
Amelioration of family dynamics with the focus on fatherhood and the role and influence of the father-figure through the LIFE-PLAN[®] intervention programme¹: A rural impact assessment

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Abstract

Fatherhood changed over time, and as a result, most families are struggling with serious problems, consequences and challenges in their respective communities. One of the serious problems in family life presently, is precisely the fatherhood issue. Families are redefined and most fathers find themselves in a serious dilemma. Often when this reconceptualising occurred, the father is not even present. This dilemma has devastated consequences because as the man goes, so goes the family, society and probably the whole world due to fatherhood. According to statistics is father absenteeism one of the main causes of quality of life, broken and destroyed families. Quality of life is often affected by father absenteeism and family violence. Therefore, families are fading away,

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and, with it, we are losing the purpose and plan of God for families and specifically for the father. The father absenteeism dilemma is facing most of our communities in rural and urban areas, and the implication is that the divine assessment of man's fundamental problem of fathers who do not fulfil their role as a father-figure. Hence, the key to the restoration of a sane and healthy family and society is the salvaging of the male through the LIFEPLAN® intervention programme from a Biblical perspective. It is proved through research that LIFEPLAN® did not only addressed a tremendous gap in the lives of families but also a significant strength for fathers to contribute in their own homes and communities pertaining father involvement. Therefore, its main aim is to improve the life of families and address father absenteeism. The programme follows a clear path of core facilitating exercises and activities that build knowledge, promote interpersonal skills and trust through contact and sharing, build thinking and decision-making, coping skills, build motivation and commitment to action pertaining family matters.

Opsomming

Vaderskap het mettertyd verander en gevolglik ervaar die meeste gesinne ernstige probleme, gevolge en uitdagings in hul onderskeie gemeenskappe. Een van die ernstige situasies in die gesinslewe is die probleem van vaderskap. Gesinne word herdefinieer en die meeste vaders bevind hulle in 'n ernstige krisis. Dikwels word die vader nie eens in 'n definisie genoem nie. Hierdie kwessie het verwoestende gevolge, want soos wat vaderskap agteruitgaan, so gaan die gesin, die samelewing en waarskynlik die hele wêreld agteruit. Die dilemma van vaderafwesigheid staar die meeste gemeenskappe in landelike en stedelike gebiede in die gesig. Volgens statistieke is vaderafwesigheid een van die hooforsake van 'n lae lewensgehalte, gesinsgeweld, gebroke en vernietigde gesinne. Families verloor die doel en plan van God vir gesinne en spesifiek vir die vader. Die oorsaak van die probleem is vaders wat nie die rol van die vaderfiguur vervul nie. Daarom is die oplossing vir 'n gesonde familie en samelewing die restourasie van die man deur die LIFEPLAN®-intervensieprogram vanuit 'n Bybelse perspektief. Navorsing het bewys dat die LIFEPLAN® program nie net moontlikhede bied om 'n groot leemte in die lewens van gesinne te vul nie, maar ook betekenisvolle advies en kennis bied vir vaders om 'n bydrae in hul eie huise en

gemeenskappe te lewer. Die hoofdoel is daarom om die lewens van gesinne te verbeter en vaderafwesigheid te herstel. Die program volg 'n duidelike pad van fasilitering deur oefeninge en aktiwiteite wat kennis uitbou, interpersoonlike vaardighede bevorder en vertrouwe skep. Dit geskied deur kontak en deelname, opbou van denke en besluitneming, die hantering van vaardighede, motivering en toewyding om op te tree in gesinsaangeleenthede.

