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# EQUIPPING THE YOUTH BY RECOURSE TO THE TOTAL LIFE TRAINING TOOL FOR YOUTH CHALLENGES IN CHRISTIANA: A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

#### **ABSTRACT**

In South Africa, the youth face immense challenges and problems. Farming communities in Christiana grapple with problems such as unemployment, poverty, occultism, Satanism, alcoholism and violence. The challenges for this specific community are widespread, because they encounter one problem after another, on the one hand, and increasing statistics of social ills such as prostitution. child-trafficking, substance use and abuse, violence and rape, on the other. As a consequence, numerous young people's lives are being destroyed. My current study focuses on the youth of the Christiana District in South Africa as target for a holistic missional outreach programme. The purpose of the study is to give hope, build resilience, and improve or enhance the lives of young people through the TOTAL LIFE programme, despite the challenges they are facing daily. This missional and biblical tool is designed in a constructive, creative-critical way, from a missio Dei perspective.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article explains and describes the training and equipping tool TOTAL LIFE, which the author developed and designed on the basis of a larger study (Freeks 2018). Youth evangelism and missional outreach are crucial to the youth and essential in this context. Evangelism and missions emerge in God (Freeks 2016:211). Evangelism

derives from the Greek words *euaggelion*, meaning "gospel" or "good news", and *euaggelizesthai*, meaning to "announce" or "bring good news" (*Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* 2013:534). *Missio* is the activity of God that lies at the heart and core of both God's mission and the gospel (De Beer 2012:55; Wright 2012:2). In addition, mission is an extension and amplification of God's being (Niemandt 2016:85-87). "Evangelism" and "mission" are used interchangeably, since it involves the total Christian ministry to the world (Bosch 2008:4). Evangelism and missions originate in God and, although evangelism is central in the process of transformation within the community, both evangelism and mission are part of God's great plan and purpose to redeem the whole of creation, which was broken by sin and evil, and to transform it into the new creation (Wright 2012:1-6). Evangelism also entails "gospeling" the good news, which God has promised and effected through Jesus Christ. It forms the centre of the fully integrated scope of all mission through Jesus Christ (Wright 2012:6-7).

Children are part of the mission of God (the *missio Dei*). Throughout time, missions have been a component of the Christian church. Missions derived from the apostolic movements and disposal of missionaries, which is the church's way to win people for God from all nations (Elton 2013). Evangelising the youth suggests a practice of spirituality, based on the premise that God is working and restoring broken relationships among young people (Kujawa-Holbrook 2010). Ministering to the youth is primarily relational and informal. This pursuit takes place from childhood to adulthood and merges relational and evangelical stimulation. In this regard, people are assisted through youth ministry to discover a Christian way of life (Elton 2013). Steffen (2011) emphasised the fact that the real mission of Jesus was to signify the Good News that God's rule began. Proclaiming the Gospel is compulsory for the sake of God's honour and His grace, as demonstrated through Jesus (Van Wyk 2014).

In this study, it is crucial to understand the importance of reaching the youth in disadvantaged communities by means of evangelism and missions. It is also essential to know the purpose and motivation for missions (De Beer 2012). In this regard, it must be clear that the entire creation lives for God's glory. Christian missions, as actualisation of the *missio Dei*, have the ability to convert adolescents (Beyerlein *et al.* 2011).

Human beings should participate in mission with the main aim to bring honour and glory to God by serving fellow human beings (Wright 2010). May *et al.* (2005) point out that, throughout the Bible, the issue of God's honour and glory forms the basis of evangelism and missions. It is not unusual to assert that the younger generation are essential and do matter. Children are a concern to God; they are made in God's image, and the church cannot function as a church without the young generation (May *et al.* 2005).

Young children are not only the church of tomorrow, but also already the church of the present (Boyd 2010). In Mark 10:14, Jesus affirmed that the children must come to Him and should not be impeded, as God's kingdom belongs to believers similar to these children.

