

PARENTING SEMINAR

16 SEPTEMBER 2017

SESSION ONE: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Communication in any relationship is as important as breathing to a human being in order to survive. The moment you stop breathing, it is a matter of time before you pass out. In the absence of communication, any relationship will eventually wilt and die.

One of the most important relationships that God gave us, is that with our little ones. Our ability to communicate with our little ones determines the quality of the relationship and what they will become eventually.

How often have we barked out instructions like:

“Jump off the couch”

“Pick that up.”

“Stop being mean to your brother.”

“I told you to listen.”

with no positive response from the kids.

Too often we are quick to throw in the towel.

You need to realise that children misbehave for different reasons:

- Parents may not have expressed their expectations clearly enough — or
- Parents may have fallen into a pattern of inconsistent enforcement of those expectations.

It is vitally important that as parents, we master the art of clarifying expectations when we communicate. Children thrive when parents have clear expectations for behaviour and enforce those standards consistently.

Effective communication is defined as *verbal speech or other methods of relaying information that get a point across. An example of effective communication is when you talk in clear and simple terms.*

How do we go about effective communication with our littles ones?

1. Establish values that shape behaviour

1.1 What are values?

- *Important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable*
- Values have a major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations.
- Defined values come handy when it comes to ensure that you are heard when issuing instructions.
- This means that as children grow, they are taught about the values.
- If you are a Christian family, your values would be anchored in the word of God.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6 And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

1.2 Write down your values

- Some families may choose to write out and frame a mission statement
- Writing down things provides clarity; it creates opportunity for performance - as parents, we find that having our family's values clearly defined up front makes it easier to enforce rules and stick to consequences.
- Examples of values
 - Respect for yourself and for others
 - Consider others more than yourself
 - Be the first one to say I am sorry
- In the absence of clear guiding principles, it becomes chaotic in the house.

Our family values

	VALUE	REASON WHY
1		
2		
3		
4		

1.3 The importance of establishing values for your kids:

- It anchors them – they are clear about how to respond to situations
- Articulate them in a simple and exciting manner – must be easy to live out or to remember
- Over a period of time, discuss each value before bed time – allow them to express their understanding of the value
- With every occurrence, find a way of bringing up the practice of the value – how a value applies to the situation. Use opportunities to reinforce the values
- Be the model by living out the values – be vulnerable enough to concede when you have violated one of the espoused values.

2. Anchor expectations in day to day life

Without realising it, we can easily expect our children to be super kids, perfect kids in whom there is no mess.

2.1 Our children are not perfect

- We feel embarrassed when they cry
- We lose it when they stumble over themselves or when they wear pants inside out
- We are impatient when they fail to clean the bath tub properly
- Now this is the key to effective communication - Keep your expectations anchored in reality,
 - to anticipate mistakes and even foresee some misbehaviour – your kids are not angels.

2.1 Have a healthy view of what is normal behaviour in every stage of growth:

- We often overestimate their ability to have self-control, to stay focused on a task and to handle social situations well.
- It's normal for a 2-year-old to get upset if he doesn't get something he wants;
- it's normal for a 3-year-old to lose it if there's a change in his bedtime routine;
- it's normal for a 5-year-old to daydream in the middle of a T-ball game;
- it's normal for a 12-year-old to be moody; it's normal for a teenager to be irresponsible every once in a while.

- Anchoring your expectations in reality does not mean disobedience is ok – what are signs of disobedience:
 - Deliberate violation of a known principle or behaviour

2.2 Expectations must be preceded by relevant training

- Create room in your heart for the odd surprises when they fail at those things
- Making mistakes is part of how our kids' brains develop.
- Use these mistakes as launching grounds for further learning.
- Our responses to their mistakes and poor choices must encourage that natural maturing process.

3. Train up your children – they don't know better

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.

3.1 Why do children need training

- Children are born with a nature inclined to sin (Ps. 51:5).
- Children are born without knowledge (Pro. 22:15).
- Children are impressionable and imitators of others (Ezek. 16:44).
- Children are vulnerable (Mt. 10:16).
- Children have unlimited potential.

- Children are the carriers of culture (Ps. 78:4-8; 145:4).

3.2 You have no right to expect what you have not trained them in

- Training children is the one way of building up children's work ethic.
- Training up a child is different from child abuse – our training must be age appropriate and must still ensure that they enjoy their childhood

3.3 How do you go about this?

- Give them age-appropriate chores to accomplish each day.
- Encourage them to take initiative in helping beyond their chore list.
- It's often faster and easier to just straighten their beds or vacuum their room ourselves. - Exercise patience
- Use the "Let's do it together" approach – this is the only way to remove the inability excuse.
 - Training will include:
 - Repetition
 - gentle correction and
 - practice before children can succeed.
- Don't aim for perfection but them doing their best

- Focus on what they are getting right – affirm them

4. When and how to correct

- Sometimes we want to take pain away from our children – your heart sinks when they cry or they are sad; doesn't it
- The reality is that missing the mark is engrained in their hearts
 - We don't go out of our way to teach how be selfish but we see selfish tendencies

4.1 Where do we have the pattern for correction?

God Himself, as our Heavenly Father, furnishes the best and primary example of all discipline (Deut 8:5).

