

# Mentoring

**MODERN BUZZ-WORD, *or*  
ANCIENT FORGOTTEN-ART?**



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## MODERN BUZZ-WORD, *or* ANCIENT FORGOTTEN-ART?

Mentoring is a word buzzing around our world today; every industry seems to be proclaiming the merits of it. However, mentoring is an ancient secret, a skill Hebrew-parents developed as they mentored their children into their inheritance. At age thirteen, Hebrew children would be adopted by their own fathers, a practice of accepting them as an adult in the community, and thus, grooming them in the family business or trade in order to one day, continue the family legacy.

The ancient Hebrew people were certainly not the only culture who understood the art of mentoring. In fact, apprenticeship-style training was still the order of the day up until the industrial revolution forever changed the course of mankind, in both good and bad ways. With mass production, sight was lost of the individual, and the cookie-cutter system of training began to influence modern society. The assembly line, which began to spit out products in masse, became a sad, prophetic picture of the modern-style of training which still props up commerce – and too much discipleship in church ministry – today.

The generalized, impersonal “in” and “out” of industry may have made its gains, but in church ministry the “one-size-fits-all” system has snuffed out God’s life in many, and retarded the release of God’s army more than we would care to admit. The promises of mass effectiveness with quick, canned training methods have squashed the creativity, spontaneity and depth of the old fashioned – admittedly slower – God-given strategy of mentoring. In the name of faster, we have got thinner... and blunt.

Into this twenty-first century, mentoring has once again made an entrance into our cold, mechanistic development of people. We should applaud the powers that be whenever they make society more humane, more personal. However, this article is not seeking to address a “hip” issue. It is a flat-out call to rediscover the principle of Biblical mentoring; to once again turn our churches into families and our generalized training programmes into “life-on-life” environments of experience, discovery and empowerment. This article soberly agrees that teaching without mentoring is empty, and calls the church to be a prophetic leader in this time-old value of mentoring...while the secular world continues to think that they have discovered something “new”.

Let us peel open the pages of Scripture, dig into the gems of this divine truth and above all... *live it* in our spiritual communities so that we see believers disciplined in the ways of God and launched into their destinies in the security and power that mentoring provides. In this forgotten art are the ingredients of greatness.

## Defining terms...

There are a number of words that are used interchangeably today to refer to the issue this article seeks to address; words like, “discipling,” “mentoring” and “fathering.” For the sake of clarity we would like to make a few definitions that we believe will assist in unlocking this ancient secret.

### ▪ *Discipling*

The word “discipling” comes from the word “disciple” (meaning, “follower, or learner”) and as such is probably the best New Testament based word to use. However it is most often used in modern speech to refer to the nurturing of new believers in an assurance of their faith and in helping them to begin a life of faith. In this sense, it is too narrow in definition, and although it is thus the first part of mentoring, we feel that it has become inadequate to describe the ancient art that this article seeks to rediscover.

\*We agree with those who are saddened by how the word “discipling” has deteriorated from its Biblical usage. We considered attempting to re-introduce the word but decided that it was a not battle worth fighting for. The bigger battle that is worth fighting for is to inspire and enable Christ-followers to be actively and practically involved in discipling others in the full sense of what this word Biblically meant. To battle for a word lost will steal from this more important battle, a truth found.

### ▪ *Mentoring*

The word “mentoring” comes from the word “mentor,” which refers to a “wise and trusted guide and advisor” (Webster). This word certainly has a new energy and strength to it, and also throws out some of the stuffy religiosity sometimes associated with the word “discipling”. Although “mentoring” as a buzz-word can tend to be a little shallow; by the definition above, it does capture the essence of what the Bible teaches in terms of this essential art. For the sake of this article, we clarify the word “mentoring” as follows:

***Mentoring refers to what one does; the task of supporting someone during a season(s) of their life; based on shared interest and the specific expertise that one can offer to another.***

For example, one can mentor another in a specific industry, a specific challenge or through a specific stage of life. One can mentor another in business, in marriage, in sport and/or in a hobby. Certainly, in the body of Christ, every believer should have a mentor(s) in their spiritual journey; and in turn, should then mentor another. Every Christ-follower should be a vital link in the chain of discipleship; should be receiving and giving of spiritual life. In this regard, we like to express the ideal of mentoring this way: ***every believer can and should imitate Christ in one and model Christ for another.***

## ▪ *Fathering*

The word “fathering” best captures the ultimate expression of Biblical mentoring. Hence, spiritual fathering\* refers to a mature relationship, one of expressed mutual recognition, in which one mentors another in more than just skills-learned but also in character-developed. For the sake of this article, we define it as follows:

***Spiritual fathering refers to who one is; the role of parenting another through seasons of their faith; based on a mutual witness between both parties that God has knit their hearts and lives together.*** It is a step beyond mentoring as the relationship matures from a focus on *what one can do* for another to *whom one is* to the other. This relationship no longer revolves only around life and faith skills, but now involves the invitation to address the issues of the heart.

