

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONFRONTING ABSENCE THROUGH STORYTELLING

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter revealed the important roles played by fathers in the lives of their sons. It has been argued that fathers play a critical role in the process of ushering the adolescent male into the external world. However, changes in the urban society have imposed demanding social and economic priorities on the contemporary fathers. It is in the scope and vein of this chapter to assess the impact of the absence of fathers through dialogue with adolescents themselves. The emotional and physical boundaries created by the absence of the father, particularly leading to social inadequacies in the upbringing of boys, will be discussed. Therefore, therapy in this chapter is expected even from the process of storytelling.

5.2 ENGAGING BOYS IN STORYTELLING

In this chapter the author has engaged in dialogue with male adolescents in order for them to share their experiences, feelings and views about their absent fathers. Story telling is crucial in this study. Through storytelling, boys will realise that their fathers are not angels by any practical definition or understanding, but that they are human beings who want to fend for them. As subscribed by Jarema,

“Storytelling heals. By its very nature, storytelling confronts dysfunctional family and societal rules that violate healthy human relationships in our homes, work places, and the world community. Storytelling breaks these vicious and crippling

cycles for keeping “secrets” and lying and confronts the three laws of an addictive system: don’t talk; don’t feel’ don’t trust” (Jarema, 1994: 157).

In spite of writing from a Western world perspective, Jarema informs the reader why African parents in Zimbabwe value storytelling. The bible reveals how our Lord Jesus Christ and the Old Testament prophets engaged with their audience in order for them to understand his teachings within their contexts. For example, the prophet Nathan drew King David to repentance of the adulterous sin with Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife (2Samuel 11:1-5). Stories shed light on particular themes in our lives so that individuals or groups join the scattered fragments of a dysfunctional situation in human existence, in order that healing takes place.

Equally, the Zimbabwean government has set aside two days in August of each year, to commemorate the fallen heroes and heroines of the war of liberation. During this period, the Zimbabwean society shares its experiences about the war of liberation; how it was waged and won. The process in itself helps people who participated in the war to appreciate God’s power during the war. One would hear the former freedom fighters say; *takatungamirwa nava dzimu na Mwari*; meaning we were guided by the ancestors and God. Those who lost relatives find time to remember them as they talk about their experiences. As the people share their stories, they and the nation connect with what happened and the healing process continues. By talking of their past experiences, friends and relatives are reminded of the painful memories of their losses. In this research, the adolescents will retell their experiences, based on the absence of their fathers, as a story that reconnects them to their past. The process of remembering, gives value to what happened. It also helps them to plan for the future.

Moreover Jerema further states that;

“By revisiting experiences of the past, we begin the process of reconciliation that allows us to embrace grief at its most intimate moments. By remembering our stories, we relive blessed experiences, or, for the first time, feel the pain of the wounded memories that previously were too difficult to deal with. When we remember, we relive the past and we embrace the fruit of the past. Doing so helps us to enhance the present. Storytelling allows us to savor and to reminisce about our life. An old Jewish proverb says, “To remember is to become divine.” When we allow ourselves to remember and revisit our past, we capture those blessings again through storytelling” (Jerema, 1994:158).

Jarema illuminates why it is important for adolescents in this study to share how they felt when their fathers were living the country. The reality of the absence and projected benefits will be assessed in order to find out whether the initial feelings and expectations were maintained and realised. The author will observe and listen in order to determine the state of the trauma that children are experiencing when their fathers are absent.

5.3 CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN CONCEPTS IN SOCIALISING BOYS

Between the ages of 10-13 Children missed their fathers more than those who are between 14 -22 years. Adolescents, who are between 14-22 years, do not want to be controlled by their mothers because they feel that they are old enough to decide what they want in life. This reflects on how they may react towards other members of the extended family and society when corrected on anything. The author mentioned in chapter three that in Zimbabwe a person remains a child as long as there are elders that he/she is living with or

around him/her. Therefore, mothers still believe that their sons are still children who should be guided and who should take orders from them.

Consequently, it is generally assumed that boys, especially adolescents are able to protect their mothers and look after other family members when their fathers are absent. A Zimbabwean Newspaper had a story with a heading; A SON CAN MAKE LIFE EASIER: In this story, a woman who was finding it difficult to fend for herself said;

“I hope to have a son who will look after me when I get old, I need a son who will help me with food and fetch water for me. At my age, I find it difficult to fend for myself” (The Sunday Mail of 20 June 2010: D5).

This explains the general African view about how boys can be of use to their mothers, particularly as they take the role of the absent fathers. While boys are helpful in various ways in some families, it should be known by the reader that if they are not guided from childhood, the dreams of parents, such as the one quoted above, may be shattered. This then shows that the way children are socialised to carry out their roles can be of great benefit or concern to the family and society.

It is also clear that from birth a boy or a girl child is socialised to be aware of his/her gender identity and importance. For example, when a daughter in-law gives birth to a boy child, the mother in law would immediately address him as ‘*murume wangu*’; in Shona meaning my husband or ‘*mudzimai wangu*’; meaning my wife by a grandfather. To that effect, the daughter in law and her husband would address their son as their father in law. This is because he has been given the status of husband by his grandmother, who is the mother of his father. When he is disciplined by his mother, the mother in law (grandmother) would be

disturbed or get angry; normally to beat a child in the presence of his grandparents or old people is a sign that shows disrespect to them, for, he is addressed by their status in the family and society. The grandson represents them and they see themselves in light of their grandchildren.

When African concepts such as those described above are misunderstood by boys, they create conflicts between mothers and their sons. This makes it difficult for boys to be disciplined or trained by their mothers; when fathers are not present. It is like a woman disciplining a man; which is perceived as an embarrassment in a patriarchal society. One of the boys in this study, illustrates this view during the interview in the following way,

“.....you are also aware that someone who can discipline me is around; at least you hear a male voice which reminds you that you are not the boss of yourself...”(interviewed by the author on 8 May 2010).

This shows that when fathers are absent, mothers suffer at the hands of their sons due to some African concepts that children take without an understanding of the enriched meaning behind it. For example, when this is understood in the context of training children on male roles and not authority over parents, children will continue to honour their mothers in the absence of the fathers. Moreover in Zimbabwe, a child who beats a mother is cursed for life by the mother’s relatives and their ancestors. Therefore, in order to restore the relationship, a beast would be given or paid to the mother or her brothers. It is, therefore, important that the society should take upon itself to train and explain to the boys the meaning of African concepts in order to socialise children to be responsible members.

5.3.1 Challenging blind spots in sons

When fathers are absent, male children suffer the absence in silence as they pretend to be in control. In the author's view, silence and lack of knowledge are some of the blind spots that children have to deal with in order for them to benefit from the process of this study. It is important that the author is conscious of the possibilities of blind spots when sharing with these boys.

According to Egan, the blind spots are dysfunctional ways of thinking and acting as boys (clients) don't seem to see, understand, realise and appreciate what they are doing to themselves—(Egan, 2002:177). Boys may fail to see how some of the realities that they construct for themselves which are self limiting and cause conflict by assuming that they are old enough to practically guide their life. The process of sharing their experiences, will enable them to erase the blind spots and move their -naiveté and become more socially and emotionally competent (Egan 2002:177). In order for that to happen, the author explained the purpose and benefits of sharing their experiences to them and the future generation. He further made them to be aware of the blind spots. Moreover, Farrar illuminates the danger of silence as a blind spot in the following way;

“Many sons won't verbally express their feelings, but the signs of hurt and frustration and distance are there for all to see. If dad doesn't pick up on it, he can lose his son” (Farrar, 2006:192).

While the author subscribes to Farrar's point of view, he, however, wonders whether the fathers in African families notice the inexpressive feelings of children through their absence. If they have picked up the feelings, how have they responded in order to win their

sons? The secrets that males keep have damaged them, leading to male dilemma in showing intimacy to others. Jarema, like Farrar, acknowledges that males do not verbally relate their painful feelings because they believe that no one will understand.

“Many men admit that the original abuse may have ended, but the trauma and paralysis continue in various forms. Men who carry their secret of sexual, physical, or verbal abuse keep their story hidden because they believe that no one will understand. Perhaps in their confused thinking it wasn’t really that bad. Perhaps it didn’t really happen at all. The fear of retribution if they reveal the abuse, the confusion about what they did to deserve this abuse, and the numbness that serves to hide the depth of the pain carried deep within them all prevent the survivors from speaking about their trauma” (Jarema, 1994:163).

The above extract on how males deal with issues that affect them, reflects responses of fathers on traumatic situations. If fathers cannot express their pain in a clear and open way, how would they encourage or teach their sons when faced with similar situations which need shared experiences in order to heal? It is important to note that what an adult accomplishes or fails to achieve is determined by the ability to identify the blind spots among adolescents that may be self limiting.

The author sought to find out from the adolescents themselves whether they thought the society, as proposed by Farrar, see in them the signs of hurt, frustration and distance. The reader has to note that boys are taught to be strong and not to express feelings in the same ways as girls. Nyanjaya in his Masters Dissertation ‘Suppression of the Grief process by males leading to Death’; states that;

“Children do not participate or do not ask questions on what affects them instead they should be silent sons” (Nyanjaya, 2006: 35).

Nyanjaya shows that his father taught him to suppress emotions during the process of helping him to grow into a strong man. In this study, contrary to the above view, he involves the male children in finding a model in caring for the boys whose fathers are absent. It is important for boys to break the silence that destroyed their parents and the author himself. When boys become silent sons, they portray identifiable traits that include a difficulty to maintain interpersonal relationships and to keep a job. These boys are easily angered because silence kills their spiritual lives and creates a lot of uncertainties in their lives. In their pain, they may also have good traits such as being good under pressure, adventurous, independent, task focused, hardworking and good at solving problems (Ackerman, 1993).

Guy Corneau cited by Jerema had this to say.

“Our fathers’ silence has become our own. Although we have been inducted into the mafia of hereditary silence, our awareness of the suffering this has caused us (and our fathers) should discourage us from passing it on to our own sons. The challenge facing men today is to break this tradition of male silence. It is perhaps the most truly revolutionary act we can ever accomplish. Those who can should start dialogues with our (their) real fathers, despite the fear, frustration, disappointment or rejection this may lead. We must fight against falling into the same silence our fathers did; we must try to bridge the gap; we can begin to heal the terrible division between the abstract, disincarnated minds of men and an increasingly cruel world” (Jarema, 1994:158).

It is the aim of this study is to access the views of male adolescents on what it means to them to live in the environment in which their fathers are missing. This will help the author to do the research together with the adolescents; as opposed to taking them as objects of research; as stated in chapter two. The advantage of taking the adolescents as co-researchers helps them to contribute and be part of the research. Below data is presented analysed and interpreted.

5.4 PRESENTATION OF DATA

Table 1: Age range and feelings of Children with fathers in the Diaspora

Characteristics Age range	Frequency	Percentage %	Remarks/opinion
10-13	7	58.33	Miss fathers so much. All boys spoke with tears in their eyes.
14-17	3	25	Miss fathers. Not all shed tears. Mother too much control.
18-22	2	16.67	Miss father but the absence helps them. It allows them freedom and know who they are in life. Problems with mothers.
General remarks/Totals	12	100	Mid and late adolescents feel they are old enough to dictate the way things should go in their lives. Hence conflict with mothers.

