

FATHERS MATTER



CHRISTIAN CONNECT GROUP

Module 1: Core Module

HEARTLINES

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**Are you a father,
father-to-be,
father figure or
interested in becoming a father?**

This is a resource that celebrates and supports active, present and positive fatherhood.

**FATHERS
MATTER**

is an initiative of

HEARTLINES

THE CENTRE FOR VALUES PROMOTION

www.heartlines.org.za

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Getting started

There will be a number of modules available for Fathers Matter Connect Groups to work through together. **This first module is the core module and is where you should start.** From there, your group can choose which of the other modules they would like to do.

Facilitator's Toolkit

If you are leading a group through this module, or are interested in starting a group, we recommend that you begin by working through our Facilitator's Toolkit. The toolkit can be downloaded under the Connect Group resources' section at www.fathersmatter.org.za



The Facilitator's Toolkit covers:

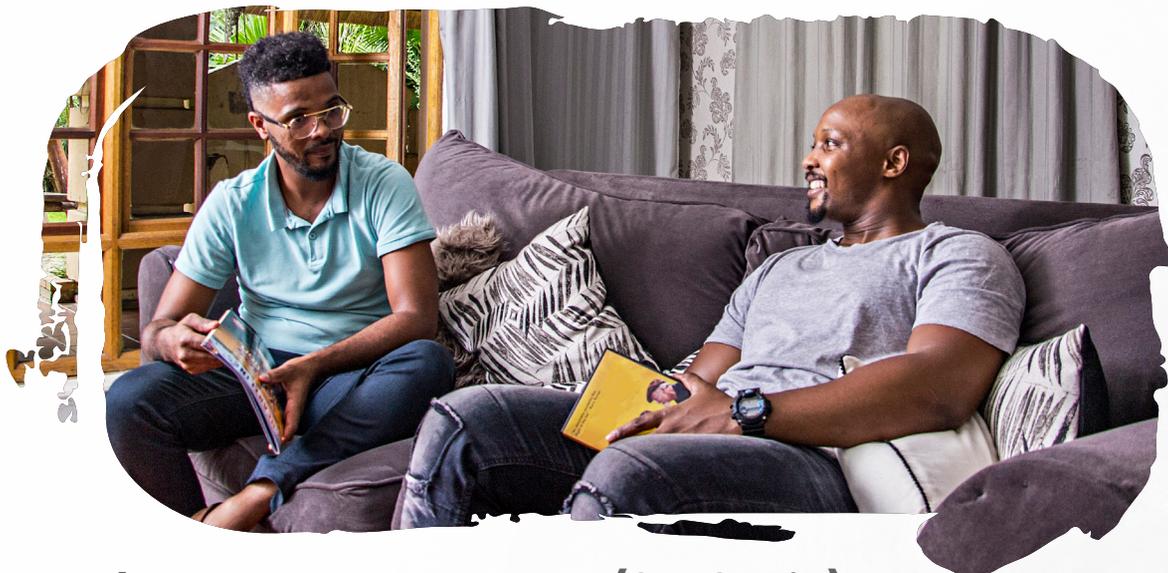
- What is the Fathers Matter project?
- What is a Fathers Matter Connect Group?
- How to start and run your Fathers Matter Connect Group
- Ways of sharing your father story
- Tips for listening and sharing
- Responding to uncomfortable stories

What to expect in each session

Each session in this module includes:

- An **icebreaker** (A light and fun way to get to know each other better.)
- **Setting the scene** (A short summary or story to set the context for the session. The facilitator may read directly from the resource or adapt the story to suit the group.)
- **Video/s**
- **Questions** to guide conversation/story-sharing
- **Scripture** reflection and **prayer** time
- **Action point** or tip

Session 1: Why fathers matter



Welcome and Icebreaker (8–10 min)

Facilitator's note: Welcome everyone and ask each group member to introduce themselves and their "father status" – e.g. "I'm Andile and I'm a: father/father-to-be/father figure/interested in becoming a father."

Icebreaker question:

- Who is a famous father you admire – and why?

Setting the scene (5 min)

Facilitator's note: You or one of the members of the group reads this section aloud to everyone.

If you ask anyone, "Do mothers matter?", the answer will be a definite "Yes", or, "Obviously!" Then ask, "Do fathers matter?", and you'll probably get a range of answers, some might be positive but most will be undecided or negative.

People don't seem to understand the importance of fathers being positively involved in their children's lives. This is mainly because many children grow up without a loving, caring and present father or father figure. Children who grow up without positive and active fathers are at risk of a number of health and academic challenges, and are open to things like addiction and abuse. That said, a father's absence is only a *risk* factor. Many children grow up and thrive when they are raised by a single mother or loving, non-biological caregiver.

