


# Mentoring fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues in a faith-based context: A pastoral-theological review



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Fathers find themselves increasingly in a social crisis, the fatherhood dilemma, and are misrepresented in various studies and theories intended to shed light on the relationship between mothers and children. Fathers were once considered the pillar of the family, but, over time, society has begun to grapple with father absence as a family issue. This issue has caused a decline in the role and status of fathers. The decline in active fatherhood is a major driving force and one of many issues in society alongside social ills such as crime, violence and poverty. Research has showed that absent fathers affect the development of masculinity in boys and femininity in girls. Families and faith-based communities are directly challenged by father absence. The absence of fathers is a destructive phenomenon and tendency that society has to deal with globally. The role of the father has been devalued and degraded because of father absence. The purpose of this article was to minimise the effects of absent fathers through mentoring which can be a valuable platform for fathers, and it has a biblical nature to solve family issues. Furthermore, mentoring results in a relationship of trust and meaningful commitment, and it provides a helpful and supportive approach to helping fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues. The literature review as a methodology in this article, provided significant knowledge and rich insights to help and support fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues. In addition, the mentoring principles discussed in this study are useful and part of the solution for fathers with fatherhood issues. Mentoring and its process in the paradigm of pastoral theology can be a workable and a possible solution in the confines of households to restore relationships within broken families. This conceptualised from a biblical viewpoint as a solution for Christian fathers. In conclusion, mentoring is a decisive necessity for fathers who grapple with family issues. Relationships are an attribute of families, and mentoring is about relationships. Fathers can be mentored to become great assets to family and society.

**Contribution:** The fatherhood issue is a serious problem in the South African context and *no fatherly presence* is a negative and devastating trend in many South African homes. Consequently, mentoring as an approach can be a significant contribution to fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues.

**Keywords:** mentoring; fatherhood; fathers; family issues; fatherhood issues; faith-based; pastoral-theological.

## Introduction

This article is aiming at mentoring elements for faith-based men, in order to correct the issue of absent fathers.

Clutterbuck (2013) asked the question: 'How valid is mentoring?' Mentoring and its process have been used for centuries to impart tradition, to support, guide, care, counsel, model and advise people to reach their full potential (Fourie & Van den Berg 2007:94–95; Hendricks & Hendricks 1995:17–18). Mentoring has become a focal point in education, organisations, the health industry, practical theology and even the family dimension (Masango 2011). Although mentoring has been used in higher education, nursing, psychology, medicine, business and research, it has also become an increasingly important matter in families. This growing trend can be an ideal platform to mentor fathers with family issues. In addition, mentoring is an important and effective method in order to help men understand what fatherhood entails. A serious, current problem in family life is the lack of the fathering element. The decline in active fatherhood is not only a crucial driving force in society, but one of the key trends of the times (Popenoe 1996). Father absenteeism and fatherlessness are immense fatherhood issues,

challenges and tendencies (Carstens 2014: 9–11; Dobbs 2013:2; Freeks 2011:4; Popenoe 1996; Williams 2014).

A Christian understanding of fatherhood stems from the Bible, and a possible solution for fatherhood issues lies in God through his Son, Jesus Christ, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to deal with social ills such as father hunger, father absence, fatherlessness and uninvolved fathers (Carstens 2014:9–11; McGee 1993:15; Popenoe 1996). The biblical fatherhood notion is not only about connection, teaching, training and equipping, but it also provides guidelines to attest to the uniqueness of God as Father, while demonstrating the pinnacle of the worth of an earthly father within a family system (Smail 1980:10).

## Introduction and problem statement

This article explores the following question: What can faith-based institutions contribute to help curb the rising issues of father absence, fatherlessness and uninvolved fathers? This question is approached from a Christian viewpoint and deeply influenced by the idea of Christian or biblical fatherhood (Dobbs 2013; Nicolaides 2003; Steensma 1995; cf. also 2 Tm 6–17). The primary purpose of this article is therefore to suggest mentoring as a unique way to help faith-based fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues. In this article, the author considered possible mentoring principles as part of a strategy and solution to reduce the problem of absent fathers in families, communities, and society. This article also calls for Christian approaches to re-imagine men and fatherhood as an integrated, faith-based responsibility that aims to cultivate the earthly father in the image of God the Creator. Men are not irrelevant as often portrayed, and they should not feel bad or ashamed of who they are, although treated disrespectfully by society and most of the time by their own families.