\*An important qualification is required immediately. Some may take exception to our reference to spiritual fathering, after all Jesus did say, **“But you, do not be called, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ... Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father....”** (Matthew 23:8, 9). What Jesus was correcting here was the Pharisees’ practice of ascribing to themselves positions of authority, and these related titles, through which they lorded over others (vv. 2-7). Jesus was calling His people to rather view leadership as servant-hood: **“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant”** (v. 11). We are certainly not advocating that people be called “Father Bob.” We are, in fact, of the persuasion that people should not be called “Pastor Bob” either, anymore than one should be called “Accountant Bob” or “Husband Bob”. Nor do we advocate that people use the privilege of spiritual parenthood to lord it over others.

True parenthood captures the sacrificial heart of servant-hood more than any other God-given role. A natural parent willingly lays down his agenda (and even life) for his children unconditionally. Through this article we aim only to capture afresh the mature relationship that God inspires between two people in their journey of faith, a concept that was the Biblical context behind the appointment of **“elders”** (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1-4) and behind Paul’s warm expressions of spiritual fathering to Timothy, **“To Timothy, a beloved son”** (2 Timothy 1:2; see also 1 Timothy 1:2 & Philippians 2:22), and to Titus, **“To Titus, a true son in our common faith”** (Titus 1:4).

In other words, ***while spiritual fathering involves the skills of mentoring; mentoring does not automatically imply fathering.*** We believe every believer should be involved in the discipleship mandate – learning the skills of mentoring to serve and encourage others in their faith – but this, of course, does not mean that every believer is automatically a spiritual father. Every believer should nurture this desire (1 Timothy 3:1), but spiritual fatherhood comes when others enjoy more than just our genuine care and mentoring skills, but submit to our mature character and wisdom. Yes, a spiritual father needs to learn the skills of mentoring to be most effective; but while mentoring can be learnt, fathering cannot.

Just as I could not become a natural father by completing a degree in parenthood, so I cannot become a spiritual father by studying it. I only became a natural father when my children were born. My study of the subject of parenthood prepared me to be a father (not sufficiently enough though!), but I was not a father until my girls were born. Only then was I given the privilege of fatherhood...through their birth. In this same way, I could prepare to be a spiritual father (and this is important), but I only became one, when my mentoring relationships – through time and faithfulness – matured, and then...I was given the privilege of spiritually parenting another.

The concept of spiritual fathering (a *gender-neutral* term) is revealed throughout the Scriptures as spiritual fathers imparted the life of God they had received into their spiritual sons. Think of Moses and Joshua, Ruth and Naomi, Samuel and David, and Elijah and Elisha to name just a few Old Testament favourites. And certainly one of the reasons the early church flourished in the first century was on the back of this strong chain of fathering: Jesus fathered Peter, Peter fathered Barnabas, Barnabas fathered Paul, and Paul fathered Timothy. Paul then, of course, urged Timothy to continue this rich legacy: **“And the things that you heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”** (2 Timothy 2:2).

For the remainder of this article, we now turn to developing the skill of mentoring. Again, we are convinced that every believer should be mentored, and be trained to mentor others. And we trust that through your faithfulness to the skills of this ancient art that you learn, the privilege of spiritual parenting will, in God’s prompting, be yours too. For this reason, we devote another entire article to the topic of spiritual fathering, called, “My Kingdom for a Son”.

## Principles of Mentoring...

**(1) Mentoring does not refer to an exclusive, controlling relationship; it refers to an inclusive, supportive relationship.**

Some of the abuses of the word “disciple” came from insecure leaders who tagged people with the abomination: “You are my disciple”. We are, of course, only called to be disciples of One Man, and that is, if you are not yet aware, Jesus Christ!

As we have said, in our definition of terms, one should seek mentors in a number of life’s arenas: work, sport, hobby, and of course, in our spiritual journey. In this we live in the power and safety of a “**multitude of counsellors**” (Proverbs 11:14).

We believe that when it comes to our faith walk, **having one or two close spiritual mentors is more effective than trying to develop (and maintain) several**; but in this, the relationship(s) must be **inclusive**; that is to mean, inclusive of the counsel of others. Even when Paul was reminding the Corinthian church of his spiritual fatherhood to them, he did not force on them an exclusive relationship.

He reminded them that, although they had many “**teachers**” to benefit from, they did not have “**many fathers**” (1 Corinthians 4:15). Although Paul himself had literally brought them into their faith – “**I have begotten you through the gospel**” (v. 15) – he still provided an inclusive relationship; he used the word “**fathers**” (plural) not “**father**” (singular). Yes, while he appealed to them: “**Therefore... imitate me**” (v. 16); he made his counsel, and thus his relationship to them, subject to other “**fathers**” in the faith.

For clarity sake: mentoring is not an exclusive, controlling relationship. Although spiritual mentoring is most effective with only one or two mentors, this relationship must be inclusive and accountable to others.

**(2) Mentoring does not involve becoming a clone of another; it involves imitating Christ in another.**

Paul wrote, “**Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ**” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The word “**imitate**” literally means to “mimic, or “act like”. It refers to following the example, or pattern, of a more mature believer **as they follow Christ**. Obviously, the point is to follow Christ not man. And the role of a mentor is to simply point out, or reveal, Christ. And here in lies the importance of Biblical mentoring.