Heartlines, a values-based social change organisation, did research on fatherhood in South Africa. This research became the foundation for the Fathers Matter project. This Connect Group resource is one of many resources in the project that aim to encourage men to be better fathers and to help us answer the question: Why do fathers matter?

The Bible has a lot to say about the love of our Heavenly Father and why our relationship with God our Father matters. Over the next five sessions, we'll watch and listen to different fathers and children reflecting on their father stories.

We'll also get to share some of our own stories and wisdom with each other. Whether you're a fresh, sleep-deprived father, an experienced grandfather, or simply hoping to be a father one day, you have something to share!

This group should be a safe space for us to do that. So we'd like to encourage everyone to listen with empathy and without judgement, to ask with curiosity and the genuine humility of wanting to learn, and to tell our own stories with honesty and courage.

Where sensitive information is shared, let's agree to respect one another's privacy. Where challenges are shared, let's commit to praying for and supporting one another. Through this course, we hope to become better fathers and to answer for ourselves: This is why fathers matter!

Let's watch a video together and spend some time in conversation.

Watch the video (8 min)

Facilitator's note: This video can be found on our website or on the Fathers Matter WhatsApp Group.

- **Fathers Matter promo video**



Conversation questions (30 min)

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "father"?
- What are you hoping to get out of this course?
- What's one fathering challenge you're hoping to address through our time together in this group?

Wrap-up (8–10 min)

The facilitator shares a bit of his own father story about his relationship with his father and his child(ren) and summarises the key themes shared by the group.

You've heard a bit of my story. Over the next few sessions, we'll hear more of one another's stories too. The next session is all about understanding our own father stories.

In preparation for the session, start thinking about your relationship, or non-relationship, with your own father. In what ways has it impacted your life? Please come ready to share your story next week.

In **1 John 3:1** (NIV) we read, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

Our hope through this course is that we encounter the love of the Father in a new and fresh way, so that we can model love to our children.

Let's close in prayer.

Action for the week ahead

Reflect on **1 John 3:1** and what it means for you.

Think about your relationship, or non-relationship, with your own father. In what ways has it impacted your life? Come ready to share your story next session.

Session 2: Understanding our own father stories (Part 1)



Facilitator's note: A large part of this session will be devoted to sharing stories.

Icebreaker (5 min)

- What's your favourite movie or series about fatherhood and what has it taught you?

Setting the scene (5 min)

Facilitator's note: You or one of the members of the group reads this section aloud to everyone.

Sharing our stories helps us understand who we are, and how we relate to God and others. Sitting and listening to brothers sharing their stories can be so helpful, because you realise you are not alone; there are others who are facing similar challenges to you and you can share your burdens.

In this group, we will process our stories together, learn from each other and be counselled by one another. We'll grow to understand how our relationship with our earthly father affects our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

As you begin sharing your stories in this session, just a reminder to maintain confidentiality, to honour the person who shares by listening well, and to be honest and brave when you share.

Healing begins when we are vulnerable.

Watch the video (5 min)

Facilitator's note: This video can be found on our website or on the Fathers Matter WhatsApp Group.

- **Olefile, Seth and Simon's stories**

Conversation question (5 min)

- What stood out for you in the video we watched?

Story-sharing (30–40 min)

Facilitator's note: Three to four men share their stories, using the questions below as a guide. The other members will share in the next session. Allow 30–40 min for sharing. If you have a group of more than six people, we suggest breaking into smaller groups for sharing stories.

Use the questions below to help you share your story. These questions are just a guide, and if you would prefer to tell your story in a different way, you can definitely do so.

- What type of relationship did you have with your father growing up? Was he involved, present, absent, or a positive influence?
- How has that relationship with your father shaped your own story?
- In what ways has it impacted your relationship with God?
- What's one personal commitment you want to make as a father yourself?

Group prayer time (5 min)

Allow time for brief reflections on the story-sharing, and for praying for each other (*For big groups, divide into pairs and pray for each other*).

If time permits, each person can share his fathering commitment with the group.