This article's most significant goal is to prioritise the meaning and viewpoint of the father as a mentor and mentorship as an approach within the family. Secondly is it my intended purpose to use this approach to reflect on fathers who grapple with family issues. The family issues considered in this context are absent fathers, fatherlessness, father hunger, non-involvement of fathers and fathers' lack of responsibilities to families. According to literature used in this article, the terms can be described as follows: Father absence results from separation and divorce which are the main causes of family poverty and difficulties. Father absence also means that fathers do not live in the same household as their spouses and children. Fatherless indicates that the father has died or does not live with his family, especially his children. Fatherless refers also to a family or household who does not have a father, or lack the protection of the father, as well as families who do not know the identity of the father. Father hunger is a lack of sufficient fathering due to emotional unavailability, death or desertion. It is also experienced when children grew up without a father after they had lost him due to illness or an accident, or they had been isolated from him after a divorce. Father hunger is also the emotional distress people experience due to father absence. Uninvolved fathers

are negligent parents who respond to only a few or no demands from their children. They have little emotional involvement with their children and, although they provide in the basic needs such as food and shelter, they are uninvolved in their children's lives.

Children who experience father absence are at a higher risk of becoming victims of drug and alcohol abuse, violence, crime, risky sexual involvement and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) (Gould & Ward 2015; Makusha & Richter 2015). There is growing attention among several scholars to the problem of father absence, and specifically the non-involvement of fathers (Salami & Okeke 2018:1). Many scholars in the domains of early childhood, education, psychology, sociology and social work have researched the problem of father absence and the decline in active fatherhood. The decline can be defined as a loss in the status of fatherhood in society or a society without fathers (Cohen, Ooms & Hutchins 1995; Okeke 2014; Popenoe 1996; Richter, Chikovore & Makusha 2010; United Nation 2011).

The decline in active fatherhood is a major contributor to many dilemmas in the world such as crime, premature sex and pregnancy, depression, substance abuse, poverty, and more (Popenoe 1996). The decline is one of the most unexpected, fundamental and noteworthy trends of our time (Lang & Zagorsky 2001:254).

Many countries, including South Africa, are paying immense attention to the issue of fatherhood and yet, it does not seem as if father absence is decreasing (Ratele, Shefer & Clowes 2012). South Africa, in particular, is rapidly becoming a fatherless society which is a society without involved fathers within families in which a large proportion of men behave immorally towards women and children (Feni 2016:2). That is why the South African discourse on fatherhood provokes serious debates, especially around the aspect of Christian fatherhood. It is also not surprising that neither Christian nor biblical fatherhood is emphasised as being important and relevant anymore. However, as author, I am of the firm opinion that fatherhood should dominate the religious discourse for an expansive and more hopeful vision for fatherhood as directed towards human social good.

Thirteen years ago, authors such as Wall (2007:53), argued that fatherhood should be reconsidered from a child-centred viewpoint rather than from an adult-centred viewpoint. There is nothing wrong with this statement, but it continues to emphasise the human domain, even if the focus is on children. Fatherhood should be viewed from a scriptural or biblical viewpoint. This is not a new concept, but a call to return to God the Father and his effective methods and prescriptions in the Bible for earthly fatherhood (Freeks 2018b:210). It is crucial to take cognisance that fatherhood and its origin derives from the Fatherhood of God (Steensma 1995:183). Scriptural examples are in Isaiah 64:8: 'O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay; and You are the potter. We are formed by Your hand'; Deuteronomy 32:6: 'Do you thus repay the Lord; O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has

bought you? He has made you and established you'; Ephesians 4:6: 'One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all;' and in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

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.

