Pharos Journal of Theology ISSN 2414-3324 online Volume 107 (4) Regular Issue (2026)
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The notions of *fathering* and *mothering* at the heart of parenting in contemporary society: A practical theological foundation

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https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.107.4031

Abstract

This paper examines the evolving conceptualizations of parenting in contemporary society, focusing on the ways in which the interconnected practices of fathering and mothering have expanded beyond traditional gendered paradigms. The analysis demonstrates a significant shift in paternal roles from exclusive breadwinning toward emotional presence and active domestic participation, while maternal roles are increasingly shaped by professional engagement and the reconfiguration of caregiving beyond maternal exclusivity. Central to this discussion is parenting from a biblical perspective, which forms the foundation of this paper and centers on love, discipline, and guidance rooted in God's Word. Parents are called to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6) and to nurture them "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Notably, contemporary culture is experiencing a significant fathering crisis that threatens our shared humanity. Although scientific studies indicate that fathers provide essential developmental benefits, television frequently portrays them as foolish or unskilled. The diminishing of the father's role contributes to substantial societal challenges, and research suggests that father absence may be associated with increased risks of adverse social and educational outcomes, although these outcomes may of course be influenced by multiple socio-economic factors. Addressing this issue requires an understanding that human fatherhood should reflect God's selfless love and providential care for others. In contrast, the act of mothering extends beyond a mere role; it constitutes a complex social process in which women balance the practical demands of childcare with the pressure to embody society's "perfect mother" image. Because it links individual experiences to broader social norms, mothering serves as a crucial area where personal identity and cultural standards intersect and are redefined.

Keywords: fathering; mothering; parenting; contemporary society; family well-being

Introduction

Over the past two decades, I have developed an extensive body of academic research examining the significance of fatherhood, the practice of fathering, the challenges of father absence, and their impact on family well-being. This scholarly trajectory is rooted in my 2004

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practical-theological study, which investigated the role of absent fathers in the South African context (Freeks, 2004). This study engaged the broader global trend of father absence and highlighted its particularly detrimental effects in local communities, where it is often associated with increased crime, poor discipline, and identity crises among children (Freeks, 2004).

My empirical research – particularly my qualitative study conducted in Promosa, Potchefstroom – provided detailed insights into the trauma and financial strain experienced by families where fathers are unbetrothed or uninvolved (Freeks, 2004). My work also demonstrates that active fathering, characterized by quality time, appropriate physical affection, and words of affirmation, is a vital factor in supporting child development, cognitive growth, and the formation of a healthy self-concept (Freeks, 2004, 2011, 2018).

My academic approach is distinctly multidisciplinary, integrating biblical perspectives with metatheoretical insights from sociology, psychology, and social work. I argue that the father's role extends far beyond economic provision; a father functions as a leader, protector, and provider who is indispensable for the spiritual, emotional, and social stability of the family. Central to my research is the assertion that biblical counseling serves as a crucial tool in addressing and altering the trajectory of father absence, enabling men to reclaim their "divine and rightful role" in the home (Freeks, 2011).

The father as a mentor is characterized by a deep commitment to guiding his children through an active and intentional relationship. It is insufficient for a father to merely reside in the same household; he must purposefully share his knowledge and life experiences to support his children's development into capable adults. By serving as a spiritual guide and teacher, he offers the encouragement and discipline necessary for building strong character. Such a relationship reflects biblical examples of leadership, in which an experienced mentor empowers a younger individual. When a father fulfills this role, he makes a lasting impact that shapes his children's identities and influences the broader community through the transmission of healthy values (Freeks, 2011).

Along with this, missional fatherhood represents a dedicated spiritual commitment in which fathers lead through selfless, sacrificial living to instill biblical values and Christ's love deeply within their children. Such an intentional approach directly confronts the destructive epidemic of father absence, a factor often linked to social pathologies including crime, poverty, and severe mental health crises. By modeling godly character, these fathers enable children to better understand the nature of God the Father and nurture a lifelong orientation toward community service. As a result, families become active and vital participants in God's mission, addressing urgent societal needs through generosity and witness. Ultimately, this restorative parenting model stabilizes communities by effectively breaking negative generational cycles of abandonment and family dysfunction (Freeks, 2018). Thus, the purpose of this article is to develop a practical theological framework for understanding fathering and mothering as complementary dimensions of parenting in contemporary society.