Most of the children who spoke with tears in their eyes were between the ages of 10-13.

This reflected that 58.33% of the co-researchers were left when they were still young.

Table 2: Countries fathers migrated to:

Characteristics Countries where fathers have gone	Frequency	Opinion/remarks
South Africa	7	Parents visit. One parent has not visited.
Australia	2	Both parents have not visited since they left.
United Kingdom	3	One parent has never visited. 2 parents visit Children each year. One child visits UK each holiday
	12	

Many fathers are in South Africa. This may be because it is near home and easy to go to.

Table 3: Reactions of Children when fathers were leaving the country

Characteristics	Frequency	Opinion/remarks
Boys' Initial feelings		
Excited	6	Promised visits and material provisions
Not excited	1	Disturbed because was sent to boarding
Not sure how they felt	5	3 not informed, 2 were still very young.
Total	12	Some boys were angry due to denial of information. Not visited

Half of the co-researchers were excited when they learnt that their fathers were leaving the country; while the other half was not because of their ages or for being left alone.

Table 4: Fathers and Children Visits

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Opinion/remarks
Visits		%	
visited by father and visit father each year	6 2	50 16.67	6 visited by father 2 visited fathers
Children not visited fathers. father not visited children	4	33.33	No visits since father left the country.
	12	100	In spite of visits children miss their fathers.

A considerable number (66.67%) of children interacted with their fathers through visits; while 33.33% did not have that privilege.

Table 5: Parental Relationships

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Opinion/remarks
Father – Mother Relationship		%	
Good	6	50	Provides, visits, visited by family
Bad	6	50	Insults her, no visit irresponsible,
Not sure	Nil	-	Nil
	12	100	Bad parental relationships signals a dark future to children

Half (50%) of the co-researchers continued to benefit from the good parental relationships; while the other 50% experienced trauma due to bad parental relationships.

Table 6: Role played by friend in the absence of fathers

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Opinion/remarks
Friends		%	
Helpful	3	25	Encouragement and support.
Not helpful	6	50	do not tell friends that father is in Diaspora Discuss school issues only Some have no close friends
Not sure	3	25	No discussion
	12	100	Boys have not engaged friends because of. Shame, labelling, ignorance of the benefits of sharing. Lack of trust.

There are mixed feelings on the role of friends. Most co-researchers are not comfortable or willing to share their experiences of the absence of their fathers.

Table 7: The role played by the church to children when fathers are in Diaspora

Characteristics-	Frequency	Percentage	Opinion/remarks
Role of Church		%	
Cares for them	1	8.33	Pastor asked to visit by father
Not sure- Do not mention them as in need of anything	11	91.67	Church assumes they are materially supported and not miss their fathers.
	12	100	The assumption may be; many children are orphans in custody of widows, grand parents or child headed families.

The church has not played a clear role in the lives of the co-researchers, when fathers are in the Diaspora.

Only one child indicated how he has benefited from a pastor.

Table 8: Role Models of Children when father is absent

Characteristics- model	Role	Frequency	Percentage %	Opinion/remarks
Father		2	16.67	Visits, talks to children, loves mother and them
Mother		4	33.33	Provides, disciplines,
Grandmother or aunt		4	33.33	Provides, guides
Brother		1	8.33	Provides, guides
Not sure		1	8.33	Due to parental conflicts
Total		12	99.99(100)	66 % female models - traumatic to mother and the boy child.

Most of the co-researchers have found women to be their role models when fathers are absent; 66.33% of the boys are guided by females

Table 9: Adults who took custody of children in the absence of the father

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage %	Opinion/remarks
Guardian			
Children staying with mother	7	58.33	Father in Diaspora
children staying with grandmother	2	16.67	Both parents in Diaspora
staying with aunts or any other female adult	1	8.33	Mother cross border trader
staying alone	1	8.33	Both parents away. Given the boy too much freedom too soon.

The table shows that children are generally staying with mothers, female family members and one of them alone.

5.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.5.1 A Practice within a family system

It is reported that some fathers did not inform their sons when they were leaving the country. One parent left at night and making the child believe that he was going to his rural home only to be informed two days later that he had gone to the Diaspora. Consequently, these children felt betrayed by their fathers and their absences make them doubt their love.

The reader has to note that in Zimbabwe, some families still believe that a journey should not be announced until it is taken. It is commonly believed that an enemy should not know the time that a person travels; lest they harm him or sabotage the journey or event.

There are also some issues that are kept a secret within a family system or reserved to particular family members. For example, it was and is common practice among some African people in Zimbabwe to keep it a secret to a child whose mother has died. If the child is very young, he or she would be given to one of the women in the family to carry on the role of the deceased mother. This is kept a secret to the child for as long as it is not told. The practice absorbed the orphan in the extended family, for the reason that the loss of a mother leaves many maternal women who play the mother function. In such families, no child is an orphan. The communal system has social links available within the family, which members would take advantage of if they so wish.

Chapter four defined the roles of all male members of the extended family to a boy child. These same roles apply to all elderly women when it came to carrying out the maternal function to children. The underlying factor is that a child belongs to the family not to an

individual couple. Since any elderly person can be referred to as father or mother, depending on gender identity, it would not be easy to tell who an orphan is.

Secondly, the reader has to be aware that it is common among African families in Zimbabwe to move to a new accommodation in the evening or at night, travel with a corpse in the evening or night to its rural home for burial the following day and that a newly married girl would be given to her husband at night. It is a secretive culture which is reflected in the Old Testament. For example, the Prophet Ezekiel figuratively expresses the nocturnal or Nicodimus way that reflects the Zimbabwean practice of doing things in the following way:

“The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people.....Therefore, son of man, pack your belongings for exile and in daytime, while they watch....During the daytime, while they watch, bring out your belongings packed for exile. Then in the evening, while they are watching, go out like those who go into exile” (Ezekiel 12:1-4).

The Prophet Ezekiel, therefore, illuminates the Old Testament practices that are still held by some individuals and families in Zimbabwe. In this way, no one else, apart from harmless people, would know of what is happening.

The reader is reminded that since there was political violence in the country, those who were leaving the country would not inform many people or children. Moreover, these boys indicated that when they grow up, they would respect their wives and love their children. One of the boys repeatedly said he would not kill people. This is just to emphasise that

some fathers left the country due to their political involvement and malicious activities while others for the purposes of fending for their families.

Therefore, the Diaspora for some Zimbabweans is analogous to an exile. This is because many people have gone there unwillingly. They have been forced by the unbearable conditions created by political leaders who are rebellious to African virtues and to God; who emphasise respect and love for one another. The nuclear family can no longer accommodate the above practices because it lacks the human resources within its system in order to protect children from traumatic experiences.

5.5.2 THE BENEFITS AND PRIVILEGES OF THE DIASPORA

In this study, two children did not know what it felt like when their fathers left the country. The fathers of these children have not visited since. Table 4 shows that the total number of fathers who have not visited comes to four; one is in the United Kingdom, another in South Africa and the other two in Australia. In spite of them not visiting, they provide material support to their children. Two of these children were excited when their fathers were leaving the country. The initially happy time translated into painful feelings because they are now missing their fathers.

The children indicated that the relationships between their parents have deteriorated. They doubt whether their parents will ever come back to Zimbabwe or meet them again; despite the promises that these fathers have made; refer to table 5 below.

The benefits and challenges experienced by children when fathers left the country are illustrated in table 4 above.

In this study, some male children who are in their early and late adolescence stages have indicated that, initially, it was exciting to learn that their fathers were going to work out of Zimbabwe. This was because their parents were struggling to provide food, shelter, educational and other family needs. Almost all the boys believed that when their fathers go to the Diaspora, life would be bearable.

The children believed that they would have their needs met and a privilege of visiting their fathers in the Diaspora. Some of these children realised their dreams because basic needs have been met and dreams fulfilled. Most of these fathers meet the needs for their children. Three of the children said that when they give a list of items to their fathers, their fathers would provide for them without fail.

Two children indicated that fathers are important to them only when they provide for their basic needs. They do not see it as a challenge to grow up in the absence of their fathers. For them, it is important that fathers work out of the country. This is because they get the privilege to visit the Diaspora. There are times when they each visited their fathers in the United Kingdom and South Africa. These two children believe that they learn to be men from their mothers and other adults in the society (refer to chapter 4 item 4.5).

5.5.3 The danger of compensating for absence

When fathers give their sons everything they want and whenever they want them as indicated by the boys in Table 5, there is a danger of not guiding them enough. Whatever is given to children should be done with caution, lest we spoil, harm or cause them to harm others. For example, a father who resides in South Africa exposed a gun to his 10 year boy

which this adolescent stole and later gave it to his friend who shot a friend with it. A Zimbabwean Newspaper reported as follows;

“The boy went into the house and took the pistol which had five rounds of ammunition. He then went to his friends and they began playing with it. As they were playing, the 12-year old cocked the pistol and squeezed the trigger while pointing at the 13 year old. He shot him on the stomach at close range and the bullet came out through the back” (the Herald of Thursday, 10 June 2010:2).

Furthermore, easy access to Cellphones, a popular mode of communication, seems to have brought with it some challenges to the Zimbabweans; particularly to adolescents. The Sunday Mail carried a story titled: Cellphones: Education System under siege.

“It is common these days for pupils as young as those in primary school to own such gadgets.....Cellphones usually come with responsibility, but observers note that many students have not grown to the level of being responsible.....It is now common for a person to be interrupted by the cellphone when praying, in a meeting, in a library, or even in a toilet... In a recent article published by The Daily Telegraph, two young Britons aged 12 and 13 were admitted to hospital for cellphone addiction. They could not carry normal duties without a cellphone and showed disturbed behaviours when deprived and were failing in school” (The Sunday Mail, 20-26 June 2010:4D).

These two newspaper extracts are examples of how affluent fathers in the Diaspora are surrendering their authority to children by exposing them to dangerous things. Fathers do almost everything to compensate for their absence. Unfortunately, children who do not have

those privileges feel inferior and disturbed when they see their peers managing life in a way that is different from theirs. The bible teaches us that God, our father, knows what to give his children before they even ask (Matthew 6:8). It is, therefore, important for the fathers to know the needs of their children even before children send a list to them. Adolescents are not responsible enough to be given too much freedom without guidance. Not all that children may need are necessary for them. It should be noted that when fathers provide without getting children to understand their situation out there, they allow great pressure on themselves. The author is aware that all this is done to compensate for their absence.

5.5.4 CHALLENGES OF THE DIASPORA

The reader should note that the contents or materials of a dream come from what we hear, see or continuously think of. Out of these dreams, we promise ourselves the benefits because dreams are considered as the royal road to integration (Nelson –Jones 1997 cited in Rukuni and Maunganidze 2001:47). Not all the fathers who left the country promised much to their children but children themselves expected a lot from them. The author assumes that some fathers might have promised a lot to their sons, as a way of creating a permissive environment for their departure. While on the other hand, they were anxious about how they would survive in the Diaspora without a job for some time. The promises and expectations created heavy loads on the fathers and excess demands from many other family members.

