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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Iron Sharpens Iron: Mentoring and Equipping Faith-Based Dads for Community Impact

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Abstract: *Iron sharpens iron* – just as one man sharpens another. Through intentional mentorship, dads acquire the insight, confidence and fortitude to lead with purpose. Equipping dads in this manner cultivates development, accountability and resilience – moulding men who contribute positively to their families and communities. However, paternal absence is a detrimental social issue embedded in larger societal frameworks, perpetuating cycles of poverty, emotional instability and fragile family systems, thereby eroding community cohesiveness and generational welfare. Dads are increasingly experiencing this as a social crisis, also known as the fatherhood dilemma, and are often misrepresented in studies and theories aimed at elucidating the dynamics between mothers and children. Moreover, while dads were historically seen as the cornerstone of the family, society has increasingly acknowledged paternal absence as a familial concern. Unfortunately, the absence of dads is a detrimental occurrence and trend that society confronts on a worldwide scale. Therefore, the paternal role has been diminished and undermined owing to paternal absence. This issue has resulted in a deterioration of the role and prestige of dads. The reduction in active fatherhood is a significant contributing factor to several societal challenges, including crime, violence and poverty.

Keywords: community engagement, equipping, faith-based dads, fatherhood, father absence, iron sharpens iron, mentoring

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Rationale

The biblical phrase ‘iron sharpens iron’ (Prov 27:17) signifies that through connection and collaboration, individuals enhance one another’s character, abilities and general well-being. Similar to the way two pieces of iron can refine each other, individuals can enhance one another via reciprocal support, constructive comments, challenges and mentoring. Proximity to positive individuals fosters mental acuity. A convergence of intellects may enhance individuals’ understanding of their concepts, polish them and transform them into profound discoveries. Two individuals who collaborate by sharing ideas and expertise can assist and mentor each other to enhance their abilities and become sharper.

This paper aims to provide mentoring elements for faith-based men to correct the issue of absent dads. Clutterbuck (2013) poses the question, ‘What is the validity of mentoring?’ For millennia, mentoring and related processes have been used to transmit tradition and to encourage, lead, care for, model to and advise individuals to achieve their full potential (Fourie & Van den Berg, 2007:94-95; Hendricks & Hendricks, 1995:17-18). Mentoring has emerged as a central theme in education, organisations, the healthcare sector, practical theology and familial contexts (Masango, 2011). While mentoring is used in higher education, nursing, psychology, medicine, business and research, it has also emerged as a significant concern inside families. This emerging trend can serve as an optimal platform to teach dads who face familial challenges. Moreover, mentorship is a crucial and successful approach to help men comprehend the responsibilities of parenting.

A significant contemporary issue in family dynamics is the absence of paternal involvement. The reduction in active fatherhood is a significant societal driving force and a prominent contemporary trend (Popenoe, 1996). Paternal absence is a substantial challenge in fatherhood. The challenges and trends in fatherhood (see Carstens, 2014:9-11; Dobbs, 2013:2; Freeks, 2011:4; Popenoe, 1996; Williams, 2014) can be addressed through a Christian perspective rooted in the Bible. A potential resolution of issues of fatherhood can be found in God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to confront social problems such as father hunger, paternal absence, fatherlessness and disengaged dads (Carstens, 2014:9-11; McGee, 1993:15; Popenoe, 1996). The concept of biblical fatherhood encompasses connection, instruction, training and preparation, while also offering principles that affirm the distinctiveness of God as a Father and highlight the significance of an earthly dad within a familial structure (Smail, 1980:10).

Problem Statement

South Africa is experiencing substantial transformations in family structure, resulting in a marked rise in fractured relationships. For instance, the absence of a parent from the family unit creates a deficiency in the parenting role, adversely affecting the overall functioning of the family. The absence of fathers, exacerbated by factors such as violence, alterations in family structure and fractured relationships, has significantly influenced the incidence of father absence (Freeks & De Jager, 2023:1-3; Kesebonye & P'Olak, 2020:383). Father absence includes the physical, social, economic and psychological non-presence of a biological father in his child's life. Physically absent dads are neither present nor accessible to their children. Fathers who are socially absent do not cohabit with their children and neglect to offer emotional and psychological support (Freeks, 2024:319-322). Father absence pertains to dads who infrequently engage with their children and lack a substantial influence on their development (Makofane, 2015:22-23).

Eddy, Thomson-de Boor and Mphaka (2013) explain that a father who does not cohabit with his children, fails to connect with them and neglects to offer financial support is classified as an absent father. Recognising the adverse impact of paternal absence on societal welfare, it is essential to acknowledge that dads who are present in their families can also harm family well-being, comparable to absent fathers (Meyer, 2018). Furthermore, the consequences of paternal absence impede children's ability to both receive and convey love, resulting in lasting behavioural problems (Freeks, 2022:1-3). Consequently, paternal absence should be seen as a social determinant that exacerbates the adversities encountered by many families in South Africa. The absence of a father exacerbates strained relationships and increases dysfunctional family dynamics, marked by a deficiency in affection (Ellis, Schlomer, Tilley & Butler, 2012:317-319).