While we must follow Christ and Him alone, God has designed mentoring as a means of supporting this goal by impressing on the one who has walked\*, and by God’s grace mastered, ten steps in the footsteps of Jesus, to help the one who may be starting this journey.

\*We believe that it is through the faithfulness to the task of mentoring another, cooperating with the Spirit’s work, that the Father’s heart to **parent** others is nurtured and proven.

***A godly mentor therefore is only a servant who provides encouragement that God's grace is sufficient; that spiritual growth and victory is possible in the sufficiency of His grace which the mentor has himself tasted first-hand.*** Without Biblical mentoring, people get stuck at various steps in their journey of faith. With Biblical mentoring people are encouraged to continue to pursue Christ by those who have overcome (more than likely with the help of their mentor) the obstacles that are currently in their way.

Notice a few important implications:

- ***Mentoring has nothing to do with granting permission.*** The aim of a mentor is to help others become dependent on Jesus, not to allow them to become dependent on him in anyway. Often, even well-meaning mentors, can through disapproving attitudes or words, control the actions of another. But the godly mentor ensures that the person he is mentoring never becomes scared of letting him down by giving ample space for failure. The mentor must avoid basing his own identity in the performance of those he mentors, and deliberately refuse to become their decision-maker. ***Mentoring has everything to do with sharing perspective.*** Mentors seek to help others explore the various options before them and thus, the responses God may be requiring of them.

- ***Mentoring has nothing to do with personality.*** Too many people seek friendships, and mentors, with people who like what they like. This is a very narrow, worldly view of relationships (2 Corinthians 5:16). ***Mentoring has everything to do with respect.*** The questions one should ask in looking for a mentor are: “Do I respect this person’s faith walk? Do I feel that I can entrust myself to their counsel? Can I receive the truth from them; what I need to hear, not just what I want to hear?”\*

\*There is one area of personality (if it can be called this) that we do feel is important in terms of mentoring; and that is, gender. Mentoring should be along gender-lines, for obvious reasons.

- ***Mentoring has nothing to do with age of life.*** In the broad context of our journey of faith, age should be a non-issue. Timothy was younger than most of the people of the church in Ephesus, but was called to mentor, and father, that highly strategic church in Asia Minor (1 Timothy 1:3; 4:12-16 & 2 Timothy 2:2)\*. ***Mentoring has everything to do with spiritual maturity.*** We all know that age is not indicative of maturity. But while we continue to live in a day where age is, sadly, too often seen as a factor when it ought not to be, we need to press out for an appreciation of spiritual maturity than transcends natural age.

\*One of the interesting insights the first epistle to Timothy reveals is that Paul taught Timothy to embrace his calling irrespective of his age, yet still urged him to respect other people’s age. While he was to be true to God in the calling on his life, not allowing others’ prejudice concerning his youthfulness to deter him (1 Timothy 4:12); he was to be respectful as a member of his community to those who were older than him (1 Timothy 5:1, 2). In other words, Paul would not tolerate any arrogant, “whipper-snapper” attitude that said: “I’m the leader... those old fuddy-duddies must just get there act together!” Even as a spiritual father, secure in his office and calling, Timothy was to treat the older men and women as he would his own natural father and mother.

**(3) Mentoring should not start by seeking to be a groupie of some spiritual celebrity; it should start within the home church community one is a member of.**

Every believer should be involved in the safe place of a home church community. Without this accountable connection we just play a game called “church,” and miss the authenticity and reality of life that God has designed for us to live\*.

\*The New Testament has over thirty “**one another**” exhortations, the *intimate responsibilities of Scripture*, which can only be lived out practically in the context of the family community of a home church. For example: “**Beware...lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin**” (Hebrews 3:12, 13). “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another...**” (Hebrews 10:24, 25). “**Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another...**” (Romans 12:10). Clearly these are intimate exhortations of a spiritual family “doing life deeply together”.

Once we have grasped this truth, we need to likewise understand that God did not intend the home church community to just be a social group, or a “holding tank” for the real business of the Sunday morning congregation. No! God designed the smallest unit of church to be the “**church in the house**” – the home church community – that lived its life, in the context of the home environment, led by a mature person or couple, called “**elders**”\*.

\*The early church structure was not the congregational model that defines the modern church today. The structure of the early church was a network of home churches that enjoyed a corporate identity as a local church in a city or town. The phrase “**church in [the] house**” is used four times in the New Testament in reference to the smallest unit of church life (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). However, these were not independent little groups doing “their own thing” but they found their identity and connection within the corporate, local church and apostolic vision they were apart of.

For example, in the same passage that Paul refers to a “**church in [the] house**” (Romans 16:5) he distinguishes a home church from the “**whole church**” (Romans 16:23), which clearly was the sum of the individual home church parts. Also, in his letter to the Corinthians, he refers to the “**church in [the] house**” (1 Corinthians 16:19) but first addressed the corporate, local church in Corinth – “**To the church of God which is at Corinth**” (1 Corinthians 1:2) – and then spoke into a number of their corporate celebration activities using phrases such as “**when you come together as a church**” (1 Corinthians 11:18).