5.5.5 Shattered dreams and broken promises

The author learnt that although the departure of fathers was an anxious time for most boys; children themselves later realised that their fathers would not meet all that was required by

them. Some children and family members discovered that both physical and psychological needs are rarely adequately met by these men. At such times, the dreams and promises of these boys start to split into patterns of realities; exposing areas that need the father's social and spiritual roles at home. This can be picked up from the boy who wished that it would be good for his father to come back in spite of the material support that he received. The other boy said that no one would replace his father. These inadequacies cannot be revealed to others in the society because we live in a shame stricken society. Therefore, it is embarrassing to let society know that a father has failed to provide for his family when he is in the Diaspora. It is always difficult to share with anyone that his father has failed in life. It seems the absence affects both the fathers and the sons, despite the author's line of assessment.

5.5.6 Inadequate information and ignorance

The absence of fathers disturbed the adolescent boys in Zimbabwe because none of them had ever thought of the negative outcomes of the nonattendance of their emotional needs. In half of the situations, father- mother relationship has been eroded by distances as evidenced through various misunderstandings that are reported during the interviews (see table 5). The study revealed that three parents are always quarrelling over the phone for no apparent reason. The author engaged with one of the fathers who lived in the Diaspora. The man had decided to discontinue living in the Diaspora. One of the problems on this issue, was lack of trust that emanated from poor communication or inadequate information and ignorance of the cost of absence. It seems that when people are leaving for the Diaspora, they raise the hopes to their family members. For example, this man admitted that he was so focused on raising money to buy land to build a house, and overlooked everyday demands at home.

Most children do not understand the pressure that these fathers go through while in the Diaspora. Little information about the conditions and challenges is given by those living in the Diaspora. On the other hand, it may be difficult for those who are wishing to go, to seriously consider the information at face value, especially when other men are out there. The pressures exerted on fathers by the mothers, children and other family members cause conflicts between parents.

Children indicated that bad relationships between parents affected their studies very much. Children indicated that while the visits are important, the absence of their fathers affects them. Table 4 above, shows the benefits and challenges of the Diaspora.

5.5.7 A Longing for fathers

In this study, there are those fathers who informed the children of their plans when they were leaving the country. The second group consists of those who left when their children were still very young to remember what transpired. The third and last group consists of those who avoided telling children of their plans.

It is amazing that those children who visit and are visited by their fathers still miss them (fathers) a lot. They feel that it would be good to go and stay with their fathers in the Diaspora than to live with one parent. The most disturbing time is when the father and child separate after a holiday.

5.5.8 Never known what it feels to be with a father

All the children who never saw their fathers go to the Diaspora, long to meet with them. The author observed that all of these children found it difficult to stop weeping as they

spoke (see table 3). For them, it was difficult to imagine how a father looks like. The boys reported that they are disturbed to be asked or to talk about their fathers with anyone.

For example, Nicholas indicated that;

“I avoid anyone who wants me to say something about my father because it is not easy to grow up without him, no one can take his place. It is easy to talk about a parent who is dead, not one who is there but does not care instead cheats me. I do not even trust what my mother and grandmother tell me about this man. I do not know how it feels to be with a father. I do not know how it feels to be loved by him”

(Interview between the author and Nicholas on 13 May 2010).

Nicholas who is 13 years old repeatedly said that he does not know when his father left the country. His mother tells him that he went when he was 3 years old. His father communicates and has promised to come and go back with him to the United Kingdom.

5.5.9 Not told about my father

The boys in the third category know their fathers but felt betrayed and cheated by their parents. One of them said;

“It pains me when I think of why my father and mother did not tell me the truth that my father was leaving the country, just to tell me that he was in Australia. And when he came back in April of 2010 only for a week, he again said he was going to our rural home to see his parents. Three days later he phoned mother that he had arrived in Australia” (the author interviewed the co- researcher on 13 may 2010).

It is not easy for the boy to trust those around them. Although his mother appeared shocked, the boy still doubts her ignorance over his father's departure. The boy's major concern is on the denial of information by his parents about his own father. The boy doubts whether the parents love him since he feels that relatives and strangers know why the father went to the Diaspora.

5.5.10 Times that children miss fathers the most

All the boys indicated that they miss their fathers when they run out of money. They always felt bad during schools' consultation and prize giving days because other children met their fathers. Generally, all children reported that they missed their fathers in various ways; in spite of what they had done to them in life. It is clear that children want to see their fathers and know them, as indicated in table 3 above.

When fathers are out in the Diaspora, children find it hard to grow up in the absence of proper guidance. Ralph says;

“When Dad is there you feel safe, you are also aware that someone who can discipline me is around at least you hear a male voice which reminds you that you are not the boss of yourself...” (This was in an interview between Ralph and the author on 8 May 2010).

Some of the children said that they were not also sure whether their fathers will return to them. When fathers do not phone, the children panic. They fear for the lives of their fathers in the Diaspora. Tinashe, who is 16 years old, had this to say:

“When he does not phone me I assume that he is sick or has died so I get disturbed. There are other times that I fail even to eat, it is just boring” (Interviewed 8 May 2010).

It seems that boys miss their fathers in many ways. One would have thought that when material support was given, children would not miss their fathers. Whether the child is close or not to his father, he still wanted to see him regularly. The author learnt that children feel good when their fathers relate well with their mothers. One boy indicated in table 5 that the father is very supportive but he is not close to him and he sees nothing wrong in that. He said that he feels good when the father-mother relationship is good. When he wants anything he would easily tell his father through the mother. He, however, believes that his mother is more important in his life than his father.

To see the mother as more important or one parent to be more important than the other, particularly for a male child, shows that something is amiss in parenting. This is because each parent has a special role in the lives of their children because in emotionally close families, spouses draw their strength of caring for their children from each other.

Nevertheless, in this situation, it is clear that the mother’s tenderness and love has attracted him more in his life. The father’s material support alone, without love, is self - limiting in moulding a boy child into a male adult. Ignorance of male love in boys is traumatic, for, it increases confusion in the boy child when he is trying to shape his own son into a loving man. There is a possibility for this boy to be like his father or to be a feminised male; with its implications as cited below in item 5.

5.5.11 longing for security, love and guidance

It is clear that despite different views and experiences by the boys in the study, there are great variations on what they want their fathers to do. However, boys, generally, want to learn from their fathers what it means to be a man. They want to see their fathers at important occasions and to be loved by them. Relationships between parents are very important. It is through father – mother interactions that they learn to relate to people in society.

The children in this study pointed out that fathers should go with their children to the Diaspora. They felt that it is not helpful for families to live separately because this created social, emotional, physical and psychological challenges to them.

It is important to accept that children may not understand that fathers in the African family systems do not provide for the immediate families alone. They look after other members of the extended family. Therefore, it would not be easy for fathers to come back from the Diaspora without a job near or back home. Fathers are also missed by their own parents since they remain their children as long as they are alive. The differences, however, are in the levels of dependence compared to other members of the family. For example, children need someone who should provide them with security, food, love, and guidance while other family members may not lack love other than material support.

In this study, security, love and guidance are aspects that the churches need to consider seriously when designing a programme to follow. In order for adolescents to benefit from the intervention plan, they should be involved in designing a programme that they will be committed to. The model creates an awareness to a community of faith that has been found

wanting in the area of caring for boys whose fathers are in the Diaspora. The model emanated from inspiration and knowledge gained from the interviews with boys. It reveals to pastoral caregivers the need to be equipped in order to help children in needy situations when fathers are absent. The model further seeks to empower male adolescents to make use of the human resources within the community of faith and to look up to them as their role models and mentors. Men and male peer groups in the church can be of use in guiding them in their lives.

5.6 THE FATHER'S ROLE IN BUILDING AN INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF HIS SON

A father is exceptionally central to a boy at this stage for the purpose of building a boy's internal structure. The internal structure is the backbone that helps him to stand alone without support and walk away into the outside world without supervision. Therefore, children need the backbone that is made by materials that are provided by the father or by people approved by the father. During the period that the father is present with his son, he should vigilantly relinquish control in each crucial area of the child's life. He should give him the chance to plan and make decisions. When fathers give freedom to the children by leaving them without a backbone, they will be unfairly exposing them to the evil world without direction.

It is important for parents to help their sons grow up having been taught the importance of the attachment to parents and autonomy from them. In this way, they will go into the world with the full knowledge of the roots and strength of their backbone. This knowledge gives security and a peace of mind to a boy because he will have began his journey inward in

order to be at home with self in the external world. The child will know that he has been given strength and sent into the world by his father after proper guidance.

Jesus did leave the disciples with a backbone; which the Gospel according to John records as the word of God. It is his nature that he gave to the disciples at his departure as recorded in his prayer in John 17, when he said, “I gave them your word.” The gospel according to John states that Jesus is himself the Word of God;

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light for men. The light shines in the darkness but the darkness has not understood it” (John 1:1-5).

Jesus prays to the father that He gave the disciples the word which is the backbone (which is what he is) for their life in the world. The word was God. This same word that Jesus is made of, is the very word that, he, in turn gives to those he was given by his father. This illustrates that fathers give to their sons what they received from their fathers; whether negative or positive. However, the greatest thing that a father should give to his children is a father or himself. A “good enough father” is the one who gives to his children what he received from our Lord Jesus Christ. He should be present with his children in order to guide their entry into the world by giving them what is important for their survival in the global village. When children accept what God fearing fathers gave them, they, as a result, accept the one who their fathers worship as illustrated by Jesus in the gospel of John in the following way;

“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them” (John 17:8).

We give to our sons what guides them in their lives. God does not leave his children without guidance, so are the earthly fathers to their sons. One should see that even at the time of his departure, Jesus left those he was given by his father, with Power. Equally, David gave to his son a charge,

“I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies....that you may succeed in all that you do and whenever you turn” (1Kings 2:2-3).

The implication of the charge is that a ‘good enough father’ is the one who walks in the way of the Lord and keeps Gods commandments. The author considers himself as a good enough father as he who knows what God wants for his sons. Every father, in one way or the other, will leave his son either through work, other commitments or death. Therefore, there are no other ways to build sons apart from training them in the ways they should go before they (fathers) decide to leave.

Fathers in Zimbabwe should be there for their sons and when they plan to go to the Diaspora, they should assess the environment in which their sons are to remain. Trusted people within their family should be given the tasks of moulding male children. Jesus informed the disciples that one of the close family members of the Godhead, the Holy spirit, would remain with them and those who will believe in his message (Luke 24:49; John 14:15- 20; Acts 2:1-11; John 17:20). Therefore, our sons should be taught that life is more

of an inner reality than an external appearance and more of a spiritual reality than material wealth.

5.7 SHARING FEELINGS WITH FRIENDS ABOUT ABSENCE

Sharing of feelings depend upon the nature of relationships between children and their fathers. In spite of having fathers who are absent, children in this study did not find it easy to share their experiences. This is because of the different circumstances that fathers out there find themselves in; as a result, children do not find it easy to share their feelings with whoever has a parent in the Diaspora. Table 6 reflects views on friends; while item 5.7 deals with the shame that makes these children feel unattractive to those who seem to be benefitting from the father in the Diaspora.