This paper examines the research question: *How do mentoring and equipping practices influence the community to mitigate the increasing and socially destructive ill of paternal absence?* This inquiry is made from a Christian perspective, significantly shaped by the concept of Christian or biblical fatherhood (Dobbs, 2013; Nicolaides, 2003; Steensma, 1995; also see 2 Tim 6-17). Moreover, this paper aims to propose mentorship as a distinctive approach to assist faith-based dads facing challenges in parenthood. I examined potential mentoring concepts as a method and solution to mitigate the issue of absent dads in families, communities and society. This paper advocates Christian perspectives to reconceptualise masculinity and fatherhood as a cohesive, faith-orientated duty that seeks to nurture earthly dads in the likeness of God the Creator. Men are frequently misrepresented as inconsequential, and they

ought not to experience guilt or shame regarding their identity, despite societal and familial disrespect.

The primary objective of this paper is to emphasise the significance of the dad's role as a mentor and to advocate mentorship as a vital approach within the family structure. Secondly, my objective is to use this technique to contemplate dads who contend with familial challenges. The familial concerns addressed in this context include absent dads, fatherlessness, father hunger, paternal non-involvement and dads' lack of familial responsibility. The material referenced in this paper delineates that father absence is a consequence of separation and divorce, which are primary factors contributing to familial poverty and challenges. The term 'father absence' signifies that dads do not reside in the same domicile as their partners and offspring. 'Fatherless' denotes that the dad is deceased or does not reside with his family, specifically not with his offspring. Furthermore, 'fatherless' denotes a family or household devoid of a dad or lacking paternal protection, as well as a household that is unaware of the dad's identity. 'Father hunger' refers to an insufficiency of paternal involvement resulting from emotional unavailability, death or abandonment. This phenomenon is also observed in children who grow up without a dad owing to his death from sickness or an accident, or owing to separation following a divorce. 'Father hunger' refers to the mental suffering individuals endure as a result of paternal absence.

Uninvolved dads are neglectful parents who respond to few or no requests from their children. They exhibit minimal emotional engagement with their children, and while they may provide fundamental necessities, such as food and shelter, they remain disengaged from their children's lives. Children who endure paternal absence face an elevated risk of succumbing to substance abuse, violence, criminal activity, hazardous sexual behaviour and acquiring acquired immune deficiency syndrome (Gould & Ward, 2015; Makusha & Richter, 2015). Scholarly focus is being directed towards the issue of paternal absence, especially the lack of father engagement (Salami & Okeke, 2018:1). A multitude of scientists in the fields of early development, education, psychology, sociology and social work have investigated the issue of paternal absence and the reduction in engaged fatherhood. This decrease is characterised by a deterioration in the societal standing of fatherhood and a culture devoid of dads (Cohen, Ooms & Hutchins, 1995; Okeke, 2014; Popenoe, 1996; Richter, Chikovore & Makusha, 2010; United Nations, 2011). The reduction in engaged fatherhood contributes significantly to several global issues, including crime, early sexual activity and pregnancy, despair, drug abuse and poverty (Popenoe, 1996).

This decline in engaged fatherhood represents one of the most unforeseen, fundamental and significant trends of our era (Lang & Zagorsky, 2001:254). Numerous

nations, including South Africa, are devoting considerable attention to the matter of fatherhood; however, father absence does not appear to be diminishing (Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012). South Africa is increasingly evolving into a fatherless society, characterised by the absence of engaged dads in families, where a significant number of men exhibit immoral behaviour against women and children (Feni, 2016:2).

The South African discourse on fatherhood precipitates significant controversies, especially concerning the concept of Christian fatherhood. Unsurprisingly, neither Christian nor biblical fatherhood is regarded as significant or pertinent today. I firmly believe that fatherhood should take precedence in religious discourse to foster a broader and more optimistic perspective on fatherhood aimed at promoting human social welfare. Eighteen years ago, authors such as Wall (2007:53) contended that fatherhood ought to be reevaluated from a child-centred perspective, rather than an adult-centred one. This statement is correct; nonetheless, it still underscores the human realm, although centring on children. Fatherhood needs to be regarded from a biblical perspective. The concept 'biblical' is not novel but rather an appeal to revert to God the Father and His effective techniques and prescriptions for earthly parenting, as outlined in the Bible (Freeks, 2018b:210). It is essential to recognise that paternity and its origins stem from the paternity of God (Steensma, 1995:183). Scriptural reference is found in Isaiah 64:8: 'O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay; and You are the potter. Your hand shapes us.' Deuteronomy 32:6 enquires, 'Do you repay the Lord in this manner, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father who has redeemed you? He has created you and established you.' Furthermore, Ephesians 4:6 states, 'One God and Dad of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.' Lastly, 1 Corinthians 8:6 asserts, 'Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.'