Gushee (1995:435) insinuated Christian fatherhood as paradigm and authority for father absence and fatherlessness. I strongly agree with Gushee (1995) and support and affirm that the Bible should still function as the supreme source of authority for the moral life of faith-based families, institutions, communities and society. This should be the case even in an era of secular domination, convictions and debates about the family and the role of the father, including the fight against manhood (Dobson 2020) by the LGBT<sup>1</sup> (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender) groups or movement, and especially the hatred of feminism (TDUSAE [The Dictionary Unit for South African English] 2006:427). Feminism is narrated as the justification of women's rights on the premise of sexual equality. It is a worldview that is against the traditional role of men (cf. Dobson 2020; TDUSAE 2006:427). Feminism argues that there are no major distinctions between men and women, and that men and women are equal in value and roles in the family, church and society. From a biblical view 'equal yet different' – positional equal before God in Jesus Christ, yet functionally different (men do not get pregnant and do not carry an embryo or foetus for 9 months). In principle, this argument is partially true based on the above, especially when we study men and women from both the New and Old Testament perspectives. The Old Testament (Gn) presents gender equality and not male domination. It teaches that man and woman are created equally in the image of God and have joint dominion over the earth (Payne 2015; cf. also Gn 1:26–27).

In the New Testament, Paul, for example, affirmed the equality of man and woman when he greeted 10 specific people of which 7 out of the 10 are women (Payne 2015; cf. also Rm 16:1–16). In Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11, Paul argued that men and women are equals in church life or for all humanity considering the *Imago Dei*. In Galatians 3:28, he indicated that there is no division of Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus (cf. Payne 2015). Nevertheless, the Bible is also very clear about certain aspects such as priesthood. In the Old Testament, only men held the position of a priest (Ex 19:6; Is 61:6). This does not mean that men ruled over women. In the New Testament, God introduced the priesthood of all his people (cf. 1 Pt 2:9). The man (or the father) should take the leading role, together with the woman (or the mother), to lead their family into the holiness of God the Father. In the context of this article, the faith-based father is the priest of his household or family.

In Ephesians 5:25–29, scripture refers to the term *head* where Paul said that the man is the head of the woman or husband is the head of the wife. In the biblical text of the Old Testament,

1. Some country leaders, for example the President of Poland, among others, are describing LGBT as an ideology that is more destructive than communism.

man is presented as the crowning work of God's creation, and the truth is also told about the line of descent between a man and a woman (cf. Gn 1:26–28; 2:4–24; 2:18–25). The word *head* in the Greek translation means 'source' and not a hierarchy of authority. In the context of this article, the phrase *the source of* – refers to the man (or father) who provides for the wife and children. In my view, being provider, as well as protector are good attributes of an involved father as mentor.

Furthermore, post-feminist discourses and viewpoints contradict the nature of gender roles and fatherhood. It also accentuates choice, freedom and female empowerment (cf. Gresaker 2017; TDUSAE 2006:427). Post-feminism integrates the ideology of equality and female empowerment in life (Köstenberger & Köstenberger 2014:312).

Post-feminism is, unfortunately, devoid of any realisation of God and his guidance for humanity and focuses only on the self. It is a self-centred movement that promotes self-realisation at the expense of others, which contrasts with and against fatherhood in the family, church and society (cf. Alard 2020:114). The post-feminist movement rebukes maleness and is creating a new perception of the word *man*. Post-feminists lash out for the deletion of gender-specific concepts and seek to replace these concepts with neutral concepts. Gay activists rage against heterosexuality and march in the streets with 'I hate straight' banners. Society keeps mixing and matching their images of manhood that are competing for the acceptance of men (Dobson 2020; Munroe 2001:17–18).

What is also disturbing, is that society and culture openly disrespect men and fathers, and often portray them as deadbeats, make them the topic of jokes, and call them worthless (Carstens 2014:9–11). Manhood has been emasculated, and society-dictated perceptions and opinions distort true manhood and create great confusion (Mohler 2010:19). Men and Christian fatherhood have been publicly attacked by gay activists and the feminist movement, for example, when the former Prime Minister of Iceland, Johanna Sigurdardottirs, spoke about *toxic masculinity* in an attempt to eradicate distinct gender roles and fatherhood (cf. Mohler 2010:19).