Wrap-up (2–3 min)

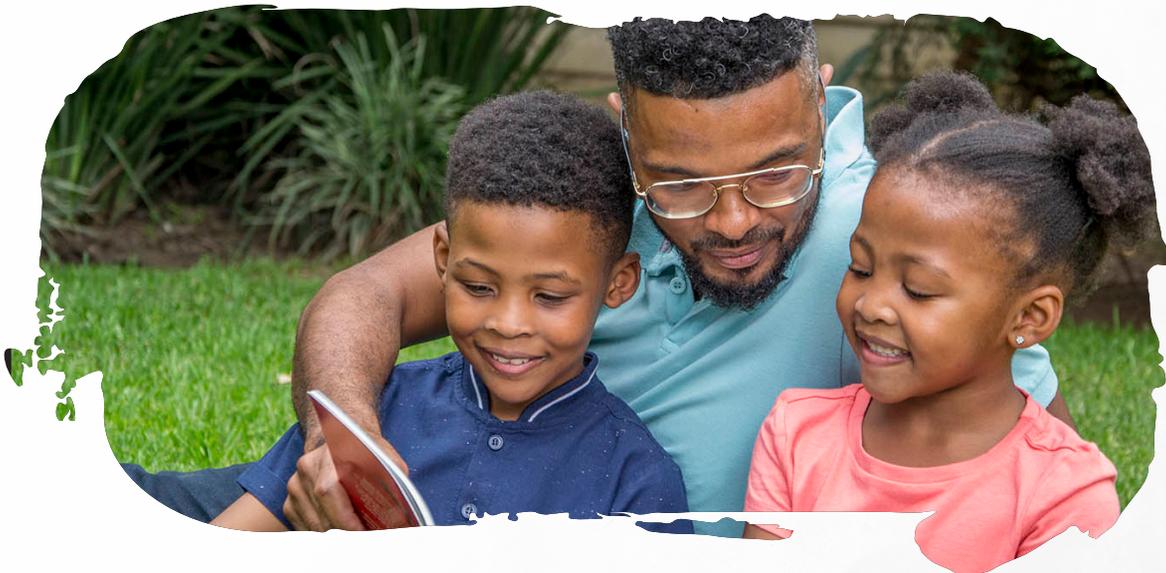
Psalm 103:8 says, “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” There are many scriptures that speak of God as compassionate, gracious and slow to anger. We’ve shared some of our father stories in this session and while our earthly fathers are not perfect and have not always expressed love the way we’d hoped, it is good to know we have a Heavenly Father who is gracious and compassionate.

In our next session we will hear stories from others in the group. Please try to check in on at least one other member in the week ahead, and spend time in prayer for one another.

Action for the week ahead

Do a follow-up call with one of the members in the group. Or, find another father or man outside this group and ask him about his relationship with his father. Be willing to share some of your insights about your own relationship with your father.

Session 3: Understanding our own father stories (Part 2)



Icebreaker (5 min)

- What's your favourite "dad" tool or gadget?
- What's your favourite meal to prepare?

Setting the scene (5 min)

Facilitator's note: You or one of the members of the group reads this section aloud to everyone.

We all have to grapple with pain caused by our fathers. Your father may have been physically present, but emotionally absent, or maybe he wasn't there at all. Your father may have given money to you as a way of showing love, but was not there for you physically and emotionally. Your father may have been physically and emotionally present, but he wasn't perfect and still made mistakes that hurt you.

This father wound shows up in our lives in different ways, like struggling with low self-esteem or confidence if your father was critical. Some people end up blaming themselves for their father's absence and grow up feeling rejected, which can cause anxiety or depression. For others it can be struggling with their own anger and rage because they had a father who was abusive.

This time together can help us see our father story for what it was, how it affected us, and what we want to do to write our own story for our children.

Remember that sharing our stories with each other helps us get to grips with who we are, and how we relate to God and others. As we begin sharing our stories now, just a reminder to all of us to maintain confidentiality and to honour the person who shares by listening well.

Facilitator's note: There is no video story this week.

Story-sharing (30–40 min)

Facilitator's note: The other three or four men in the group share their father stories. Allow 30–40 min for sharing. If you have a group of more than six people, we suggest breaking into smaller groups for the sharing of stories.

Here's a reminder of the questions you can use to help you share your story:

- What type of relationship did you have with your father growing up? Was he involved, present, absent, or a positive influence?
- How has that relationship with your father shaped your own story?
- In what ways has it impacted your relationship with God?
- What's one personal commitment you want to make as a father yourself?

Group prayer time (10 min)

Allow time for brief reflections on the story-sharing, and for praying for each other. *(For big groups, divide into pairs and pray for each other.)*

In this session there is no video so that you have extra time for praying into any specific areas of healing or restoration from father wounds.

Wrap-up (5 min)

Psalm 68:5-6 says, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land."

In our journeys of healing from our father wounds, this scripture reminds us that God the Father has always been there for us. This can give us hope and encouragement that our stories are not defined by the absence of an earthly father. We can find our healing and strength in the love of a good, Heavenly Father. Let us continue to look to him for our validation and identity.