1. Introduction and problem statement

Fatherhood alludes to the approach of granting certain men the role of being a father and having responsibilities for children (McCarthy & Edwards, 2011:95). Fatherhood is also defined as an attending to the needs of children by providing spiritual- and physical care as well as intellectual and emotional matters (Freeks, 2019:692-696; Dowd, 2012:917-919; Makofane, 2015:24). Studies that were conducted in South Africa about fatherhood focus mainly on violence, gender power, masculine control, paternal maintenance and family provision (Ratele, Clowes & Shefer, 2012). Even so, fatherhood goes beyond violence, gender and provision. Fatherhood is mainly about family than aspects such as responsibilities, accountabilities, respect, discipline, obedience and many more to mention. The family is God's structure in society and he wishes to restore broken families within a community. However, there are detrimental factors such as the increase in absent fathers within communities and unexpected and extraordinary social trends, namely the decline of fatherhood (Popenoe, 1996). The trend of absent fathers and their role are serious challenges for fatherhood, and the debate and fatherhood dialogue does not look favourable either (Centre for Social Development in Africa & Sonke Gender Justice, 2013:10). The latter in South Africa is associated with the idea of masculinity and based on the socio-economic history (Richter & Morrell, 2006). But even if fatherhood is masculine, it has ample distinctive forms (Leopeng & Langa, 2017:438). For example, in the sociological context, fatherhood is regarded as socially constructed because family and fatherhood are not seen as entities but as social institutions (Thunstedt, 2017:4). In this article, it is crucial to understand fatherhood from a biblical perspective. The biblical fatherhood notion does not only refer to an authoritative source of admonition, connection, teaching, training and equipping. It rather provides exceptional measures and guidelines that attest to the uniqueness of God as Father while highlighting the worth of an earthly father within a family system.

2. The LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme and its history

The acronym LIFEPLAN® stands for Life Inequalities amongst people addressed by means of purposeful living and nutrition interventions and follows a clear path of core facilitating exercises and activities, that builds knowledge, promote interpersonal skills and trust through contact and sharing, build thinking and planning skills, and build motivation and commitment to action regarding family matters. The programme activities comprise presentations, interactive activities, discussions, sharing or dialogue and exercises or activities (Freeks, 2008).

The LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme was developed at the North-West University to support broken and poor families in South Africa to make healthy, quality and informed decisions pertaining their lives (Freeks, 2008). The training and equipping of the programme as well as the research was performed in the North West Province of South Africa (cf. Freeks, 2016:205-206; Freeks, 2017:1; Freeks, 2018:5). Most communities in this province is riddled by family crises such as the fatherhood problem, family abuse, father absence, unemployment and ample social dilemmas associated with the social and economic situations (Freeks, 2018). However, families in these communities could benefit from the LIFEPLAN® Programme that can train and equip them with parenting skills, knowledge and insights about biblical fatherhood and the role of the father-figure to make informed and better choices regarding the challenges of father absenteeism and family issues. LIFEPLAN® could be the ideal training and equipping tool for broken and destroyed families in these communities. The goals and aims of the LIFEPLAN® programme is to strengthen, motivate, inspire and develop families and fathers with regard to their choices and decision-making regarding family matters and issues (Freeks, 2008).

LIFEPLAN® is specially designed to guide and to assist families conducting training and equipping sessions pertaining fatherhood and the role of the father who want to be equipped and to become knowledgeable in terms of his role as a father and to be involved in the lives of his children. The aim of this equipping and training is to develop a strong self-image and make aware a great concern to fathers to be involved and to take care of their family. The reason for this appeal is because quality of life is mostly affected by father absence, family violence and people's coping mechanisms to deal with life issues such as fatherhood and father absence and all its facets in a society (Bonthuys, Botha, Nienaber, Freeks & Kruger, 2011).

The presenting of the programme started in 2008, and has been running for the past twelve (12) years. The programme reached more than 2000 participants and families who was trained and equipped with a variety of life skills such as parenting, biblical fatherhood, management, etc. The programme was accredited on the 14th of September 2010 by the Institutional Committee for Academic Standards (ICAS). During this meeting the goals and objectives of the LIFEPLAN® programme were clearly outlined and described (NWU: Institutional Committee for Academic Standards, 2010).

3. Research question

From the above background the research question arises: To what extent did the LIFEPLAN® programme contribute and impact family life with regard to biblical fatherhood and the role and influence of the father-figure?

Purpose of the research

The purpose of the investigation was to determine how the LIFEPLAN® programme can be effective in terms of biblical fatherhood and the role and influence of the father-figure in a family.

Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of the present article is that the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping programme can identify that biblical fatherhood is paramount and may provide a *buffer* against father absenteeism, family dilemmas and challenges facing most of our families in rural areas.