According to Gushee (1995:435), Christian fatherhood serves as a model and the authority for the concepts of paternal absence and fatherlessness. I concur with Gushee (1995) and assert that the Bible should continue to serve as the paramount source of authority for the moral lives of faith-based families, institutions, communities and society. This should remain true, even in an age of secular predominance, encompassing beliefs and discussions regarding the family and the paternal role, including the opposition to masculinity by LGBT (lesbian gay bisexual transgender) groups or movements, and especially the predisposition to feminism (Dictionary Unit for South African English, 2006:427; Dobson, 2020). Feminism is articulated as the rationale for women's rights based on the principle of sexual equality. It is a perspective that opposes the conventional role of men (Dictionary Unit for South African English, 2006:427; Dobson, 2020). Feminism posits that there are

no significant differences between men and women, asserting their equality in ideals and positions within the home, religion and society. From a biblical perspective, individuals are 'equal yet distinct' – positionally equal before God in Jesus Christ, yet operationally different (men do not conceive or gestate an embryo or foetus for nine months). This argument is somewhat valid, especially when examining men and women from the viewpoints of both the New and the Old Testament.

The Old Testament (in Genesis) advocates gender equality, rather than male supremacy. It asserts that man and woman are created equally in the likeness of God and possess shared sovereignty over the planet (Payne, 2015; see also Gen 1:26-27). In the New Testament, Paul exemplified the equality of men and women by greeting ten particular individuals, seven of whom were women (Payne, 2015; see also Rom 16:1-16). In Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11, Paul contended that men and women were equal in ecclesiastical life and for all mankind, referencing the *Imago Dei*. Galatians 3:28 states that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, since all are one in Christ Jesus (see Payne, 2015). Nonetheless, the Bible explicitly delineates some features, such as the priesthood. In the Old Testament, the priesthood was exclusively occupied by men (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6). However, this does not imply that men dominated women. In the New Testament, God established the priesthood of all believers (see 1 Pet 2:9). The man, or dad, alongside the wife, or mother, should assume the primary responsibility in guiding their family towards the sanctity of God the Father.

Within the framework of this paper, the faith-based dad serves as the spiritual leader of his household or family. In Ephesians 5:25-29, the word 'head' is used to signify that the man is the head of the woman, or the husband is the head of his wife, as articulated by Paul. In the Old Testament, humanity is shown as the pinnacle of God's creation, and the lineage between man and woman is elucidated (see Gen 1:26-28; 2:4-24; 2:18-25). The term 'head' in the Greek translation signifies 'source', rather than a hierarchy of power. Within the scope of this paper, the phrase 'the source of' denotes the male figure (or dad) who sustains his wife and offspring. In my opinion, the qualities of being a provider and protector are commendable traits of an engaged parent as a mentor.

Moreover, post-feminist discourse and perspectives challenge the essence of gender roles and paternal responsibilities. It further emphasises choice, autonomy and female empowerment (see Dictionary Unit for South African English, 2006:427; Gresaker, 2017). Post-feminism amalgamates the principles of equality and female empowerment (Köstenberger & Köstenberger, 2014:312). The post-feminist movement, regrettably, lacks an acknowledgement of God and His guidance for

humanity, concentrating solely on the individual. This egocentric movement advocates self-actualisation to the detriment of others, hence contradicting and undermining fatherhood within the family, church and society (see Alard, 2020:114). The post-feminist movement criticises masculinity and is reshaping the concept of manhood. It criticises the eradication of gender-specific notions and wants to substitute these notions with neutral alternatives. Furthermore, gay activists express their animosity against heterosexuality and demonstrate in the streets with banners proclaiming, 'I hate straight.' Society continually amalgamates several representations of masculinity that vie for male approval (Dobson, 2020; Munroe, 2001:17-18). It is particularly troubling because society and culture overtly denigrate men and dads, frequently depicting them as disreputable – the subject of humour – and labelling them as useless (Carstens, 2014:9-11).

Manhood has been undermined, and societal ideas and attitudes distort authentic masculinity, resulting in significant uncertainty (Mohler, 2010:19). Men and Christian parenthood alike have faced public criticism from LGBT activists and the feminist movement, exemplified by the former prime minister of Iceland, Johanna Sigurdardottir, who addressed 'toxic masculinity' in an effort to eliminate separate gender roles and parenting (see Mohler, 2010:19). All these methodologies and criticisms not only ignore the significance of the Bible but also challenge God, its source.

