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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Influence of a Biblical Fatherhood Programme on Faith Communities: A Community Engagement Strategy

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Abstract: This paper emphasises the significance of fatherhood, specifically the Fatherhood of God, and the experiential reality of faith communities as a viable framework for theology and public life. Numerous faith communities in South Africa contend with challenges such as poverty, unemployment, financial difficulties, alcoholism, occultism, Satanism and familial issues, including gender-based violence, father absence, fatherlessness and single parenthood. An intervention that encompasses training and the provision of resources for fathers is necessary and imperative. Faith communities took action on the demand for a biblical fatherhood initiative. Human fatherhood warrants recognition and serious contemplation, as it provides a foreshadowing of the nature of God the Father. Contemporary fatherhood is a facet of fractured families and arguably the most perilous aspect globally. The study reported on in this paper aims to mitigate the social and destructive problem of father absence by implementing a biblical fatherhood programme. The programme has a biblical nature aimed at addressing social issues in faith communities. The programme was developed from a practical theological study of fatherhood, primarily aimed at training and equipping participants with knowledge about fatherhood through community engagement.

Keywords: biblical fatherhood, faith communities, Fatherhood of God, father absence, intervention, programme

Rationale

The biblical fatherhood programme reported on in this paper ([click here for more on Fatherhood Programme](#)) has significantly influenced faith communities, theology and

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public life by cultivating strong, engaged fathers who exemplify scriptural principles. The programme nurtures spiritual leadership in faith communities, also enhancing familial bonds and church participation. Furthermore, it reinforces biblical teachings regarding fatherhood, highlighting God's intention for paternal guidance, accountability and care. Moreover, it influences society by fostering stable households, mitigating social and detrimental problems associated with paternal absence and advocating policies that uphold familial bonds and integrity. Such programmes cultivate and develop men who lead with conviction, influencing future generations through discipleship, ethical integrity and community engagement service, ultimately embodying God's fatherly nature in all spheres of life.

Within the scope of this paper, community engagement refers to the strategy employed to assist society in addressing communal issues and challenges. Holland and Malone (2019:1) characterise community engagement as the process of the execution of and collaboration in decision-making. Polat and Yildiz (2019:71) assert that community engagement is a fundamental component of planning and design in developing communities. Faith communities can be accessed via intervention, community programmes and projects through community engagement. The term faith communities denotes individuals affiliated with a specific church of a particular religious denomination. The individuals in faith communities possess a specific set of religious beliefs. The levels of commitment within any faith community vary.

For this biblical fatherhood programme, collaboration between the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus in South Africa, and faith communities is essential, especially in rural regions. Rural communities frequently experience inadequate services owing to numerous challenges (Baldwin & Poje, 2020:16). According to Mashau (2019:6), the significance of faith communities must be highlighted, as they should provide shelter for the homeless, advocate for the voiceless and safeguard the marginalised in society. Consequently, they should strive to prevent discord among community members (Moon, 2019:99). Faith communities are acknowledged as significant leaders within communities owing to their engagement with the challenging factors that influence religious life and communal dynamics (Hardison-Moody & Yao, 2019:363). Moreover, faith communities ought to cultivate an environment that facilitates knowledge acquisition in communities (Chifeche & Dreyer, 2019:4).

Within the framework of this paper, biblical knowledge ought to serve as the optimal perspective on the concept of fatherhood. The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme of the North-West University Faculty of Theology underscores the notion of fatherhood in accordance with biblical principles and directives. The notion of fatherhood is rooted in the Bible, which offers remarkable principles that

affirm the uniqueness of God as Father. The role of an earthly father within a familial structure is substantial. The highest honour God can bestow upon a man is to designate him as a father (Munroe, 2001). "The fathers have consumed a sour grape, and the children's teeth are rendered sensitive" (Jeremiah 31:29). This verse represents the father's supremacy as the primary authority within the family. However, significant transformations have taken place in familial dynamics and structure, along with notable alterations in paternal authority (Oliker, 2011). The phrase 'The fathers have eaten' also appears in Ezekiel 18:2, where it is referenced as a proverb. Men expressed grievances regarding their punishment, asserting that they endured the consequences of the transgressions of their forebears. The identical words are associated with the second commandment in Exodus 20:5, and in this era, these patriarchs discovered a justification for their own irresponsibility.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel perceived these particular words as imbued with divine authority. Every individual is accountable for his or her own actions. The phrase 'who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge' is a modification of the proverbial expression. Individuals will bear the consequences of their fathers' sins without any culpability.