5.8 LIVING WITH SHAME DUE TO ABSENT FATHERS

When parents leave the country, society expects them to do what they would have failed to do in their own country. Most men who go to the Diaspora are aware of those expectations before they leave. The failure to meet the demands mounts a lot of pressure on them and their children. The pressure that goes to the fathers in the Diaspora makes them see themselves as failures, worthless and unlovable fathers.

It is generally believed that, he who has money is loved and respected; this can be evidenced by differences in the way many people attach value and respect to those who are well-to-do in Zimbabwe. There is a Shona saying that illustrates this view in the following way; *anemari ndiye mukuru*, meaning ‘he who has money is powerful’. For example, a child who has resources to look after his parents is popular in his family. Wimberly states

that we are living in a shame prone society. He, therefore, defines the feeling of being unlovable as shame. He describes shame in the following way.

“I defined shame as feeling unlovable, that ones life has a basic flaw in it...The cure for shame, I insisted, is finding relationships with significant others in which we experience some semblance of nurture and care without having to turn ourselves inside out, in ways that increase our shame, in order to meet other people’s expectations”(Wimberly, 1999:11),

Fathers in the Diaspora see the inability to provide as a major thing that lessens their value. According to Wimberly, the power of shame comes from our self-beliefs and self-convictions. He states:

“What we believe about ourselves shapes our behaviour towards ourselves, others, and God. Normally, what we believe about ourselves forms either positive or negative images, which we then act out in our lives. These images either nourish our growth and development or they contribute to our demise when they negatively affect our feelings about ourselves” (Wimberly, 1999:16).

According to Wimberly, it is the external pressures that cause shame to the family as fathers aim at meeting other people’s expectations. This is what Fowler (1981) views as the synthetic- conventional faith which most adults may be locked into and never move on to other stages in faith development (see chapter 2:9 on stage 3). These pressures extend to affect the father- child and father- mother relationship. For example, society talks about the family members with fathers in the Diaspora; especially when they do not appear to be living a luxurious life. Society expects that the living standards of these families should

reflect that fathers in Diaspora are now able to support their families better than when they were in Zimbabwe. It is, however, unknown by most people in Zimbabwe that not all of the fathers in the Diaspora are employed or have jobs that give them enough money to fully support their families.

It may also be difficult for children to easily understand that their fathers are struggling in the Diaspora, when their peers seem to be well supported by the Diaspora fathers. It would, therefore, make them doubt their fathers' love. When children are faced by such a situation, it would be difficult for them to share with others that their fathers are working in the Diaspora. The children find it difficult to share with others the pain of failing to live like others who can afford items such as Cellphones or a better life, when their fathers are also in the Diaspora (see table 6).

Two boys reported that they do not want their friends to know that their fathers are in the Diaspora because not much is realised from their fathers. Another boy, who is twenty –one years old, informed the author that all his friends are those with fathers who are either in the country or with fathers who are deceased. He said that he feels comfortable to be in the company of those who do not show off and that his father told him that he should live a simple life. He has no cellphone or other things that most of those with Diaspora fathers have. He has found friends whom to identify with; in order to deal with his shame.

5.8.1 Feelings of guilt in BOYS

The author observed through dialogue with the boys that the absence of their fathers has created feelings of guilt in their lives. It is because of these feelings that the author decided to briefly look at the categories subscribed to by Collins.

According to Collins (2001:131-140), guilt can be put into two categories: objective and subjective guilt. Objective guilt refers to legal status of a person who has broken a law, committed a crime, or violated some standard. In contrast, subjective guilt refers to the emotions or inner feelings, most often feelings of remorse, regret, or self-condemnation, that come because of one's action or thinking. It should also be noted by the reader that guilt feelings can be in theological, legal, social and psychological dimensions. Theological guilt involves failure to obey God. The failure comes as a violation of God's divine standards, disregard of His authority, challenge His goodness, reject His holy will, and dared to defy His truth. It is also a failure to trust God and His authority, but self.

Legal guilt is the breaking or violation of the law of the land whether one is caught or not, for example passing through a red robot.

Social Guilt: It often comes because we have broken unwritten but culturally expected rules. It occurs when we mistreat and fail to show love to another human being. Sometimes this mistreatment is also a violation of the law. For example, child abuse, theft, murder just to mention a few (Luke 10:25-37; Romans 1:29-30 James 2:1, 16-17; 1Peter 4:9). This shows that we are at times guilty of both social and theological guilt.

Psychological guilt often occurs when a person violates his own standards. A person may not have disobeyed God or violated any known law, but his own conscience which is an inner standard that monitors and enables us to evaluate every thought and action. The conscience is an inner voice that accuses or excuses us because of what we have done or failed to do, and sometimes it brings feelings of guilt and an awareness that we need to repent.

The guilt comes from what we learn from our early childhood. We learn what is right and wrong from our parents and we internalise those standards and cultural expectations of our societies, neighborhoods, and families in which we are raised. As these experiences become part of us, we form our world views and accept certain standards and mores as being the right way to do things. Each person is assumed to draw from the culture to create and sometimes to remould his or her own conscience. According to the bible, these standards of right and wrong are “written on the human heart” (Romans 2:15).

Children have felt guilt in one way or the other; due to the absence of their fathers. For example, they showed a feeling of guilt when they found it difficult sharing with friends or did not want society to know that their fathers are in the Diaspora. There is a sense of self condemnation by boys when they have gone against the internalised societal standards and expectations. They feel the parental conflicts are caused by their being in need of support; otherwise, parents are supposed to be together.

5.8.2 The Theological and psychological guilt feelings

Some children do not want friends to know that their fathers were in the Diaspora. The assumption is that friends would consider them as having money, when in actual fact, their

fathers were unable to meet particular needs. By not informing peers, children feel that the shame is reduced on their side, in spite of them feeling guilty. Some would feel that sharing may make them unpopular. Therefore, the guilt feelings can lead to unhealthy conditions in their lives.

The Psychological guilt feeling comes when children are aware that their fathers are out of the country in order to provide for them. Guilt feelings are unhealthy in people's life (Aden L & Brenner D 1989:105). The feelings can be both psychological and theological in that children feel they have caused their fathers to violate God's standard of being role models. In the interviews carried out, most of the children reported that their fathers went out of the country to work for them. One of the boys, Kudakwashe, who is 13 years old, felt that his father's absence was not necessary since it disturbed family relationships. Kudakwashe indicated, as he spoke through ~~between~~ tears, that he regretted that the Diaspora was disturbing his parent's relationships. He had this to say:

“I think dad has to come back home, we miss him and it is difficult out there and yet they are always quarrelling with mum, but he don't want to....it is better to be a day scholar otherwise they will divorce because of us” (Interview between Kudakwashe and the Author on 8 May, 2010).

Boys are not very open about issues that reveal some signs of parental weakness for they make them feel unpopular in their lives; as a result, they avoid discussing them. They, as a result, do not find friends helpful in their situations. Secondly, the silence by the church leaders and society may have made it difficult for the boys to connect with those who are facing similar challenges.

Literature on divorce has also indicated that children of parents who are divorcing, are, at certain times, affected and blame themselves for failing to help avoid the situation (Collins, 1988:462-463). They, sometimes, feel guilty for failing to reconcile their parents. Equally, Kudakwashe feels terrible for failing to mend his parents' bad relationship. Shame and guilt affect the child's positive world view; leading to unhealthy conditions and practices such as individualism and violence (see item 5.7).

Children who were open to friends about their relationships showed that friends would encourage and even lend them money. In spite of the boys being represented by a small percentage (25%), the discussion showed that they understand the importance of sharing experiences. When children are connected to each other, sharing their problems would help them deal with some of the social and psychological guilt that encroach their minds.

5.8.3 ANGER - A Seed for bitterness

The children who were not informed by their parents that their fathers were leaving the country, are disturbed. The other category is of those fathers who bade farewell but have not returned home. There is yet another category of fathers who left the country when their children were still very young to remember what they fathers looked liked and have not yet visited them. Consequently, all these children feel betrayed by the fathers and their absences make them doubt their love. Children, in all the above categories, are angry and bitter towards their fathers and other family members (refer to table 3 above). The last category is for those who have been provided for but have experienced bad father-mother relationships (see table 5 above).

The absences, as can be evidenced by the reports from the children indicate that fathers have robbed their children of an environment in which they are supposed to realise their freedom and potential. Children are supposed to be aware of what freedom means and how to recognise their potential through a relation with fathers. When the relationship is not there, children are angry with their fathers and God, since, as mentioned in chapter four, that they (fathers) represent God on earth. In such situations, they may ask why their fathers are unloving to them. The author interpreted the tears to mean a need to be loved. In our deep pain we need the hand of the one who cares to be extended to us; which in this case is lacking.

The relationship that existed between our Lord Jesus Christ and God, the father made Him to call when he is in anguish, to take away the cup of suffering. It is the father, as the head of the family, who is looked upon by the sons for help and it is him who can rectify his sons' situation. Children are angry because the father, who should provide security, masculinity and basic material needs, is missing. When children fail to respect their parents they contaminate their relationship with the creator and the men; in general.

5.8.4 Effects of anger and bitterness

The boys in this study are terribly angry with their fathers as already indicated in this chapter. According to Heinemann English Dictionary, **Anger** is defined as “a strong feeling of displeasure and often hostility.” The author sees anger as an emotional response to disappointment. Anger comes and is expressed in different ways because each person is different and what disappoints each person varies. The children are angered by how their

fathers have treated them at the time of leaving the country and during their absence. Anger can be controlled or hidden and surface sometime later if not dealt with. Not all anger is a sin but anger, if not dealt with, can lead to sin. Nyanjaya in his master's dissertation sees anger as another way a bereaved person can deal with loss. He states that;

“It is not a sin to be angry, if anger is handled properly it helps us in dealing with loss, but if it is mishandled, it leads us into sin or trouble. The bible cites moments when Jesus was angry with money changers, once or twice when he cursed a fig tree” (Nyanjaya, 2006: 20).

The writer of the Epistle to Ephesians warns fathers not to provoke children into anger, but instead, to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The writer of Hebrews 12:15 caution us all on the effects of anger. When anger is inhibited, it can draw us away from the grace of God.

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is sexually immoral or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son” (Hebrews 12:15).

This shows that when anger controls boys resulting from absent fathers, it would lead to bitterness which is sin. To have a bitter root judgement means to draw negative conclusion about the character or behaviour of another person, which are hard to bear, especially to someone close to us. In this particular study, boys are bitter with their fathers whom the bible commands us to honour for they are our role models.

The root of our bitterness would be traced back to the father-son relationship or unresolved anger of the past disturbance that was not dealt with. This is why in his letter to the Ephesians Apostle Paul states that;

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:25-26).

Paul, like the writer to the book of Hebrews, shows that it is human to get angry, but he warns that anger can destroy our relationship with God and other people. When allowed to dwell in us for a longer period, anger can lead to unhealthy conditions. The boys in the categories mentioned above, could not avoid getting angry with their fathers. It is important that they talk about the anger and find a way to go on with life. This is why a model in Chapter six is going to guide the boys in dealing with the situations that they may be unable to change. If boys fail to face their situation of anger and thereafter, deal with it, they will be like their fathers. Paul illustrates this when he states that the things we do not want to do are the very things that obscure our life.

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me...” (Romans 7:14-15).