- God disciplines His children out of love (Pro. 3:11-12; 13:24; Heb. 12:5-6; Rev. 3:19).
- God disciplines because He is faithful to us (Ps. 119:75).
- God disciplines as a form of instruction (Ps. 94:12, NIV; Ps. 119:71).
- God disciplines but afterward re-establishes His love to us (Job 5:18; Jer. 31:18-20; Ps. 89:32-33).
- Love + Discipline = Happy Functional Children
- Correction correctly applied builds the child's esteem, the child feels more secure and happier

4.2 What are we seeking to instil into the lives of our children?

- minimize their negative tendencies,
- emphasize the positive
- help our kids discover and follow God's plan.

Scripture says discipline is the key. If a parent does not discipline, a child is likely to suffer dire consequences (Proverbs 5:23), whereas a disciplined child will bring peace and delight to a family (Proverbs 29:17).

- We have to outlast, outthink and outmanoeuvre our children and their inborn bent to foolishness.
- How does consistent discipline look like:
 - when we are tired,
 - when we are preoccupied,
 - when we are frustrated or angry,
 - when we would rather be relaxing.
 - Apply the same measure for the same offense for the different children
- The following principles will help you ensure that your discipline is consistent and fair:
 - **Create capacity that enables correct behaviour.**
 - Never punish for something a child didn't know was wrong. To do so would be unjust.

- Differentiate between childishness and defiance – never punish a child for being a child
- Allow/tolerate childish behaviour – never make a child to feel guilty for spilling milk as a result of being naturally clumsy.
- **Exercise appropriate and relevant punishment**
 - Don't burn the house in order to kill an ant - A small infraction should be met with a small form of correction
 - A big wrongdoing should be met with more stringent correction.
 - Don't pass on punishment to another parent especially if they were not present – this erodes your authority over the child. You have relevant information to decide on the appropriateness of the punishment.
- **Establish guidelines**
- Establish the child's personal responsibility. Have them tell you what they did wrong.
- Don't ask, "Did you do that?" You are giving them the opportunity to lie. Now you have two sins with which to deal.
- Don't ask, "Why did you do that?" You are giving them an opportunity to make up an excuse. Now you will have to judge the excuse.

- Do ask, “What did you do that was wrong?” Now you are giving them an opportunity to confess and at the same time you are reinforcing the original instruction.
- Explain again to the child the reason for discipline.
- Before you correct them, sit in silence for a few seconds for their personal reflection.
- Correct with a rod, a neutral object (Pro. 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; 23:13-14).
- Never use your hand. You use your hands to show love.
 - Never use the “eye for the eye” method (biting, pinching, pulling hair, scratching, slapping, etc.),
- Apply the board of education to the seat of knowledge.
- Correct firmly and do not let his or her crying stop you (Pro. 19:18; 20:30).
- Do not over correct – no more than is necessary.
- Show love afterward without nullifying discipline.
- Do not degrade the child; encourage him or her in right behavior patterns.
- Pray with your child and help him or her to pray for forgiveness.
- The child needs to understand that they have not just offended or sinned against you, they have sinned against God. They need to ask for

forgiveness from all offended parties. This will help build into them a God consciousness that will serve them for the rest of their life.

- If there is a need for restitution, have the child do it.
- They need to follow through on the original instruction, apologize to offended parties, replace what was damaged or give back what was taken.
- Be consistent!

SESSION TWO: PRESENT PARENTING

1. What does it mean to be a present parent?

- If we look at the dictionary the word present means the state or fact of existing, occurring or nearness or keeping one company.
- Nothing explains being present better than the relationship God had with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden
 - God would come down and fellowship with them
 - There was conversation
 - They enjoyed each other's presence - they enjoyed an intimate relationship
- A present parent is one who spends meaningful time with his/her children

- Sacrificing your Sunday naps to take kids on a bike ride or a walk
- Switching off your gadgets in order to give them undivided attention
- Doing what they enjoy doing – playing puzzles or monopoly
- Just talking with them, connecting emotionally

2. Why it is important to be present In a child's life

2.1 Parents are the vessels through whom God desires to promote His eternal purpose in each family (Gen 1:26-28).

- Parents are responsible for bringing children into the world.
- Parents are to aid in the production of godly character and maturity in the family members.
- Parents are to help bring forth God's deposit, potential and ministry that He has placed in each child.
- Parents are to see that their children come to know and experience true fellowship with God and with people.
- Parents are to protect children (guarding from sin, strife, idleness, worldliness, evil association etc)
 - They are valuable (Ps. 128:3).
 - They are damageable (Ps. 144:12).

- They are corruptible (Pro. 22:15).

2.2 Parents are the primary source of influence on their children

Influencing your child involves guiding them. To guide literally means to aim our children as one would aim an arrow. This is not passive involvement but active participation (Ps. 127:3-5).

Consider the following areas of influence:

- How to respond to authority (Pro. 1:8-9; 24:21-22).
- How to resist peer and social pressure (Pro. 1:10-14).
- How to avoid greed and covetousness (Pro. 1:15-19).
- How to value wisdom and avoid moral impurity (Pro. 2:1-22).
- How to earn respect by God and others (Pro. 3:1-10).
- How to handle finances and how to prosper (Pro. 3:1-10; 6:11-19).
- How to respond to correction (Pro. 3:11-20).