To date, as both an author and academic, I have published more than 65 scholarly articles examining the complex dynamics of fatherhood, the role of the father, father absence, and family well-being. A consistent theme across my publication record is the understanding that the Fatherhood of God serves as the ultimate archetype for human fathers, who are called to model the attributes of Jesus Christ in their daily lives. Through my extensive academic contributions, I continue to advocate strongly for the restoration of fatherhood as a prerequisite for the health and flourishing of broader South African society.

From the viewpoint of my fellow collaborator: Over the past two decades, I have been developing an extensive body of research and academic work centered on motherhood, maternal thinking, and their significance for the *missio Dei*. My foundational scholarship is rooted in my PhD dissertation, which examines transforming mutuality within a theology of

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mission through a case study of a Colombian congregation (Rheinbolt-Uribe, 2023). A consistent theme in my work is the systemic marginalization of maternal wisdom within theological discourse. I have shown empirically how mothers, grandmothers, and extended family networks sustain faith and community resilience during periods of institutional collapse.

Maternal thinking constitutes a distinct epistemological stance. I contend that maternal wisdom, particularly from Global South contexts such as Colombia and South Africa, offers a transformative perspective for challenging Western-centric theology and developing more pluriversal approaches to Christian mission. Missional motherhood encompasses relational presence, sacrificial love, and the embodiment of Christ's compassion, directly countering what I identify as systemic motherlessness (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2025b). Eventually, maternal thinking provides a foundational knowledge system for human flourishing and spiritual formation, positioning mothers as central agents in God's mission of restoration and care.

Moreover, in contemporary society, the concepts of fathering and mothering are best interpreted as fluid, co-constructed roles that transcend traditional binaries, reflecting cultural pluralism, egalitarian principles, and shifting familial norms. These parenting practices are understood through theological frameworks, and grounded in doctrines of divine love, covenantal obligation, and stewardship, which collectively inform the moral and spiritual dimensions of fathering and mothering. Within contemporary scholarship, fathering and mothering are recognized as integral to family well-being, providing emotional regulation, ethical orientation, and relational support that collectively sustain familial resilience and cohesion.

A Note on Family Structures and Parenting Across Diverse Contexts

While this paper highlights the complementary roles of fathering and mothering as fundamental to parenting in contemporary society, we recognize that many children are raised in family structures where a biological mother and father are not present. I work extensively in Colombian contexts, where grandmothers, aunts, and other female kin often serve as primary caregivers. Similarly, Fazel's research in South African communities documents the important contributions of extended family members, particularly mothers and grandmothers, to family well-being during periods of father absence.

The biblical narrative itself demonstrates the recurring significance of alternative caregiving structures and non-biological parenting relationships. Moses, born to Hebrew parents during a period of persecution, was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, who became his mother in every meaningful sense (Exodus 2:1-10). In a similar manner, Jesus Christ, though conceived by the Holy Spirit, was raised by Joseph, a man who was not his biological father but who fulfilled the role of earthly father by providing protection, guidance, and the transmission of cultural and spiritual values (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 2:39-52). Joseph's paternal presence was vital to Jesus's development and safety, illustrating that fatherhood extends beyond biological parentage. Furthermore, the New Testament establishes the importance of extended family care through the example of Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother, who transmitted faith across generations and were cited by Paul as models of genuine faith (2 Timothy 1:5). These biblical examples demonstrate that the roles of mothering and fathering are not limited to biological relationships but encompass relational capacities and spiritual orientations that can be embodied by any committed caregiver.

The principles of mothering and fathering articulated in this paper are not limited to biological parents. Instead, they refer to relational capacities and spiritual orientations that can be embodied by any committed caregiver, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, or family members. As previously discussed in the paper, a family may consist of a single

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parent and children, grandparents, extended kin, child-headed households, or any group of individuals dedicated to collective care.

We recognize that many of the parenting responsibilities and virtues described here (protection, guidance, spiritual mentorship, emotional presence, and value transmission) can be shared among multiple caregivers and are not exclusively associated with gender or biological connection. In fact, *ubuntu* philosophy affirms that "it takes a village to raise a child", acknowledging that parenting responsibilities are distributed throughout communities. Children flourish when they are surrounded by several nurturing figures who demonstrate both strength and tenderness, leadership and compassion, irrespective of biological relationship or gender identity.