Several people, however, disagree with child and youth evangelism and missions (Horton 2010). They contend that the younger generation are too unimportant or inexperienced to be included in such a mission. On the contrary, Evans (2012) pleads that research on the ramifications of the younger generation studying the Bible is urgently needed. Nevertheless, for issues of practice and doctrine, the Bible is considered the reliable source, especially to teach the younger generation. This will confirm that children and youth are schooled in biblical truth, thus creating a sound, stable, biblical basis for life choices (Widstrom 2011).

Young children should learn to serve God with their intellect or mind (Bisschoff 2014). Even if they are young, children should be taught the will of God through the Bible (Van der Kooy 2014). Ward (2009) supports the notion of biblical formation, adding that the younger generation should be evangelised, since it is of essence to teach them about worship and the Bible. Understanding why the biblical message also applies to young children, Beckwith (2004) cautions that the Word of God should not be used to teach the younger generation moral lessons. They should instead be introduced to God by conveying God's ways and His story to them (Beckwith 2004).

In the same explanation and context, Botma (2012) argues that all individuals must, at some point, make their own choices. In this regard, evangelism and missions are crucial avenues to empower younger generations. All people are accountable for their own lives and spiritual growth, but they require support. Such help can be provided through evangelism and missions (Botma 2012). Children must be educated and raised in a Godly way through evangelism and missions. One should take cognisance of the fact that the Bible states explicitly that the church and parents have a purpose to help the younger generation develop and grow in Christ (Prov. 22:6).

Often, the younger generation have various queries about the Bible and God. Even though these young people have piercings or tattoos, it is necessary and imperative to collaborate with them with passion and in love through evangelism and missions (Copeland 2012:13). The spirituality of people is essential for their entire well-being (Hodder 2009). This is expected even of the younger generation. According to Snailum (2012), the faith of a 15-year old is as important as that of a 65-year old. Therefore, as stated earlier, evangelism and missional outreach to the younger generation should be a focal point in God's kingdom, in order to glorify and worship God (Wright 2010).

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It is clear that ministry among young people has exploded since the 1990s to convey a form of specialised, professional ministry and as a field of study in theological education (Dean 2010). Evangelism, missions and youth ministry should not be considered a form of coercion to pressurise the youth with the evangelist's own religious values, but a part of the *missio Dei*: performing God's mission. The youth is empowered in the process as agent-subjects-in-relationships. This also helps advance fullness-of-life-for-all (Steffen 2011). In this ministry, the agent should move where the youth are (Gouger 2013) and deliver the message of God's love to them (Kennedy 2010). According to De Beer (2012), God calls and gathers people, whether they are children, the youth, or others, for his glory and everlasting love.

The communication process is crucial and one of the most valuable experiences when doing evangelism and mission among the younger generation. The conveyed word should be totally transparent and understandable, as the missionary ministers God and Jesus to the youth. Nevertheless, this is more about practice than theory. The aim is to become part of, collaborate and interact with other people, especially the younger generation (Ward *et al.* 1994). Evans (2012) indicates that young people seek new platforms to be Christ-like. Thus, Christian ministers and missionaries must adjust the manner in which they convey the message of the Christian faith to these youngsters and take their feedback seriously. According to Penner (2003), learning to listen is paramount, because the younger generation are better *talkers* than *listeners*. At this stage, many people find it difficult to reach the younger generation through evangelism and mission (Penner 2003).

Young children are described, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the most notorious and the most safeguarded generation (Beckwith 2004). The young generation should not be considered liabilities for parents (Freeks 2016:213). These young people must rather be viewed as God's reward, gift, grace, and favour to families. God esteems and values children, and parents should do the same (Mueller 1999). Even though this young generation develops and grows older, parents may experience issues when viewing their children as gifts, due to their challenging phases of behaviour. However, Mueller (1999) asserts that the age of children does not count. They remain gifts of God. Therefore, society should value the gift of the younger generation (Mueller 1999).