All these approaches and critics disregard, not only the importance of the Bible, but also question God, the initial author of the Bible. The Bible is significant and the most essential book in the world (Saucy 2003:3); in fact, it is the most influential book in the history of civilisation (White 2004:19). The Bible has fundamental truths for societal problems such as father absence, fatherlessness, uninvolved fathers, teenage dilemmas, and more (Sills 2016:33–34). It should be the prime and highest authority on family matters, including fatherhood (Dobson 2020). The Bible should guide faith-based families (Christians) in their lives, because it is the authoritative Word of God.

There is no exaggeration when we say that the root cause of the many problems in our society is father absence and fatherlessness (Freeks 2017:1–2). These issues are serious

concerns and have been identified as the fourth-ranked problem in the world next to crime, drugs and violence (Carstens 2014:9–11).

The absence of a father causes devastating dysfunction in any family, including emotional, physical and spiritual problems, poverty, abuse, educational problems, crime, sexual problems, teenage pregnancy, and many more (Carstens 2014:9–11). Father absence impedes many children from receiving and giving love (Richter et al. 2010) and directly affects their behaviour and socio-emotional state (Gray & Anderson 2016). For example, boys who grow up without their fathers, develop behavioural problems such as emotional instabilities and aggression (Holborn & Eddy 2011). Girls who grow up without their fathers develop risky sexual behaviour, low self-esteem, and difficulties in forming and maintaining romantic relationships (Malherbe 2015). Most of these issues are related to the phenomenon of *fatherhood*. Therefore, fatherhood needs to be placed under the magnifying glass again. Where do we start?

In Christianity, God is known as God the Father, God our Father, and God the Father of Jesus Christ. Hence, the idea of fatherhood can be derived from Scripture, for example in 2 Corinthians 6:18 it says that, 'And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord almighty.' Jesus referred to God as his Father and he invites us into a relationship with God. He is also teaching us to address God as 'our Father in heaven' according to Matthew 6:9.

Therefore, fatherhood originates from the Fatherhood of God. God is the Father of his creation and people. Further, the Fatherhood of God is a model to show how faith-based, earthly fatherhood should be pursued (Freeks 2016:9–11). The Christian faith (or Christianity) has the potential to shape men and fathers to be more involved in their families (Wall 2007:53). Men were created by God to be the source and sustainer of humankind (Munroe 2008:43). The male is the foundation of his home. Fatherhood is God's way of building and sustaining the human family (Munroe 2008:43). However, today, activists have the foolhardiness to contradict the Creator of the universe.

The Fatherhood of God is a central concept in the Bible, and knowing God as the Father lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel (Rm 8:15; Gl 4:5–6). The Fatherhood of God is proclaimed in Jesus Christ, because Jesus called God his Father and the Father of all (Jn 5:18–47; 8:19, 25–30; 10:29–30). Jesus asserted in John 8:41 that God is the only Father that all humans have, and they are his true children (Jn 17:3).

## Research objective

The research objective of this article is to propose mentoring as a workable training tool for faith-based fathers who grapple with family issues such as father absence, fatherlessness, and the non-involvement of fathers towards families, specifically children.

## Research design

This article follows a literature review and discussion concerning mentoring as a workable training tool suggested to assist faith-based fathers who are absent and not involved with their families. The argument is based on how it affects boys, as well as girls.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed the ethical standards for conducting research. However, in this context, I discussed mentoring from a literature review, and the research does not focus specifically on empirical results.