We stress, therefore, that our focus on the complementary dimensions of fathering and mothering as ideals does not diminish the significant contributions of single parents, extended family members, or other caregiving configurations that support children's well-being and moral development across diverse contexts worldwide. Rather, by articulating the qualities and spiritual orientations inherent in mothering and fathering, we present a framework that all committed caregivers, regardless of their relationship to the child, can adopt and exemplify.

Parenting From a Fathering Point of View

Parke and Cookston (2019:64-65) observe that contemporary research increasingly recognizes fathering as a distinct and essential dimensions of family life, rather than merely a supplementary role to motherhood. Nevertheless, a father's relationship with his child can be readily disrupted by parental conflict or physical distance. Given that mothers are frequently regarded as the primary experts in parenting, fathers often model their interactions with children on maternal approaches. Notably, a father's warmth and sensitivity can provide a stabilizing effect on family cohesion, even when the mother experiences depression. Although fathers were frequently overlooked in earlier research, it has become evident that the extent of their involvement is influenced by the degree to which mothers permit their participation, a dynamic referred to as *gatekeeping.* Ultimately, fatherhood encompasses a complex interplay of biological influences and societal expectations (Freeks, 2011).

As Cabrera et al. (2018:152–153) note, fathers are parents in their own right and play an important role in children's development. Current research demonstrates that focusing exclusively on mothers represents an outdated perspective, as fathers play an equally crucial role in a child's upbringing. Although traditionally regarded primarily as "breadwinners", fathers significantly influence children's cognitive and behavioral development through their direct engagement. In many contemporary families, fathers assume an active role in daily childcare; the quality and significance of their interactions with their children contribute more to development than the mere quantity of hours spent together. Researchers are increasingly encouraged to consider the family as a whole and to recognize fathers as essential, integral members of the parenting team.

Collaborative Partnerships Between Father and Mother Enhance Parenting Practices

According to Freeks (2008), collaborative partnerships between fathers and mothers contribute to improved parenting practices. Children are described as a gift from God to parents, while parents are equally considered a gift from God to children. Consequently, parents and children together constitute a family comprising individuals of equal value. Contemporary society, however, is confronted by a reversal of this dynamic, with increasing instances of boys assuming paternal roles and girls assuming maternal roles. Within this evolving context, the definition of *family* becomes complex. A family may consist of a couple, a couple with children, a single parent with children, or extend to include grandparents, uncles,

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aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, in-laws, child-headed households, or even two or more individuals who choose to form a family unit.

Healthy family relationships are essential in any society because aspects such as well-being, health and happiness lead to quality of life (Freeks, 2008). The connections among individuals who constitute a family are not merely coincidental or simply the result of people residing together. Healthy relationships within a family are considered a gift from God. These relationships are characterized by mutual love, respect, acceptance, commitment, loyalty, protection, responsibility, sharing, communication, intellectual stimulation, physical (not sexual) interaction, and involvement in social life (Freeks, 2008).

Physical relationships among family members represent a fundamental aspect of family life and parenting. It is important to distinguish these interactions from sexual caressing, fondling, and intercourse. Gestures such as greeting one another with hugs and kisses, as well as affectionate touch, serve to express the unique bond shared between parents, children, and other family members. Couples should feel comfortable demonstrating affection in the presence of their children, thereby helping children understand that physical interaction within the family context is healthy and appropriate. Children benefit from experiencing their parents' care in tangible ways: for example, being hugged upon returning home from school, comforted physically when distressed, or engaging in physical activities such as netball and soccer. At the same time, safeguarding children from emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse remains paramount. Parents have a duty to protect their children from all forms of abuse (Freeks, 2008)

The Fundamental Role of the Father and Mother Regarding Children's Education

The crucial role of the father

All fathers possess a divinely ordained role within the family. Man is regarded as heaven's masterpiece, and the father serves as the central figure within the household. No father enters the world without inherent responsibilities and duties. However, many children today grow up in families where fathers have neglected their obligations to both their wives and children. Husbands and fathers who exemplify Christian living serve as vital role models for children, who benefit from witnessing authentic examples of faith in everyday life (Freeks, 2004).