Background

Faith communities contend with challenges such as fractured families, paternal absenteeism, fatherlessness, unemployment and violence (Freeks, 2018). The researcher has noted that, with assistance from North-West University and the Faculty of Theology, faith communities have been enhanced through the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme, despite the challenges faced. This programme educates individuals on biblical principles regarding the Fatherhood of God and human fatherhood. Moreover, the programme serves as an optimal safeguard against the difficulties posed by paternal absence within faith communities encountered in individuals' daily lives.

Introduction and problem statement

This paper proposes the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme as a means to assist and strengthen faith communities in addressing the detrimental social issue of father absence (Freeks, 2011a, 2011b). What is the rationale for including the Bible in a training programme? The Bible is roughly 2000 years old. Owing to its antiquity, numerous authors, researchers, academics and even the general populace question the applicability and relevance of the Bible's moral teachings to modern life. Some Christians lack full confidence in the significance and applicability of the Bible

to contemporary societal issues, including paternal absence, fatherlessness, the disengagement of fathers and fractured families.

The researcher, as the author of this paper and a Christian, unequivocally views the Bible as a reliable, authoritative and trustworthy standard for morality and the issues mentioned above. The Bible has long served as a source and foundation for human issues, such as moral values, which have influenced many, including the researcher, and have shaped cultures, traditions and civilisations. The researcher relies on the Bible as the standard and foundation for issues and morality, believing that biblical principles, ethical norms and moral teachings originate from God the Father and that the Bible is the Word of God. Although the researcher's argument may appear self-evident and potentially inconsequential, it merits contemplation regarding its significance in one's spiritual journey and lived experiences with God and the Bible, as well as people's interactions in a secular context.

The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme has been employed to instruct and prepare faith-based communities to address issues related to fatherhood. The perception of fatherhood has evolved significantly over time, and research indicates that many families encounter substantial issues and challenges within society. The absence of fathers presents a significant societal challenge, exacerbating issues in communities and leading to an alarming decline in fatherhood (Popenoe, 1996).

The absence of fathers is a societal affliction confronting the nation of South Africa (Salami & Okeke, 2018:2). Research consistently substantiates that the phenomenon of paternal absence is a significant societal issue (Freeks, 2019:1-3; Londt, Kock & John-Langba 2017: 154-155; Matlakala et al., 2019:6-7; Salami & Okeke, 2018:4-7). Indeed, father absence has been identified by Carstens (2014) as the fourth most pressing problem globally.

Research indicates that dysfunctional family dynamics constitute a significant societal issue, with paternal absence as the focal point (Carstens, 2014:10). Father absence is a prevalent and global phenomenon observed in numerous communities worldwide (Freeks, Strydom & Bartlett, 2015:46; Dobbs, 2013:2; Williams, 2014). Globally, there is a statistical trend resembling a 'fatherhood disease' and a swift rise in single parenting (Freeks, 2019:1-3; Goodsell & Meldrum, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2011). The absence of fathers is the primary factor contributing to the increasing prevalence of single mothers in South Africa (Bertelsmann, 2016). In South Africa, single-parent households have become prevalent, with the 'typical' child being raised solely by the mother. The number of children living without their fathers has

consistently risen since democracy has been established in South Africa. The absence of a father is perceived as socially detrimental for many children in South Africa, as it results in the absence of a positive male role model in the household. The absence of fathers significantly affects family dynamics and represents a concerning social trend, comparable to major diseases such as the human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (Freeks, 2019:2). Yi and Nel (2020:2) have identified the human immunodeficiency virus epidemic as a primary factor contributing to paternal absence.