With a local church structure built on home churches, the early church embraced the Hebraic concept of “**elders**” (or mature people) to parent/shepherd these home churches/flocks. Both Peter and Paul exhorted these elders to faithfully shepherd (parent) the “**flock of God which is among you**” (1 Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28), referring to a close, fixed proximity of genuine “life-on-life” relationships. Elders are not some distant board of “grumpy old men” determining the programmes the people must attend; they are spiritual fathers tending to the people themselves!

While these home churches should enjoy a connection to a broader apostolic vision, and enjoy life as part of a corporate local church, the point should be obvious: ***our first place to look for a mentor(s) is within this home church fellowship into which we (should) invest our prayer, our time and our gifting and from where we anticipate developing true relationships and enjoy vital spiritual growth.***

The Biblically appointed roles of “**elders**” – the mature shepherd/parent of a flock/home church – and “**deacons**” – the elder’s support team of mature older brothers in the Lord – ***find their first and primary outworking within home church life*** (1 Timothy 3:1-13).

Although they may, and often do, have secondary functions within the wider local church and their ministry to the world at large, their foundational role in Christ's discipleship mandate (Matthew 28:18-20) means that ***believers need to first invest relationally in these precious people as their fathers and older brothers in the Lord.*** Indeed until this happens – until believers see the privilege and advantage in being mentored by these faithful men and women; rather than wanting a mentoring relationship with some, more publicly recognised Ephesians 4:11 equipping gift – the church at large will continue to stumble along, enamoured with gifting rather than character.

## **Instructions to those who desire to be mentored...**

### ***(1) Be realistic in your expectations.***

As we have already stated in this article, to be mentored does not mean you give up your personal responsibility to walk with the Lord and become instead dependent on another. No! The goal of mentoring is to enable you to become more dependent on the Lord and to support you in this pursuit. In other words, we should be realistic in the expectations we put on those who mentor us:

- ***The person who mentors you, will no doubt, lead an active, busy life.*** To expect them to be at our beck-and-call is not only unfair on them, but would be a terribly selfish and childish expectation. We should rather prize every moment we do have with them, looking to learn from them whenever we can, ensuring that we are a blessing, not a burden, to them (Hebrews 13:17).
- ***The person who mentors you will not... surprise, surprise... be perfect.*** Yes, respect is vital in a mentoring relationship and blatant sinfulness will undermine respect in a heart-beat. But we are not here referring to casual or blatant unrighteousness. A godly mentor will seek to be real with those they mentor, rather than trying to impress them. In this, a good mentor will honestly open up his own heart in a desire to be authentic and in order to empathise with those they mentor. Rather than right off the mentor as, "Oh, so you're not as strong as I thought you were," we should honour their courage and vulnerability. The truth is that the greatest lessons you will learn from your imperfect mentor is how they handle failure, overcome adversity and endure hardships.
- ***The person who mentors you will at some point let you down.*** This is the reality, and test, of all true relationships. At some point, in their active schedule and in their imperfections, they will give you the opportunity to feel let down and even offended. This is a good thing! Firstly, it will remind you again that they are not perfect...yet; reminding you to continue to reaffirm your dependence in Christ and Him alone. And secondly, the mentoring relationship will become stronger, less artificial, if you can easily, yet thoroughly, forgive them. No relationship can grow until it is tested.

## ***(2) Purpose to be transparent and teachable.***

As good as a mentor may be, his mentoring will be ineffective with you unless you develop two vital attitudes: transparency – to open your life – and teach-ability – to humble your heart. Here is a sobering thought: ***life flows in mentoring only because the person being mentored allows it to!***

### ▪ ***Transparency***

There is absolutely no point, if you desire to be mentored, in keeping your cards close to your chest. Mentoring requires that we be transparent; that we open up our life (perhaps in stages) to the person we trust to mentor us. The power of all sin lies in its secrecy; the first step to freedom is to jump into the light. **“But if we walk in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7). Seeking to be honest in the “safe place” of a mentoring relationship helps us bring into the light, and thus into the power of God, the dark issues of our heart that hold us in bondage. **“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed”** (James 5:16).

Opening our life to another may take a super-human effort on our part. We have all, through painful experience, learnt to build up walls to protect ourselves, not realising that these very walls only end up imprisoning us. We need to fall heavily into the grace of the Lord as we use the sledge hammer of courage to dismantle these walls of bondage, and allow another in.

### ▪ ***Teach-ability***

Opening our life up to another – warts and all – is not being weak; it takes great courage to do so. Actually to not do so is stupid! **“Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid”** (Proverbs 12:1).

We all have blind-spots and we will all, even the best man among us, lose perspective when the storms of life blow over. It is only wise – and courageous – to invest in a relationship of trust where we can learn to appreciate both sincere affirmation and honest correction from someone who is committed to us, in love, for excellence. A true mentor is someone who stabs you in the front, because you have asked them to!

As we purpose to become lovers of Truth, we need to first start by facing the truth about ourselves. True freedom and self-discovery comes first by allowing God’s light to penetrate our soul, and in so doing, allowing it to expose the darkness. For those of us who have allowed this healing beam of intense love to do just this; we can only joyfully urge others to likewise walk this path of ***wise courage***.