Drawing on principles of sacrificial love as articulated in 1 Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 5:25-29, where husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church, the father's headship is interpreted not as authoritarian rule, but as servant leadership marked by self-sacrifice, emotional engagement, and spiritual guidance for the well-being of the family as a whole.

Furthermore, the father serves as both priest and head of his household, and he is expected to govern his family in accordance with the principles and regulations of the Bible (1 Corinthians 11:3). The father continues to fulfil the role of breadwinner, charged with providing for his family's physical, spiritual, emotional, and financial needs. He functions as God's instrument for leadership, exemplifying the life and character that God intended. It is essential that the father acts as a positive role model to his children, avoiding conduct that would bring shame upon his family. He remains accountable before God to lead his family with sacrificial love. Children can comprehend the concept of God more fully when they can relate to their earthly or physical father (Freeks, 2004)

Moreover, he should adhere to sound principles and strive to align his life with the teachings of the Bible. His conduct ought to be evident in the daily lives of his children. He is expected to exemplify a godly character, be a follower of Christ, and exhibit qualities such as humility,

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gentleness, and patience towards his children (2 Timothy 2). The father, therefore, must serve as a model who fosters and nurtures God's love and Word within the family (Freeks, 2008).

In addition, the father bears the responsibility of ensuring that God is both worshipped and obeyed. His disposition should reflect godliness and spirituality. He is accountable for shaping and instilling his children's identity. The principal role of the father is to provide for and nurture his family (1 Timothy 5:8). He is called to lead his household (Proverbs 1:9), acting as both teacher and leader, imparting wisdom and cultivating responsibility. The father should instruct his family according to the Word of God, enabling his children to embody values such as honesty, discipline, and obedience. From a biblical perspective, the father is regarded as the priest, ruler, educator, and manager of his family (Freeks, 2004)

In addition, the father's physical involvement contributes significantly to the strength and stability of the family, enabling it to withstand challenges and adversity.

A father's presence is crucial for his children, as he plays a key role in instilling values, norms, standards, principles, ethics and character. His active participation at home is vital, since childrearing should not be regarded solely as the mother's responsibility. The father must facilitate communication within the family and inspire his children, particularly his son(s), to become responsible fathers themselves in the future. His involvement should begin during the mother's pregnancy and continue through the early care of the child. Furthermore, he ought to support the child's social development, especially regarding friendships and engagement with the broader community (Freeks, 2004).

A physical and spiritual connection between fathers and children is therefore essential. When the father's conduct is exemplary, it fosters a lasting bond of affection between himself and his children. The value children place on their love for their father often translates into a similar reverence towards God. Trust and faith in their earthly father can also cultivate trust and faith in God (Freeks, 2004)

The crucial role of the mother

God's creative work was not complete until He made woman. He could have formed her from the dust of the ground, as He did with man. However, God chose to create her from the man's flesh and bone. While man and woman symbolically became one flesh, man gives life to woman, and woman, in turn, gives life to the world (Genesis 1:27; 2:20-23). Consequently, each role possesses distinct privileges and authority within marriage and parenting. God created man and woman with unique and complementary characteristics; thus, neither gender is superior to the other. When fathers and mothers understand their roles and recognize their individual gifts and talents, they can enhance the educational development of their children (Freeks, 2008).

Furthermore, the mother must assist the father in the home, as her ability to educate their children may sometimes diminish, requiring the father to provide his support and strength. Therefore, it is essential for the mother to aid her husband (father) in the education of their children, and for the father to do the same in return. Both parents should demonstrate submission to one another, as God ordained submission to maintain order; however, submission does not imply surrender. Rather, it denotes a mutual commitment and cooperative effort for the benefit of the children (Freeks, 2008).The mother should love the father, and likewise, the father should love the mother. They ought to honour, obey, and respect one another for the sake of their children and in reverence to God (Freeks, 2008).

Notably, the mother exerts a considerable influence on her children's development, as she remains consistently attentive to their needs. Her role includes addressing her children's physical requirements, such as preparing food, providing clothing, and arranging bedding. She

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continually ensures her family's well-being by making certain they have enough to eat and are dressed warmly during cold weather. The mother is committed to her children's safety and experiences unease or restlessness if any of her children are not at home (Freeks, 2008).