4. Research method

The method the researcher used to gather data was a qualitative research. This involved participants (farm workers) through naïve sketches and structured interviews. The use of naïve sketches in qualitative research is particularly relevant in investigating personal experiences, attitudes and feelings, as well as narrating experiences and perceptions (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007:41). Furthermore, Speziale and Carpenter (2007:41) define narrative writing as the systematic documentation of a person's experiences, feelings and perceptions. Naïve sketches are self-report techniques where participants narrate their experiences and perceptions in written format. Narratives can be used in place of an interview and was preferred in this population group as it allowed farm workers time to compose their thoughts about what they wished

to write and share, and provided also rich, comprehensive data (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007:41). The question posed was: *Draw your experiences and feelings about the essence of fatherhood and the crucial role of the father within a family context.* Structured interviews are questions that are prepared in advance. Structured interview questions can be open-ended or closed-ended. In this context, it is open-ended questions. This is in contrast to unstructured interviews, in which there is no specific set of predetermined questions. Open-ended questions are those that can be answered in many ways and allow the participants to give elaborate, thoughtful answers. The aim of this approach is to ensure that each interview is presented with exactly the same questions in the same order. This ensures that answers can be reliably aggregated and that comparisons can be made with confidence between sample subgroups or between different survey periods. According to De Vos (2005) (cf. also Freeks & Lotter, 2011) the use of qualitative approaches is effective in undertaking this type of research (cf. also Freeks, 2016:210).

Research design

In this article, the research design is embedded in using qualitative approaches such as naïve sketches and structured interviews as mentioned and discussed under the research method heading.

Permission to conduct research

Permission to conduct the qualitative research with participants was granted by the following bodies and individuals: Research Committee of the Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, Institutional Research Ethics Committee, as well as the individual participants. Permission was granted by the individual participants through informed consent (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010:12; 16-17). Letters was written to each participant in the Christiana district explaining the study. This was followed by each participant signing a consent form confirming that they would partake in the research on a voluntary basis.

Measuring instrument

The researcher attempted to determine how the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme contributed and strengthened the role and influence of the father-figure in order to ameliorate family dynamics, using naïve sketches and structured interviews. Descriptive research is normally used for quantitative research but it can also be used in a qualitative research (Vyhmeister, 2008).

Participants

Participants were adult parents (N=151) living within the different and various farm communities in Christiana.

Population

Respective to this article, the population consisted of the farm workers from the broader Christiana district in the North-West Province of South Africa. The demographic layout of this district is Black and Coloured people (farm participants).

Sample

The researcher attempted to investigate the lived experiences of families (farm workers), using naïve sketches and structured interviews.

Sampling

Families (farm workers) were selected because they were trained, equipped and developed on the concept of biblical fatherhood with the support of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme.

Sample size

The sample size in this research were 151 farm workers (families) in total.

Data gathering

The researcher identified families (farm workers) in the Christiana district and contacted their farm managers by telephone and arranged for appointments, the time and place where naïve sketches and structured interviews were going to be conducted. Factors such as anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, risks, withdrawal and even possible termination were discussed (cf. Botma, *et al.*, 2010:13-14). The physical setting where the naïve sketches and the structured interviews took place was in the private training rooms and offices of farm managers of their choice. These settings were private, pleasant and comfortable, holding little or no distractions (Pinkoane, 2005:293).

Data analysis

For the data analysis, data was obtained through the naïve sketches and structured interviews. The researcher formulated themes and sub-themes from the naïve sketches by moving from descriptive to interpretive analysis (Botma, *et al.*, 2010:2-4). Verbatim quotes provided richness in the study. From the structured interviews, several conclusions were drawn that give significance to this article. Any raw data were refined into relevant sense making information. The data is presented in the results.

Trustworthiness of the research process in this article

Trustworthiness of this article was ensured where the researcher applied Lincoln and Guba's model (as cited in Botma, *et al.*, 2010). Truth value was ensured by prolonged engagement with the participants during the intervention, the LIFEPLAN® training project, naïve sketches and structured interviews. Reflectivity was achieved by guiding participants to write naïve sketches before, during and after the training, and by conducting structured interviews. Regular discussions with the coordinator and managers from the various farms improved the credibility of the research.