Moreover, father absence adversely affects families and communities, resulting in numerous families enduring challenging domestic circumstances. When these circumstances are harmful and catastrophic to families, family members may attribute their misfortunes and adversities to God. Therefore, the advocacy for biblical fatherhood is essential for families, communities and parents. Children are a divine blessing to parents; however, many children are reared in households where fathers neglect their duties (Freeks, 2008). Owing to father absence, the South African society has deviated from acknowledging the significance of fatherhood.

The increasing absence of fathers and their failure to fulfil their parental responsibilities pose significant challenges to the concept of fatherhood, and the ongoing discourse surrounding father absence appears unfavourable (Eddy, Thomson-de Boor & Mphaka, 2013:10). In South Africa, fatherhood is linked to the concept of masculinity and is grounded in socio-economic history (Richter & Morrell, 2006). Nonetheless, although fatherhood is inherently masculine, it encompasses numerous distinct manifestations (Leopeng & Langa, 2017:438).

In sociological terms, fatherhood is perceived as a social construct, as family and fatherhood are viewed not as entities but as social institutions (Thunsteadt, 2017:4). Furthermore, research in South Africa regarding fatherhood has primarily concentrated on violence, gender dynamics, masculine authority, paternal responsibilities and family support (Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012). However, fatherhood transcends the themes of violence, gender and provision. The researcher believes that the concept of biblical or Christian fatherhood is infrequently addressed in research and academic studies. Yi and Nel (2020:1) have found in their research that adolescent children who are estranged from their fathers or lack paternal presence struggle to perceive the proximity of God the Father and may develop a negative perception of God.

Objective of the research

In this paper, the researcher aims to examine the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme and its biblical influence on faith communities, while also reflecting on spiritual life, lived experiences and personal growth.

Research design and methodology

This paper builds upon a reflective discussion in which training and equipping were implemented through a community engagement strategy grounded in practical theological research on biblical fatherhood (Freeks, 2011a). The discourse progressed through investigation, theory, education, preparation and contemplation. As a methodology, reflection allows researchers and practitioners to theorise based on their own experiences, thereby enhancing and advancing their work (Morley, 2013:166). Reflection is a crucial cognitive process. It represents a reversion to 'the self', in which the researcher (inquirer) assumes the role of an observer (Mortari, 2015:1). The reflective discussion has focused on faith communities, specifically examining their lived experiences, behaviours, spiritual lives and perceptions of the Bible in relation to the above-mentioned fatherhood programme.

The notion of paternity

The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme primarily focuses on the concept of fatherhood from a biblical perspective. The concept of fatherhood, parenthood and family dynamics is undergoing significant transformation as individuals navigate the dichotomy between traditional and modern interpretations of fatherhood (Richter, Chikovore & Makusha, 2010:2). In South Africa, the concept of fatherhood is predominantly associated with manhood or masculinity (Meyer, 2018:4; Morrell, 2006:15), representing a human and cultural role (Richter & Morrell, 2006:8, 18). For instance, the conventional approach prioritises biological factors, which contrasts with the contemporary perspective that emphasises two dimensions: economic and social (Morrell, 2006:14). Fatherhood cannot be comprehended without considering the framework of patriarchy (Meyer, 2018:7), as it encompasses more than merely the notion of patriarchal fatherhood. According to Dowd (2012:917-919), fatherhood should be characterised by the approach to child-rearing, encompassing physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual care.

Other authors, such as McCarthy and Edwards (2011:95), assert that fatherhood refers to the concept that specific men are assigned the role of father and bear responsibility for their children. Fatherhood encompasses the provision of spiritual

and physical care for children and providing for their intellectual and emotional needs (Dowd, 2012:917-919; Freeks, 2019: 692-696; Makofane, 2015:24). The notion of fatherhood can be comprehended and manifested in various manners. There is no universally accepted definition of fatherhood, and researchers and academics interpret the concept differently (Rabe, 2006:25).

