

Fathers Matter

When I look around me at the crime perpetrated by young people and see the degradation of our moral values and of the social fabric, I cannot help but ask, “where are the fathers?” In the 2018 “State of South Africa’s Fathers Report,” the authors state that there is no typical father in South Africa. There are biological fathers, social fathers, gay fathers, straight fathers, young fathers, older fathers...” With so many single parents and child-headed households, there is no one way to define the modern family.

This speaks to me of a broken world. When something is broken for long enough and you do not repair or replace it, the broken becomes normal. Nestasjnia Barnes, a young poet and artist, recently commented on a popular social media platform that daily posts photos of victims of abuse and crime by saying “it’s sad that, that is normal.”

I see the wisdom of God in the nucleus family with mom, dad and children within the confines of marriage. Having been born to a single mother myself and raised by my grandparents initially and then living with my mom and stepfather as a teenager, I knew that something was missing. In fact, being a single father with my daughter living with me since she was five – she is now 15 – I realise the impact of lack of fathering in my own life initially.

I give my daughter structure. When she was two, I defied the women in her life and had her sleep in her own bed. She had a specific time to go to bed at night, which she negotiated with an extra half hour every year she got older, but my discipline gives her stability.

I am also her protector. When she was eight, she was threatened by two large dogs after running ahead of me out of our yard. She screamed “daddy!” in fear and I rushed to her and stood between her and the threat. It was not that I am a dog whisperer. To the contrary, on a normal day I would have been afraid of the dogs myself – but my voice betrayed my anger at their audacity to threaten my daughter’s safety and they got the message and left.

When a schoolboy punched my daughter in the face, I went to school the next day to insist that the school take action. I also demanded the boy’s parents’ information. I went to their house and had the parents take action after showing them my daughter’s black eye.

I can only imagine what it must feel like to know that there is someone to protect you and the confidence of knowing you are loved by your father. I did not have that as a child. Neither do millions in South Africa.

Stats SA’s 2017 General Household Survey (GHS) found that 61.8% of biological fathers were not present in their children’s lives. Around 63% of births registered in 2018 had no information on fathers. The GHS of 2018 revealed that 43.1 percent of children lived only with their mothers, while 3.3% of children lived only with their fathers.

The causes of father absenteeism include unemployment, culture, dependence on a child grant or just plain and simple irresponsible sexual behaviour.

What is abundantly clear is something significant must be done to bring about positive change with regards to absent fathers. Church leaders and their teams need to be intentional about addressing this need in our congregations and communities. The Department of Social Development needs to be more intentional about bringing programmes to communities countrywide.

Apart from being a pastor and community worker, I am a representative for the social and behaviour change organisation, Heartlines, from Gqeberha to Makhanda. One of their programs is “Father’s Matter”.

It is inspired by the last few prophecies in the Old Testament which state that Christ came to restore the hearts of the fathers to the children and those of the children to their fathers.

You can find out more about Heartlines on www.hearlines.org.za. Churches and NGOs can contact me on awalljee@icloud.com and developmentisawesome@gmail.com.

One of the greatest revelations that Christ gave us of God was introducing Him to us as “Father”. When He teaches us to pray, “Our Father...” it changes our approach to God. I am not just hoping for attention from God, I have the right of access to Him.

It is time for fathers to take responsibility for their children and to be in their lives. Solomon never had to fight the Philistines in his lifetime because his father, David, defeated them during his reign. The prodigal son rejected his father's covering and ended up among the pigs. But when he returned to his father and they embraced, his father immediately changed his life by restoring his identity, providing sustenance, covering his shame and restoring purpose in his life.

Imagine how the quality of life of many of our children can be improved just by having their father in their lives? God had always intended that children enter life and adulthood from the springboard of their parents' shoulders.

I have a message based on my own experience that I call, "In My Father's Shadow". I would love to share with groups and churches to help young people appreciate the role of fathers in their lives.

Pastor Alain Walljee: Bay Christian Church