Action for the week ahead

Consider having a conversation with your own father about your reflections from this course. If he is absent or no longer alive, you may want to check out resources on the “father wound” by The World Needs a Father.

Session 4: What is a father?



Icebreaker (5 min)

- What superhero skill or special power do you think every father should have?

Setting the scene (5 min)

Facilitator's note: You or one of the members of the group reads this section aloud to everyone.

Over the past few weeks we have shared some of our own stories about our fathers. We have all had different experiences. Some people have had close, loving relationships with their fathers. Others have experienced a distant, uncaring relationship with their fathers, or no relationship at all.

Now the question for us is, “What kind of father do we want to be?” and “What kind of father should we be?”

The research Heartlines has done shows that the positive presence of fathers is important for the well-being of children and for the benefit of fathers. This positive presence can be measured by the quality of the relationship and involvement between a father and his child.

Unfortunately, in today's society a father is often just seen as needing to be a provider (or ATM, as the saying goes). But at a time when there is so much

unemployment in our country, this is not always possible, and many fathers are left feeling like they have nothing to give their children if they can't provide for them.

A father's responsibility is more than to provide money – it includes love, reliability, availability and support towards his children. There is no substitute for spending time with our children. We can learn to love the things they love and spend time doing those things with them in order to form a bond with them.

What changes do we need to make to be heroes to our children? What expectations do our children have of us? If we asked for a list, it would probably include things like: being able to talk to each other; showing affection; someone who protects us and makes us feel safe; someone who emotionally connects with us; someone who takes an interest in our lives, our schoolwork, sport and hobbies; someone who teaches us values and morals. Are we meeting these expectations?

The Bible has a lot to say about who a father is and the role he is called to play. In **Ephesians 6:4** we read, "Fathers, take your children by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master" (The Message). What does it mean to lead our children in the way of the Master?

We also read in **Proverbs 22:6** (TLV): "Train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not turn from it." The way we live our lives and what we show and teach our children with our actions and choices matters. Being a father is not easy, but it is an incredible privilege.

Watch the videos (8 min)

Facilitator's note: These videos can be found on our website or on the Fathers Matter WhatsApp Group.

- Gosiaime's story
- David's story

Conversation questions (20–30 min)

- What stood out for you in these stories?
- What do you think are the things that make someone a good father? Who in your life models that?
- What's one area of your own fatherhood (now or in the future) that you'd like to change or improve?

Wrap-up (5 min)

We have seen that being a father is a whole lot more than just being a financial provider. God has called us to love and nurture our children. They need our presence as well as our provision.

We have been given the responsibility to model good values. Our children learn, not just from hearing, but especially from seeing and observing what we do. Consistently living out positive values such as honesty and compassion can be hard. We have our own struggles and failures. That is why we need God's help. As we allow Christ to control our lives and to fill us in ever increasing ways, we can become the fathers that our children need us to be.

And we also need help from each other. Try to find ways to support each other during the week, with a phone call, WhatsApp or cup of coffee.

Let's close in prayer and ask God to help us be the fathers we have talked about today.