In conclusion, God's intention and purpose for parents is to shape and equip them for various responsibilities, all of which ultimately serve the same objective: to honour God, regardless of whether one is a mother, father, or child. God's overarching purpose for family and parenting is to bring blessings upon all members: father, mother, and children.

Parenting from a Mothering Point of View

Following Ruddick (1995), this paper understands mothering as the practice of responding to children's demands for preservation, growth, and social acceptability, a practice not limited by the caregiver's gender or biological status. To Ruddick's three practices we add a fourth, release (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2024, Rheinbolt-Uribe & Freeks, 2026:80), which completes the arc by empowering the nurtured other toward autonomy and independent flourishing. We call this the "fourfold maternal practice."

As a mother of three and a researcher engaged in both Colombian and South African contexts, I approach this practice from within. As confirmed by the research of Narvaez et al. (2016), mothers play a vital role in shaping their children's development, both during pregnancy and after birth. My perspective is informed by the same principles that underpin Freeks' (2025b) paternal analysis: parenting as a lifelong responsibility; the extension of parenting beyond childhood into adulthood; the evolving nature of the parental role as children mature, shifting from guidance to support; and the enduring influence of parenting on emotional resilience and decision-making.

My understanding of mothering is also grounded in an African epistemological framework: the "thinking-with-the-womb" that Kiboko (2001:213) draws from a 98-year-old Sanga woman's insight that "she has a womb, the matrix of knowledge." It names an embodied epistemology in which one knows not only with head and heart but with the womb as the center of life. So understood, it frames knowledge as relational, embodied, and interdependent.This transmission of knowing across generations is echoed where grandmothers become primary spiritual guides and caregivers, a pattern that aligns with biblical examples and reflects what Armas (2021) describes as "abuelita faith" (grandmother faith) and what AlKhouri (2025) names "teita's faith" among Palestinian Christians in Gaza, where maternal lineage serves as God's means for preserving and passing on Christian identity and values across generations (Titus 2:3-5).
I remain cautious of frameworks that confine mothering solely to domestic spheres or restrict women's contributions to their roles as mothers and nurturers. Discrimination against women often confines them to domestic tasks, curtailing their participation in the public arena. My own positioning as both a mother, mission practitioner, and scholar reflects a conviction that mothering and intellectual contribution are not mutually exclusive.

Mothering is evident in the way I continue to support and guide my children, now adults, reflecting the enduring nature of parental responsibility. However, my perspective diverges from Freeks, who focus on the strength and protective qualities associated with fatherhood. I recognize that mothering is shaped by what I refer to as "womb logic" – a holistic, relational way of knowing that values interdependence and collective well-being alongside individual growth. My research on the life of David J. Bosch shows that transformative potential is nurtured through the relational security of the mother-child relationship (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2025a), challenging modernity's "systematic motherlessness" (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2025b).

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Fatherhood: Strength and Nurture

According to Volling and Bornstein (2025:353-354), contemporary fathering is characterized by the quality of a man's actions rather than the amount of time he spends at home. A key component of this role is the demonstration of genuine affection, which contributes to children's development of stronger social skills. In addition to this nurturing care, fathers offer a specialized form of guidance known as autonomy support. This entails encouraging children to be independent and to take risks, while maintaining a supportive presence – a process referred to as the *activation relationship*. Through playful interactions and educational activities, these specific behaviors are central to fostering a child's development. By modeling both personal resilience and interpersonal compassion, fathers equip their children to navigate the world as confident individuals and engaged community members.

As Freeks (2025b) asserts, fatherhood is a divine calling that encompasses far more than simply producing offspring; it requires an ongoing commitment to being an active and present influence within the family, reflecting the attributes of God. The significance of a father is evident in his capacity to provide stability, guide his children's moral development, and safeguard the family's welfare through acts of sacrificial love. A father of integrity, whose consistent presence offers a reliable point of reference, enables children to cultivate a secure sense of identity and resilience. Through his role as both spiritual and practical leader of the household, he fosters an environment in which children can flourish emotionally and academically. Moreover, fatherhood is fundamentally characterized by a man's commitment to being devoted, present, and available, to ensuring the overall welfare of the family unit while serving as a vital anchor. A father's real strength lies in his role as a dependable mentor, provider, and protector, giving his children a foundation for affection, resilience, and insight. By demonstrating wisdom and integrity, a father leads by example, serving as "salt and light" as Jesus indicated in the Bible (Matthew 5:13-16), to guide his children's character development and shape their understanding of divine love and spiritual truth. This strength is not simply authoritarian but is revealed through unwavering dedication and the willingness to sacrifice personal comforts in order to prioritize his family's needs (Freeks, 2025b).