The Bible is an important and paramount text globally (Saucy, 2003:3); indeed, it is the most influential book in the annals of civilisation (White, 2004:19). The Bible contains essential truths addressing social issues such as paternal absence, fatherlessness, disengaged dads and the challenges of adolescence (Sills, 2016:33-34). Therefore, it ought to be the paramount and supreme authority on familial issues, encompassing fatherhood (Dobson, 2020). The Bible should direct faith-based families (Christians) in their lives, as it is the authoritative Word of God. The primary cause of several societal issues is fatherlessness and the lack of (involved) dads (Freeks, 2017:1-2). This concern is significant – it has been recognised as the fourth most significant issue globally, following crime, drugs and violence (Carstens, 2014:9-11). The absence of a dad precipitates severe dysfunction within families, encompassing emotional, physical and spiritual issues, poverty, abuse, educational challenges, crime, sexual difficulties, teenage pregnancy and numerous other problems (Carstens, 2014:9-11). The lack of a dad prevents numerous children from receiving and expressing affection (Richter *et al.*, 2010) and directly influences their behaviour and socio-emotional well-being (Grey & Anderson, 2016). Boys raised without paternal figures exhibit behavioural issues such as emotional instability and violence (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Girls raised without paternal figures exhibit

hazardous sexual conduct, diminished self-esteem and challenges in establishing and sustaining romantic relationships (Malherbe, 2015). Many of these concerns pertain to the concept of fatherhood.

Consequently, fatherhood requires re-examination. The following question arises: Where should we commence? In Christianity, God is referred to as God the Father, our Father and the Father of Jesus Christ. The concept of fatherhood is articulated in Scripture; for instance, 2 Corinthians 6:18 states, 'And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, declares the Lord Almighty.' Jesus addressed God as His Father and extended an invitation for us to engage in a relationship with Him. He instructed us to refer to God as 'our Father in heaven', in accordance with Matthew 6:9. Consequently, fatherhood derives from the Fatherhood of God. God is the Creator and Father of His creation and humanity. The Fatherhood of God serves as a paradigm for the pursuit of faith-based, earthly fatherhood (Freeks, 2016:9-11). Christianity has the capacity to encourage men and dads to engage more actively with their families (Wall, 2007:53). Men were divinely designed by God to serve as the origin and sustainer of humanity (Munroe, 2008:43). The man constitutes the cornerstone of his household. Fatherhood is God's method of establishing and maintaining the human family (Munroe, 2008:43). Today, activists audaciously challenge the Creator of the universe.

The Fatherhood of God is a fundamental notion in the Bible, and understanding God as our Father is vital to the Christian Gospel (Gal 4:5-6; Rom 8:15). The Fatherhood of God is affirmed in Jesus Christ, as He referred to God as His Father and the Father of all (John 5:18-47; 8:19, 25-30; 10:29-30). In John 8:41, Jesus proclaims that God is the sole Father of all humanity, and they are His genuine offspring (John 17:3).

Research Objective

The objective of this paper is to advocate mentoring as an effective equipping instrument for faith-based dads facing familial challenges, including paternal absence, fatherlessness and paternal disengagement from families, especially regarding children.

Research Design

This paper employs a literature review and discussion on mentoring as viable equipping tools proposed to support faith-based dads who are absent from and uninvolved with their families. The argument pertains to the impact of fatherlessness and paternal disengagement on both boys and girls.

Ethical Considerations

This paper adheres to the ethical norms for conducting research. I address mentorship through a literature study, and the research does not concentrate primarily on empirical findings.

The Notion of Mentoring and its Relevance

Definitions of Mentoring

As early as 1985, mentoring emerged as a significant phrase for assisting and supporting individuals. Kram (1985:110; see also Caffarella, 1992:23-24; Clutterbuck, 2013) observes that mentoring encompasses a profound loving connection in which a more seasoned individual, the mentor, fulfils two roles for a less experienced individual, the mentee. The primary duty is to offer guidance on professional advancement. The second objective is to provide personal assistance. Scholars and authors offer varying interpretations and meanings about the ideas of 'mentor' and 'mentoring'. Mentoring is a multifaceted and intricate concept encompassing several components that are challenging to delineate (Chiroma & Cloete, 2015:1). Various scholars and authors characterise mentoring as a relational process whereby learning, experimenting and skill development occur, with measurable consequences reflected in acquired competences. The mentoring process should last for a specified duration to achieve efficacy (Chiroma & Cloete, 2015:1). Conversely, Masango (2011:1) emphasises that mentoring is a supportive process designed to modify behaviour, enabling the protégé to operate completely and successfully. In the context of this paper, a mentor is an individual possessing relevant life experience and knowledge who may offer appropriate direction and assistance to a younger, less experienced individual. In most cases, mentors are older than their mentees.