## The concept of mentoring and the significance thereof

### Definitions of mentoring

As early as 1985, *mentoring* was a noteworthy term used to help and care for people. Kram (1985:110; cf. also Clutterbuck 2013) noted that mentoring involves an intense caring relationship (Caffarella 1992:23–24) in which a more experienced person, the mentor, provides two functions for a less experienced person, the mentee. The first function is to provide advice about career development. The second is to provide personal support. Sanfey, Hollands and Gantt (2013) indicated that mentoring is like parenting in many ways in that it requires time, emotional resources and energy. Often the concept of *mentor* is associated with the concepts of advisor, friend, teacher and counsellor (cf. Knippelmeyer & Torraco 2007:2). Santora, Mason and Sheahan (2013:427–428) defined mentoring as a collaborative and personal relationship in which the mentor (experienced person) guides the mentee (less experienced person) to achieve maximum success. The definition by Tucker (2007:iii–vi) alluded more to the readiness of the mentee if he stated that mentoring is a learning relationship in which the mentee should be willing and ready to benefit from this exchange of learning experience, knowledge and insights. From these definitions, it is clear that mentoring involves relationships, caring, advice, collaboration, exchange of knowledge, influence and communication. The above will help correct the issue of fatherlessness and absent fathers in the lives of children.

### The significance of mentoring

There has been an increase in the focus on mentoring over the past few years, especially in the family dimension (Masango 2011). The field of mentoring is not thoroughly investigated yet, and the kaleidoscope of mentoring is continually changing (cf. Clutterbuck 2013).

The term *mentoring* is often used interchangeably with the word *coaching* (Masango 2011:1–5). The context and emphasis in this article are on mentoring.

The significance of mentoring is to be found in advising and guiding fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues and to



support them to develop themselves to overcome these issues. The significant issues discussed in this article are that mentoring is important, that it supports faith-based fathers in their own development, and allows them to talk about their issues, as well as helping them to reflect on their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Jenkins 2013:144; cf. Katz et al. 2019:306–307).

Mentorship in terms of father involvement holds numerous benefits for mothers, women and children. For mothers it ensures stability and strength (Freeks 2018a:4), and fathers as mentors are also the *rocks* or *anchors* in the family, because they show the right direction (Groenendyk & Volling 2007:205). Women benefit from the support of involved fathers as follows: their hope increases, good relationships, trust and commitment are formed which are the pillars of the family (Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico & Lewis 2011:53–54). With respect to children, they learn their vocations and their personal public role from their involved fathers who act as mentors (Larney 2009:37). Children receive stable love, an intimate bond, protection and clear direction in life (Williams 2008:18). Furthermore, involved fathers as mentors are great role models and provide social support to their children (Steytler 2007:54–55). In addition, there is also immense interaction between the involved father and his children (Pleck 2007:196) as he shows them how to deal with, among other things, tragedies in life (Williams 2008:1–3).

By performing these roles, mentoring goes beyond coaching, as the mentor tries to bring the best out from the mentee. Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:18) explained it as follows:

A mentor looks inside a person and finds the man he longs to be. The mentor then helps to bring that man to life, at his best, and the mentor nurtures the mentee's soul. He also shapes the mentee's character and calls the mentee to become a complete, whole man, and, by the grace of God, a holy man.

Thus, mentoring in the context of this article has a biblical nature and significance. The significance of mentoring is that everyone can participate and benefit from it throughout their lives.

### **Mentoring faith-based fathers**

The author focused on 10 mentoring principles to mentor faith-based fathers who grapple with family issues. It is crucial to elaborate on these mentoring principles.

#### **Mentoring principle 1: Mentorship stems from the Bible**

Mentorship has a biblical point of view emanating from the Old and New Testament, and a biblical significance that fathers should be active and proactive. For example, fathers should forgive their children when they mess up in life, and fathers must also try to help their children to make better informed choices in life (cf. Lk 15:11–32). Faith-based fathers cannot risk not being involved in their families. Mentoring is vital in the home, and fathers should take cognisance that they are the priests and leaders of their homes. Scripture

teaches mentoring, stating that the Israelites had to teach their children the commandments. Therefore, we see that mentoring is a spiritual obligation of faith-based fathers as parents (cf. Dn 4:9; 6:1–25; 11:19).