Then as we begin to build a life centred on Truth, we not only allow another in but we also make ourselves accountable to the Truth revealed in this “safe relationship”. Nothing is more frustrating, or dishonouring, to a mentor who invests both prayer and time into another, when the person they mentor does not follow through on what God has revealed. Speaking from personal experience, we implore you to value and honour your mentor by being sober and diligent. To be teachable is not about nodding your head in agreement, it is about applying your faith to life.

## **Instructions to those who desire to mentor...**

### ***(1) First be mentored yourself.***

This should be immediately obvious. Even the Gentile centurion understood that to have a place of influence in another’s life, we have to give another a place of influence in our life (Matthew 8:5-13). We cannot, with integrity, expect someone to be transparent and teachable with us, if we have not first understood what this requires in doing so to another. Otherwise, we play the hypocrite!

### ***(2) Nurture the godly desire to mentor others.***

Paul not only encouraged us all – every believer, without exception – to desire to be a spiritual parent, he described it as a noble desire (1 Timothy 3:1). Of course, he then went to great lengths to stress the character required to be appointed as an elder – a spiritual father – in the local church (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

There are many ungodly reasons why one may desire to mentor, or lead, others. We see these ungodly motives in our world just about every day. Some, to fill the deep hole in their own heart, need to be needed. This is tremendously sad: we use others to fill our own void in the name of serving them! This is a sure recipe for disaster, and only an unhealthy, co-dependent (and terribly controlling) relationship can result.

Still others desire to mentor, and lead, people for their own benefit, to advance their own cause. Again this is as selfish as it is common. While this is often the unapologetic goal in business and industry, it dare not be so in God’s people. We, according to the Master, are to live by a different ethos; one where we prioritize people, and who they are, over what they can do for us! Jesus made it clear that the world would always confuse this Kingdom priority, but was emphatic: **“Yet it shall not be so among you”** (Matthew 20:26).

We must honestly evaluate our motives, and nurture the *godly desire* to mentor others; *to, in the pure joy of bringing the Father pleasure, reveal Christ*. There is no greater privilege than the honour of revealing the One we are passionately following. Our reward is in giving freely what we have freely received.

Paul's words capture so well the joy of mentoring (and in his case, the deeper-yet thrill of fathering): **“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy”** (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20).

This issue of our heart-motives is even more important than we first imagine. Not only must we cut out from our heart the numerous ungodly motives for desiring to mentor others for our own sake (and sanity), but we must do so for the sake of those who entrust themselves (and their sanity) into our hands. For as important as it is for us to be involved with restoring this ancient art of mentoring, we can do untold damage if we try doing so with self-centred and self-seeking motives.

The age in which we live is filled with hurt, burnt and broken people. If we encourage someone to take the risk of dismantling their self-imprisoned protective walls, and then abuse it, we will ensure that they never trust again! If we help someone to remove the masks they wear, and then deface them, we ensure that those masks will again be bolted down...this time, forever. We, again, implore you to yank out from your heart every selfish motive to gain from mentoring another, and nurture the precious, selfless, Father's heart (Spirit) within you.

### ***(3) Understand the heart dynamics of mentoring.***

As we seek to nurture the good desire to mentor others within, we have found the following four keys helpful in grasping the “heart dynamics of mentoring”.

#### **1> Delight**

As parents delight in their children, so the Father delights in us, His children. Nothing captures the heart of mentoring more than the word “delight”. This word expresses the willingness of one to unconditionally support another, and the pure pleasure that they gain in this sacrificial giving of themselves.

#### **2> Explore**

This word captures where the attention is directed in the relationship. It is the person being mentored who is the subject of attention; the mentor is curious to explore his world, and most importantly to encourage the mentored in the adventure of discovering themselves, God's Truth and the appropriate responses to His revealed leading.

#### **3> Listen**

Nothing communicates value to another better than listening to them. If we truly listen to others, we communicate – in ways that words cannot express – that what they have to say, and thus ***who they are***, is important to us. In fact, it is through the art of genuine listening to another that people actually walk into Truth for themselves. What a joy it is, when the mentor, can honestly say, “Do you realise that you just came to that conclusion through your own prayer, your own honesty, and your quest for truth?”

The task of a mentor, though, is not to just sincerely listen to those they mentor, but to likewise tune into the most reliable Voice present in any relationship, the Spirit of God's gentle whisper. The gifts of the Spirit are not just reserved for the celebration-worship meeting but are available, in a pure and powerful way, when even just **“two or three are gathered together in [His] name”** knowing He is in our midst by His Spirit (Matthew 18:20).

#### **4> Pursue: “Pray, Care & Follow-Up!”**

Just as nothing communicates value to another better than listening to them, nothing can be more destructive than, after listening to them, we do not follow up on the verbal and non-verbal cues provided. If the person we are mentoring shares an intimate struggle or need and we forget, or do not do what we can – what may be realistically expected – we are failing them in our role as mentor. Yes, of course we cannot do that which is unrealistic, and while we **“bear [their] burden”** we cannot **“bear [their] load”** (Galatians 6:2, 5). But mentoring is not just about listening; it is about helping people become more Christlike, and this requires that we be true and faithful with what is shared with us in confidence\*.