Sanfey, Hollands and Gantt (2013) assert that mentoring parallels parenting in some respects, necessitating time, emotional investment and energy. The notion of a mentor is frequently linked to the roles of adviser, friend, teacher and counsellor (see Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007:2). Santora, Mason and Sheahan (2013:427-428) characterise mentoring as a collaborative and personal connection in which the mentor (an experienced individual) directs the mentee (a less experienced individual) towards optimal performance. Furthermore, Tucker (2007:iii-vi) defines mentoring as a learning relationship that emphasises the mentee's preparedness and willingness to gain from the interchange of information, experiences and insights. These definitions indicate that mentoring includes a connection, care, guidance, cooperation, knowledge sharing, influence and communication. The concept of mentoring is used

in this paper to address the problem of fatherlessness and the absence of dads in children's lives.

Significance of Mentoring

The importance of mentoring has gained prominence in recent years, especially within the familial context (Masango, 2011). The domain of mentoring remains inadequately explored, and its dynamics are always evolving (see Clutterbuck, 2013). The term 'mentoring' is sometimes employed synonymously with 'coaching' (Masango, 2011:1-5). Miller-McLemore (1994:19) poses the following significant question: 'Who can find a kind mother?' This inquiry is grounded in Proverbs 31:10, where the author, Solomon, poses it concerning his own mother and delineates the attributes of an exemplary mother. Miller-McLemore (1994:19) posits that the inquiry should be addressed with 'the courage to dispel the clouds of silence that enshroud the complexities of mothering and with the first-hand knowledge of the power of a woman close to a child'.

Bober (2017:vi) states that she was raised with her sisters and mother, and other relatives, but in the absence of her father. She conveys profound gratitude to her grandmother, mother, two children and other family members for their indispensable support during her experience as a single mother (Bober, 2017:vi). She also expresses appreciation to her ex-husband for his aid, but omits any mention of her father, who was absent from her life. It is evident that women do not require men to raise children or achieve success in life. Miller-McLemore (1994:19) substantiates this assertion by recounting the achievements of the single mothers she examined.

Moreover, mentoring has been implemented in higher education, nursing, psychology, medicine, business and research (Freeks, 2014:191-196). This vital life skill has rapidly become a significant factor in family dynamics (Freeks, 2021:1). In addition, mentoring is a crucial and efficacious approach to assist individuals in understanding the fundamental nature of fatherhood and motherhood (Freeks, 2021:1).

Therefore, this paper focuses on mentorship, highlighting its importance in advising and assisting dads who face challenges in parenthood and supporting their personal development to address these concerns. Furthermore, the paper highlights the importance of mentoring, its role in supporting faith-based dads in their personal development and its facilitation of discussions regarding the challenges faith-based dads experience, while also aiding in the reflection of their thoughts, emotions and behaviours (Jenkins, 2013:144; see also Katz, Elsaesser, Klodnik & Khare, 2019:306-307). Father engagement in mentorship offers several advantages for mothers,

women and children. Mothers provide stability and strength (Freeks, 2018a:4), while fathers, as mentors, serve as the foundational anchors of the family by guiding the appropriate course (Groenendyk & Volling, 2007:205). Women derive advantages from the engagement of committed dads, including enhanced hope, the establishment of positive connections and the cultivation of trust and commitment, which serve as the foundational elements of the family (Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico & Lewis, 2011:53-54).

Children acquire their occupations and public personas from their engaged dads, who serve as their mentors (Larney, 2009:37). From engaged dads, children get consistent affection, a close connection, safeguarding and explicit guidance throughout life (Williams, 2008:18). Furthermore, engaged dads serving as mentors are exemplary role models and offer social support to their offspring (Steytler, 2007:54-55). Moreover, there is significant engagement between an engaged dad and his children (Pleck, 2007:196), as he instructs them on navigating various life disasters (Williams, 2008:1-3). Through these responsibilities, mentoring transcends coaching, as the mentor attempts to elicit the mentee's full potential. Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:18) explain that a mentor perceives the potential within an individual and identifies the person they aspire to become. Thereafter, the mentor facilitates the realisation of the mentee's potential, while also nurturing the mentee's spirit. The mentor also shapes the mentee's character, directing them to become a full individual and, with divine favour, a virtuous person. Consequently, mentorship within the framework of this paper possesses a biblical essence and significance. The importance of mentoring lies in its accessibility and the lifelong benefits it offers to all individuals.

Mentoring Faith-Based Dads

In this paper, I emphasise ten mentoring ideas aimed at guiding faith-based dads with familial challenges. It is essential to expound upon these mentorship ideas.