Aside from the previously noted points, additional research consistently validates that fatherhood is vital in society and fathers continue to fulfil a significant role within families (Vaughan, 2010). Abraham Lincoln affirmed the significance of fatherhood more than two centuries ago by stating that a nation's strength resides in the home where both father and mother collaborate (Family Life, 1998:2).

The most significant transformation in the comprehension of fatherhood arises from recognising God as the Father (Smail, 1980:10). Fatherhood derives from the Fatherhood of God. He is the progenitor of his creation and his people, and the qualities of his paternity should be recognised as safeguarding, sustenance, warmth, tenderness, clemency and engagement, allowing human parenting to derive from and embody this notion. The biblical analogy juxtaposing human fatherhood with that of Father God implies that a man should conform to the principles of biblical fatherhood.

In recent decades, fathers have gained prominence in research; however, there remains a substantial amount to learn and uncover regarding their roles. Most studies (including Cabrera, 2020; Meyer, 2018; Pikel-Uludağlı, 2019; Peyper, De Klerk & Spies, 2015; Sieber, 2008; Wood & Brownhill, 2018) examine father involvement, father attachments and fatherhood models through the lenses of psychological, social and physical sciences, positioning the human father as the focal point. Limited research demonstrates the significant impact of the Fatherhood of God. A notable study from the alternative perspective is Popenoe's (1996) research.

The researcher's primary assertion regarding the concept and definition of fatherhood is that it originates from the Bible, which is essential for understanding the concept from a biblical viewpoint. Fatherhood encompasses the father's role within the family, emphasising responsibilities, accountabilities, respect, discipline and obedience. In this context, the family represents God's framework in society for mending communal fractures.

Nel (2018:56) highlights the significance of family in Genesis 17, where God engages with households. Nel also asserts that the Bible serves as a compendium of familial narratives. The Trinity represents God as a divine family, while the familial structure of father, mother and children symbolises this sacred community. Our world requires an

ideal heavenly Father. The concept of fatherhood has evolved over time, leading to numerous families confronting significant challenges within their communities.

A significant issue in contemporary family life is the problem of fatherhood. The notion of fatherhood predates Christianity and is not confined to the Christian faith (Meyer, 2018:1). The resolution to issues related to fatherhood, including father absence, fatherlessness and the yearning for paternal presence, is found in God through His Son, Jesus Christ, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The concept of biblical fatherhood extends beyond merely being an authoritative source of admonition, connection, instruction, training and equipping. It offers substantial measures and guidelines that affirm the distinctiveness of God as Father, while emphasising the importance of an earthly father within a familial structure.

The researcher believes that this biblical expression of fatherhood has significantly diminished and become obsolete. However, this biblical method should be restored. The disclosure of God via Scripture as the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, and His salvific grace offers not only knowledge but also fundamental assistance, counsel and a significant understanding of fatherhood in a time characterised by fractured families and paternal absence. The earthly father is obligated to fulfil this biblical role, as he is divinely appointed to do so in the family context.

The biblical analogy juxtaposing human fatherhood with God the Father implies that men must conform to the principles of biblical fatherhood. The father should fulfil his role as an authority figure, as ordained by God, especially in the family context and specifically concerning the children.

The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme

Provenance and context

The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme was initially formulated in 2011 (Freeks, 2011b) and organised and assembled based on my research (see Freeks, 2004, 2011b). Subsequently, it was expanded, revised and modified based on additional research concerning fatherhood, father absence, disengaged fathers and the essential role of fathers within the familial framework (Freeks, 2018). The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme commenced officially in 2012 in the Christiana District, North West province, and is included in the Community Engagement Projects of the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University in Potchefstroom. The programme has the potential to affect faith communities positively and mitigate the adverse effects of paternal absence.