\*One word on confidentiality. We do not believe that one should promise absolute confidentiality to anyone in a mentoring or counselling situation. We obviously must keep in confidence what is shared, but must always reserve the right to seek further counsel should we need, or have, to. Some might feel that if we do not promise absolute confidentiality, then people will not be honest. This is not true. People will be honest if they trust you to be wise with what they share with you, and know that you too are accountable to others for counsel when you need it. People who will not be honest until absolute confidence is guaranteed can be encouraged, through your faithfulness, to trust your discretion in the matter... or else they may indeed be carrying a dark secret that will only trap you in guilt or worse, should you be bound by absolute confidentiality.

#### **(4) Be strategic in mentoring.**

There is great truth in the statement: if we fail to plan, we plan to fail. Since mentoring is more than just a friendship that can meander and take a course of its own, one ought to have a plan, to think through a strategy to aid the mentoring relationship. If a person has asked you to mentor them, then there is inbuilt in that request, a purpose or goal they are seeking to attain by interacting with you. Below we discuss a strategy of mentoring that we have found effective, developed on the anvil of our own experience.

##### **1> Initiate the mentoring relationship.**

A mentoring relationship is not a wishy-washy relationship, so at some stage, it has to be formalized. There are no hard and fast rules here, and ideally it should be the one desiring to be mentored who asks you if you can commit time to this. In other words, in an ideal world it would be the person desiring to be mentored who initiates the relationship. In this case, the mentor knows that the person is serious and actually wants the mentoring!

However, because most people do not have a clue of the benefits of mentoring, and some would feel that asking to be mentored would be too presumptuous, the mentor may have to initiate the relationship.

To do so, cold, to some unsuspecting “potential” person is not what we are advocating here. However, when a mentor senses that a person is starting to draw more and more from their influence and ministry, or even simply benefiting from their care and friendship (such as in a home church), he may need to explain the concept of mentoring and invite the person to consider being mentored.

This should be done carefully, respecting their suspicions of what such a relationship involves and resolving to not allow a negative response to dampen the existing, meaningful relationship. As should be clear from this article, mentoring cannot be imposed on another; it is neither the heart behind Biblical mentoring, nor will it achieve the results and rewards of it. Whoever it may be who actually initiates the relationship, it is vital for the mentor to formalize it by setting a time aside where both parties can get together to...

## 2> Clarify expectations and set goals.

This is an absolutely vital starting point for a mentoring relationship. ***One should not only clarify expectations and set up goals, but look to regularly, say every three or six month, evaluate these expectations and goals.*** This not only ensures that we are being productive in the use of this time, but also builds in reflection of the relationship. Should either party decide that the mentoring relationship should terminate, it will be based on this inbuilt review process.

The mentor should immediately clarify what expectations the person who desires mentoring has. Requiring that they read an article like this, and then even discussing the “principles of mentoring” and the “instructions” outlined above would be invaluable. Another “up-front” safeguard for both parties would be for the mentor to clarify that the relationship is inclusive, not exclusive.

This is especially important when the mentoring involves young people who still live at home, or when you may be mentoring a person who is in another home church, or local church (however, this should be the exception to the norm). In these cases, it would be wise for the mentor to stress that the person’s parents or elders, respectively, would be included when necessary; that is, their reach extends into every issue discussed. The mentor would be careful then to give advice without first leaning on the primary relationship the person being mentored ought to have; asking them first, “What do your folks think?” or “So what did your home church leaders say?”

Once the expectations are purified and then affirmed, together goals should be set. Immediate short-term goals such as personal faith struggles, which may have prompted the person to seek mentoring, should be tackled first. Then medium-term goals of life experience and character development can be prayed through, ensuring that they are “realistic, obtainable and measurable”. Writing these goals down, and keeping a confidential record of this, is important.

### 3> Use life as the “course material”.

While the mentor may prescribe articles and books to read, Biblical passages to study, and even courses to do, these must supplement the journey the person is on. This is important for two reasons: (1) ***the goal of mentoring is to participate with what path God is leading the mentored person down***, not in trying to create alternate paths, and (2) if you end up creating alternate paths – you will have plenty of work on your plate, trying to play “god”!

Using life – ***their life, not yours*** – as the primary backdrop involves exploring their world and listening carefully to them, as mentioned earlier. But it also means using the important context of (spiritual) social groupings to better understand them, and more importantly, cooperate with what God is saying. By social groupings we mean: the God-designed benefits we derive from being part of a home church, from being a part of the larger grouping of the local church, from being a part of a gender-specific accountability group...to compliment the “one-on-one” time spent together.