2.3 Unique challenges facing children at this point in history

- Rampage ungodliness
- Dangers of media and how it shapes worldviews
- Child abuse

3. When do we need to be most present

- At all times we need to be present for our kids - Parenting is a 24hr, 7day and 365 day job
- At crucial times of transitioning
 - When a new helper joins the home
 - When they start nursery school
 - When they start grade 1, high school etc
 - When they get to their puberty stage

4. Practical Ways of being a present parent

Children react to changes to their environment as well as to changes taking place within them. It is important to know what your child needs in the different situations.

Children have different and unique needs depending on their developmental stage.

4.1 Being present for babies

- Babies need touch the most when they are born.
 - Touch helps the bonding process between a baby and the parents.
 - Touch expresses feelings of love and affection
 - Touch removes feelings of being a stranger to them

- Breastfeeding (if possible) is a great way of being present
- Being playful e.g playing peekaboo

4.2 Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Engage in stimulating activities - A playtime routine
- Reading sessions
- Involving them in appropriate chores and tasks around the house
- Appropriate physical Touch
- Praying with and for them each day and teaching them the word of God
- Engage in meaningful conversations

4.3 School going age kids

- Going on dates -Having specific times set aside to spend time with each child
- Playing with them
- Praying with them and teaching them the word of God which is age appropriate.
Topics such as salvation, what is Christianity become more relevant for us to take time teaching them.
- Expressing love through touch - hugs and kisses

4.4 Teenagers

- All of the above (touch, dates, spiritual discipleship etc)
- Being interested in their hobbies
- Converse (two way communication) instead of information passing

- Master the art of question asking
 - Asks as many questions as possible – ask one question deeper.
 - Ask not interrogate but to understand
 - Pay attention to the answers you receive
 - Be open for questioning
 - Provide honest feedback

5. Reasons why parents might be absent

In today's world it is possible to be present physically but absent emotionally in a child's life. There are a number of factors that are leading to this sort of absenteeism.

Some reasons are:-

- More parents are working outside of the home and therefore spending less time with the children
- The parents might be going through difficult times e.g grief, sickness
- Paying more attention to their own hobbies or interests e.g a parent might be so interested in playing golf the whole weekend and they don't have time in their schedule.
- Addiction to Social media
- Not knowing better - Some parents are completely ignorant of their responsibilities.

6. Signs of being an absent parent

- Unable to engage in meaningful conversations with a child
- Not knowing what is going on in a child's life e.g at school
- Having no idea of who the child really is in terms of their character and personality
- Feeling a sense of guilt for not being there
- Not being there to teach your children or very little teaching is taking place

7. Consequences of being an absent parent

Some of the consequences that may arise from that present but absent parent are:

- Children feeling that they not important/valuable – lack of positive self esteem
- Lack of confidence in themselves and in communicating with authority
- Lack of identity – since no one ever affirmed them at home
- Behavioral problems e.g drug abuse as teens or adults – due to lack of guidance from parents
- Children departing from the Christian faith

8. Conclusion

Parenting requires a lot of hardwork and diligence. As a parent ask yourself what are some of the changes that I need to make in my life in order to be a present parent? It will require a lot of sacrifice but the reward of raising up Godly children will surpass some of the present things that we will have to let go of. Be diligent in your parenting. This can be summed up in the below verses:-

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 New Living Translation (NLT)

4 "Listen, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. 5 And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. 6 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. 7 Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. 8 Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 New Living Translation (NLT)

7 As apostles of Christ we certainly had a right to make some demands of you, but instead we were like children among you. Or we were like a mother feeding and caring for her own children. 8 We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too. 9 Don't you remember, dear brothers and sisters, how hard we worked among you? Night and day we toiled to earn a living so

that we would not be a burden to any of you as we preached God's Good News to you. 10 You yourselves are our witnesses—and so is God—that we were devout and honest and faultless toward all of you believers. 11 And you know that we treated each of you as a father treats his own children. 12 We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory.

SESSION THREE: BUILDING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH

CHILDREN

1. Relationship is Key

Parenting: It must be one of the hardest things to do. God uses it to chisel us and teach us as parents even as we are trying to mold and teach our children.

Parenting our children simply can't be outsourced, and it must stem from relationship with them as individuals (not a group of 2 or 3 or more).

1.1 God is a loving relational God

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;.." (Gen. 1:26)

And we know (understand, recognize, are conscious of, by observation and by experience) and believe (adhere to and put faith in and rely on) the love God cherishes for us. God is love, and he who dwells and continues in love dwells and continues in God, and God dwells and continues in him. (1 Jn. 4:16 AMP)

- God exists in relationship
- God is love

- He made man in His image, to exist in relationship, in family, in love.

1.2 God took time to walk with Adam and Eve and be present with them

Gen 3:8-10 *And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. (Gen. 3:8)*

1.3 When sin entered the world, relationship was severed, fear, deception, shame and hiding resulted

(9) *But the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, Where are you? (10) He said, I heard the sound of You [walking] in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself. (Gen. 3:9-10)*

The effects of sin were devastating first on man and second on creation. Before Adam and Eve disobeyed God (before the Fall), man was not sinful and enjoyed uninterrupted favour and fellowship with the Lord. When sin entered the world, this relationship was severed, man's nature was corrupted by sin and he was separated from God. This separation is referred to as spiritual death (Is. 59:2; Eph. 2:1, 3b, Rom. 6:23).