Authors such as Hendricks and Hendricks (1995:17–18) indicated that the origin of mentoring could be related to some characters from the Bible such as Joshua, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Paul, Timothy, and others. Biblical mentoring is one of the most dynamic means to develop faith-based fathers (and leaders) (Johnson & Ridley 2004; Pelletier 2006:46). Biblical mentoring can help faith-based fathers learn the basics of walking with Christ (acts as a disciple), as well as to learn how to grow in their Christian life (acts as a spiritual guide).

It must be remembered that the family, especially as indicated in the Old Testament, can be seen as a type of home congregation. Thus, a father who mentored his family had to portray the fatherhood of God. In the New Testament, it was Paul's strong intent to develop others. This is evident in his mentoring role to Timothy, Titus and Onesimus in 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul was a spiritual guide, counsellor, teacher, contemporary model and sponsor to these men (his mentees).

#### **Mentoring principle 2: Mentoring impacts lives**

Mentoring is of utmost importance, especially in the lives of children regardless of whether these children are young people, learners, working or at tertiary institutions. Mentoring is not only about inculcating knowledge, but is also about being available to children as a faith-based father. Faith-based families, with the father as the leading figure, can raise a generation. Mentoring is an opportunity to have impact on the lives of children, especially helping them move into their destiny which God has called them to fulfil. Through mentoring, faith-based fathers (mentors) can shape the characters of their family members (mentees) and help faith-based families (or mentees) reach their destiny (cf. Hendricks & Hendricks 1995:18).

Through influence, faith-based fathers (as mentors) can help families (mentees) achieve their goals (Ndabazandile 2006:14). This is also why Tucker (2007:iii, vi) verified that mentoring is about releasing people's potential. It allows mentees to be the best they can be. The faith-based father should direct his children in biblical character through mentoring. This is because biblical character and influence help guide behaviour and give significance and direction to a person's existence (cf. Larney & Lotter 2005:663–664). Mentors must cultivate and vouch for their young, and children who experience the real sense or spirit of fatherhood within themselves should share it with others. Faith-based children become self-reflective and self-confident, because their faith-based fathers (as mentors) offer vision, develop trust, encourage, care for and protect them for a lifetime (Evans 2019:403–404). Faith-based fathers as mentors can reflect these human traits in the process of guiding and socialising, because the principle of *I am because you are* (spirit

of *Ubuntu*) makes it possible for people to be with each other and to value one another (Mulaudzi, Libster & Phiri 2009:49).

### **Mentoring principle 3: The importance of God within a faith-based family**

The significance of God within a faith-based family is paramount. God wanted union (father, mother and children) from the beginning (Gn 2:7–25). God did not create a single parent, but he created man and woman in order to take responsibility and care for the children he gave them (Bergh 2002:47). Therefore, the role of faith-based families is the highest, noblest calling from God and faith-based families should be aware of this existing, deeply committed and proactive role (McGraw 2004:10). God created males with a specific reason in mind. He intended males to be fathers and therefore God designed them to be so. The male was designated to be a father by the Creator, because God presented himself as the *father* when he created man (cf. Munroe 2008:23–26). God expected a faith-based family to be a greater nobility and power, for it is God's holy decree through which he desires to sustain mankind until the end of time (Bergh 2002:47).

God is the primary preference within a faith-based family, which means that he should always be a priority in every aspect of that family. A faith-based father should know and understand that God comes first in everything in his life because the position of the faith-based father figure directly encourages a strong, religious atmosphere for faith-based families. There is stability and assurance when children perceive God as Father in the home (Dickie et al. 2006:58–59). The Fatherhood of God is the original image of earthly fatherhood, and the origin of human fatherhood is born out in the Fatherhood of God (cf. Steensma 1995:183). Hence, faith-based parents should teach their children about God's truths, and they should lead and direct their children so that they may find their own faith in God (Bergh 2002:110). I agree with the above-mentioned that God should come first in everything within the family, and that fathers should teach their children about the truth of God and who God is.