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 1: Mentorship is Grounded in Biblical Teachings

As articulated in both the Old and the New Testament, mentoring highlights the necessity for dads to be engaged and proactive. Dads should pardon their children for their mistakes and assist them in making more informed decisions in life (see Luke 15:11-32). Faith-orientated dads should prioritise their involvement in their families. Mentoring is essential in the household, and men should recognise their roles as the spiritual leaders of and authority figures in their families. The Scripture advocates mentorship, indicating that the Israelites were required to instruct their children in the

commandments. Consequently, it is evident that mentoring constitutes a spiritual duty for faith-based dads in their parental role (see Dan 4:9; 6:1-25; 11:19).

Scholars such as Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:17-18) have suggested that the concept of mentoring can be traced back to various biblical figures, including Joshua, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Paul and Timothy. Biblical mentoring is a highly effective method for cultivating faith-based dads and leaders (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Pelletier, 2006:46). Biblical mentoring assists faith-based dads in understanding the fundamentals of discipleship and advancing their Christian journey as spiritual leaders. It is essential to recognise that the family, especially as depicted in the Old Testament, can be regarded as a form of home congregation. Consequently, a father who guided his family was required to exemplify the paternal nature of God. In the New Testament, Paul was determined to cultivate others. This is shown in his mentorship of Timothy, Titus and Onesimus in 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul served as a spiritual adviser, counsellor, educator, modern exemplar and benefactor to these individuals (his mentees).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 2: Mentoring Influences Lives

Mentoring has significant relevance, especially in the lives of children, irrespective of whether they are learners, adolescents or engaged in higher education. Fatherly mentoring encompasses not only the imparting of information but also the provision of support to children as a faith-orientated paternal figure. Faith-orientated households, with the dad as the primary authority, may cultivate a faith-based generation. Mentoring offers a chance to influence the lives of children, especially in guiding them towards the destinies to which they are divinely appointed. By means of mentoring, faith-based dads (mentors) can cultivate the character of their family members (mentees) and assist faith-based families (mentees) in realising their potential (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1995:18). Through their influence, faith-based dads (mentors) can aid their families (mentees) in attaining their objectives (Ndabazandile, 2006:14). Tucker (2007:iii, vi) affirms that mentoring involves unlocking individuals' potential. It enables mentees to achieve their utmost potential. Religious parents ought to train their children in biblical virtues through mentorship. Biblical characters and their influence shape conduct, providing significance and direction to an individual's existence (Larney & Lotter, 2005:663-664).

Mentors should nurture and advocate for young people, while children who embody the essence of parenting should impart it to others. Children raised in faith-based environments develop self-reflection and confidence owing to the mentorship of their faith-based dads, who provide vision, cultivate trust, give encouragement and ensure

care and protection throughout their lives (Evans, 2019:403-404). Faith-based dads serving as mentors can embody these human characteristics while guiding and socialising, as the principle of 'I am because you are' (the spirit of ubuntu) facilitates interpersonal connections and mutual appreciation (Mulaudzi, Libster & Phiri, 2009:49).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 3: The Significance of God within a Faith-Based Family is Essential

From the outset, God desired unity among father, mother and children (Gen 2:7-25). God did not create a single parent; instead, He created man and woman to assume responsibility and nurture the offspring entrusted to them together (Bergh, 2002:47). Consequently, the function of faith-based families represents the most exalted vocation from God, and such families ought to recognise their profound, dedicated and proactive responsibility (McGraw, 2004:10). God designed men with a specific purpose in mind. He intended men to fulfil the role of dads and, hence, God created them for this purpose. The man was appointed as a father by the Creator, as God manifested Himself as the Father throughout the creation of man (see Munroe, 2008:23-26). God anticipated that a faith-based family would embody more dignity and strength since it is His divine mandate through which He intends to uphold humanity until the end of time (Bergh, 2002:47). In a faith-based family, God is the foremost priority, necessitating his prominence in all facets of family life. A faith-based dad should recognise that God is paramount in all aspects of his life, as his role significantly fosters a robust religious environment for faith-orientated families.

Children experience security and certainty when they regard God as a paternal figure inside the household (Dickie, Ajega, Kobylak & Nixon, 2006:58-59). The paternity of God serves as the archetype for earthly paternity, with human fatherhood deriving its essence from the Fatherhood of God (Steensma, 1995:183). Therefore, faith-orientated parents ought to impart God's truths to their children and guide them in discovering their own faith in God (Bergh, 2002:110).