1.4 God made a way for His children to be in fellowship with Him again

God, however, perfect Father that He is, made a way for His children to be in perfect fellowship and communion with Him once again.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14)

God took responsibility as Father, to rebuild the relationship. Even though He was the one that had been wronged. Father's today could learn a lot from this example.

Parenting is about building relationship and using that as a platform for every aspect and responsibility that comes with being a parent.

Story-time:

William wanted to work with children. He saw how receptive they were and felt it was important to help them build Christian values into their lives at an early age. He especially wanted them to come to Christ. The pastor told the parents in the congregation that William would run a weekly children's club, starting the next Friday afternoon. The children were excited and the parents supportive. **Fifty children came** on that first Friday afternoon, some arriving early. William was delighted. He assembled the children on the floor and began to teach them about **God as Father and Creator**.

"They are soaking it up like little sponges," he thought.

After about fifteen minutes of teaching however, he noticed that a few were becoming restless. After about **twenty minutes**, more were restless and several were fidgeting. When two boys started a wrestling match in the back row he decided that

it was time to finish his teaching. So he rounded things off, congratulating himself on knowing when to stop.

The next Friday **thirty children turned up**. William had prepared a talk on the sinfulness of people. This time the children seemed to be **restless from the outset**. The two difficult boys started wrestling almost immediately. William decided to finish up sooner because of all the restlessness and wriggling so he stopped after fifteen minutes.

The following Friday, to William's disappointment, **only ten children arrived**. He had bought some cool drink and biscuits, which the children enjoyed, and then he sat them down to teach them,- this time about the crucifixion. The children did not seem very interested in what he had prepared for them and after a short time he stopped teaching and allowed them to go home. As the last children left the house he collapsed into a chair, exhausted and disillusioned.

Reflection:

- What was William's problem?
- Why do you think that happened?
- What was his relationship with the children? Motivate your answer.

The main problem was that William was so focused on the programme, that he forgot his relationship with the children. What he was teaching was more important than **who** he was teaching. So he was not aware of the real needs of the children. We can say that he was **programme-focused and not person-focused**.

Activities

1. Try to think of the person that had the greatest spiritual impact on your life. Then try to think why that person had such an influence on you. Was it because of what he or she taught you? Or because of the kind of person he or she was?
2. What do you think is meant by the following statement? Do you agree? Why do you say so? “Faith is caught and not taught.”

Negative Relationships and Their Impact

Walter Luthi tells a story from his childhood:

The neighbours’ children and I played together for hours in front our homes. We built sandcastles, made mud pies and pedalled our tricycles as hard as we could, round and round. We played to our hearts’ content. But regularly every afternoon the same thing happened. As the sun started going down, the neighbours’ children began to get restless. They lost interest in the games and toys and would cast anxious glances along the street, towards the corner. Then one of the boys would jump up and run to the corner and keep watch. As soon as he saw his Dad in the distance, he would yell: “The father is coming, the father is coming!” Then the children would scatter like chickens that had seen a hawk – sandcastles, mud pies and tricycles all forgotten.

None of them wanted to be the first to be noticed or spoken to by “the father” and particularly, get touched by him. Literally within a moment the street was deserted – except for a drunken Dad, weaving his way home.

Reflection:

- Why did the neighbour’s children act as they did – what do you think?
- The children called their Dad “the father”. What does that tell you about the relationship between them?
- What does this story teach us about relationships?

Relationships are at the core of our humanity. Relationships can be positive or negative. The children of Luthi’s neighbours had a negative relationship with their Dad. They were afraid of him and avoided him. They did not see him as “our Dad”, but just as “the father”. **When a parent or authority figure has a negative relationship with a child, they cause the child to develop a negative view of himself and to be unable to reach his potential. It also hampers his emotional and spiritual development. A negative emotional relationship with an adult who is important to him can also cause the child to develop a negative view of God.**

2. Building relationships

2.1 It starts in the heart.

- How do I view my children?
- How do I view time with them (forced, or other)?
- Do I carry them in my heart and pray for them?
- Do I craft prayers for them?

- Do I know their strengths and weaknesses? Possible gifts and callings?
- If they are boys, do I communicate respect to them?
- Do I keep my promises?
- Do I communicate with them in an age-appropriate manner?
- Do I communicate for them?
- Do I shame them or cause humiliation in public? (Publicly disciplining them?)

A child that does not find something of God in his father will find it difficult to find something of a father in God.

The classic story “The Little Prince” explains much about the power of building positive relationships with our children.

Story-time:

“I cannot play with you,” said the fox. “I am not tame,” “Oh! Please pardon me,” said the little prince. But after he had thought for a moment, he asked: “What does ‘tame’ mean?” “It is something which is often forgotten,” said the fox. “It means to form relationships.” “Form relationships?” “Yes, of course,” said the fox. “At the moment you mean nothing special to me. You are just a little boy, like hundred thousand other little boys. And to you I am just a fox, like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, we shall need each other. We shall be special to each other – the only one of our kind in all the world.” “My life is really boring. I hunt chickens and people hunt me. All the chickens are the same and all the people are the same. So I get quite bored. But if you tamed me, my life shall be bright, like sunlight. I will know the sound of your footsteps – they will sound different from all

the other footsteps. Those footsteps chase me back into my den under the ground, but yours will draw me like the sound of music, out of my dark hole.