In addition, a father imparts essential emotional stability and security, equipping children to confront life's challenges with confidence and resilience. When a father fulfills his God-ordained role, he leaves a legacy of identity and destiny through his distinctive "fingerprints" on the household. Ultimately, the essence of fatherhood emerges in the transformative process of cultivating enduring relationships, wherein the father serves as a spiritual leader and educator, mirroring the warmth, protection, and provision of the Heavenly Father (Isaiah 54:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; Psalm 46:1; Psalm 37:25; Deuteronomy 31:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Matthew 7:9-11). Such a resilient character is indispensable for establishing robust families and fostering a healthier society, thereby mitigating the adverse consequences of paternal absence (Freeks, 2025b).

In their study, Jessee and Adamsons (2018:28-30) argue that fatherhood plays a crucial role in fostering healthy child development, with engaged fathers contributing to improved career and relationship outcomes for their children over the long term. Effective fathering is characterized by emotional closeness and physical affection, which exert a greater influence than financial provision alone. Parenting styles are frequently transmitted across generations, as men often replicate the behaviors modelled by their own fathers during childhood. Positive involvement from grandfathers significantly increases the likelihood that their sons will become active parents, thereby strengthening intergenerational bonds. While living arrangements may pose challenges, the overall quality of interaction remains the most significant factor in determining a child's success. Promoting active fatherhood thus constitutes a central strategy for enhancing well-being across generations (Jessee & Adamsons, 2018:28-30).

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Motherhood: Compassion and Guidance

Motherhood, as I (Renee) experience and practice it, is fundamentally characterized by compassion and guidance. My approach in the present analysis is one of embodied theology: a practical-theological, autoethnographic method in which I treat my own lived experience of mothering as a site of theological knowledge (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2023).
Compassion and guidance, understood this way, are not merely sentimental; rather, they function as strategic orientations toward the development of whole persons within communities, inspired by the maternal God-image in Isaiah 66:13: “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you”. A maternal perspective on the *missio Dei* provides deeper insight into the value of motherhood and its significance across diverse cultural contexts, suggesting that motherhood extends beyond a purely biological process to include spiritual and emotional dimensions that foster human connectedness. Compassion in my mothering extends beyond emotional warmth to include the discipline Ruddick (1995) names maternal thinking.

Guidance, in my view, differs fundamentally from paternal guidance. Rather than orienting my children primarily towards achievement or autonomy, I direct them towards relationality and accountability within their communities. As argued in my analysis, "Maternal-thinking, *missio Dei* and managerial missiology" (Rheinbolt-Uribe, 2024: 11), cultures often regarded as peripheral to the West can contribute valuable insights, solutions, and wisdom on crucial issues affecting the future of humanity. There is a need for openness to reciprocal exchange of knowledge in the spirit of Christian mutuality, exemplified in Matthew 23:37, where Jesus expresses a desire to gather Jerusalem's children "as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings".

According to my understanding of the biblical text, equality does not depend on mutual imitation but rather on acknowledging differences and interdependence between men and women, where both are inherently designed to require one another and fulfil complementary roles. I perceive my mothering as complementing Freeks’ fathering; however, complementarity should never serve as a justification for silencing, subordinating, or restricting women to limited spheres.

Transmission of Values

Shared Values from a Paternal Perspective

Regarding shared biblical values from a paternal perspective, paternal fatherhood and mentorship stress the vital importance of transmitting these values to restore the family unit and, by extension, the broader moral fabric of society (Freeks, 2011).