I concur with the aforementioned assertions that God should be prioritised in all familial matters and that dads need to impart knowledge of the nature of God and His truths to their children. It is essential for faith-based families to embrace and study the Word of God to cultivate confidence in the Bible. I regard the Bible as the constitution of the household, and faith-based families need to conduct themselves in accordance with its teachings. God has benevolent intentions for faith-based families – not detrimental intentions, but plans to enrich them and provide a promising future (see Jer 29:11). Faith-based families should enhance their devotion to God and His

Word, ensuring that God is prioritised in both the household and their individual lives. Devout parents must recognise their relationship with God, as the influence of their faith permeates their children. The Holy Spirit fosters the children's bond with and confidence in God. It is essential for faith-based parents to recognise that their beliefs encourage their children to pursue a relationship with God (Hart & Hart Frejd, 2010:16-19).

Faith-based families should engage in spiritual practices, such as maintaining household altars. A house altar is a sacred space within a domestic domain designated for prayer, meditation, and spiritual reflection. It is sometimes referred to as a family altar where significant elements such as family time of Bible reading, spiritual gathering, prayer, contemplation, songs, edification, communion, and spiritual practice occurred. House altars serve as a daily reminder of faith, offering peace and hope, and spiritual grounding (Freeks, 2018b:184-185). Household altars provide effective means for faith-based families to engage with the Word of God and cultivate devotion to Him. Regrettably, faith-based families appear not to view household altars as essential anymore. Consequently, it is imperative to re-establish household altars, with faith-orientated dads assuming responsibility for their establishment. They ought to guide their families in prayer, presenting their petitions to the Heavenly Father at the household altar. Furthermore, they should incorporate Bible study, cell church gatherings and prayer groups into their families. Lastly, faith-based families should refer to the Word of God to thrive in all aspects of their lives (Bergh, 2002:168).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 4: The Significance of Reliance on God

The role of a faith-based dad is a blessing bestowed by God's favour upon faith-based families. For instance, Matthew 7:11 states that sinful (earthly) fathers can provide advantageous gifts to their children, and therefore, so can God, our Heavenly Father. It is essential to recognise that faith-based dads are not infallible and do not consistently fulfil their primary responsibilities. God, our Heavenly Father, epitomises perfection, and earthly dads of faith may never attain His stature; nonetheless, they can endeavour to emulate Him in their paternal and mentoring roles in their children's lives (Crow, 2008:89-93). Jesus Christ serves as the primary exemplary model to emulate. He entrusted his life to His Father and never questioned His will. The function of the earthly, faith-orientated dad within the family should remain consistent; the mother and children ought to entrust their lives and faith to the father, who derives his authority and fortitude from the Heavenly Father (see John 18:11; Matt 7:7-11). God bestowed life upon parents, both father and mother, and endowed them with the capacity to nurture their offspring. Consequently, parents should rely on and be accountable to God. God designated them as parents, and from a Christian

perspective, the obligation of parenthood constitutes a divine vocation (Bergh, 2002:119).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 5: The Function of the Faith-Based Dad Should be Firmly Rooted in the Biblical Framework

The role and function of the faith-based dad should be profoundly anchored within the biblical context. Many faith-based families have departed from the biblical paradigm in which the father serves as the priest of the household (Barker, 2008:5). A faith-based dad must recognise the necessity of Jesus Christ in his life and exemplify a godly character by becoming a follower of Christ and embodying traits such as love, patience, humility and respect (Barker, 2008:5; Coakley, 2006:153-156; Munroe, 2008:127). To demonstrate a virtuous character, faith-orientated dads ought to serve as educators inside their households. They should proactively educate their children on fundamental issues without relying on other spiritual instructors. As religious parents, it is their obligation to educate their children. For instance, before children commence school, they should be adequately prepared; likewise, faith-orientated dads should instruct their children in spiritual resilience.

In this paper, it is essential to recognise that faith-based parents need to be the principal educators of their children, especially in cultivating character and establishing values at home (Heenan, 2004:3). Religious dads should demonstrate engagement in their children's education (Freeks, 2004:91). A dad fulfils multiple roles, including that of a teacher, coach, manager, agent, mentor and advocate for his children (Coakley, 2006:154).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 6: Faith-Based Dads Should Exhibit Unwavering Commitment

The faith-based dad should be fully dedicated to his role, as it is both significant and obligatory (Barker, 2008:1-3). A devoted parent needs to contemplate the following question: What lessons am I imparting to my children? Am I practically embodying these pillars? Do my children observe these ideals in my life? Dads who adhere to faith but do not actively champion their children's interests are perceived as failing to satisfy the criteria for effective parenting. Committed faith-based dads actively foster their children's success, as parental dedication is a vital determinant of achievement.