The structure of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme

The structure of the programme includes a manual, a workbook and practical activities (Freeks, 2011b). The themes of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme are as follows:

- the notion of fatherhood
- the significance of self-perception
- the concept of character and profession
- the aspect of labelling
- the aspect of disappointments
- the father as a developer
- the father executing his responsibilities within the family

The objectives of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme

The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme addresses father absence, the disengagement of fathers and familial challenges. The programme seeks to enhance familial relationships by emphasising the leadership roles of both the father and the mother, specifically focusing on the father's fundamental role within the family structure. Faith communities are urged to engage more actively in the lives of their families, especially their children. The programme aims to facilitate connections among faith communities, empower them and assist in identifying shared objectives. The content prominently underscores biblical truths regarding fatherhood and serves to instruct, train and equip faith communities with skills and theological understanding of its significance. The programme offers distinctive opportunities to make a lasting investment in the lives of faith communities by providing biblical solutions and hope. Religious communities can thrive within society by establishing a foundation of trust, mutual respect, connection and engagement based on biblical principles.

The influence of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme on faith communities

The researcher deemed it essential to contemplate seven specific and critical perceptions following the training and equipping of faith communities with the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme. These perceptions are discussed below.

Perception 1: Significance of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme

The participating faith communities reported having a transformative experience through the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme. The programme facilitated their return to God, resulting in a positive transformation in their lives. Notably, more than 50% of the faith communities expressed a strong interest in Christianity. Most of the faith communities assessed the programme as exceptionally high. Members of the faith communities stated that the programme instructed them to involve God in their challenges. Throughout the training and preparation, the researcher observed that many faith communities had a skewed self-perception, resulting in a misinterpretation of how God perceived them. Consequently, the programme has the capacity to educate faith communities regarding God and empower them to make informed decisions about their lives, especially in the face of important choices.

The programme educated numerous faith communities on the importance of prayer, especially in the context of life challenges. It was essential during the training for faith communities to recognise the importance of dedicating time to praying to God, especially when confronting challenges and adverse situations (Jakes, 2008:434). Several participants indicated that they felt a void in their lives, prompting them to incorporate the fatherhood programme into their routines. The programme instructed them that they could attain specialisation in their respective fields, as no individual is inconsequential and each person holds intrinsic value, especially in the sight of God.

Perception 2: The function of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme

The researcher explicitly communicated to the participants that God fulfils a distinctive and pivotal role in the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme. They stated, 'The fatherhood programme reconnected us with God and illuminated the significance of both God and life.'

Humans are divine creations and are, consequently, inherently virtuous beings fashioned in the likeness of God. Believers maintain relationships with God, themselves, others and their surrounding environment (Freeks, 2008). Moreover, it is essential to recognise that all life originated from God and derives its purpose from Him (Col 1:16). God holds paramount significance in human existence, as humanity was created by God and for God's gratification. Life will remain incomprehensible to

humans until they grasp this concept (Van der Walt, 1999:328-329; Warren, 2002:17-18).

Perception 3: The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme aligns with the Scriptures

The fatherhood programme, aligned with biblical teachings, was deemed by faith communities to offer significant and pertinent information, consistent with the purpose of the Bible. Members of the faith communities declared, 'The programme enhanced our trust in God as it educated us about the Bible.' The Bible serves as the sacred text of faith, with its central message being the kingdom of God. The Bible presents a fundamental account of God's actions throughout human history and all of creation (Van der Walt, 2001:68). The core of the fatherhood manual is its incorporation of biblical principles in the programme. It instructed various faith communities that they are distinct and valued individuals, cherished by God, and should perceive themselves as God intended, rather than through their own perspective or that of others (Freeks, 2008).

Furthermore, the course imparted biblical knowledge to the participants and reinforced their faith, as faith communities were instructed that the Bible, regarded as the Word of God, is dynamic. The communication and significance of the Bible flourish, evolve and ultimately produce a harvest in individuals' lives (Jakes, 2008:186). Most of the participants indicated that the Bible transformed their lives, as the fatherhood programme guided them to the Bible for answers and solutions to their challenges and circumstances. The programme positively transformed the lives of numerous faith communities owing to its biblical perspective (Freeks, 2008).

