



Is Single Parenting a Better Option?

There is little doubt that the traditional family unit of dad, mum and their children is fast becoming the exception rather than the rule these days. Today we are faced with a smorgasbord of configurations for a family. De facto relationships are very common, as are step family situations. Single parenting is also much more of an attractive option than it was previously. In Australia it is estimated that one fifth of all families with children under fifteen years are now one parent families. In the US this figure increases to approximately thirty percent.



As Christians we are called to love and accept people from all family situations, and not to judge. We would do well to remember this, while we also remember that not everyone made that choice to be a solo parent. For some, death has taken their spouse prematurely. Others may find that their spouse has left the family home and the marriage relationship without any warning or consultation. For these people single parenting may be a hard road, and one they would not choose to walk.

While we continue to love those who walk this difficult road, I believe we are also called to uphold and promote the standards that God has given us in the Bible. If we stay silent and accept the standards of the culture around us without questioning, are we really being salt in this world?

And so I write this message in response to an article I read only recently in the Sunday Life, a regular magazine which comes as part of The Sun Herald. The article entitled, 'Flying Solo', was written by a woman who chose to end her marriage and raise her children as a single parent. Sabrina Broadbent questions the thinking that two parents are better than one, and asks, "what if single parenting is more harmonious, more loving and more successful than the conventional model?" (Sunday Life, 25/7/10) The author responds to this by maintaining that children can in fact be better off in a single parent home, suggesting that with the dissolution of the nuclear family structure, greater equality, intimacy and companionship between parent and child can develop.

This situation may indeed sound attractive, and there may well be some positive outcomes for single parents and their children, but let us not lose sight of the facts here. Research has shown that children are far better off (in general) when they are in a family with both parents. It has been seen that children in single parent homes have a higher prevalence of physical, emotional and psychological problems. The resulting issues for children may be because of circumstances that co-occur with single parent families (such as economic disadvantage, residential instability, disrupted parenting and interparental conflict) or may be a direct result of having only one parent (reduced income, increased stress on parent, lack of time available for children).

There is evidence to suggest that children from one parent homes are at greater risk of

obesity, drug abuse or drug addiction, psychiatric disease, suicide or attempted suicide or injury, and involvement in criminal activity, than children from a traditional two parent home. This is not at all to suggest that every child from a single parent home will experience these things, but simply that there is an increased risk.

By far the greater proportion of single parent homes are headed by mothers. This creates another significant problem; many children are growing up without a male role model. Researchers see this as being greatly detrimental both to children and society. "The social research on the importance of fathers is now extremely well-established, and quite convincing. Thousands of international studies have told us the same thing: children do better by every social indicator when a father is present" ('The perils of fatherlessness', Bill Muehlenberg's Culture Watch, Quadrant Online).

I want to acknowledge that many children from one parent homes may in fact do very well and experience very few of the problems stated above. But the fact remains that two parents are better than one, when it is at all possible.

My words are in no way meant to criticize or cause further pain in a difficult situation. Rather, I want to challenge us, as Christians, to remember what we stand for, to represent God's standards in the culture in which we live, and to question those who would oppose what God has instituted. Will you join me in this?

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