When we take what the Apostle Paul is saying to be of relevance to the boys’ situations on absent fathers, it shows that our boys are in a big trouble if their anger leads them into

bitterness. The warning is very clear that the bitterness that has its roots in our relationship with our parents would keep our sons in bondage for many years; feeding on them. Bitterness if not faced and dealt with, is an enemy in the lives of our sons for it drifts them from the grace of God and causes those they relate to, to stumble.

The nation is not safe when our sons are angered and bitter. Boys are in danger of repeating what their fathers and mothers did to them (refer to chapter three items 3.13 on David, Hitler and Mugabe). This will lead them to display violence to innocent people. It is until and unless they deal with their situation in a way that opens them to the power of God that they could be of benefit to themselves. Otherwise, every father will reap what he has sown in his son. A model alone without the Holy Spirit to guide them, is not enough and this is the reason a pastoral model would be of help in Chapter 6.

5.9 CONTRADICTORY MESSAGES IN THE CARING COMMUNITY

The church is the place where these wounded boys were found crying silently for help. The Methodist church in Zimbabwe has guided people on many situations through counselling and be given tangible and practical support. For example, it has cared for people through funerals and supported people in dire need of physical and spiritual help. Through its structures, it pulls together people of different ages together and has created church discussion groups or class meetings.

In this study, children indicated that the church has cared for orphans and has created a day when they pray for them and give gifts. They, however, quickly indicated that they would not need a special day for gifts but for prayers. The church has been found wanting in caring for children whose fathers are in the Diaspora. Children felt that this may be because

there are many children who are in need of material support in the community. Furthermore, it would be an embarrassment to the fathers who are in the Diaspora to learn that their sons are supported as destitute.

Furthermore, the church members see them as not in need of support (refer to table 7). The children themselves feel that many people do not see them as missing their fathers. The need for father's love may not be viewed as important when people think in terms of an African concept of the extended family. In Africa, it is still believed that it takes the whole village to bring up a child. With this concept at the back of their minds; many Africans may not consider children with fathers who are working in the Diaspora as lacking anything, especially when they are with the mother. The church had previously sent out contradictory messages through its members, by not praying for the children.

The author does not disregard the relevance and the spirit of this African concept, but wonders whether it is useful in many extended families due to urban circumstances of this study. In the urban area where this study was carried out, people live away from their relatives. Therefore, the concept may only remain in the minds of the urban nuclear families. It is, therefore, the role of the pastor, as a shepherd, to redirect the minds of the caring community to look beyond a rich concept to the changing circumstances. In these changing circumstances, the church should borrow some relevant parts of this concept. For example, the church can, through its structures, continue with the communal ways of bringing up the children whose fathers are absent. Chapter six will deal with the role of the caring community in detail.

5.10 **BOYS: Absorbed into feminine energy and power**

Almost all the boys indicated in some way that they are staying and influenced by mothers in many ways. Some boys do not associate with their fathers much though they valued material support and father–mother relationship. Figures 7 and 8 summarize their views.

Boys shared that it is difficult to be alone, with mothers, grandmothers or aunts. They feel that there are issues which need to be shared with fathers only. They all indicated that they consult their mothers on many other issues as well, just as they consult their peers on certain personal issues. In an interview with the author, Elvis had this to say,

“No one takes his role in my life he is a special friend so his absence makes me crazy, moody, lose concentration....” (Interviewed on 13 June, 2010).

When asked by the co-researcher (steward) what class position he attained last term he said, 35 out of the 50 students in his class. Elvis’ class position reveals how the absence of a father has an impact on academic performance; in particular on children. However, the reader should note that the same traumatic situation would lead other children to become bookworms, workaholics or addicted to some activity. Elvis visits his father in the United Kingdom every holiday but that seems not to be enough. He, like many of his friends, does not feel that it is okay to be disciplined by his mother. On this, he said that;

“Mothers at times beat you or insult you just because of the frustrations from their husbands...” (Interviewed Elvis on 13 June, 2010).

This shows that the absence of fathers affect the mother as much as it impacts on the development of the adolescents.

While Tinotenda feels that;

“it is not good to be always told that you are a problem just because your father is not here, this makes you feel guilty, I sometimes cry....” (Interviewed Tinotenda on 13 June, 2010).

Generally, raising a child has never been easy for many people in Africa today where historically, a child is raised by the whole community. It is therefore, stressful for the mother to be a model to her sons. Elvis has shown the pressure that is exerted on him by an already overburdened and stressed mother. Elvis and Tinotenda may, as a result of this pressure, fail to appreciate the role played by their wives or women in general when they are married, because of the experiences with their mothers. It is likely that these mothers may be dealing with their spouses through the sons; in that way, they will be destroying the sons' view of women.

Almost all the boys reported that they are in the custody of females except for one, who is staying alone. The author observed that out of the twelve children, he dialogued with seven boys who are in the custody of their mothers, three who are staying with their grandmothers, another who lives with an aunt while the 16 year boy is living alone. The boy who is staying alone has been exposed to the world in a very unfair way because the parents have given the boy early responsibility and freedom; which he is likely to misuse.

The author in chapter three indicated how a boy finds it difficult learning to be a man when he is always in the hands of women. He will be absorbed in the feminized energy. The loss of sense of a male identity or model in the likeness of a father exposes the boy to inner conflict which he has to resolve. Stephen Clark's description of a feminized male helps the

author by highlighting some of the effects of being in the woman world between childhood and adulthood.

Clark states that;

“A feminized male is a male who has learned to have or react in ways that are more appropriate to women. The feminized male can be normal as a male, with no tendencies to reject being male and no tendencies toward homosexuality, and yet he can have been so influenced by women or can have so identified himself with a world in which women dominate, that many of his interest and traits are more womanly than manly. Compared to men who have not been feminized, he will place much higher emphasis and attention on how he feels and how other people feel. He will be much gentler and handle situations in a “soft” way. He will be much more subject to the approval of the group, especially emotionally expressed approval (that is, how others feel about him and what he is doing, how others react to him). He will sometimes tend to relate by preference to women and other feminized or effeminate men, and he will sometimes have a difficult time with an all-male group. He will tend to fear women’s emotion, and in his family and at work can be easily controlled by the possibility of women (his mother, his wife, or co-worker) having an emotional reaction. He will tend to idealize women and, if he is religious, he will tend to see in women the ideal Christians or the definition of what it means to be spiritual. He will identify Christian virtue with feminine characteristic.....A feminized man may have a character in which the traits of gentleness and quietness are stronger than the traits of aggressiveness and courage” (Clark, 1980:636,638).

Clark has raised an important point when he describes how one can be a feminized male. One should note that in the past, when fathers worked away from home for many months or years, they left their sons with their wives and other males within the extended family. It was common practice for a child to grow with his father's brother or grandfathers. These males carried all the roles, which were supposed to be done by the one who was not there. Therefore, boys would not be feminized due to the absence of a father because there were human resources ready to mould boys into men.

The major difference with the contemporary environment is that children are left with mothers or women. This is because many of the children live far away from their male relatives. The absence of males, who take family cohesion as a major factor that qualifies them to mentor boys in the society, is missing. It should, however, be acknowledged that mothers have played a very important role in the life of children in Zimbabwe. In the study, many children indicated that they learnt traditional virtues from their mothers and grandmothers.

In Zimbabwe, men die earlier than women. For example, there are many women who are widowed compared to men who are widowers. As a result, some children are left with mothers and grandmothers. There are many other reasons as to why men die much earlier. Some of the reasons may be that; men are generally careless with their lives: for example, they are involved in drugs, murder just to mention but two dangerous activities. It is also common among Africans for a man to marry a young woman, because it is believed that women get older earlier than men. This means that men would die first and leave their young wives behind. Deaths of men may also be stress driven as indicated by the author in his master's dissertation

“A Pastoral Approach to Suppression of the Grief Process among Males leading to Death.”

In his research, the author indicated that men died due to suppression of the grief process when they are bereaved (Nyanjaya 2006). Male stress emanates from how men are socialised to express grief. The reader has, therefore, been made to understand where the grandfathers are in this study, when grandmothers seem to be looking after children with absent fathers.

5.11 LOSS OF ACCESS TO MALENESS

By using mothers and grandmothers as role models or guiding images in their lives; boys lose access to maleness. Instead, they become absorbed with the feminine power as they begin to move into adulthood. They approach adulthood with confusion which may make them find it difficult to live in the world that men operate. It would be difficult for them to feel comfortable when in the company of men. Boys should reach a point in life when they disengage themselves from their mothers in order to engage with the fathers. This will assist them to form their own identity when they finally disengage from their fathers. However, in this study, the author has observed that boys fear to distance themselves from the mother image without a clear male image. For example, the relationships with their uncles or grandfathers were not mentioned at all. The boys only talked about their mothers, aunts and grandmothers. This identification with mothers is an indication that reveals that boys remain imprisoned in the women world for a long time. Consequently, absence leads them to lose access to male images.

When boys revisit their childhood, they should remember clearly the images of their fathers - which they created in the process of growing up. The author in this study has

realised that the absence of fathers have created painful environments for the children; and these included situations such as growing up alone and growing up without a male model.

In the study, some boys indicated that fathers are not important in their lives. They like their fathers when they provide for them. These are boys who have regularly visited their fathers. This view differs with those who have not seen or met their fathers for a long time. It seems that these boys do not realise the importance of the father because they are provided for and have regular contacts.

The consequence of being in the woman world alone without understanding the man's world affects the boy child in finding relationship with other men. He would be less trusting to men. Therefore, if a boy is to be a man, he must be able to see and walk with a man, for no boy becomes a man by seeing himself in the image of a woman. This human image is developed in the journey that starts with a mother, and then continued by the father in the same environment in which both parents are present. Parental images do continue to exist in children as they grow up. These are the same images that they will portray to their offspring.

5.12 GROUD DISCUSSIONS

The author had a group session with all the boys. This session was not emotional when compared to the one to one dialogues on the same issues. This may be because the children did not want to express their painful situations in public. Secondly, it may be because the children had already related what they felt about the absence of their fathers. Whatever the case may be, children in the group shared the same feelings as was already done in the previous sessions. In the group, they encouraged each other to focus on their studies and

aim to do better academically. They discouraged each other from lamenting over situations that they have no control of or may not change.

Group work revealed that the sharing of painful situations has some benefits to children who have identical situations such as living in the absence of a father. It should however, be noted that some details that were shared in a closed session with the researcher would not be repeated in the group. This may be because trust had not yet been built at such an early stage. Psychological guilt feelings are difficult to express in public and be understood by others in the context of the individual concerned.

The Group discussion was very important because children asked questions which the author and the co- researchers themselves responded to together. The process helped children to identify with each other as they discussed issues that underline the absence of fathers as the common denominator.

5.13 OBSERVATIONS ON THE ABSENCES OF FATHERS

The author in this study has observed that parents are trying hard to care for their children. This is evidenced by the personal sacrifices that they make in an effort to provide and protect their children. For example, parents decide to separate for their sake, the mother taking the responsibility of being present while the father went away. Fathers are in the Diaspora in order to provide the material needs for them. One should be aware that no one would like to separate with his spouse for its own sake but for the sake of the family.