The fox stopped talking and gazed at the little prince. "Please ... tame me!" he said.

"I would like to," replied the little prince "but I don't have much time. I need to find some friends and learn new things." "You'll understand only the things you have tamed," said the fox. "But these days people do not take the time really to understand things. They buy ready-made things at the shop. But no shop sells friends. If you want a friend, tame me!"

"How do I do that?" asked the little prince. "You'll have to be very patient," said the fox. "You need to sit down, a little distance from me, over there, on the grass. I'll watch you out of one eye, but you must keep quiet. Words only cause misunderstandings. But every day you may come and sit a bit closer to me..."

So the little prince tamed the fox. But then the time came to say goodbye... "Good bye," said the little prince. "Good bye," said the fox. "I shall tell you my secret. It is very simple. You only really see with your heart. The truly important things cannot be seen with the eyes."

"The truly important things cannot be seen with the eyes," the little prince repeated, to make sure that he would not forget." (A. de Saint-Exupery:56- 59)

Once our hearts are right, we can begin to build our relationship with our children. There are many aspects to this, but the aspect I will be looking closely at today is that of listening.

2.2 Learning to Listen to our Children

Being present with children puts you in a position to listen carefully to what they are saying. We will now focus on the skill of listening to children. The following story about Lameck's disappointment will help us gain a better understanding of this important skill.

Story-time:

Sam lives in a small village. Early every morning Sam walks one kilometer to work on his piece of land. Usually he plants maize, sweet potatoes and groundnuts. It is very important to him to provide for his family. During the afternoons after an exhausting day's work, Sam sits and relaxes in the shadow next to his house. A month ago Sam had bought a new radio in town. He enjoys listening to the music.

One day Sam's son Lameck comes hopping from school. Very excited he tells his father, "Dad, I had a cool soccer match today". With bright eyes he shows his father with his soccer ball made of plastic bags and how he scored a goal for his team. The jazz music over the radio plays loud. Sam nods his head to the beat and "hmm" with the tune as his son waits anxiously for some response. But his Dad's attention is far away. His body is moving with the beat of the jazz music over the radio.

It takes a while before Sam notices his son. He cannot think of anything better than the usual “How was the day at school?” “Okay,” Lameck responds, clearly disappointed and even irritated as he starts walking away with folded arms. He kicks a small stone lying in his way and says: “I’m very hungry, I’m going to eat.” His shoulders droop and there is disappointment all over his face as he enters the kitchen. “What’s the problem?” his concerned mother asks. “Mum, Dad doesn’t care. He doesn’t really listen to me.”

Reflection:

- Describe the way Sam “listened” to his son.
- How did Lameck experience the way that his father responded to him?
- What proved to Lameck that his father wasn’t really listening to him?
- What advice would you give Sam about really listening to his son?
- Think about a situation in your own life where you experienced that someone was not listening to you. What was it that convinced you that this person was not really listening? How did you feel at that moment?

Sam didn’t really listen to Lameck. He pretended, but his son saw through it. It is amazing how often people fail to listen to others. You must have heard many times someone exclaim: “You are not listening to what I’m saying”. What children look for in being there with them and listening is not the other person’s ability to repeat their words. They need more than a mere physical presence in communication with them; they need the other person to be present psychologically, socially and emotionally.

If you really want to listen to your children, it will be very helpful if you can give attention to the following four things:

- The world where the children live in (their context)
- Their non-verbal behaviour (what they communicate without using words)
- The words that they say
- The feelings that they experience

a.) Focus on the children's world or context

To really listen to and understand your children is to enter the world where they live. You must meet them at their level. The soccer match was very important for Lameck, but his father failed to hear that. Sam was caught up in his own world. The boy felt that his father didn't accept and love him. It is very important to be attentive to what children are doing and to be sensitive for their world.

Story-time:

Listen to the following two children expressing their feelings to somebody else.

Pedro is 11 years old and Megan is 12. Both were sharing their feelings with an adult they felt they could trust:

Pedro: "I felt many times very lonely and it seems that nobody cares for me".

Megan: "Although I have everything I need, it seems to me that nobody loves me. Sometimes I feel very lonely; I need someone to talk to; I need someone that loves me."

What do you think are the reasons for the negative experiences of these children?

Pedro's story:

I live in Angola. My stepfather used to drink a lot and he would maltreat my mother. I couldn't do anything about it because I am a child. I ran away from home when I was 10. I lived with some friends on the street. There were about 10 of us. Some were even younger than me. The oldest was around 14. To earn money, I would wash cars. At times I didn't get very much, so I used to go to a square where there are many small eateries. I'd wash plates there. It didn't pay very well – only 15 kwanzas (about \$1US) – but they'd also give me dinner. I'd use the money to buy more food. Life on the streets was really difficult. We used to sleep on pieces of cardboard. When it rained, we'd take shelter under buildings. The police would sometimes find us and we had to run away and find some other place to sleep. My friends led me astray. I started taking drugs. One day, the police caught me and took me to the station. They threatened me so much that I stopped taking drugs. My friends didn't treat me well. When I did something wrong, they told me off. Sometimes they beat me up too. One day, they threw me out of the group. I felt many times very lonely and it seems that nobody cares for me.