It is also crucial that faith-based families should love and study the Word of God to gain confidence in the Bible. The Bible is, according to me, the constitution in the home, and faith-based families should behave as the Word of God prescribes. God has good plans for faith-based families – not harmful plans, but plans to prosper them and give them a hopeful future (cf. Jr 29:11). Faith-based families should further cultivate a passion for God and his Word so that God becomes the priority not only in the home, but also in their personal lives. The faith-based father and mother should remember that they stand in a relationship with God and the effect of their faith cascades to the children. The Holy Spirit nurtures the children's relationship and faith in God. It is therefore crucial for faith-based parents to understand that their faith influences the child to seek God's presence (Hart & Hart Frejd 2010:16–19).

Faith-based families should practise and indulge in spiritual activities such as house altars. House altars are practical ways in which faith-based families can study the Word of God and develop a love for God. Unfortunately, faith-based families do not seem to consider home altars as necessary anymore. Therefore, house altars must be brought back into the home and it is the faith-based father who is responsible for implementing house altars. He should lead his family in prayer, bringing their requests to the Heavenly Father at the house altar. Faith-based fathers should also implement Bible studies, cell church and prayer meetings within his family. Faith-based families must consult the Word of God to prosper in every area of their lives (Bergh 2002:168).

### **Mentoring principle 4: The importance of depending on God**

The role that such a father plays, is a gift through the grace of God to faith-based families. For example, in Matthew 7:11, it says that sinful fathers know how to give good gifts to their children and so does God our heavenly Father. However, one should know and understand that faith-based fathers are not perfect and do not always succeed in their fundamental role. God, our Heavenly Father, is the perfect Father and earthly faith-based fathers can never be equivalent to the Heavenly Father, but they can strive to reflect the Heavenly Father in their fathering and mentoring role in the lives of their children (Crow 2008:89–93). Jesus Christ is the good and perfect example to follow. He gave his life into the hands of his Father, and he never questioned his Father's will. The role of the earthly, faith-based father should be the same in the family –the mother and children should put their lives and their trust in the hands of the father who receives his power and strength from the Heavenly Father (cf. Jn 18:11; Mt 7:7–11). God gave life to parents (both father and mother) and equipped them to raise their children. Therefore parents must depend on and be responsible to God. God appointed them as parents, and from a Christian viewpoint, the responsibility of parenthood involves a divine calling (cf. Bergh 2002:119).

### **Mentoring principle 5: The role of the faith-based father should be grounded within the biblical context**

The role of the faith-based father should be deeply grounded within the biblical context. Most faith-based families have moved away from the biblical context in which the father is the priest of the house (Barker 2008:5). A faith-based father should know that Jesus Christ must be in their lives and should demonstrate a godly character: he should become a follower of Jesus Christ and should reflect specific characteristics such as love, patience, humility and respect (cf. Barker 2008:5; Coakley 2006:153–156; Munroe 2008:127). To continue to demonstrate a godly character, faith-based fathers should be teachers at their homes. The faith-based father should not wait for other spiritual teachers to teach his children about essential matters. It is his duty as a faith-based father to teach his children. For example, before a child goes to school, they must be school-ready; similarly, the faith-based father must also teach his children how to survive spiritually.

In the context of this article, it is important to know that faith-based parents should be the primary and most important educators, especially when building character and instilling values at home (Heenan 2004:3). Faith-based fathers need to show interest in their children's education (cf. Freeks 2004:91). Such a father serves not only as a teacher, but as a coach, manager, agent, mentor and even an advocate for the child (Coakley 2006:154).

#### **Mentoring principle 6: Faith-based fathers should be committed**

The faith-based father should be wholeheartedly committed to his role, because his role is not only significant, but also obligated (Barker 2008:1-3). A committed father should ask himself the following questions: 'What am I teaching the children?'; 'Am I living these principles out practically?'; 'Do children see these particular values in my life?' Faith-based fathers who do not actively advocate the interests of their children are not thought to be meeting the standards of good parenting. Faith-based fathers who are committed, actively promote their children's success, because parental commitment is a crucial factor in children's success.