Ethical considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, the ethical aspects are there to protect the rights and integrity of the participants and the researcher. The families (participants) are autonomous, and have the right to self-determination, fair treatment, privacy and this right should be respected and their information should be treated with strict confidentiality (Burns & Grove, 2005:186; Strydom & Delpont, 2004:61). Informed consent was obtained, which entails informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation. (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:70). A consent was issued to the potential families (participants). The purpose and nature of the research were explained clearly and concisely in the consent and during the briefing and debriefing stage. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time he/she felt uncomfortable (cf. Brink, 2007:32).

5. The essence of fatherhood and the fundamental role of the father flows from a biblical perspective

Research confirms continually that fatherhood is fundamental and fathers still play a unique role in the development of their children's behaviour, life choices, relationships and self-esteem (Vaughan, 2010). Abraham Lincoln confirmed the importance of parenthood and fatherhood more than two centuries ago in his statement that the strength of a nation is found in the home where the father and the mother function together (Family Life, 1998:2). The most profound change in understanding fatherhood will come from knowing God as Father (Smail, 1980:10). Fatherhood originates in the Fatherhood of God. God is the Father of his creation and his people, and the attributes and characteristics of his Fatherhood should be perceived as protection, provision, warmth, gentleness, forgiveness, and involvement so that human parenting can adopt and flow from it. Fatherhood is more than

the concept *patriarchal fatherhood*. In modern times a broader base than the patriarchal system is needed for setting out principles for fatherhood. The views of fatherhood are considered, the biblical analogy between the human father and God the Father suggests a view of human fatherhood that requires the man to adjust to biblical fatherhood. The author is of the opinion that this good biblical way of giving expression to fatherhood has, however, declined and died out. The revelation by Scripture of God as Father through his son Jesus Christ and his saving grace does not only provide knowledge and information, but basic help, advice and meaningful insight into fatherhood in a time and era of father absence. The father should fulfill his role of a figure of authority and is called by God to fulfill this role and calling in the context of the family.

Pertaining this article on the significance of fatherhood, the premise is that God the Son is subordinate to God the Father (Jn 14:28), and God elevates his Word above his Name (Jesus). It is therefore important for families to abide in the Word of God, and Christian families have to believe that God is faithful and He can empower them through his Spirit to restore issues or difficulties that may occur in the life of a family. In this regard, the LIFEPLAN® programme indicates that the father is God's instrument to lead and model the life and the example God intended him to be (Freeks, 2008:28). Therefore, the argument is that fatherhood stems from the Bible and this means the solution lies in God through His Son, Jesus Christ with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to deal with father absenteeism and fatherlessness in families.

The references about the Fatherhood of God in the Bible is explicit (Dt 32:6; 2 Sm 7:14; Ps 68:6; Is 63:16; Jr 3:19; Mi 2:10). The Old Testament testimony and narratives present God as a Father to Israel, especially through the Lord's fundamental roles as Creator, Protector and Saviour (Dobbs, 2013:43). The first specific reference to God as Father can be found in Deuteronomy 32:6 where Moses testifies that God is the Father who created all of humanity.

God is the Father of all flesh, including humans (Jr 32:27; Job 12:10). This indicates that God presents a type of father image to all people (Is 64:8; Nm 16:22; Mi 2:10). God is the ancient Father who honours his Fatherhood, and expects that humans should honour and respect Him as their primeval Father (Mi 1:6; 2:10-11). Thus, the same honour and respect should be shown to earthly fathers (Freeks, 2016:11).

Significantly, God is depicted as the Father of his creation and people. The Lord's Fatherhood should be displayed so that the earthly parenthood can flow from it (Dt 32:6, 15, 18). Earthly fatherhood and parenthood and its origin thus derives from the Fatherhood of God (Steensma, 1995:183).

Furthermore, God proposed the image of earthly fatherhood at a very early stage of adulthood. According to Genesis 2:24, the man will leave his parents and be united to his wife to take up his role as the head of his house and to fulfil his position in society. In this example the Fatherhood of God can be seen as model indicating how the Christian earthly fatherhood should be pursued (Freeks, 2016:9-11).