Megan's story:

I live in a very beautiful town in South Africa. We have a double story house with 3 garages. My father is a doctor and my mother a primary school teacher. I have a very beautiful room. I like china-dolls. I have fifteen dolls with the most awesome dresses. We have our own movie theatre. There is a big screen television set two times higher than myself. My father has a very big boat that we sometimes use during December

holidays. My father bought me a four-wheel motorbike that I like to ride on Saturdays. My parents are very busy and have very little time to spend with me. My father never attends any of my sport matches. Although I have everything I need, it seems to me that nobody loves me. Sometimes I feel very lonely; I need someone to talk to; I need someone that loves me.

Reflection:

- What are the differences in context between Pedro and Megan?
- How will the two different contexts influence you if you listen to Pedro and Megan

respectively?

b.) Focus on children's non-verbal communication

In our story above Sam failed to pick up both the verbal and the non-verbal cues in his communication with his son Lameck. If he really listened to Lameck, what non-verbal cues could he have picked up?

The way Lameck moved towards his father after the soccer match already conveyed a clear message – he was so excited that he was hopping along. His brightened face also conveyed his excitement and happiness. It was also no coincidence that he continued to play with his homemade soccer ball or even kicked a little stone on the ground. In his mind he was replaying the memorable soccer match. When Sam failed to allow his son an opportunity to share his joys about the soccer match, deep disappointment and frustration were communicated through his folded arms, his

walking away, his drooping shoulders and the expression on his face. His mother did not need any words to really hear his deeper emotions.

Communication without using words is the basic way of conveying information to another person. Long before a baby can speak it expresses its happiness or dissatisfaction without any words, using noises and gestures such as the moving of its arms. Even with adults it is estimated that non-verbal communication comprises two-thirds of our communication, with words making up for the remaining third.

Mehrabian wanted to know what cues people use to judge whether another person likes them or not. He and his associates discovered that the other person's actual words contributed only 7% to the impression of being like or disliked, while other voice cues contributed 38% and facial expressions 55%. They also found that when facial expressions were inconsistent with spoken words, facial expressions were believed more than words. This clearly shows the importance of non-verbal communication in relationships with people. It can be assumed that this is even more so in our relationships with our children.

The face and the body are extremely communicative. The part of the body providing most of the clues is the face. Somebody once said: "The most important thing we wear is the expression on our face." That is also true of children. Quite often their feelings are written on their faces. They cannot hide it.

If we really want to build relationships with children we must "listen" very carefully to their:

- Bodily behaviour such as posture, body movements and gestures
- Facial expressions such as smiles, frowns, raised eyebrows and twisted lips
- Voice-related behaviour such as tone of the voice, pitch, voice level, intensity, inflection, spacing of the words, pauses and silences.

The reverse is true too. We need to communicate God in all ways, and when necessary, use words.

c.) Focus on what our Children say In Words

Most children like to talk. Quite often they are merely talking, without saying much. At other times they may be imitating others, without knowing the deeper meaning of what they say. This may tempt us to underestimate the value of what children say in words. This will be a big mistake. We need to learn to really hear what they say. They may not be as accurate or as logical as people more experienced in expressing themselves. But much of what goes on inside of them is expressed in the words they say. It takes much time and practice for children to be able to express their feelings, fears, intentions or dreams. Even adults find this difficult. This makes it so important to be able to listen when children express things from deep inside.

Let us return to Lameck's story. This time we will focus on the actual words he used and the way his father understood it.

Reflection:

- What did Lameck tell his father? What were his actual words?

- Do you think that there was enough in the words to help his father realise that Lameck was bursting with excitement? Why do you say so?
- What does this show us about the way children express in words what they feel inside?
- Why did Sam fail to hear what his son was saying?

Lameck expressed his experience and feelings through telling his father that he had a 'cool' soccer match. Sam didn't realise how important this match was for his son.

A child's way of expressing their experiences and feelings may differ from the way we adults would do it. During childhood their language and thinking is still developing. We need to know this and take extra trouble to really hear what they say.

Listen to the way Danny Dutton described God and the reason why he believes in Him. He is from Chula Vista in California. He wrote this when he was 8 years old and in Grade three:

One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grown-ups, just babies – I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way, He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray all the time, besides bedtime.

God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because He hears everything there must be a terrible lot of noise in His ears, unless He has thought of a way to turn it off.

God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere, which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting His time by going over your mom and Dad's head, asking for something they said you couldn't have.

Atheists are people who don't believe in God. I don't think there are any in Chula Vista. At least there aren't any who come to our church.

Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind like His Father and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said okay.

His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore – He could stay in heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary, only more important. You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to hear you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time.

You should always go to church on Sunday because it makes God happy, and if there's anybody you want to make happy, it's God. Don't skip church to do something you think will be more fun, like going to the beach. This is wrong! And, besides, the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

If you don't believe in God, besides being an atheist, you will be very lonely, because you parents can't go everywhere with you, like to camp but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim very well and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids. But you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and He can take me back anytime He pleases. And that's why I believe in God.

Reflection:

- What is there in Danny's views about God that you found refreshing and challenging?

What is there in what he said that you do not accept, or would have expressed differently?

d.) Focus On The Feelings That The Children Experienced

If we really want to have a good positive relationship with children we must have insight into and understand their feelings. How did Sam handle his son Lameck's feelings about the soccer match? Sam failed to understand his son's feelings about the soccer match. The secret of understanding another person is to listen to his or her feelings. We must learn to detect the feelings behind the words and the non-

verbal expressions. Quite often these feelings are what the person really wants to or needs to communicate.

