is the paradigm shift that must occur in this community! We must begin to see and think and love as only a "Father" can. His heart on display in our lives may be the clearest proof of the gospel this city has ever seen.

Last year a police officer showed me ten photographs of a prostitute taken over a ten year period. He wanted to show the impact of drugs and prostitution over time. The transformation was horrific. Over the ten year period, the once beautiful lady was transformed into a haggard old woman.

I ask you: how would you look at her if she was your daughter? How do Father-hearted people see this woman? Your answer is crucial as it indicates the mindset of one who is in relationship with Father.

We need men and women in this city who, having met the Father, are being transformed by knowing Him personally; people who are becoming Father-hearted: willing to pray, and fast, and learn, and listen and ACT until the father-hunger in Knoxville goes away.

And I believe it can go away. There are just too many of us who love Jesus in this city!

To connect with the fatherless, send us an email (info@compassioncoalition.org).

Andy Rittenhouse,
Executive Director
Compassion Coalition
Knoxville TN