## 2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTION, OBJECTIVES, CENTRAL THEORETHICAL ARGUMENT AND RESEARCH METHOD

The Christiana District in South Africa faces considerable problems and challenges in developing the youth in rural areas. This raises the question as to what extent the missional and biblical training tool meets the standards of sound missional principles and its possible relevance for other rural districts in South Africa. The main research question can be formulated as follows: To what extent is the TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical programme for a young generation in the Christiana District a tool for successful Christian missional outreach to the young generation especially in disadvantaged communities? Researching this question aims to evaluate the TOTAL LIFE programme from a missiological perspective. This assessment focuses on the programme's impact and effectiveness in the Christiana District. To reach this aim, the following objectives were formulated. First, the research identifies the key features of the problems facing youth development in the Christiana District. This is followed by a summary of the goals and objectives of the TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool. Lastly, the holistic missional and evangelistic outreach to the young generation should be a crucial aspect of the mission of God. The central theoretical argument of the TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool may provide a buffer against the mentioned challenges facing the youth, churches and Christian ministries, with the chief aim to enhance youth outreach in current South Africa. An explorative literature study was used in the research (Freeks 2018).

#### 3. THE TOTAL LIFE MISSIONAL AND BIBLICAL TOOL

The TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool was developed in 2017 on the basis of a missional study (Freeks 2018). The acronym TOTAL LIFE has the following meaning: **T** for teaching, training and equipping; **O** for optimal ("*Imago Dei*"); **T** for transformation, which indicates that the gospel changes lives (Rom. 12); **A** and **L** for abundant life: Jesus gives abundant life (John 10:10), and **LIFE** to indicate lifelong learning and experience in the Word of God.

### 3.1 The aim, layout and design of the TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool manual

The main aim of this missional and biblical tool is to support the young generation in the Christiana District in South Africa in making healthy and quality life choices. The TOTAL LIFE tool also aims to address the youth challenges in a more holistic manner. It is recommended that churches,

schools, correctional services, NGOs, other organisations, and local government use this missional tool to address the youth challenges in and among our communities. The mission of this programme is to strengthen, motivate, inspire and develop the young generation, primarily in their decision-making and choices on behaviour problems (Freeks 2018). TOTAL LIFE is designed specially to advise and to help young people and facilitators when presenting or directing developing and training sessions and discussions. These sessions target the young generation, illiterate and semi-literate participants who want to be equipped and wish to become well educated to know more about God and His Word.

Various factors such as family violence, father's absence, and family abuse directly affect quality of life. A family needs coping mechanisms in order to deal with aspects of life that, to a great extent, determine the individual's faith life. The activities of the programme focus entirely on the holistic development of the individual conditions, namely to re-establish, address, support, and nurture abundant life in Christ, with the aim of the best feasible quality of life, good health and welfare for the population.

TOTAL LIFE helps the young generation embrace the opportunity to be equipped, trained and developed in order to be knowledgeable, self-supporting, hardworking, and self-reliant. The planned outcome, upon completion of the TOTAL LIFE programme, is that the youth will have developed a valid self-image. This will help them be proud in their personal capacity, experience, capability, ability, skills, and potential.

#### 3.2 What is TOTAL LIFE?

TOTAL LIFE pursues a clear direction of key learning, activities and facilitation exercises. These practices foster interpersonal skills, build knowledge and confidence through sharing and contact, help with planning skills, develop thinking, as well as enhance attentiveness and motivation to action. The TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool consists of exercises, discussions, presentations, interactive activities and sharing. It is driven by ten principles. (See the diagram below and the layout of its principles [Freeks 2019].)