The children in this study pointed out that when parents decide to migrate to the Diaspora, they should go with them. This was subscribed to by almost all the children. They felt that it is not helpful for families to live separately because it created social, emotional, physical

and psychological challenges to family members. Most of the boys acknowledged the benefits and challenges faced through the absence of fathers in their lives. Children indicated that they feel insecure to grow up in the environment in which their fathers are missing, as stated by Keith;

“Seeing others with their fathers, you feel bad and ask why then does my father not do something here in Zimbabwe” (Interviewed Keith on 13 May 2010).

Children believe that their fathers should be around while, at the same time, fending for them. It is better for them to suffer when fathers are around.

The presence of fathers makes them feel safe. Moreover, it is important to see what their fathers do and learn from them. Three boys noted that the presence of the father created a learning environment for them. Representing this view is Tinotenda who puts it in the following way.

“I learn how dad does things without him telling me to, but by observing him without him knowing” (Tinotenda interviewed on 13 May 2010).

This shows that the absence betrays them of a very crucial way of learning. While most boys felt good to be with their mothers because of their love and softness, it was hard to face challenges in this cruel world without a male figure for a male child. Allen said in an interview:

“You ask yourself what father could have done in a situation where mum is stressed or yelling” (Interviewed, on 8 May 2010).

The question shows a vacuum that needs to be filled by the father. He wants someone to represent a male attitude and reaction to situations. It was amazing to learn that all the boys wanted to meet with the author as individuals; when time allowed. The boys further planned to have another group discussion which had nothing to do with the research.

The author has observed that fathers have purposefully gone to the Diaspora without realising the impact of their absence to their children. For example, they have supported their families without attending to the need for love of the children. Therefore, children may not know what to love may require or mean in their lives.

5.14 LIVING IN RISKY ENVIRONMENT

Boys are in deep trouble in spite of them appearing to be in control of the environment when their fathers are missing. They face serious problems which have been understood from their own point of views in this chapter. In spite of coming from the high density areas, the risk factors that surround these children do not exclude those in the low density areas. If the church ignores those in the low density areas, it will be neglecting and stigmatising the children living in other areas. It is not the boys who are risky to the society but the environments in which they reside, the groups they spend their energy with, and the absence of fathers which are a risk to the boys.

The major issue in this study is the impact that an absent father has on his sons; regardless of their locality. In this study, boys are the victims and survivors of the exodus of men and fathers to the Diaspora. The absence leaves the children in unstable and less supportive family environments which have been created by the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe.

Children do not all of a sudden become risky. It is when children are exposed to the risky environment that they take up risk behaviours. The risk factors in adolescents can be overcome by nurturing or offering a responsive environment. Factors in the nurturing environment include parents, other adults, and neighbourhood or community resources (Rutter & Rutter, 1993, Sameroff & Fiese, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1992; Burt, 1998:24).

The reader has to bear in mind that the absence of a father can be only one of the factors to maladaptive outcomes in the life of child. There are many other factors that may affect the normal pace of child development; thus, leading to risk behaviours; two of which would be exposure to violence and being abused.

A caring community may modify the individual's response to a negative situation that under most circumstances would lead to predicted and unpredicted unhealthy outcomes.

5.15 Preliminary conclusion

This chapter revealed the emotional, psychological and spiritual struggles that boys experience during the absence of their fathers. Many of the boys were excited when they were told that fathers were going out of the country. While another group of children did not see or hear about their father's departure because they were very young at that time. The effects of the Diaspora are numerous for they impact children in ways that are unknown to us if we are not informed by them. The traumas that children experience are as a result of the absence as well as the pressures that come from the double roles mothers play in guiding them; her own and that of an absent husband. For, it is not only the son who misses the man in the Diaspora, but both the child and mother need the love from the head of the family.

When fathers are absent, children continue to miss them in spite of the material support that they receive from them. It seems that the tangibles alone do not meet the deep needs of one's being. This is because every person at whatever level has a need to be loved and for social interaction by those he trusts. Children are angered when the existential vacuum that is created by the absence of the father is not dealt with. When an adolescent male does not get assistance at this stage, he may be emotionally wounded and likely resort to unruly behaviour towards property, himself and other human beings. A sense of shame, guilt and bitterness, that has its roots in anger, creates unhealthy conditions in a son. This is because he will be looking for a male model while living in a women's world.

The next chapter comes up with a practical theology model of caring for the male adolescents. It is important to note that human beings tend to give to others what they have received from their parents, society and the almighty God. In John, Jesus illustrates this view when He prayed that:

“For I gave them the words you gave me, and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you.....” (John, 17:8).

The above prayer shows that, children offer to society what they learnt in their journey with fathers during childhood. The model in chapter six guides the church and community on the importance of creating a community of faith. This community should prepare and empower our sons to live in a risky environment without them being at risk and being risky to the society and themselves. Jesus, in John is aware of the environment in which Christians live and He prays for us in the following way;

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world (their environment) but that you protect them from the evil one (bad influence)” (John 17:15).

The prayer gives the church a task to confront society over the absence of fathers and design a pastoral model that cares for the children. Jesus wants his followers (the children) to be the light that shines in the world without taking them out of their environment. When adolescents are nurtured by the church, they will benefit the community in which our sons exist.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has guided the author to appreciate and understand how fathers in the Diaspora have supported their children materially. However, the cost of the absence on their sons could not be balanced with the material benefits that the children have enjoyed. The benefits have been outweighed by the trauma that children experience during the absence of their fathers. The emotions and tears have revealed that material support cannot compensate for the love and the presence children expect from their fathers. The deep hurt instilled in their hearts by the periods of absence angered them and led to traumatic experiences. The protracted period of living with one primary caregiver has imprisoned them into the feminized environment; thereby robbing them of a male identity. Therefore, this chapter is devoted to creating a practical theological model of caring for boys.

6.2 A PASTORAL CARE MODEL OF CARING FOR ADOLESCENTS

The shepherding model coined by Gerkin (1997:23-24), helps the researcher to create a model that shows the roles of God's people to the community. For example, Gerkin shows us how the priests, wise men and women offered counsel regarding issues of good life and personal conduct. He also states that prophets confronted people who deviated from the will of Yahweh. On the other hand, Fowler gives the structure through which faith develops and how an individual can easily be seen as having a mature faith in God. This has been revealed through this study that the role played by the church will help the adolescents to develop their faith when they are nurtured through love.

Equally, the Zimbabwean society has human resources that have carried out roles in the past; as already alluded to in chapter three (item 3.9). It is from such resources that the author seeks to design a model that draws its strength from biblical, African culture and contemporary practices. Gerkin (1997:118) subscribes to such a view in his pastoral care approach by dealing with an individual and the community, when he states that;

“Pastoral care involves not only the care of the individuals and families, but also the care of the community itself. Pastoral care also entails the thoughtful reinterpretation of the tradition that shapes Christian identity as that tradition is brought into dialogical relationship with contemporary culture and its impact on the community of Christians as well as its individual members” (Gerkin, 1997:118).

Gerkin shows us that pastoral caregivers should be aware of the communities that surround and have influenced individuals in their world views. The awareness helps him or her to interpret the social conditions in order to determine what affects people in the community of faith and society. Moreover, relationships in African cultures are very important for they include all the people that one interacts with and those in need. The African practices of caring should connect the reader to the parable of the ‘Good Samaritan’ (Luke 10:25-35). For example, when someone’s house catches fire it takes the whole village and visitors included, to put out a fire. Furthermore, it is within the African way of living to attend a funeral without being invited by the relatives of the bereaved. The above examples simply show the reader how the church can take advantage of the African practical ways of caring.

Therefore, the church should be viewed as part of the extended family not as unrelated to the extended family system. The early church in the book of Acts (2:42-47), portrays this picture when it gives us an account of the home fellowship of believers which led the

community to praise God. The church should work together with families in reconnecting these children to the traditional aspects of caring. It is with this understanding that the author engaged in dialogue with boys in order to deal with these human realities and deficiencies.

6.3 THE MINISTER AS A SHEPHERD

In the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, ministers as shepherds of the flock of God's people and have great influence on the members of the congregation. The minister's influence extends to the society in which he and his members reside. For example, he/she attends to situations that affect people in the society through his role of shepherding those under his care. Also, as representative of the Christian faith, the community solicits his presence when they are faced with situations that may require a representative of Christ. This makes it possible for him or her to guide the church that he/she leads to care for the adolescents by creating a permitting environment for the expression and receiving of care.

Seward Hiltner, when cited by Gerkin (1997:18), defines shepherding as "care and solicitous concern" This shows that the minister must be attentive and interested in the welfare of the adolescents in order for him or her to solicit support and care from the community of faith to guide them.

For example, in chapter 5, a child indicated that his father had asked a minister of religion to guide him. In spite of being aware of other human resources in society, the father in chapter five chose to invite the minister to guide his child. This shows that the father of this child is aware that the church has great influence in helping people to live purposely. The child informed the author that he found it important to be guided by the minister. He

indicated that the regular visits that he had so far made benefited him. He said that the minister prayed with him and sometimes shared many other issues in life. Gerkin helps the reader when he articulates the importance of care in the following way;

“...While singing can express care and acknowledgement or mutual need for care. Praying together can search for and celebrate the receiving of the care that only God can provide” (Gerkin, 1997:82).

This shows that prayer gives us confidence in approaching God. It is through prayer that we are at home with ourselves because of the care that God gives to those who meet with him in prayer.

A survey carried out on the role of the clergy on caring for the children whose fathers are absent, showed that little or no spiritual support is given to the boys in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. Children expect the clergy to understand that the boys are missing their fathers and that spiritual support is just as important. Children in this study indicated that when there were problems between parents, the ministers normally attended to their mothers only. This shows that when the relationship between parents is bad, children are as well affected and need the minister’s support. The gospel according to John illuminates the role that the clergy should carry to the flock which includes the lambs when it states the charge that was given to the apostle Peter:

“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, Feed my lambs”.....Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus

asked him the third time, “Do you love me? He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said feed my sheep....” (John 21:15-17).

Here, Jesus is, first and foremost, concerned about the lambs and later the sheep. They were to be fed by the apostle. The above quotation also shows that the apostle is a man who should facilitate the care of the lamb and sheep through his influence to the community, and should be the one who feeds the flock, cares and is concerned about their safety and health. It simply gives an understanding of how Jesus feels about the flock; which includes children. It is from this understanding that the church should care for the young people in the church at individual and group levels in order to identify their joys and frustrations.

6.4 Listening beyond TEARS and hearing WORDS

The author in the journey with the children looks at ways that would lead to a model that protects adolescent males in their journey to adulthood. The children themselves are some of the valuable human resources that will remain under utilised if the church ignores their ability of coming up with a model. They are important in designing an intervention plan for their own situations. Gerkin illuminates this thought when he states the importance of the co-researchers.

“To care deeply for persons is to inquire with them, search with them, question with them about what the events of their lives mean at the deepest level. It also means to inquire with them into the ways in which their questions (and experiences) have been presented in the past and how those questions have been answered, most particularly with the people of the Bible” (Gerkin, 1997:125).

This shows that the results of this research emanated from the inquiries made in the journey with the children. It also indicates that when journeying with the children, the pastoral caregiver should listen to issues that affect them. Listening gives value and meaning to the situation in which the children find themselves. Listening should go beyond hearing what people say about their situations, but should take note of their emotions, tears and silence as they communicate their inner life.