From this standpoint, the father assumes the role of spiritual mentor, priest, and leader, entrusted with the intentional and consistent instruction of ethical standards. Biblical values function as the principal directives in this process, grounded in the theological conviction that human beings reflect God's image. At the heart of these shared values are character-forming qualities such as honesty, reliability, respect, obedience, responsibility, and duty. Scriptural examples illuminate these formative processes, as seen in the lives of historical figures such as Abraham, who demonstrated patience and faithfulness to Isaac, and Jacob, who imparted virtue and integrity to Joseph (Freeks, 2011).

Furthermore, the New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the ultimate, perfect model, whose paternal mentorship of his disciples was characterized by enduring love, humble service, and the necessity of self-sacrifice. Christian values are explicitly identified as the fruit of the Holy Spirit, including joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. These values extend beyond humanitarian ideals, carrying a vital spiritual dimension by recognizing God as their source and assessing behavior in this light. Effective paternal mentorship calls for active,

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heartfelt engagement that goes beyond mere physical presence; it requires living out these values to offer children a firm foundation of certainty (Freeks, 2007, 2011).

Finally, transmitting moral and ethical principles such as justice, fairness, and human dignity seeks to nurture a child's ability to distinguish right from wrong. Through this continuing process of spiritual guidance, fathers create a legacy that shapes the family and fosters positive transformation across all areas of life (Freeks, 2011).

Shared Values from a Maternal Perspective

In both my family life and research, I have witnessed how mothers transmit values through everyday parenting, embodying integrity, respect, and perseverance in their daily actions (Proverbs 22:6). However, it is important to note that the transmission of values in my maternal practice is never solely individual; it is always situated within communal and cultural contexts. Perseverance is exemplified through my continued engagement with challenging theological and missiological questions, alongside my dedication to my children's development. When my children were younger, I chose to step away from full-time pastoral work to devote myself to motherhood. As they grew older, I transitioned towards greater visibility in academic spaces, authoring scholarly works and participating in public discourse. In doing so, I try to model that perseverance at home involves fully and unapologetically pursuing one's calling, while adapting to the various stages of life.

Family traditions and rituals serve as vehicles for transmitting values within my household. My children have been raised with practices that honor both our Latin American heritage and my United States background. During gatherings with extended family and faith communities, I emphasize the principle, articulated by Freeks (2015, 2025a), that the community acts as an extended family, bearing responsibility for the well-being of all its members. I teach *ubuntu* not as an abstract concept, but as a lived reality, demonstrating in my presence and engagement across various spheres what it means to be fully human. The primary way I enacted this during their upbringing was hospitality, consistently welcoming individuals from diverse backgrounds into our home. Together as a family, we participated in being-with-others and embraced a “missiology of listening” (Mogensen, 2010). When one reads the Gospels from the perspective of food and shared meals, it becomes evident that Jesus frequently ate with others, a theme especially prominent in the Gospel of Luke. Thus, preparing and sharing meals as a family is a meaningful way for us to imitate the practice of table fellowship we observe in Jesus’ life.

The Impact of Parenting Through *Fathering* and *Mothering* in the Domestic Domain

Fathering – Thinking From the Soul and Heart

Fathering – conceived from the soul and heart, rather than as a mere social construct – is increasingly understood as a spiritual process rooted in these deeper dimensions. Religious narratives prompt fathers to regard children as spiritual beings with a divine purpose, cultivating a moral connection that extends beyond biological or societal expectations. An internal orientation is advanced, centered on “turning the heart” toward one’s children through sacred commitment and reliance on divine assistance. When paternal identity is anchored in faith, men acquire a transformative and enduring motivation for engaged fathering, which nurtures their children’s spiritual development and affords a distinct sense of identity and purpose within a secular context (Dollahite, 1998:3-5).

In the research conducted by Miller et al. (2021:95-97), modern fatherhood is depicted as undergoing a significant transformation, shifting from a focus solely on financial provision to fostering deep emotional connections. The concept of "thinking from the soul" encapsulates the prioritization of attunement and attachment, which are essential for supporting children's social and emotional well-being. Moving away from outdated stereotypes, an increasing

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number of engaged fathers now pursue active roles centered on the quality of interactions, intentional engagement, and genuine fulfilment.