In the Scriptures, Paul proclaims that human lives are transformed through Jesus Christ (Phil 3:21). Van der Walt (2008:15) elucidates that the Bible constitutes God's written revelation, in which God discloses to humanity the significance of phenomena that would otherwise remain obscure. The attachment to God is a predictor of psychological well-being, especially when religious activities are engaged, aiding individuals in managing their life experiences (Limke & Mayfield, 2011:123). The programme led faith communities to develop a belief in God and depend on Him for their daily necessities. Notably, Scripture instructs that individuals who have faith in God will remain steadfast and prosper in life (2 Chr 20:20).

Perception 4: The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme asserts that a robust relationship with God is essential

The participating faith communities declared that the programme facilitated their experience of healthy relationships with God. They can comprehend the true significance of their existence by recognising their identity in relation to God's creation of humanity (see Gen 1-2). The faith communities fostered a positive relationship with God through spirituality. All Christians, encompassing faith communities, ought to cultivate a personal relationship with God through Christ (Munroe, 2001:57).

Perception 5: The implementation of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme is necessary

Numerous faith communities indicated that the programme ought to be integrated into their daily lives, as it imparted significant insights into the Bible. Consequently, they are obligated to implement this knowledge and apply the lessons acquired from the programme.

Perception 6: The significance of respect and self-respect in the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme

The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme instils reverence for God, the self, the family and others. Members of the faith communities articulated that 'respect for God is paramount in our lives, and a deficiency of respect undermines relationships and collaboration among individuals'. They further noted, 'This mindset frequently leads to poor conduct and behaviour among us as workers, which adversely affects our relationship with God.' The Bible encompasses a moral dimension that establishes the basis for reverence towards God. Isaiah 17:7 instructs individuals to have reverence for their Creator, the Holy One of Israel. Individuals ought to revere and esteem God, and He will reciprocate with honour and respect (1 Sam 2:30).

In the New Testament, Jesus affirmed that honouring and respecting the Son equates to honouring and respecting the Father (John 5:23). Individuals who adhere to and honour God's directives, statutes or decrees experience a blessed and gratifying existence (Van der Walt, 2010:25, 183).

Most of the faith communities emphasised the significance of self-respect, familial respect and mutual love. They articulated that respect and self-respect shape and have an impact on an individual's entire existence. Respect engenders mutual respect, and faith communities should first cultivate self-respect and strive to garner the

respect of others (Oosthuizen, 2006:5). Self-respect and familial bonds are essential, as respect serves as an implicit principle governing intimate relationships such as those within families. The biblical testimony emphasises that the lives of faith communities should be governed by love, as Christ loved them and sacrificed Himself as a pleasing offering to God (see Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006:883; see also Eph 5:2; John 3).

Perception 7: The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme imparts essential knowledge, self-awareness, gratitude and a constructive mindset

The faith communities stated that the programme provided them with substantial knowledge and fostered an appreciation and optimistic perspective on life. Regarding self-awareness, they noted that they had gained a comprehensive understanding of their identities following the fatherhood programme.

Remarks made by the faith communities

The faith communities also made the following remarks with regard to the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme:

It is imperative to show respect to others. The programme emphasises the importance of respecting others and how this respect can enhance both one's self-image and the self-image of others, which is a crucial element of interpersonal relationships and personal identity. Respect is an emotion-driven concept that has been regarded as a significant facet of personal identity in recent decades. Moreover, it is a particularly crucial element in a marriage (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2006:882). Couples possess two fundamental requirements in their marriage: love and mutual respect. Respect for others is a principle strongly endorsed by biblical testimony (Frei & Shaver, 2002:121; Rom 12:9).

A participant also stated, 'We understand the nature of our relationships and how to attend to our well-being.' Emotionally intelligent faith communities can coexist harmoniously with others. Consequently, they will resolve conflict, self-motivate and attain most of their life goals (Rae, Nelson & Pederson, 2005:18). Many individuals grapple with the inquiry 'Who am I?' and their existential purpose (Warren, 2002:312). Understanding one's purpose will streamline life, as it delineates the objectives one endeavours to achieve. A purpose serves as the criterion by which an individual can evaluate the significance of various aspects of life (Warren, 2002:31). When individuals are candid and transparent, their character will embody their authentic self, which represents the core of their identity and their genuine conduct. One's

authentic self provides significance in life (Schlegel et al., 2011:1-2). The true self consists of the traits and qualities that authentically define an individual (Schlegel & Hicks, 2011:991). Individuals' authentic identities are fundamentally a divine endowment; their actions reflect their offering to the divine (Warren, 2002:249).