According to Gerkin (1997), “it means listening for hidden conflicts, unspoken desires, unspeakable fears, and faint hopes...”Gerkin (1997:91) which the pastor should handle pastorally”.

The author had never thought that children who are living with their mothers would ever long for their fathers in such a shocking way. Listening to their experiences challenged the author’s previously held belief. The author had always thought that what were important in the lives of the children were material provision and mother’s love.

6.5 INSIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

African adolescent children are affected by the absence of their fathers just as much as their Western counterparts. However, in emotionally close families, the male adults are important in moulding of boys, though they cannot replace the father’s role. When love comes from a biological father, it is more valuable to the child because it makes him feel proud in the presence of his peers to show them his father. However, when it comes to moulding and mentoring children in the African environment, there is need to have men who can carry out that role very well when the father chooses them for their children. The father remains important in all that should be done to his son.

Therefore, the absence of fathers seriously impacts the children when father-mother relationships are bad. One child felt that having a dead father is better than having an absent one. This was because the boy felt that his father had not influenced him in any way. The boy felt that he has learnt nothing from his father apart from receiving messages that he will one day go back with him to the Diaspora to visit.

Despite the material support, the boy felt cheated and betrayed. Children expect fathers to protect them, and being hurt or emotionally harmed by them is a betrayal of trust. The harm would be carried through life and lead to traumatic experiences.

The author also learnt that some children, who are well supported materially, did not see the importance of a present father. They felt comfortable growing up under the guidance of their mothers. This was because of the feminine warmth and tenderness while missing the male strength and warmth which they did not seem to admire much. This shows that some children have unfinished issues with fathers that need to be dealt with, in spite of the material support received. Otherwise, these children will have difficulty in discovering a man in themselves.

However, some children want to grow up in the presence of their fathers so that they can learn from them and create a male identity from their interactions.

Generally, the boys feel that they cannot change their painful situation by lamenting over the absence of their fathers but to focus on their studies and do well. The author, however, thought that this idea without guidance may lead to emotional insensitivity and males who are introverts or task focused adults. The behaviour may also lead the child to be unfriendly

to women in order to have freedom from both same and opposite sex relationships. Therefore, a model should include the following dimensions.

6.5.1 The Father should know the friends of his son

Since this model does not just emphasise therapy but a way of caring for the adolescents whose fathers have left the country and those who are wishing to leave in the near future. It is, therefore, important that every father should be aware and prepared for a day when he will be away from his son. The fathers should guide their sons always. It is one of the full time jobs of the father to mentor and mould his son. This is done when he is still present with him so that when he is away, a caring relationship will already be in place.

Here are some guides for fathers before and after they leave them (sons) in the care of others:

- ❖ Teach them to walk with wise men.
- ❖ Discuss with them the biblical perspective of characteristics of a wise man. Examples can be drawn from Psalms (1:1) “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers.

6.5.2 Examples of quality friends for adolescents

Adolescent males should have quality male friends who will help and encourage them in their journey to manhood. Quality friends are friends of Jesus Christ; as referred to in the Gospel of John 15:14 “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Moreover the bible gives many examples of good friends as indicated below;

- ❖ A good friend is not driven by instant gratification. But a bad friend says, Eat, drink, and merry, for tomorrow we will die (Proverbs 23:6, 20-35).
- ❖ A good friend is loyal, but a bad friend is fickle (Proverbs 24:21 and 25:19)
- ❖ A good friend speaks truthfully, but a bad friend “devises violence,” and his “lips talk of trouble (Proverbs 24:1).
- ❖ A good friend loves the law of God, but a bad friend is a lawbreaker (Psalms 1:1-2)
- ❖ Do not be misled: “Bad Company corrupts good character.” Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God- I say to your shame (1 Corinthians 15:13-34)
- ❖ Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9 -12)

Our sons are living in a world with many connections and also spend more time with friends at school and out of school. Therefore, it is the job of the father to know the friends of his sons and where and how they spend their time. To put it in another way; it is the role of the father to know the primary influence of his son. This is why the author believes that a father should consider his son’s environment from morning to evening. Material support alone without a plan for building an internal structure of our sons destroys them; as already alluded above. Fathers should equip their sons to be in the world of many voices. They are in the world but not of the world. They have to be equipped to interact, with no-believers, exposed to media, politics, peer pressures but still maintain their boundaries and fear for God. As a result, the father’s role will help them to follow the familiar voice of Jesus, their

friend and chief shepherd, through the help of male members of the community such as male teachers and members of the extended families; just to mention a few.

6.6 PASTORAL CARE FOR ADOLESCENT MALES IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The church is an important institution of care for God's people. It is through the church that believers show God's love and care for each other. Later, this love is expressed through the societies in which children live.

Gerkin (1997:95), informs Christian communities of the importance of engaging with people within their situations in order to effectively give care to them. It is through their community that children can be helped well because when therapy and care overlooks people's environment, it becomes irrelevant, particularly in Zimbabwe. The cultural practice of communal life among the people of Zimbabwe may be challenged by the modern person, but it remains in the hearts of its people. Therefore, care of the adolescents should take cognisance of the family network. In Zimbabwe, no one would like to die in church, hospital and particularly in the absence of relatives, but in a home surrounded by his/her own people and a community of faith. In the event that death approaches while in the hospital, he/she waits for or calls his own relatives or children before one dies. Gerkin submits to this thought when he states the role of a minister in the following way:

“...It is therefore not enough for pastors to become relatively competent psychologists and therapeutic counsellors if they are to adequately perform their pastoral role. They need also to become competent in helping people make connections between their lives of faith within the community and tradition that

identifies us as the people of God, and the day- to –day individual, social, and cultural realities of our lives” (Gerkin, 1997:95).

Therefore, the church’s role is to enter in dialogue with families where children come from. When the church engages and complements parental roles in nurturing boys, the world becomes a safe place for our sons. Children, when properly guided by the church and society, can be the light that shines in the lives of their families and society. When the church carries the role of caring for the children by cementing relationships, Practical theology retains the role of creating harmony in its interactions with the environment that people live.

6.6.1 Pastoral care as the care of individuals

While the boys are individuals with particular challenges in this study, they also form a community of children faced by a situation whose major variable is the absent father. The absence bred insecurity, lack of primary male role models, and lack of masculine love, care and guidance.

In the research journey, the children informed the author that they would want to meet him as individuals and then as a group to discuss issues that affect them. James Fowler (1981) is important to the author when he states that although adolescents have external influences, they are individuals who are unique in perspectives. The church should, therefore, encourage the clergies, youth workers and preachers to see these children as people who are in need of spiritual support at individual and group levels. It is, therefore, important that the adolescents whose fathers are absent to be considered as individuals. The pastor and his

leaders should inform church members of the need to care for individual adolescent males with the available human resources.

6.6.2 Pastoral Care for adolescent male groups in the Congregation

Group discussions are important in helping children to deal with various issues of life. Participants receive stimulation from others, with issues of other group members triggering their own. The frequency of the gatherings creates trust and confidence. When confidence is created; disclosure is encouraged and confidentiality is maintained. Group participation leads to better quality decisions, creates a healthy and conducive environment for the group members.

When leadership functions are vested in the group, it is stronger than when it relies on any single member of the group. This implies that through group participation, better quality decisions are made. When children do things together they feel secure. This is because the coming together of people symbolises unity, strength, love, and care and group identity.

This is a stage that James Fowler calls synthetic- conventional faith; because during this stage there is a reliance on external authority and its construction of meaning in interpersonal images. It is conventional in that it is seen as being everybody's faith system or of the entire community; synthetic in that it is non analytical: it comes as a sort of unified global wholeness. It is a conformist stage, which depends upon the expectations and judgments of others and does not form a separate identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain independent perspective, beliefs and values are tacitly held. Santrock summarises this thought when he states that;

“According to Fowler , although this stage is abstract than the previous one, young adolescents still mainly conform to the religious beliefs of others and have not yet adequately analyzed alternative religious ideologies. Someone’s behavior that involves a question of right and wrong is seen in terms of the harm it does to a relationship or what others might say” (Santrock, 2005:295 -296).

Youth workers should be present to guide the group leaders and to lead certain topics. This is because young people may have not yet reached a stage where they take responsibility for their religious beliefs and lives. When they are properly guided, they realise that they can choose the course of their lives without much influence from the outside. They analyse their course of action. For example, with proper guidance, they will appreciate the efforts of their fathers and the situation they find themselves in.

Guidelines on the issues of confidentiality and building of trust in members should be laid down. Lessons such as these can be discussed;

- ❖ The role of father,
- ❖ how to support the father when he is out of the country,
- ❖ how to relate to mothers when the father is absent,
- ❖ how to support each other in growing into adulthood,
- ❖ the role of male family members in the lives of boys when the father is absent,
- ❖ The importance of the church (helping the church to help us).

The reader should note that in the Methodist church, like in many other churches; youth groups that allow boys and girls to meet separately do exist. The youth group for boys in

the Methodist is called Boys Christian Union (BCU). Boys are grouped according to ages. For example, Junior BCU is composed of boys, who are between 6-12 years of age while senior BCU are those from 13 – 22 years.

The youth leaders together with the children they lead should pick topics that cover diverse issues that affect all boys today, without separating them from the existing groups. In that way, stigmatisation will be avoided. The youth leaders and advisors should be aware of the developmental challenges of children at this stage, because differences in opinion or non-conformity may make some feel unwanted or misfits of the group.

At this stage, children are likely to internalise the external expectations and standards; thereby, imprisoning self. In others, non-conformity to the external expectations and measurement may lead to anxiety, despair or hidden anger leading to compensatory intimacy to the commandment of love for God and hate of significant others. For example, children may literally interpret the bible passages such as those cited below;

...for whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother (Matthew 12:48).

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother... - yes, even his own life-he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26).

These biblical passages may make the adolescents believe that their love for God is more important than respect for parents who are non Christians. This is where the role of mature Christian youth advisors is important in guiding and caring for the group that is maturing at different levels.

6.6.3 Adolescent males' engagement with Christian man.

In the past, boys sat where men gathered in the evening to listen to stories and other conversations; as already cited elsewhere in this study. These were deliberate gatherings at which men fellowshiped and shared their wisdom and experiences with each other. Boys benefited through these gatherings and informal lectures. Since this way of disseminating important information to the children already exists within the Zimbabwean community structure of guiding children, churches can take advantage of the design. Children would benefit from Christian men to learn what men of integrity passed through to adulthood.

The Christian men should meet with boys at church to share with them how they grew up and how boys would grow up in the absence of their fathers. Men in the church should approach issues that affected them and what can affect the children today with honesty. They should reveal how other men in the family, church and community have helped them to grow in their Christian faith. There is need for the church to encourage all male boys in each congregation to have elders who would mentor them.

The bible guides us on this way of caring when the apostle Paul refers to Timothy in 2Timothy 2:1-2, as his son in Christ when he declared that;

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

It also records how Eli mentored Samuel (1Samuel 1:21-25). From these biblical examples, boys whose fathers are absent can benefit when men within the Christian community complement the role of the extended family by guiding them. The author is also reminded

of how Jesus at adolescence entered the temple courts. The bible tells us that his parents found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions (Luke 2:41-46). The above thoughts show how God fearing men can be of benefit to the adolescent males in each local church.