Correspondingly, Ren and McGuckin (2022:3-5) argue that contemporary fathering is no longer confined to biological definitions but instead encompasses a "socially constructed" identity marked by considerable emotional depth. Through "thinking from the heart", fathers act as sensitive, affectionate carers who cultivate secure attachments. Such soulful involvement is crucial for holistic child development and the overall well-being of the family.

Freeks (2020:1-4) contends that fathering constitutes the heart of masculinity, requiring a complete transformation of character to lead effectively. By reflecting the original Fatherhood of God, men answer a divine calling, actively shaping their family's spiritual environment and offering essential leadership through the guidance of the Word of God.

Mothering – Thinking-With-The-Womb

The influence of mothering within the domestic sphere cannot be fully captured by behavioral outcomes or institutional metrics alone. Rather, I conceive of my mothering as a mode of thought originating in the body, what I call womb logic, drawing on Kiboko's thinking-with-the-womb. This concept is not mystical; rather, it is grounded in the reality of embodied knowledge. The maternal logic embedded in the well-known scripture John 3:16 ("God so loved the world that he gave...") illuminates how God's giving mirrors Vaughan's (2015) "maternal gift economy". From the moment a mother becomes aware of the child in her womb, she begins to engage in continual acts of giving that support the child's development, including the transmission of knowledge and language, the nurturing of relational security, and the foundations of spiritual formation.

According to Freeks and Rheinbolt-Uribe (2025:14), mothers serve as cultural and spiritual anchors within their communities, reshaping domestic and communal spaces while fostering resilience and belonging. The maternal eye functions as an epistemological stance, positioning mothers as knowledge-keepers and conduits of both human and divine wisdom. In my research with Colombian congregations, I have observed how maternal presence becomes a catalyst for spiritual and social resilience during periods of institutional breakdown, as mothers sustain the spiritual vitality of their communities through daily practices of care, reconciliation, and collective support, often unacknowledged by formal leadership structures. Luke 1:46–55 (Mary's Magnificat) voices this same maternal empowerment and the transformation of social hierarchies. The epistemological authority inherent in maternal knowledge-keeping calls for recognition at all levels of community and institutional life.

Consciousness and ethical agency seem to arise from the vulnerable, embodied dialogue of love, positioning the mother-child relationship as the essential nexus where neurobiology and spirit intersect (Rheinbolt-Uribe 2025a). The domestic domain, under maternal empowerment, becomes a site of theological and missiological significance. In everyday activities such as cooking, discipline, celebration, and accompaniment, values are shaped, resilience develops, and the gospel is enacted. My children continue to embody both the paternal values from their father and the maternal values from me, while also learning from a mother who refused to limit her gifts to a single sphere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, fathering and mothering, as central dimensions of parenting, represent complementary roles that nurture children's emotional, social, and moral development. Together, they demonstrate the balance of guidance and care, authority and affection, shaping resilient individuals and reinforcing the profound relational foundation of family life. Ultimately, effective parenting, deeply rooted in both mothering and fathering, serves as the vital "initial

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institution" for transmitting essential values and spiritual character. By adopting *ubuntu*-inspired principles of empathy and communal accountability, parents can effectively address familial crises while supporting holistic child well-being and development.

Findings

- Fathering is multidimensional and extends beyond economic provision.
- Mothering as epistemological stance and maternal thinking is articulated as a distinct knowledge system that sustains family resilience and spiritual formation.
- Fathering and mothering are complementary dimensions of parenting.
- Fathering and mothering are shown to be crucial in transmitting faith and values across generations.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the contributions of this paper, several limitations warrant acknowledgment and point toward avenues for future inquiry.

- Conceptual scope of parenting: The study primarily conceptualized parenting through the roles of fathering and mothering. This framing, while valuable, does not fully capture the broader and more diverse realities of parenting.
- Focus on parental roles: The analysis concentrated predominantly on fathers and mothers, with limited attention given to children and adolescents. This emphasis restricts insights into how parenting practices are experienced and interpreted by younger family members.

Possible Future Research

- Contemporary understandings of family life extend beyond the binary parental roles and encompass varied family structures, caregiving arrangements, and cultural contexts. Consequently, further research is required to explore family well-being and the multiplicity of family forms to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of parenting.
- Future studies should therefore incorporate the perspectives of children and adolescents, as their voices are critical for a holistic account of family dynamics and developmental outcomes.

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