The Fatherhood of God is a central concept in the Bible, and knowing God as Father lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel (Rm 8:15; Gl 4:5-6). This concept can be understood better by focusing on Jesus Christ (Hoepfner, 2009:47). If Jesus speaks to believers, they can know and accept that God the Father is speaking to them through his Son Jesus Christ (Jn 14:16; Mt 11:27; Heb 1:1). A relationship with Jesus Christ should point towards the suitable solution for broken families with problems of father's absence and fatherlessness (Gerstenberger, 2009:44-47). Furthermore, the Fatherhood image of God can be presented analogically, where the man is the head of the family as Jesus Christ is the head of the church, according to Ephesians 5:23.

Subsequently, the Fatherhood of God is proclaimed in Jesus Christ seeing that 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 (cf. also Jn 17:3). Calling God Father, Christians must keep in mind that they are adopted by love into his family to become God's sons and daughters (Gupta, 2016). God showed his love as a Father through Jesus. This implies that the earthly father can place his trust in God to help secure a hopeful future for him and his family (Hoepfner, 2009:61).

In conclusion, fatherhood is fundamental because God created the universe as Father God, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. Fatherhood is also the most perfect depiction of God that any man can achieve, and it is the ultimate revelation of God Himself. As human beings, and as earthly fathers and mothers, knowing God the Father brings identity, self-worth, security and service (cf. Ef.3:14). Through the LIFEPLAN® training and equipping fathers were shaped to be good fathers to their respective families. Good fathers are priceless as are the children they lead and invest in. Being good fathers is the most Godlike thing men can do and societies, communities and the entire world need more good fathers. Hence, developing good fathers does not come automatic, it takes time, effort, training, equipping, and empowering. The LIFEPLAN® was such a programme of great help and a tool for broken families in these rural areas.

6. Results of the research

Introduction

Results obtained from the qualitative research (naïve sketches and structured interviews) The data were presented by forming themes and sub-themes from the naïve sketches and impressions, comments, opinions and suggestions from the structured interviews. From the structured interviews feedback was given by making a summary. Based on the findings from both the naïve sketches and structured interviews, this article also evaluated the LIFEPLAN® programme's strong and weak points.

Results from the naïve sketches of participants

Five themes emerged from the participants' (farm workers) naïve sketches about their lived experiences of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme.

1. the essence of LIFEPLAN® pertaining the essential role of the father;
2. LIFEPLAN® emphasize the importance of family with the father as leading figure in the family according to the Bible;
3. LIFEPLAN® contributed much to family relationships when the father is present;
4. LIFEPLAN® in practice with regard to fatherhood;
5. LIFEPLAN® taught me as a father to respect God, family and others

Each theme is discussed below including the various sub-categories. A bullet is used to indicate a sub-category under discussion.

Theme 1: The essence of LIFEPLAN® pertaining the essential role of the father

Theme 1 portrays the importance of the LIFEPLAN® programme pertaining the essential role of the father to the participants. This theme has three specific sub-category findings: the value of LIFEPLAN® with regard to the important role of the father-figure; the role of LIFEPLAN® in the life of my family; and God's role in LIFEPLAN® pertaining my family.

- The value of LIFEPLAN® with regard to the important role of the father-figure
Most participants valued the LIFEPLAN® programme extremely high. They expressed their feelings with phrases such as: ***“LIFEPLAN® taught me about the important role of the father-figure in a family”***; ***“I value the LIFEPLAN® programme because it taught me about my role as a father to my children”***; ***“I took LIFEPLAN® and make it my own friend to be a good and better father.”***

- The role of LIFEPLAN® in the life of my family
Participants were extremely grateful that they were trained and equipped with the LIFEPLAN® programme. They expressed this experiences through the following responses: ***“I thank LIFEPLAN®, it is something that has been missing in my life”***; ***“I took LIFEPLAN® to be part in my children’s life.”***
- God’s role in LIFEPLAN® pertaining my family
Fathers indicated that God has a role in the LIFEPLAN® programme when it comes to their family. They expressed their views as follows: ***“LIFEPLAN® took me back to God to be a good example to my family”***; ***“LIFEPLAN® taught me how important God the Father is in our family.”***

Theme 2: LIFEPLAN® emphasize the importance of family with the father as leading figure according to the Bible

The second theme assessed the LIFEPLAN® programme with its emphasize on families with the father as the leading figure in families according to the Bible. Participants indicated that the programme provide important and relevant information about the importance of fatherhood, which is also what the Bible intends. Three specific sub-category findings include: LIFEPLAN® taught valuable learning lessons regarding fatherhood and the Bible; A life-changing experience through the LIFEPLAN® programme; and LIFEPLAN® increased my trust as earthly father in God.