#### **Mentoring principle 7: Faith-based fathers should play a more responsible role in the family**

Faith-based fathers should play a more responsible role in their families. They should interact more with their children, because the interaction is essential in the household, and promotes the children's success (Coakley 2006:154). Faith-based fathers need to have expectations for their children and should plan for their future (Wall 2007:59). There must also be a visible bond between the faith-based father and his children. Physical contact and interaction are vital, because they strengthen the bond between a father and child (Roest, Dubas & Gerris 2009:146-148). Responsible faith-based fathering provides for the needs of the children and accomplishes success (cf. Freeks 2004:58).

#### **Mentoring principle 8: Faith-based fathers should spend more time with their children**

Nowadays, faith-based parents are not spending enough time with their children (Freeks 2004:94). A faith-based father must make time to sit down and listen to his children even in his busy scheduled life.

Children experience sensitive and complicated issues, especially in their teenage years. If faith-based fathers spend quantity and quality time with their children, the bond (as mentioned earlier) will become stronger between them. Children themselves have revealed a need for their father to spend more time with them (cf. Steytler 2007:55). The faith-based father should form a formidable team with his family (mother and children) against problems, and they should search for a solution together. Children need to spend more time with their parents as opposed to receiving gifts and money as a substitute for their time (Freeks 2004:94). Quality and quantity time can be spent on, for example, outdoor activities (cf. Freeman & Almond 2010:243).

#### **Mentoring principle 9: Faith-based fathers should be role models**

Faith-based fathers must lead by example so that their children can see them as good role models and desire to be like them when they are adults (cf. Coakley 2006:154-159). The faith-based father should strive to be the best possible role model for his children. This is because children learn by observing the behaviour and attitude of their parents, which gives the faith-based father the opportunity to portray the ideal model because of his position as priest and loving father in the home (cf. Barker 2008:1-3; Bergh 2002:168). The faith-based father as a role model is imperative, especially in shaping the child's knowledge of God (Bergh 2002:168; Munroe 2001:201-203).

#### **Mentoring principle 10: The role of the church regarding faith-based families**

Over and above the imperative, spiritual practices of house altars, cell church and prayer meetings (as discussed earlier), faith-based families, under the leading role of the faith-based father, should attend church meetings together (Bergh 2002:168). Attending church meetings has a definite influence on the world- and life view of faith-based families, which also incorporates their view of God and religion (Beckmann & Nieuwenhuis 2004:58).

The church has a responsibility to guide, support, mentor and serve faith-based fathers to help them mature spiritually. The church is a place where information is exchanged and shared, and it should offer reading and other short programmes to faith-based fathers about father- and parenthood. The church must help to prepare young couples for parenthood before they get married and have children. Training at the church about values, especially moral values, would be a considerable advantage to faith-based fathers, as well as young adults. What children see and experience in church should be so substantial that it outweighs all the negative and distorted perceptions that they get from the outside world. The church has traditionally been considered as the gathering of people (believers) to praise and worship the Lord, but it should also be the place where people are educated and taught so that religious and cultural values may be imprinted (Pitout et al. 1990:37).

Church and religion are about more than just the existence of God. It is also for devotion to God. Religion should therefore be an integral part of the faith-based father's life (Abdool 2005:47). The church must also play a central role in a faith-based family's work activities. It is further a place where faith-based families are taught about giving (including the giving of tithes and offerings) (Bergh 2002:160).

## **Recommendations**

This article about the mentoring of fathers who grapple with fatherhood issues in a faith-based context led to these recommendations:

- Mentoring is a significant concept that can be used to help and care for families who grapple with father absence and fatherhood issues.



- Mentoring can impact and influence lives positively.
- Mentoring and parenting have similar effects on individuals of which the most outstanding aspect is to build positive relationships – a core value for families.
- Mentoring has a biblical nature and is a valuable platform to deal with faith-based families who have broken structures.
- Mentoring should not only be a suggestion, but a necessity for fathers who grapple with family and fatherhood issues.

## Conclusion

The faith-based father should demonstrate a godly character as a follower of Christ, and he should display specific attributes such as humility, gentleness and patience towards his wife and children (cf. Scalise 2010:53–54). Faith-based fathers should be mentored, equipped and trained to fulfil their godly role in the family. It is clear from this discussion that the faith-based father has a godly role and should continuously practise that role.

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### Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

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