A child may tell you, "I'm going to quit soccer". This may be a simple, factual communication, telling you exactly what the words mean, namely that the child will stop playing soccer. More often than not, however, there is a different meaning to this statement. And this different meaning can only be found by looking at the feelings behind the words. We should try to find out what the child really is saying. It could be any of the following, or even something different:

- "I am unhappy with the way that my soccer coach treated me."
- "Today I failed to kick the ball properly."
- "I'm scared of my coach."
- "I'm worried because I have no time to prepare my homework."
- "I am very sad because they dropped me from the soccer team."

Why is it important to listen to a child's feelings? The feelings can be regarded as the door to the inside of the person. If I open this door I come very close to that person. They also allow me into the child's inner world and provide a parenting opportunity, or discipleship moment.

Activity 1:

Try to list as many emotions as you can. It may help to ask a friend or two to help you. You may even have a little competition with some friends to see who can list the

most different emotions. You can then compare and combine the two lists to have even more emotions.

People that have made similar lists of emotions have come to the conclusion that all different emotions can be grouped into five primary feelings. These primary five are popularly expressed as being glad, sad, mad, bad and scared. As one would expect, this list has been criticised as being too simplistic. The argument is that our emotions are much more complex than we think. There can be an infinite variety or even mixture of different emotions. This may be true. Yet we are going to use this very simple list of five primary emotions in the discussion that follows. We believe that it can be very helpful in recognising and understanding the emotions of children.

Activity 2:

The table below lists six different statements made by children. Carefully consider each statement and try to describe the emotion that might be behind it in a short statement. With the first statement is given as an example, with the emotion already described.

The child says	The emotion behind the words:
1. The bus driver yelled at me when we went to play hockey.	Everybody laughed at me. I was so embarrassed!
2. I'd like to punch that Jeffrey in his nose!	
3. Just because of a little rain my teacher said we couldn't go on our picnic. She's so dumb!	

4. Lucy invited me to her birthday party, but I don't know.....	
5. Sibongile is my best friend. She is moving away to a very far place. We are not going to see each other again.	
6. We had a soccer match today and I failed to score a goal.	

Activity 3

In the table above add a possible primary emotion to the emotion you have already indicated. Glad Sad Mad Bad Scared

3. Responding with empathy

We have already given attention to the first two major skills of listening and talking to children, namely to be there with children and to listen to them. We now come to the third and last – responding with empathy.

There is a direct connection between how kids feel and how they behave.

Often as parents, we don't focus on our child's feelings. We sometimes make the mistake of seeing their feelings as not important or serious. We have seen that an attitude of accepting a child is one of the characteristics of a person that builds positive relationships with children. One aspect of accepting a child is not to deny but accept their feelings. The problem is that quite often children's feelings are not taken seriously. They are told directly or indirectly:

- "You don't really feel that way."

- “You are just saying that because you’re tired.”
- “There is no reason to be upset.”

In what follows we evaluate two different reactions to a short statement by 8 year old

Samuel. Samuel rushed home one Wednesday afternoon and exclaimed to his mother Sara: “I’d like to punch that Jeffrey in his nose!”

Reaction No 1:

Samuel: I’d like to punch that Jeffrey in his nose!

Mother Sara: Why? What happened?

Samuel: Jeffrey threw my notebook in the dirt!

Mother Sara: Well, did you do something to him first?

Samuel: No!

Mother Sara: Are you sure?

Samuel: I swear, I never touched him.

Mother Sara: Well, Jeffrey is your friend. If you take my advice, you’ll forget about the whole thing. You’re not so perfect, you know. Sometimes you start up and then blame someone else – the way that you do with your brother.

Samuel: No I don’t. He starts up with me first ... Oh, I can’t talk to you!

Reaction No. 2

Samuel: I’d like to punch that Jeffrey in his nose!

Mother Sara: You’re angry Sam!

Samuel: I’d like to push his fat face in!

Mother Sara: You're that mad at him!

Samuel: You know what that bully did? He grabbed my notebook at the bus stop and threw it in the dirt. And for no reason!

Mother Sara: Hmmmm!

Samuel: I bet he thought I was the one who broke his pencil in the class.

Mother Sara: You think so?

Samuel: He kept looking at me all the time he was crying.

Mother Sara: Oh?

Samuel: Well I didn't do it on purpose! I couldn't help when Leah pushed me into the table.

Mother Sara: So Leah pushed you?

Samuel: Yeah. A lot of things got knocked down, but the only thing that broken was the pencil. I didn't mean to break it.

Mother Sara: OK. You didn't mean to. Did you get hurt?

And so on.

Reflection:

- Which reaction of Sara was the best? Why?
- If you were in Samuel's position, how would you have felt if somebody responded to you in the way that Sara did in reaction no. 1?

In the first reaction Samuel's mother did not accept his feelings. She responded by asking questions, evaluating what he did and giving advice about what Samuel should do in the future. This response put Samuel on the defensive and he reacted by stopping the conversation. For Samuel there is no point in continuing. His mother

failed to look at the looked at the whole situation from his perspective. He got the message that his mother didn't understand him or care for him.