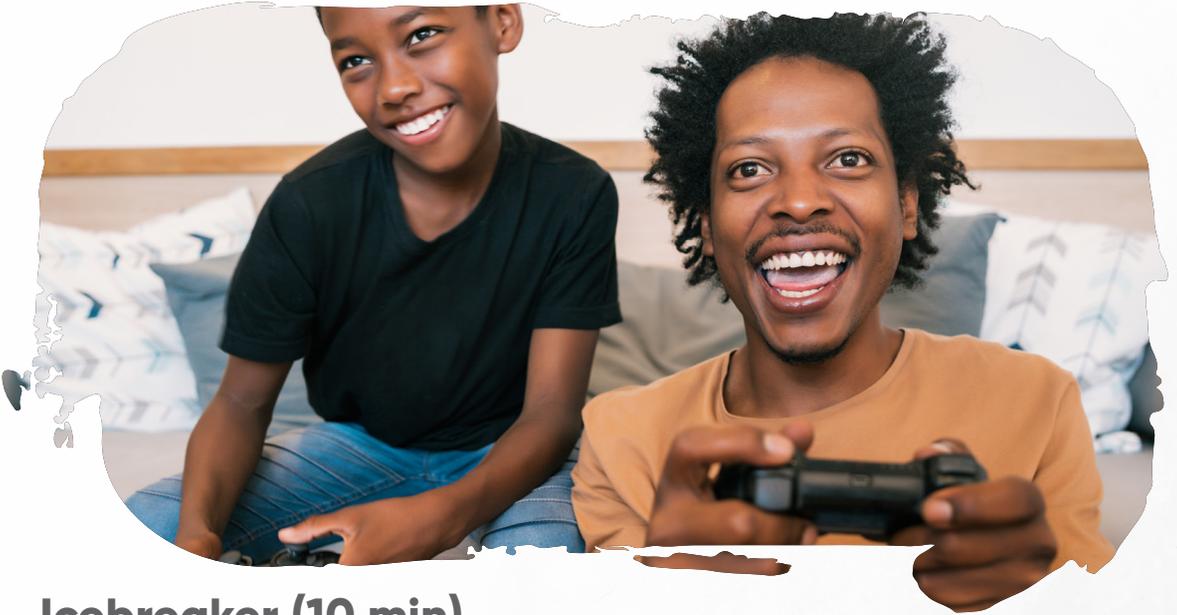
Action for week ahead

There is something special about a father's blessing, whether from an earthly father or our Heavenly Father. A blessing can be a source of motivation and guidance in a child's life.

In the next session, we will explore the idea of a father's blessing further, but in the week ahead, write down a short blessing to your own child(ren) or a child you are close to.

For example: "[Name] I appreciate how you..."

Session 5: The father I want to be



Icebreaker (10 min)

- Complete the sentence: Every father should be able to teach his child how to...?
- If time permits, you can hear from some members about how their father's blessing exercise was received.
- What has stood out for you over the past four sessions? To what extent do you now believe that fathers matter?

Setting the scene (5 min)

Facilitator's note: You or one of the members of the group reads this section aloud to everyone.

A father's journey is a challenging one with many ups and downs, but if we can begin to understand what a positive father is and to dream about the father we want to be to our children, we will be able to take steps to become that type of father.

Throughout the Old Testament there are important stories that show us the value of a father's blessing over his children. A blessing is one of the ways God has allowed fathers to give their children a sense of identity and destiny.

In **Matthew 19** we read about parents bringing their children to Jesus to lay his hands on them and bless them. There is something special about a father's blessing,

whether from an earthly father or our Heavenly Father. A blessing is a public declaration of a favoured status (**Luke 3:22**). A blessing can be a source of power for prosperity and success. And in all cases, blessings are a guide and motivation in a child's life.

Understanding the importance of a father's presence and blessing, we may wonder about children who grow up without a father. There are many circumstances that lead to a father's absence. Things like death, divorce, infidelity, mothers not allowing fathers to see their children, and certain cultural practices can all cause a man to be an absent father. Some of the other Fathers Matter Connect Group modules look at several of these specific challenges in more detail.

Heartlines' research has shown that even a man who isn't a child's biological father can have an impact on their life if he is a positive and present role model.

Where we face challenges in our fathering, we can seek wisdom from God and learn to follow his word to help us grow into the fathers we want to be. **Deuteronomy 6:5-9** says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words that I give you today. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you're at home or away, when you lie down or get up. Write them down, and tie them around your wrist, and wear them as headbands as a reminder. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

May we grow in our fathering as we follow our Heavenly Father.

Watch the video (5 min)

Facilitator's note: This video can be found on our website or on the Fathers Matter WhatsApp Group.

- Learning to be an active father

Conversation questions (30 min)

- What one thing have you learnt from your father or a father figure that you'd like to pass on to the next generation?
- What's one fathering challenge you have right now – and how could this group support you? (*Allow time for other members to share their experience or advice on the challenges raised.*)

Group prayer time (5 min)

Facilitator's note: For big groups, divide into pairs and pray for each other.

Pray for each other and say this blessing over each other:

“May the Lord bless you and take good care of you.
May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you.
May the Lord look on you with favour and give you peace.”
– adapted from Numbers 6:24-26

Wrap-up (10 min)

We've come to the end of our first module of the Fathers Matter Connect Group series! We've shared our stories, been encouraged by one another, and been challenged about the kind of fathers we'd like to be. What a journey it's been thus far.

For those who'd like to continue, there are a few other modules available, and these can be found on the Fathers Matter website. The group can decide which of the modules to do next based on the needs of the members.

There's also a feedback form that the Heartlines team would like us to complete. Please also remember to sign up at fathersmatter.org.za for updates, resources and tips to help you on your fathering journey.

Until we meet again, may the blessing of our Heavenly Father continue in our own fathering journeys.

Final actions and tips

- Look through the list of fatherhood organisations on our site and choose one or two that you'd like to find out more about getting involved with.
- Further reading: *Becoming Men* by Dr Malose Langa from Wits University. A story of young men growing up in Alexandra township.
 - Remind members to sign up at fathersmatter.org.za

USB

Facilitator's note: This USB has the promo video plus inspiring video stories.



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