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 7: Faith-Based Dads Ought to Assume a more Responsible Role within the Family

Faith-based dads' increased engagement with their children is vital, as it is fundamental to the home and fosters the children's success (Coakley, 2006:154). Religious dads should establish expectations for their children and strategise for their future (Wall, 2007:59). There should be a discernible connection between a faith-orientated dad and his offspring. Physical touch and connection are essential since they reinforce the relationship between parents and their children (Roest, Dubas & Gerris, 2009:146-148). Furthermore, responsible faith-based fatherhood addresses children's needs and fosters success (Freeks, 2004:58).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 8: Faith-Based Dads Ought to Dedicate More Time to their Children

Currently, faith-based parents (especially dads) are insufficiently engaging with their children (Freeks, 2004:94). A faith-based dad should allocate time to engage with his children, despite his demanding schedule. Children encounter delicate and intricate situations, especially throughout their adolescent years. If faith-based dads invest time in their children, the link between them will strengthen. Children have shown a desire for increased paternal involvement (see Steytler, 2007:55). Faith-based dads need to establish a robust alliance with their families (mother and children) to confront challenges, collaboratively seeking solutions to those problems. Children require parental engagement, rather than material presents and monetary compensation as a replacement for quality time (Freeks, 2004:94). Dads should devote time to outdoor activities with their children (Freeman & Almond, 2010:243).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 9: Faith-Based Dads Ought to Serve as Role Models

Faith-based dads must exemplify desirable behaviours so that their children perceive them as positive role models and aspire to emulate them in adulthood (Coakley, 2006:154-159). Devout dads ought to endeavour to be the most exemplary role models for their offspring. Children acquire knowledge by seeing their parents' conduct and attitudes, allowing faith-based dads to exemplify the ideal model owing to their roles as priests and nurturing dads within the household (Barker, 2008:1-3; Bergh, 2002:168). Faith-based dads serve as crucial role models, especially in influencing their children's understanding of God (Bergh, 2002:168; Munroe, 2001:201-203).

Mentoring and Equipping Pillar 10: The Role of the Church Concerning Faith-Based Families

In addition to essential spiritual practices, such as household altars, cell churches and prayer meetings (previously discussed), families, guided by faith-based dads, should participate in church gatherings collectively (Bergh, 2002:168). Participation in church gatherings influences the worldview of faith-based families significantly, encompassing their perceptions of God and religion (Beckmann & Nieuwenhuis, 2004:58). The church is tasked with guiding, supporting, mentoring and serving faith-based dads to facilitate their spiritual maturation. Accordingly, the church serves as a venue for the interchange and dissemination of knowledge and should provide reading materials and brief programmes for faith-based men about parenting and parenthood. The church should assist in preparing young couples for parenting prior to marriage and childbearing. Training within the church about values, especially moral standards, will significantly benefit faith-based dads and young adults.

The experiences and observations children and young people have in church should be sufficiently significant to surpass the negative and erroneous views they encounter in the external world. The church has historically been viewed as a congregation of believers to exalt and adore the Lord; apart from that, it should also serve as an institution for education and instruction, ensuring the transmission of religious and cultural values (Pitout, Smith, Windell & Steinmann, 1990:37). Church and religion encompass more than just the reality of God. They also encompass the worship of God. Consequently, religion needs to be a fundamental aspect of the life of the faith-based dad (Abdool, 2005:47). The church should assume a pivotal role in the vocational endeavours of a faith-based family. In addition, it serves as a venue where faith-orientated families receive instruction on philanthropy, encompassing tithes and offerings (Bergh, 2002:160).

Recommendations

This paper investigated the mentorship of dads confronting challenges related to fatherhood within a faith-based framework to influence the community. The study has resulted in the following recommendations:

- Mentorship is a pivotal concept that can be employed to assist and support families dealing with paternal absence and fatherhood dilemmas.
- Mentoring can positively influence lives.
- Mentoring shares similarities with parenting, especially in fostering positive relationships, which is a fundamental value for families.

- Mentoring has a biblical essence and serves as a vital framework for addressing the challenges faced by faith-based families with fractured structures.
- Mentoring should be regarded as not only a recommendation but also an imperative for dads confronting familial and paternal challenges.

Conclusion

The notion of fatherhood is a significant challenge within the South African setting, where the absence of paternal figures is a detrimental and alarming trend in several households and society. Consequently, mentoring and equipping can be significant approaches for dads who grapple with fatherhood issues. Furthermore, mentorship is an essential requirement for dads facing familial challenges. Relationships are a characteristic of families, and mentoring pertains to relationships. Dads can be guided to become valuable contributors to both their families and society. However, in reality, a faith-based dad must have a Christ-like character, exhibiting traits such as humility, tenderness and patience towards his wife and children (see Scalise, 2010:53-54). Dads who are grounded in faith ought to be mentored, equipped and instructed to accomplish their divine responsibilities within the family. This debate indicates that the faith-based dad possesses a divine duty and should consistently fulfil that responsibility in the familial context and society.

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