6.6.4 Pastoral care in training caregivers of adolescents

Training is an important component of pastoral ministry. Ministers have instructed believers formally and informally on Christian living and what it means to care – for the tradition of faith, for the community of believers, for individuals and families, and for the socio-cultural milieu of believing community (Gerkin 1997:94). Therefore, the training of men’s groups on caring for the adolescent males on various topics fits very easily in the minister’s programme.

The minister should take the task of training his or her male groups, youth leaders and advisors the skills on helping the adolescent males, whose fathers are absent, to discover the purpose and a male identity that is worth living for. Boys make wise choices when love and care are expressed in practical ways by the males they interact with at deep spiritual levels. For example, when Christian men reveal weaknesses and strengths in their interactions with them, children will appreciate their efforts in mentoring. Every opportunity these men spend with boys will definitely yield results.

The purpose of these groups is to reduce trauma in adolescent males as they grow into adult males when their fathers are absent. It is this relationship that helps them equip the boys to form a communal and an individual male identity of their own.

The training should take cognisance of how the Zimbabwean black African societies structured the training of a boy child. The training ought to include lessons on men of integrity, how to mentor a boy, the role of the community and parents to the boy child.

The parents of these boys should be made aware of the church's programme in guiding boys. The training aims at equipping men to be Christian mentors. The Christian mentors should note that children are also being guided by other male adults in the community and family; particularly in emotionally close families.

While training has been emphasised to men's groups and youth leaders, there is a need to create awareness to the whole congregation on the need to care for adolescents. When the whole congregation has an appreciation of the programme, its influence may bring other boys to church.

6.6.5 Working with the Whole family in sincerity

The African family system in Zimbabwe has existing structures that can be taken advantage of for the purpose of caring for the children whose fathers are absent. What is important for the fathers to consider before leaving the country are the males who would mould their sons. The departure of fathers is meaningful when they leave their sons with men of integrity to guide them.

In the past, it was not difficult to find male adults who would take up the role of mentoring children. One did not need to scratch his head about the one to leave the children with, instead, absent fathers were anxious about how they would achieve their dreams. Fathers should discuss their expectations and commitment to parenting with members of the extended family. Otherwise, there would be no need to leave children in risky situations. If

not, as suggested by the children in this study, it would be better for them to suffer together with their fathers here in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, it would not be practical for African men to leave and to follow the suggestions from the children because of their role as providers.

Fathers should inform other family members on how they feel about the future of their children. This will help them appreciate the importance of guiding these boys in the ways the father may so wish. The father should inform his sons; the purpose of going to work out of the country; the importance of a disciplined life and the roles that other male members in the family will play in their lives. When fathers discuss openly with their children, the foreseeable benefits, challenges and what should be done in response, they will have prepared them for their absence. Jesus in John's Gospel notifies the disciples of the conditions on which he was going to send them the power of the Holy Spirit when he said;

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever- the spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you” (John 14:15).

These conditions are important for the family members and children. This is why the bible cites the guidance that Jesus, in the gospels, gives to the disciples. While most boys felt good to be with their mothers because of their love and softness; it is hard to face challenges in this cruel world without a male figure for a male child. Boys should be helped to understand that they would not prosper if they do not listen to the advice of their adults in the family and Christian community.

6.7 THE BENEFIT OF THE RESEARCH TO ADOLESCENTS

The researcher met with the adolescents three months after the research interviews. This was upon the request by the boys that they wanted to discuss with him on a different level, other than that of the research. Secondly, because in the first session, children could not suggest a way that would enable them to create a male identity because of the emotions involved. It seems children were very emotional about the discussions because it was the first time that they had been afforded such an opportunity to talk about their experiences about the absent fathers.

In order for the adolescent males to live positively they:

- ❖ Accepted that their fathers are human beings who can also make mistakes and should be forgiven.
- ❖ Acknowledged that they cannot change their situation, therefore, they should appreciate that they have fathers who are supporting them from the Diaspora.
- ❖ Recognised that they should please their fathers by working hard at school work.
- ❖ Admitted that they should have good friends to guide them in life.
- ❖ Realised that they should have a positive attitude about their lives.
- ❖ Accepted that fathers will not find it easy to come back home, because the Zimbabwean situation does not promise early economic recovery that may create jobs for them.

The session helped them to be part of a community that is facing similar situations and gave them an opportunity to share views about the absence of their fathers. Lastly, the children felt that they can benefit from their guardians, family members and their teachers to be good children in the society when fathers are absent.

6.8 GUIDANCE AS A PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO ADOLESCENTS

Despite the mistakes and other short comings encountered by children when fathers are in the Diaspora, the Researcher guided the children in the following way;

- ❖ Boys should strive to forgive their fathers in order to destroy the seed of bitterness that may lead to numerous pathologies in their lives also because Christ set forgiveness as a condition of being forgiven.
- ❖ They should not condemn or judge their fathers over the past short comings which may only be understood in their real context when discussed with elders in the family. For example, some practices that people follow are cultural expectations which fathers were fulfilling. These expectations may only be understood and dealt with by an individual and the society through dialogue and biblical examples of love.
- ❖ Discuss with some elders in the church and society to understand the African man's view of being a father. Adolescents were also asked to hear from the family members how their fathers grew up and their relationship with their fathers and the role they played in guiding their sons.

- ❖ In the event that their fathers do not communicate, a boy should discuss his pain with his father's brothers and sisters (your aunts) or a pastor. In Zimbabwe, one's father's brothers are his fathers because the brothers share the same parents and nurturing environments. The reader has to note that aunts are a source of strength to the nephews.

6.9 A RESEARCH WORTH TAKING

Taking a research on absent fathers due to migrant work; its traumatic impact to adolescent males in Zimbabwe benefited the researcher in the following ways;

- ❖ To understand that father's absence affects children emotionally.
- ❖ To recognize the impact of absence on his (author) children and discover a model to care for them as well.
- ❖ Boys need someone to share with their joys and sorrows on the absences of their fathers.
- ❖ The study taught the researcher that while people's situations vary, they all need someone to talk to in order for them to create and find solutions to their predicaments.
- ❖ Some relationships can be managed when people find guidance although not healed. For example, some children accepted that they still love their fathers despite the betrayal they experienced. This shows that, with time even those who have not yet come to terms with their situations may positively manage their situations.

It is important to continue meeting with young people and listen to what they are going through. Listening to people in difficulties as a group or individuals, is another way of caring. Lastly, the aims and objectives of the research were realised. The impact of absence on both the father and adolescent male was identified, community made aware, model was created, the boys were empowered and recommendations are, therefore, given below.

6.10 CONCLUSION

Migration of fathers to the Diaspora could not be resisted by men because of the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe. Fathers have left the country for greener pastures. The exodus of fathers to the Diaspora has created a vacuum in mentoring and moulding male children into adult males. The study that was carried out with adolescent boys indicated that fathers in the Diaspora are engaged in some form of employment. As a result, fathers are able to provide for their families back home. This group felt that the absence of fathers benefited them.

However, the absence of these fathers has made some children feel emotionally abandoned and betrayed, while others were disappointed by fathers who did not bid them farewell and are irresponsible. The feelings of these children make them fear involvement, limit father – son relationships, generate anger, bitterness and lack of any future dependence on their fathers. When children are angered and bitterness resides in them, they would go against their father’s potential assistance.

On the other hand, in the process of the study about the absent father, a Christian model of caring for the individual and community emerged. The church has been noted to be the only institution that would guide the society to value the job of caring for the people of God who

are in needy situations. When the church cares for the adolescents they will be caring for the body of Christ.

The author drew from Gerkin (1997) and Fowler (1981) the views of the church as a community of faith to signify a fellowship of love or community of love. For, it is only by Christ's love that we are forgiven by God through grace. It is through love that people are nurtured; miracles of spiritual and numerical growth are seen.

Acts 2; bears witness of the power in love fellowships. In sharing the gospel of Christ in love fellowships, each member becomes a part of Christ's body that spreads the gospel. The love fellowships make the church to be more than preaching or meeting points. It becomes a family where all members have the opportunity to share their experiences at fellowship and individual levels. People will not depend on one person for spiritual growth but on each other for spiritual nourishment.

Therefore, caring for boys whose fathers are absent requires both individual mentors and local communities that mentor them. The people will know through these fellowships, that the church represents Christ (John 13:35). Paul in his letter to the Corinthians equates a fellowship of love with a human body. He states that, there is no division in the body, but concern and sensitivity to the needs of one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it (1Corinth 12:25). The Methodist church has been found wanting by the boys in this study. Boys have indicated that the church was not aware of their pain. This shows that the church was unable to see the depressed and hear the silent voices in order to interpret the situation. This reveals that the church has some parts that need spiritual attention in order for the body of Christ to function optimally.

The above model in chapter 6 will help children who have bad feelings about themselves due to absence of their fathers. Children will open their hearts in love fellowships in order to be healed, nurtured, sustained and guided through love. Faith will be expressed in a more mature and responsible way when all is done in love.

Faith, in this study, is the act of love that guides individuals and communities to an expression of freedom and responsibility in trusting God's presence in human situations. It aims to increase love for one another and to God. For, it is only through Christ's love that healthy memories are created.

6.11 RECOMMENDATIONS

The church should take a lead in guiding the adolescents before fathers leave the country and when they are out of the country. The existence of male groups in the church should take up the task of complementing the role of the extended family in preparing them for adulthood. The church, therefore, should carry these responsibilities as part of the extended family that is unique but connected to families without competing with it.

Chaplains in the schools, youth leaders and advisors in the Methodist churches should pioneer the programmes that help adolescents prepare for adult life through; group discussions, dramas, and organise outings, share testimonies from those adults that have passed adolescent stages in the absence of fathers and debates focused on father and fatherhood.

Fathers, before they leave the country, should discuss with their children, in all honesty, the purpose of the departure. They should not raise their hopes by promising too much. This will help children to continue trusting them.

Adolescents should engage with adults in order to be equipped for life in the global village. Furthermore, adolescent males should invite other boys in order to form groups in which they can discuss issues that affect them from a Christian perspective. This is because adolescents are the experts in designing a model that affects them when fathers are absent.

African adolescent males need a path on which to travel by being guided by their biological fathers. Therefore, fathers should find a way of meeting them and honestly communicating with them when they are in the Diaspora. If, for any reason, they cannot come back to Zimbabwe, they should meet with their children in neighbouring countries for a holiday. In both ways, there is an aspect of expense which is either material or emotional. It is, however, important for the father to connect with his sons so that boys appreciate the efforts and love of their fathers when they (fathers) are unable to go with them to the Diaspora or come to Zimbabwe.

6.12 FUTURE RESEARCH

As a result of the lessons learned, the following fields of research have emerged:

- ❖ Absent mothers due to migrant work: its impact on boys in early childhood.
- ❖ Cross boarder trading by mothers; its impact on adolescent girls.
- ❖ Absent husbands due to migrant work. The Challenges faced by mothers in caring for adolescent boys and girls in Zimbabwe.

- ❖ Absent mothers and fathers due to migrant work: its impacts on adolescent children in Zimbabwe.