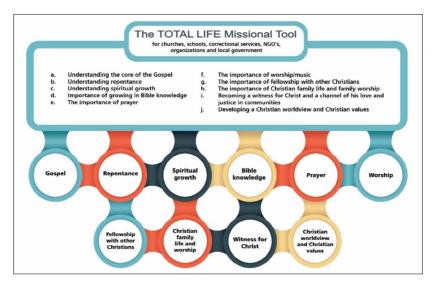


Figure 1: The TOTAL LIFE missional and Biblical tool

## 3.2.1 The ten TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical principles (Freeks 2018)

#### Understanding the core of the Gospel

The core of the Gospel is crucial in the context of mission. This especially entails the five markers of the Gospel, namely to proclaim the good news of the kingdom; to teach, baptise and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to seek and transform unjust structures of society; to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to sustain earth's life. The Gospel focuses on making all things new, but the significance is to transform the person as a whole. The Gospel brings hope to people and must, therefore, be proclaimed to the honour of God. It can equip people against the attacks and invisible powers of evil.

#### · Understanding repentance

Repentance means giving up a sinful way of living and turning to God. In other words, the person turns from a sinful lifestyle and changes the direction of his/her life, by depending on Christ for forgiveness of sin. True repentance and forgiveness take place only in and through the name of Jesus, since God reconciled the world through Jesus. It is crucial that the youth should repent.

#### · Understanding spiritual growth

The TOTAL LIFE programme can give guidance on spiritual growth, because it evokes a deeper experience in the lives of people through character formation. Character formation is needed to *transform* and not *conform* people into the image of Christ. Spiritual growth is essential for youth ministry. Evangelising young people means teaching them a spiritual practice. Spiritual growth is based on values that give meaning and direction to a person's life. Spiritual formation deepens a person's faith and growth in a relationship with God. Spiritual growth begins with the Word of God, the purpose being sanctification. This entails the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit shaping an individual's life. Such growth can help build resilience, especially when dealing with poverty among the youth.

#### · The importance of growing in biblical knowledge

The Bible is a book of faith with its central narrative of God's acts in the history of humanity. It is, therefore, essential that the Scripture should be the constitution in the home. Families should study God's Word, in order to grow in biblical knowledge and increase their trust in God. The knowledge of facts is not as appropriate in this case. The focus should rather be on God's *active plan* conveyed by the Word to young people who are discouraged, depressed and without hope for a future. The biblical testimony found that God places a high premium on families. In this regard, the Bible is the authoritative standard, according to which the youth may apply their daily lives. God's Word can change lives; it provides vital guidelines for the youth to make informed and quality life decisions.

#### The importance of prayer

Prayer guides the believers' lives. Therefore, the TOTAL LIFE training programme highlights the importance of prayer. Prayer is an important lifestyle, especially as a coping mechanism in the face of challenges. Prayer is people's resort in times of trouble, when there is need for forgiveness, or guilt. The prayer of a believer is also a powerful spiritual weapon. In essence, prayer entails spiritual communion with God. It is important to understand that prayer provides spiritual strength by building people's relationships and religious life with God through Jesus. A lifestyle of prayer can provide a *buffer* against acute issues such as the youth being confronted by Satanism. In a family situation, for example, the father leads his family in prayer and makes the family's prayer requests known to God. Of the various types of prayer, intercession can be considered the highest form, namely prayer on behalf of others, as modelled by Jesus.

#### The importance of worship and music

God lives among the praises of His people and to worship God through songs and hymns means appreciating the Lord. In a family set-up, it is imperative to teach children about the importance of worship and music since they glorify God. Engaging in worship promotes awareness of God and His presence. Worship, music, and singing praises are crucial for the youth, since they help connect them spiritually with God. Furthermore, the positive climate created by worship and music helps the youth cope with challenges and stress, by bringing them comfort in God. Music has the power to uplift and transform a person's well-being.