We have found that mentoring works best when seen in the context of these various social groupings rather than just the intense “one-on-one” time together usually associated with a mentoring relationship. In fact, the “one-on-one” time need only be a monthly, one-and-a half-hour time of heart-to-heart interaction (sometimes increased to bi-weekly, should the mentored need extra support) if the person mentored is enjoying the benefits of:

- A ***home church***, which provides the vital, intimate ingredients of soul health as the person learns to love and be loved, and to serve and be served.
- The bigger ***celebratory life of a local church***, which provides inspiration and challenge so vital for each person’s well-being.
- A ***gender-specific accountability group***, which is priceless, especially for men, who need brothers to be asking about the issues of their soul\*.

We are of the persuasion that if a person desires mentoring but is not enjoying the benefits of these other areas designed by God, they will have false, unreasonable expectations of a mentor. But when the mentored person has a healthy involvement in these arenas, the mentor can grasp a more holistic picture of what God is doing in their life. For example, the mentor can gauge the level of self-awareness and honesty the mentored person professes to have versus the reality of their social interaction. The mentor can follow up “one-on-one” on a teaching spoken, a prophetic word given, a weakness confessed or a Spirit-prompted response that the mentored person experienced in these other settings.

\*Of course, women can greatly benefit from this too. The stress we make here on men is because women tend to create their own groups of honesty and accountability, whereas men often do not.

#### 4> Meet together in one-on-one times.

This has already been implied, but mentoring must involve “one-on-one” times together. By itself – without the context of the setting described in point three (3) above – it can become very suffocating and incestuous. This is another reason why we believe that God intended mentoring to be primarily based in the context of the local church.

***Our suggestion, as implied, is that the mentor commits to either a bi-weekly or monthly time with the person being mentored.*** To begin the relationship, a bi-weekly time for two or three months is valuable, at which time it can become a monthly meet. Returning to a bi-weekly format can occur if and when necessary, but is most effective when the reason is defined, and a period of time, say two months, is determined as necessary to achieve the defined purpose.

We have found that a weekly meeting is too much. Firstly, we lose a sense of purpose when the time is too frequent as it easily becomes too casual (and often familiar), and secondly, it does not allow enough time for either party to process and follow through “homework” which arises from the times together.

#### 5> Explore horizontal and vertical questions together.

The key to effective “one-on-one times” – unless there is a definite, circumstantially prescribed reason for the meeting, such as, “Help, my marriage just hit a wobble!” or “Oh no, I’m struggling with ‘that area’ again!” – is to ask questions; “soul-questions” that, in a sense, become a regular “check-up” of the heart. We call these questions, the “Christ-centred” questions, as they explore both the horizontal and vertical “checks and balances”.

Below we run through them in question form:

##### (A) “How is your vertical?” or “How are you top to bottom?”

This refers to the person’s *relationship with God*. Here the mentor is interested in the health of the person’s love-life with the Father. Questions here should revolve around one’s...

- ***Devotional life:*** Jesus said, “**Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every words that proceeds from the mouth of God**” (Matthew 4:4).

Here we ask: “So what are you feeding on?” “What do you feel God may be saying to you?” “What is nourishing your appetite at the moment?” “What is alive to you from the Scriptures?” “What button do you think God is pushing in you?” “How close do you feel you are walking with Father at present?”

- ***Condition of their soul:*** David prayed, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight” (Psalm 19:14).

The words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart are reliable indicators of the condition of our heart. Here we ask: “What’s your talk like? Are you speaking positive, life-giving words of hope and encouragement to yourself and others?” “What’s on the screen of your heart? Are your thoughts generally upbeat, positive, grateful and full of praise?”

**(B) “How is your horizontal?” or “How are you left to right?”**

This refers to the person’s *relationship with life*, specifically with *people*. Here the mentor is interested in the health of the person’s inter-personal relationships. There are seven categories of relationships that affect us, either drawing out from us the Presence of Jesus or... provoking the dark side of our nature:

- 1) Our parents (and wider family),
- 2) Our spouse – or if single, our dating relationships,
- 3) Our children,
- 4) Our friendships (both intimate friends and those part of our fellowship),
- 5) Our work or vocation colleagues,
- 6) Our acquaintances and strangers (people in our world that we do not know well, and those who do not the Lord), and
- 7) Our enemies (anyone in the above categories, who for whatever reason offends, abuses or persecutes us).

Here we ask questions to try to discover how well the person’s inter-personal world is, and more importantly how they are playing a responsible role in this world. Misunderstanding, offence and unforgiveness does more to rob people of the righteousness, peace and joy of the Kingdom than any other thing.

The importance of the horizontal questions hang in Jesus’ words: “**But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness**” (Matthew 6:33). In other words, *seek first the King’s reign in your life, and then rightly align your life with His rule.*

The point in asking questions pertaining to these inter-personal relationships is not to promote a “juggle-these-balls-if-you-can” (let alone their numerous sub-responsibilities) mentality. Rather it is to view (and review) our relational responsibilities in the light of the centrality of Christ’s Lordship. In other words, being a Christ-follower does not mean that we have to become a master-juggler, designating the appropriate priority index to these areas, and then attending to them in order of importance. No. Jesus never gave us a list of priorities to live by; He did not say, “Here is the way to live.” He said empathically, “***I am the Way***” (John 14:6). In other words, *being a Christ-follower means that we have one, and only one priority, the Lord Himself; and we are to gauge the responsibilities of our life in obedience to His will.*

For example, if a man is neglecting his wife and children, he does not have, at his core, a “time-management problem”. Yes, he more than likely can benefit from knowing how to better manage his time, but he will never do so until he acknowledges and repents of his core “sin problem”. He is not seeking Christ’s Kingdom first and is wrongly aligned to God’s will for his wife and children.