- LIFEPLAN® taught valuable learning lessons regarding fatherhood and the Bible
Participants indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme taught them valuable lessons about fatherhood and the Bible. They expressed the following view: ***“LIFEPLAN® taught me about the importance of biblical fatherhood.”***
- A life-changing experience through the LIFEPLAN® programme
Participants indicated that they experience a life-changing process because of the LIFEPLAN® programme. They expressed their experience through the following responses: ***“The LIFEPLAN® programme change my life as a father drastically within my family.”***
- LIFEPLAN® increased my trust as earthly father in God
Participants indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme increased their trust as earthly fathers in God. They expressed their opinion through responses such as: ***“The LIFEPLAN® programme makes me as earthly father to believe in God when I experience family problems”***;

“The LIFEPLAN® programme helped me to lead and care for my family and to discipline my children according to the Bible.”

Theme 3: LIFEPLAN® contributed much to family relationships when the father is present

Theme 3 demonstrates the aspect of family relations when the father is present. Specific sub-themes are: sound relations with God; sound relations with my family; and sound relations with others.

- Sound relations with God
Participants expressed their views about their relationship with God clearly: ***“As a father I am the creation of God and my relationship with God is important”***; ***“I have a sound relationship with God.”***
- Sound relations with my family
Fathers mentioned that their relations with their family members is vital and therefore expressed in the following response: ***“I have sound and godly relations with my family.”***
- Sound relations with other fathers
Fathers were of the opinion that sound relations with other fathers are crucial since they believe that one is what one is today because of other people. This can be inferred from responses such as: ***“I have a sound relationship with other fathers and that’s why, I am a better father and person today.”***

Theme 4: LIFEPLAN® in practice

Theme 4 highlights the need for the LIFEPLAN® programme to be applied practically in the lives of families. Under this theme, a specific sub-category was found: The practice of LIFEPLAN®.

- Applying LIFEPLAN® within my family
According to most participants LIFEPLAN® should be applied in their daily lives. They expressed their feelings as follows: ***“I have to apply the LIFEPLAN® programme in my family because as a father-figure I will be a good example to them.”***

Theme 5: LIFEPLAN® taught me as a father to respect God, family and others

The fifth theme reflects the aspect of respect, respect for God, family members and others. Specific sub-category findings include: respect God is principle within the family; respect for family is important; and treat others with respect.

- Respect God is principle within the family
A lack of respect damages relationships and co-operation. Often this attitude results in bad conduct and behaviour among family members – as participants pointed out. This situation also influences their relationship with God. Participants expressed their opinions in the following response: **“Respect God first is important and as a father I need to ensure that in my family.”**
- Respect for family is important
Most participants stressed the importance of respect for family members. They explained that respect for family determine and influence one’s entire life. Participants expressed their feelings in these responses: **“Respect for your family is what God expects from you as a father”;** **“Respect for your wife and children brings a blessing from God.”**
- Treat others with respect
Participants were keen on the subtheme of treating others with respect. They affirmed that the LIFEPLAN® programme emphasises strongly how to respect other people and how one can build one’s self-image and the self-image of others by showing respect. They expressed the following response: **“I learn how to treat others with respect.”**

Summary of participants’ responses regarding the LIFEPLAN® programme

It is crucial to consider that the responses of the participants form an integral part of the central theoretical statement of the article.

Firstly, the essence of LIFEPLAN® pertaining the essential role of the father. Their focus was on God’s role and plan for families, the fundamental role of the father in the LIFEPLAN® programme and the correlation between LIFEPLAN® and the Bible. Participants emphasised that the programme provided valuable learning lessons about fatherhood and the crucial role of fathers within families. Participants showed throughout the study that they had a life-changing experience with regard to fatherhood. They confirmed this state of affairs by indicating that the LIFEPLAN® programme changed their life and as fathers they experienced more trust in God.

