

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: How can I get my husband to take a more active role in parenting our children? He seems to think bringing home the paycheck is the most important thing he can do for us. He works long hours so I hate to say anything, but I need his involvement!

ANSWER: When children are interviewed, they always say **they would settle for far less materially if they could have the presence of their fathers more often.** I cannot judge the heart-motive of your husband, but I will offer some understanding of what motivates the heart of a man, and how you might challenge him to give more of himself.

A man finds his greatest fulfillment in accomplishment (work). That is the task God gave him in the Garden...to work. But because of sin, God cursed the very area of a man's life where he finds fulfillment--his accomplishment/work. Now there are "weeds" in a man's life, and he will search for the **easiest and safest** setting to find accomplishment. In the lives of many men, the safest and easiest place is career. Often, relationships are just too much work for men. Not only are they too much work; they are often too inconsistent in providing the kind of gratification a man desires. It becomes far easier to find quick accomplishment and gratification at the keyboard surfing the Internet, or scanning a pornographic magazine, or hanging out with the guys, or watching the game, or having a drink, making the sale, or working long hours. Get the picture?

Men live in fear that they do not have what it takes when it comes to family relationships. He can fix the car, but what can he do about fixing the kids??? Results are hard to see; rewards are often intangible. It is easier to go off to work than to try to accomplish anything measurable in the lives of those at home. He also knows that it will seem unjustified to criticize him for his lack of involvement at home when he puts in 60 hours a week at work.

Understand that your husband lives in the shadow of fear. **He will avoid failure with a passion.** It is hard for him to feel successful with his kids. **Fathers handle this fear with varying degrees of avoidance.** On the one end of the avoidance spectrum, they can be so abusive at the times they do interact with their kids that the kids don't want dad around. At the other end, they can be so naive and inept around their kids that the kids know they can't really expect much of anything from dad. Between these extremes are selfish dads who just don't want the bother of kids, and adolescent dads who have never grown up themselves. It is important that you understand the mechanism and manifestation of your husband's avoidance.

On the other hand, **men are also thirsty**...thirsty to give what they have to give. They want to be able to do things for their family. They want to succeed. They long to have good gifts to offer their wives and families. Men do, in fact, have wonderful gifts to offer their families: Their ability to sacrifice and provide strength to name a couple. Once your husband knows he has something to offer, and can succeed when he does offer it, he will be far more interested in interacting with his kids.

A mother's job is to be clever in helping her husband find ways to experience success and accomplishment with his kids. For dads, this success is usually found in the areas of **doing projects and playing** (both forms of accomplishment). Don't rob your husband by seizing all of the teaching opportunities with your kids. Defer to him in the presence of the kids. Encourage him when and how he plays with the kids. For some real heart-connection, get dad to create a special time to read some good stories to the kids. Look for some good "adventure" times as a family. Camping, mission trips etc. work well to bond fathers with the rest of the family. Challenge your husband without nagging. Men feel love through the vehicle

of respect; they want a wife who is a companion not a boss. Affirm and encourage him when he succeeds with you and the kids. Have a vision for who he might be. Pray daily with and for him. Applaud him when he tries to lead.

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