By inquiring about a person’s inter-personal relationships, *we are encouraging those we mentor to regularly reaffirm that Christ is at the centre of their existence, and to constantly define their life, and relationships, from this divine centre.*

Please note:

We are not suggesting that the mentor grill the poor mentored person with every one of these questions in a kind of seek-and-destroy mission, “A-ha...gotcha! That’s where you’re out of line!” We have given a rather comprehensive list of questions to point out the need to regularly check the vertical and horizontal planes of a person’s life. Good mentoring encourages people to be centred on Christ, to be dependent on Him alone and to draw from the resources He alone provides.

## The Strategy of Five

With our passion for Jesus' global mandate (Matthew 28:18-20); and for the vital part that mentoring has in its fulfilment, it is our express desire to see mentoring strategically fleshed out within the God-designed community of the home church. We believe that without the backbone of mentoring, a home church can easily deteriorate into a social group that meets out of obligation once a week. However, with a strong skeletal mentoring structure, a community becomes a healthy, functioning body able to march to God's drumbeat in meaningful purpose. Then meeting together once a week (or more) becomes the cherry on the top for people who are filled with God's life, and who just love being together!

**The Strategy of Five is based on these principles:**

- ***Each person can (and should without exception) be mentored.***

Every believer, from the apostle, to the elder, to each member of a home church can and should be mentored. In the local church, mentoring begins as a member(s) of the equipping team mentors each elder, and together the elders form a team and an accountability group for one another.

- ***Each person can (and should in time) mentor others.***

In our busy day and age, most people can realistically ***mentor between 3-5 people*** based on the principles outlined in this article. We urge our leaders to embrace the goal of seeking to mentor (up to) five people as the primary responsibility of their leadership. In other words...

Each elder aims to mentor (up to) five core members of their home church, people who are, or maybe in-training to be, appointed as deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13). In turn each deacon aims to mentor (up to) five members of the home church. This means that in any home church, every person is potentially being mentored.

- ***Each mentor views the people that he mentors as his team and by extension an accountability group for members of the team.***

(This has specific application to the elder) The elder's primary investment of time in shepherding his flock then becomes the time he puts into mentoring his team of leaders (deacons), as they care for and mentor the rest of the home church, and in facilitating this team to co-lead their community life. Besides his "one-on-one" times with each person, he looks to bring them together for a monthly accountability group time, and once a month to pray and plan for the home church.

- ***Mentoring evolves from a caring relationship.***

(This has specific application to the deacon) The deacons' primary investment of time is to first care for the "care group" of (up to) five people they are responsible to in the home church. New people in the home church are prayerfully adopted by a deacon to care and support them in their new found life in Christ, or new found experience of community expression. Faithfully caring for another builds trust that can (in time) become the doorway to a blossoming mentoring relationship.

The deacon can (and should) start a monthly care group time where the members can pray for one another and begin to understand the rewards and responsibilities of accountability. Through the development of this care group, the deacon can begin to initiate individual mentoring relationships. And as this "care group" matures, it often becomes the nucleus of a new home church plant, as the elders of the parent home church recognize the grace upon and integrity in them. In this way home churches reproduce naturally, or more correctly, supernaturally!

- ***Mentoring should run on gender-lines.***

For obvious reason, the intimacy and honesty involved in Biblical mentoring means that it is most effective man-to-man and woman-to-woman. The ideal is of course, if couples can mentor couples and thus benefit from "one-on-one" and "couple-to-couple" times. And certainly, if an eldership couple is mentoring their deacons on gender-lines, to pull them all together to pray and plan for home church activities is powerful.

- ***We must reason from the whole to the part.***

For example, the care group is not an independent little group, in which the deacon draws people to himself. This is trouble waiting to happen! Rather the care group exists dependent on, and accountable to, the wider home church it serves. In other words, the care group does not act in anyway that will be in conflict with its parent home church; in fact, it seeks to compliment and enrich it. Likewise, each home church is dependent on, and accountable to, the local church it serves. And the local church itself is dependent on, and accountable to the apostolic vision it serves. This is what we mean to reason from the whole to the part.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

We trust that this article will be a launch pad for those who desire to be mentored and those who desire to mentor. We pray it will be a useful starting place for you as you seek to imitate Christ in one and model Christ for another. And may we once again see the church recapture this ancient skill of people development as we become a prophetic leader in this world currently so enamoured with the froth and fizz of the mentoring buzz. Let us, without agenda, give ourselves to the pure expression of mentoring that God intended for His people.

***“O Father, let a grassroots movement of ‘life-on-life’ shake this world once again in the reviving power of Your Holy Spirit!”***

**This article is part of a series entitled  
“Fathers & Sons”.**

**For other resources please contact us...**

## **CrossWave**



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