

# MAGNOLIA MINDS: Fathers Leave tracks

*By Dean Register*

We are living in a time of gigantic moral and spiritual upheaval and the need for godly fathers cannot be overstated. The most endangered species in America today might not be the Florida Panter, the California Condor, or the Mississippi Gopher frog. If the current trend continues, then the most endangered species could be a godly dad who loves and leads his children to become courageous followers of Jesus.

My dad was a WWII Army Sergeant who left tracks across Italy and North Africa fighting against the Nazi Axis. As a child, I often prodded him to tell me war stories. To him, however, the greatest war was not a place on a distant shore, but a place in the hearts of his sons. He knew that fathers leave tracks that ultimately point children toward righteousness or ruin.

The Apostle Paul emphasized a two-fold battle plan for fathers. The first involves constraint: "Fathers do not provoke your children to anger." The second involves correction: "Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Godly dads must refrain from harsh nagging and demeaning sarcasm that leads to bitterness and discouragement. On the other hand, they must practice Christ-like discipline and instruction. The entire battle plan operates under the phrase "of the Lord." The Lordship of Christ must beat strongly in the hearts of fathers. Otherwise, the tracks they leave will be confusing. Sadly, a Barna Research Group found that very few fathers consider the spiritual health of their children to be a priority.

The ouch for dads who care is the realization that hundreds of

hours and dollars are spent on teaching their kids how to catch a football, hit a baseball, putt a golf ball, kick a soccer ball, shoot a basketball, or perform gymnastics, ballet, swimming, cheering, and dancing. None of those things are bad activities, but the hard question to be faced is why dads don't invest the same hours and money on their kid's spiritual and biblical development.

Since fathers leave tracks it's crucial to be the kind of man that God delights to use. Joshua was a man who made his faith known to his family and his community. He said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). The kind of dad that God uses knows that steps of godliness leave undeniable footprints that impact the future.

It's too easy for our secular culture to underestimate a father's impact. But the fact remains that he has an irreplaceable responsibility.

In ancient Greece, there was a celebrated footrace in which runners received a burning torch at the start of the race. Despite the grueling race, the prize didn't go to the fastest runner or the strongest runner. The prize went to the first runner to cross the finish line with his torch still burning. Fathers have an irrevocable race to run. The torch of faith, hope, and love must remain burning because kids are watching the tracks their fathers leave.

*Register is Pastor Emeritus and Minister of Congregational Health at Crosspoint Church, Hattiesburg.*