Secondly, LIFEPLAN® emphasize the importance of family with the father as leading figure in the family according to the Bible. LIFEPLAN® in practice with regard to fatherhood, changed their entire view. This view is based on the impact the LIFEPLAN® programme had in the context of its value and role for their daily lives.

Thirdly, LIFEPLAN® contributed much to family relationships when the father is present. Participants emphasised the importance of sound relationships between themselves, God, family and others. Such relationships helped made them better persons at present. Therefore, they could attest that the programme helped them to be better and more effective fathers to their families.

Fourthly, participants felt strongly that the LIFEPLAN® programme should be put into practice and that Christian fatherhood should be practiced daily within families. According to them, the programme should be applied to all Christian families.

Fifthly, participants mentioned crucial points from the programme, namely respect for God, respect for family and respect for others. They were clear and keen on the fact that respect for God is essential. God must be respected first, then one will have respect for family and respect for other people. It was also promising to observe after the programme that participants suggested that the programme should be recommended for other rural areas who experience father absenteeism and family dilemmas. Most participants expressed their gratitude for the programme by indicating that they are better fathers to their families than before.

The overall view of participants was that they enjoyed a life-changing experience through the LIFEPLAN® programme. They expressed this lived experience as follows: ***“It is because of the programme that we now know the importance of fatherhood and the important role of the father within a family, and the programme therefore changes our lives as fathers for the best.”***

Results from the structured interviews of farm managers

For the qualitative research five open-ended questions were formulated to ensure similar exploration of participants' lived experience (Botma, *et al.*, 2010:134-135). Feedback were given in the form of a summary. The open-ended questions were first evaluated by experts in the field of Missiology and Pastoral Theology to determine whether these questions were clear, understandable and appropriate. The questions were refined and adjusted by applying this feedback (Botma, *et al.*, 2010:207-208). The researcher also conducted a pilot study by testing the structured interviews with one participant in each of the identified populations. The data were found to be usable and were included in the total data set. Subsequently, the open-ended questions are presented and discussed under the following subsections.

Question 1

What are your general impressions and comments with regard to the LIFEPLAN® programme?

Most of the fathers responded highly positive to Question 1. They confirmed that the LIFEPLAN® is an effective course for family members and especially for the role of the father. However, a small group remarked that the programme did not influence and did not change their lives. Overall, most family members were convinced that they were enriched through the programme. Most fathers also mentioned the fact that LIFEPLAN® is an informative programme because they learnt important values such as a positive attitude, a positive self-image, respect and appreciation. Participants also indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme impacted and made a major difference in their daily lives as fathers.

Question 2

Did the LIFEPLAN® programme, according to you, make a significant difference in the life of your family? Motivate.

On this specific question, some participants indicated that there were no significant differences. The reasons they provided was: "My family did not take the LIFEPLAN® training seriously; the programme was too difficult to understand; and they are still negative toward the programme." However, most participants answered "Yes" to the question. They affirmed that the LIFEPLAN® programme did make a significant difference in the lives of their families. These participants found a significant difference in the positive behaviour within their families.

Linked to positive behaviour of participants was the principle of appreciation and respect for their families. Fathers are deeply concerned about the welfare of their families. A number of families enjoy a high standard of living after the programme, which is increasing, and was not the case previously.

Question 3

Is fatherhood according to the Bible and from God?

All the participants answered "Yes" to this. Their responses indicated that biblical fatherhood is vital for Christian families. Participants practice and exercise Christian values within their families. Their interest in biblical fatherhood was obvious in their lives and noticed during Monday's morning prayer and Scripture reading by them. Participants also indicated that the LIFEPLAN® programme depicts morality in the aspect of fatherhood.

Question 4

Is there a possibility that the LIFEPLAN®s programme may be used to strengthen biblical fatherhood in rural communities?

All participants responded positive to this question. They affirmed that there is a huge possibility for the LIFEPLAN® programme to be used to strengthen biblical fatherhood.

The LIFEPLAN® programme has the potential to change fathers' wrong lifestyles into improved ones. Participants proposed that more fathers should get involved in the LIFEPLAN® training because they believe that this programme has the possibility to transform lives.