· The importance of fellowship with other Christians

Christian fellowship with others in society is fundamental due to the mutual care. Fellowship with other Christians means worshipping God together and knowing Him under all circumstances. This fellowship is significant by taking care of the needs of others. For example, sharing meals and praying together to deal with challenges. Within a family context, relationships with young people are imperative. House altars or home fellowships are important for family communion and joint Bible study, prayer and Christian encouragement of each other. The father should take the lead to teach family members about the Holy Spirit, and how to lead a Spirit-filled life. Family members should also teach each other to be humble and submissive to one another. Such a family practice can spread to the entire community.

The importance of Christian family life and family worship

The TOTAL LIFE training and equipping tool teaches that family life is crucial and that the practice of building happy, healthy and stable families should be consistent within this context. Christian families should be committed to mission by sharing the Gospel with other families and other people in their community. They should also be united in their faith and ministry. Loving other family members is important in light of Christ's love for all without exception. Family life is complex, due to the enormous challenges most families are facing. A dysfunctional family life is a global problem. However, Christian family life implies healthy relations with God and a sound understanding among family members. Families should be aware and careful of family breakdown caused by poverty. The strength in families lies in the mutual emotional support of family members.

 Become a witness for Christ and a channel of his love and justice in communities

It is important to bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus. A powerful witness for the Gospel occurs when someone expresses self-giving love

to others. Therefore, every believer should be a true witness for Jesus; this implies sharing and declaring the good news of God. In the context of the family, members should be witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. This does not only entail witnessing to family members in the home environment or other congregation members in church. The witness should also ripple outward to others in the community, testifying through words and deeds of God's mercy, love and grace, which means his unmerited favour.

#### · Develop a Christian world view and values

A Christian or biblical world view is recommended in the TOTAL LIFE programme in the face of misleading world views that may impede people's spiritual growth. The programme is based on Christian living values and aims to change the world view of the youth. A Christian world view has the potential and influence to replace and correct other world views in the lives of young people. In a family context, parents with the father as leading figure are responsible to shape their children's world view into a Christian or biblical one. Such a renewed world view can be a solid alternative to clarify misconceptions about ancestral spirits, the occult, and Satanism. Church attendance is crucial in that it helps shape the world view of children. Specific values flow from a world view or mindset, making life worthwhile and giving meaning and direction to a person's life. Christian values imply a world view of ethics and norms based on God's ordinations for human life. The fruit of the Holy Spirit should be an ideal example (Gal. 5:22). According to the empirical research, participants indicated a high interest in Christian values and practice. It was found that the home and the church, in particular, are the best spiritual institutions for children to learn about Christian values.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The TOTAL LIFE missional tool depicts the ten identified missiological principles of mission and evangelism. This tool is suggested as a resource for churches, schools, correctional services, non-governmental organisations, and local governments. It aims to contribute to the field of community engagement through a useful model to guide and structure integrated mission that enhances the quality of life and human dignity of the youth in honour of God through Jesus. This missional tool also contributes to the body of knowledge on integral mission, by expanding the ten missiological principles in light of the *missio Dei* approach with the aim of serving the youths in impoverished, disadvantaged communities in developing countries worldwide. The lives of these young people could be transformed to live in honour and gratitude towards God and fulfil their purpose in life by ministering to other youths. This model can also be applied nationally, targeting other similar impoverished rural

areas with a high-density youth population and its problems and challenges. The application can also be relevant internationally within diverse missionary situations. The missional tool provides the incentive and application to practise the programme in diverse communities. TOTAL LIFE has the potential to impact on the youth in the rural areas in the Christiana District. It is possible to build spiritual well-being through the TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

In this article, the TOTAL LIFE missional and biblical tool was proposed as a possible solution and support for the youth in challenging times. The TOTAL LIFE equipping and training programme was especially developed as a missional tool to help enrich and transform lives, with particular focus on the youth in impoverished, rural areas. In the two years of its design as a training and equipping tool, the TOTAL LIFE tool has the potential to impact on and to make inroads into alleviating challenges concerning the youth in rural areas.

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