The biblical account asserts that humanity is created in the likeness of God and operates as integral components of Christ's body (Gen 2:26-27; Rom 12:5). The Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme instructs faith communities to develop not only secular and self-knowledge but also biblical knowledge. Through Jesus Christ, individuals can develop in grace and knowledge, uncovering their identity and purpose (2 Pet 3:18). The objective of faith communities is to mature, attain spiritual growth and cultivate the attributes of Jesus Christ. His intent prevails, notwithstanding the multitude of individuals' plans and life designs (Eph 4:15; Prov 19:21; Warren, 2002:179).

Gratitude in the programme

Regarding gratitude, the faith communities remarked that the programme instilled gratitude and appreciation for life, enhancing their personal development. They also expressed their gratitude for the programme as a valuable educational resource for success.

Joyful and pleasant emotions characterise a grateful individual, with gratitude serving as the cornerstone of personal well-being (Ahrens & Forbes, 2014:342; Smith, Tong & Ellsworth, 2014:19). Most individuals prefer to experience happiness over unhappiness and place a high value on positive emotions, such as enthusiasm and excitement (Livingstone & Srivastava, 2014:84). It is important to note that gratitude fosters good health (Battié, 2015:557). Biblical doctrine posits that God anticipates gratitude from individuals, especially within faith communities, in all circumstances of life (1 Thess 5:18). In line with this, Ephesians 5:20 states that believers ought to express gratitude to God the Father for all things.

Regarding the assessment of transformative experiences and an optimistic outlook on life, members of the participating faith communities elucidated the following:

- “Our lives improved significantly, and we developed a strong sense of optimism toward life.”
- “We embraced our identities and are not reliant on others to transform our lives.”

- “We felt optimistic about life and will not relent, as we have acquired a clear vision for the future after participating in the programme.”

It is crucial for participants to recognise that a positive attitude and disposition result in healthier outcomes (Kato et al., 2012:359). This comprehension elucidates a significant component of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme. Faith communities are likely to abandon their efforts if they maintain a negative perspective owing to their experiences, as they would then concentrate on the negative rather than the positive and a constructive outlook (O’Baugh et al., 2008:111). Moreover, a lack of vision, coupled with a negative disposition, will prevent individuals from realising their purpose, as per biblical wisdom (Prov 29:18). Consequently, possessing a vision and a purpose in life is essential. This precisely delineates the components of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme.

Recommendations

This paper about faith communities and the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme makes the following recommendations:

- It is essential to obtain authorisation to engage with faith communities prior to initiating any project, programme, intervention, workshop or research.
- Comprehensive training in paternal knowledge and skills should be integrated into the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme to prepare faith communities for their vital role as members of society.
- The biblical principles and truths serve as the driving force and foundation of the programme, which is emphasised in this paper; therefore, this programme should be implemented in other communities in the province and the country.
- Faith communities ought to be motivated to cultivate resilient families and provide effective parenting training.

Final Concluding Thoughts

The primary focus of the Biblical Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme instructs faith communities on effective parenting, emphasising familial involvement and imparting biblical teachings regarding God as Father. This presents a significant challenge for faith communities, as many individuals may feel intimidated, and prevailing opinions among community members can undermine their role. Human fatherhood must be regarded with gravity, as it reflects the essence of God the Father; without human fatherhood, all understanding and truth regarding God the Father

become void and insignificant. Contemporary fatherhood is a crucial yet potentially threatened and endangered aspect of society. Hence, faith communities bear a significant and pertinent responsibility concerning fatherhood and should put it into practice in families and society.

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