

“You strike a WOMAN; you strike the ROCK!”

I write this as a father of a 21-year-old daughter who is studying at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and who lives right around the corner from where UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana was murdered.

Can you imagine the horror and fear my wife and I both experienced when we read about this happening so close to our daughter? The feelings of helplessness are only calmed by constantly praying for her protection. This fear and paranoia, which I, as a man, only experience occasionally, is most probably the awful daily experience of most women in our country.

It can safely be assumed that we are living in a very unsafe and abnormal society as far as women are concerned. It can also be assumed that women view most men as a threat to their safety no matter where they are. So, I ask myself the questions: “why are such a lot of South African men angry and violent?” and “if over 60% of men in SA are raised by mums and grannies, why are they so violent towards women?” In my humble opinion, the bulk of the blame lies squarely at the feet of fathers, or more accurately, absent and irresponsible fathers! There are countless studies that have concluded that the general root problem of society today is FATHERLESSNESS!

Guys, let me explain before you shoot me down... Now I speak firstly, as a son who had a wonderful father for 67 years, and secondly, as a father of a 17-year-old son! Just a very important note at this point; by no means is a fatherless or bad childhood an excuse for abuse, rape or antisocial behaviour!

I have seen and experienced the positive influence and impact that the love and discipline of a wise father has on a son. If over 60% of boys in SA are growing up without a dad or positive father figure in their development, could this be the root cause of their anger and violence? I think that most single parents would agree with me that the anger issues of their children are mostly based in the resentment of not having a relationship with their dad.

If we really want a long-term solution to this crisis, then we need to address the formation and growth of the family unit! Or, more specifically, how and what are boys and girls taught in their families? Are boys taught that they are better than girls or that girls are just sexual objects? Are girls taught to accept this and to keep quiet?

Men in families have to make sure that their words and actions display a healthy respect for sisters, mums, wives and women in general. The development and growth of society starts with families. Clichéd, I know... but still true and relevant! What is the solution? Time and space do not allow me to fully try and address this thorny question? Maybe I should conclude by speaking from my own experience.

I was fortunate to be raised by a loving mom and dad and have never known abuse or lack of fatherly love. On the positive side, this caused me to have a fairly healthy and happy upbringing. On the negative side, I struggled to understand why not having a father or happy family (which I took for granted) was such a big issue. Only when I became a youth leader and started to deal with the issues of young people did I come to realise what a huge factor this is in determining success or failure in life. It even became more apparent when I became a full time pastor in 2001. As a man, a husband, a dad, a pastor and a leader, I experienced first-hand the major role I could play in the lives of the fatherless youth.

I therefore took on the responsibility of being a role model and father figure to those in my sphere of influence. Of course, I firstly needed to take personal responsibility for my own life and learn how to

be a real MAN, a loving husband, and a good father to my own family. The greatest influences on my life, when it comes to family and marriage, are the Bible and God as my Heavenly Father. The Bible taught me that I have a Heavenly Father whose example I can follow (Matthew 5:48 and 1 Corinthians 11:1). It taught me God's heart and concern for families. I learnt that I am physically stronger than women so that I can protect them better. I learnt to love, respect and honour women as equal partners in life who are also made in the image of God (1 Peter 3:7).

This is my encouragement to all my brothers out there...If you are struggling with any of the issues mentioned above, know that God can heal you from the inside. The very last verse of the Old Testament (Malachi 4:6) says that God is able to change our hearts and families. God already knew a long time ago that FATHERLESSNESS would be a major challenge in the world and that is why when the Lord Jesus came to earth, He encouraged us to pray and address God as "Our Father...who art in heaven..." My genuine desire and prayer are that every man in our society would experience God's love and healing power in their lives and this will result in them changing to love, honour and respect women as the wonderful and beautiful gifts from God that they are.

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