During the group discussions with participants, it is clearly indicated that rural communities could use certain modules of the programme about fatherhood. Therefore, it is possible that the programme can impact strongly on other rural areas and help fathers to strengthen their role as father-figure within the home when family challenges and crises approach.

Question 5

How do you see this programme pertaining fatherhood being used by churches?

Participants indicated that churches can incorporate this programme especially the parts of families and fatherhood in their Bible study sessions to teach men about biblical fatherhood. Participants reason that Bible studies provide the best opportunity to teach men about fatherhood and their significant role within the family. The programme can be used to train and equip fathers with fatherhood values, spiritual growth and help motivate them to trust and believe in God to be effective fathers to their families.

Summary of the participants' responses regarding the LIFEPLAN® programme

Overall, it must be mentioned, that not all the participants agreed on all the open-ended questions. Thus, the feedback and results about fatherhood and the role of the father within the home setup received from the LIFEPLAN® programme were not all positive. For example, certain participants responded totally negative: ***“LIFEPLAN® taught me nothing”, “I learn nothing from the programme”***. However, this type of response was the exception rather than the rule.

Evaluation and critique of the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme

The views, approaches and perspectives of scholars, researchers and academics in terms of the fatherhood concept are possible guidelines to the LIFEPLAN® programme to make a stronger and a more effective impact with respect to biblical fatherhood. Fatherhood from a biblical perspective is crucial and the biblical testimony about fatherless families is clear, but the programme in its current state is insufficient. The general weak point of the programme was the lack to deal effectively and explicitly with the fundamental aspect of fatherhood. Therefore, the programme needs to be modified and amended as a fatherhood guide to become an effective tool for broken families. Although a major focus of the programme is on family matters, it does not fully address the issue of biblical fatherhood. It is therefore essential that the programme must be adapted and amended to emphasise the concept fatherhood, and especially biblical fatherhood. The programme needs to be adjusted to fit and to find a holistic biblical foundation in order to respond to the call of God. Furthermore, the programme should develop more guidelines in terms of biblical fatherhood so that it be to the honour of God and the point of departure, as well as the rationale behind its actions. Biblical fatherhood should be more explicit in the programme and an ideal teaching, training and equipping topic in the LIFEPLAN® programme, so that it provide possible answers and solutions to father absence and fatherlessness.

The feedback and results received from the LIFEPLAN® programme were not all positive. Some results illustrated the following: "LIFEPLAN® taught me nothing about fatherhood", "***I learn nothing from the programme about the role of the father***". It must also be investigated whether the programme can be effective within a context whereby participants exhibit higher levels of literacy because the programme was designed, developed and compiled to support participants who are under-developed, unemployed, illiterate and semi-literate.

7. Conclusion

It was striking to note that Scripture readings about fatherhood and the role of the father-figure became the order of the day. These participants attest that presently, aspects such as Christian fatherhood, the role of men and the essence of God the Father is vital in their daily lives. Furthermore, participants agreed on the impact and significance that the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme about fatherhood and the role of the

father had and the difference it made to their lives as men. They indicated that the programme may function as a *buffer* against father absenteeism and family challenges and problematic issues which face most of the families in the rural areas of South Africa.

The overall view of participants about the programme were the *life changing experience as fathers to their families*. Participants mentioned that the LIFEPLAN® programme taught them about God the Father and his role, intervention and influence pertaining the family. Also their fundamental role as earthly fathers to their families. They expressed themselves in the following way: ***“It is because of the LIFEPLAN® programme that we now know our purpose as fathers for our families and the Bible as core manual in our lives, and therefore our lives changes for the best”***.

Finally, it is essential and necessary that people should be trained and equipped through fatherhood programmes. These programmes, and especially the LIFEPLAN® Training and Equipping Programme is relevant and vital for all races in society. Growing boys and young men must be equipped through Bible studies and biblical courses to grasp and realise the notion of biblical fatherhood. Fathers should know that fatherhood is a God-given calling. They need to be a model that embodies the quantities and purpose of Christ’s new commandment. In practical life, that implies loving your family as Christ loves them. If fathers succeed in this area, they have fulfilled their calling in life where it matters the most, namely family life.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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