In the second reaction Samuel's mother accepted his feelings. She acknowledged his feelings and gave him a chance to talk more about what was troubling him. She tried to look from Samuel's perspective to his situation. He experienced that his mother understood. We can see that she responded with empathy. Empathy means to be able to see, as it were through the child's own eyes, what his or her world looks like.

If I want to respond with empathy I must set aside my own frame of reference and attempt, without prejudice or preconceived ideas, to hear and understand the child and to convey such understanding to the child verbally and non-verbally. The latter is most important because it is of no benefit to the child if you understand him or her, but the child is unaware of it.

To respond with empathy to their feelings you can:

- Acknowledge their feelings with a word like "Oh ... Mmm ... I see ..."
- Give the feeling a name like "That sounds frustrating".

This conversation took place on the way from school one afternoon after the first soccer practise of the winter sports term in 2015.

Me: Hi Sammy

Samuel: Hi Mom

Me: How was school Samuel?

Samuel: Fine.

Me: Who did you play with today?

Samuel: My friends.

Me: How was soccer?

Samuel: He didn't respond. Shrugged his shoulders and looked away from me.

Me: What's wrong Samuel?

Samuel: Soccer practice was horrible today. I don't like school soccer.

Me: Oh. Why? What happened?

Samuel: It's not fun. My friends say that hockey was fun. I want to do hockey. They get to play. They said it's fun.

Me: Oh. I see. Why is soccer not fun?

Samuel: I don't like school soccer. It's not fun. I want to do hockey.

Me: Oh. Well, hockey is on a Monday afternoon. If you do hockey, you won't have any free afternoons. Is that what you want?

Samuel: No

Me: What happened in soccer?

Samuel: We just did pass and trap for the whole practise. And the other team got to play a game.

Me: Oh. That must have been frustrating.

Samuel: Yes! And our coach put me with two guys who aren't good and so I didn't even get to pass and trap a lot.

Me: Oh dear. I'm sorry Samuel. How were the teams chosen?

Samuel: The coaches just put some boys in one and some in another. Some of my friends were with me and some were in the other team. The other team got to play matches.

Me: I am sorry Samuel.

Samuel: It's not fair! The other team's coach let them play, but ours didn't. When we asked him why we couldn't play, he just told us the other coach was a different coach and we were doing pass and trap and that's that.

Me: Sorry Samuel. That must have been disappointing.

Samuel: Yes. I don't want to play soccer.

Me: Well, you do love soccer, and you are good at it. There is soccer three times a week. Do you think it may be different on the other afternoons?

Samuel: Maybe.

Me: Are they still doing soccer trials this week?

Samuel: Yes Mom, I have already told you that.

Me: Well, I guess if they are doing soccer trials there must be matches coming up. Is that right?

Samuel: Yes, I guess so. Next week there is a match on Wednesday.

Me: Do you think they will have more than one team?

Samuel: Yes. They have an A, B and C team for swimming and an A and B team for cricket. I think they will have more than one team.

Me: Well, I am sure you will make one of the teams. Do you think you will play a match next week?

Samuel: Yes, definitely, on Wednesday.

Me: That will be great! So you just have a few more soccer practices this week and then you will get to play a match next week.

Samuel: Yes!

Me: And will you have the same coach every time?

Samuel: No, I don't think so. Mom, I feel happy now. Hey mom, you have made me feel happy now.

As this conversation started, I determined to utilise empathic listening tools. These types of conversations with Samuel can sometimes be challenging for me, but in this case it was actually relatively easy. I focused on listening and responding with empathy as opposed to controlling the outcome of the conversation or modifying how he sees the situation. The outcome was very positive. He was open about his feelings, we were more bonded after the conversation and we came to a point of resolving the issue at hand together.

Activity:

The table that follows again has a list of statements that children can make. Use the second column to briefly describe the emotion that might be contained in that statement. Use the last column to write down an appropriate response. Use the following guidelines:

- Listen carefully what the child is saying
- Try to capture the child's emotion in a short statement
- Try to respond with a statement that shows the child that you understand and that leaves room for the child to continue expressing himself or herself.

The child says	The emotion in the statement	A statement that shows you understand the feeling
The bus driver yelled at me and everybody laughed.	I was so embarrassed!	That must have been very embarrassing!
My sister is so annoying. She always comes in my room and touches my things without asking, even though I tell her not to do. Every time touches my stuff I should just grab one of her CD's and break it!		
Bryan has such a big mouth! He's like a little baby because he has to cry to all his friends and tell them things about me that I wanted to be kept secret. He should just mind his business and shut his stupid mouth!		
I don't like my brother. He is always teasing me. This was the best birthday party I ever had! I scored one goal today in		

my sports match.		
------------------	--	--

Remember that listening to a child is an active process that does not just happen by itself; we have to make it happen. We have to make a conscious, deliberate, and continuing commitment to listen. It demands energy and dedication.

Conclusion

In order to parent our children effectively, it is essential that we as parents pursue a relationship with them. Just as God our Father made a way for our communion with Him to be fully restored, even so, we should build our relationships with our children. This relationship provides a healthy basis for discipleship, loving discipline, watching over them, guiding them and fulfilling all the various roles of parent. To effectively do this, our hearts as parents need to be positioned aright towards our children. We need to truly listen to them, without negating their experiences, and respond appropriately with empathy.