

# The blessing of spiritual mentoring

Early New Testament leadership created a culture of mentoring in the church so that the next generation could learn from their example, experience, wisdom, and fortitude. This should also be done today, through intentional training and teaching.

piritual mentoring is built into the fabric of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The Word of God urges parents to “start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” ([Prov. 22:6](#)).<sup>2</sup> Such instruction is repeated throughout Scripture. Moses, for example, commanded the children of Israel: “Teach them [Moses’ words] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” ([Deut. 11:19](#)). Says the psalmist: “For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born; who should arise and tell them to their children” ([Ps. 78:5, 6](#), KJV).

The same emphasis is repeated in the New Testament. Jesus focused a major portion of His ministry on mentoring the disciples spiritually and in ministry. Paul repeatedly talks about the importance of sharing our lives, knowledge, and experience with others. “So we cared for you,” he writes to the Thessalonian church. “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well” ([1 Thess. 2:8](#)). He also extended mentoring to include modeling by urging the imitation of the faith of others.

Moreover, Paul wanted to create a culture of mentoring in the church so the young could learn from the example, experience, wisdom, and fortitude of the old. This should be done through intentional training and teaching. Thus

in Titus, he admonishes older men to mentor younger men and older women to do the same for younger women in character, conduct, and self-control. "Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

"Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

"Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In every- thing set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" ([Titus 2:2–8](#)).

Paul's core argument for spiritual mentoring includes that to be effective mentors, our teaching must be backed by the witness of our own lives. We are to demonstrate all that we teach. What is laid upon us is the tremendous task of not only talking to men about Christ but showing Him to them through our lives. The experienced and exemplary Christian creates a responsible atmosphere for spiritual growth, sharing life experiences and skills and sacrificing time and energy.

As part of the mentoring process, Christians are to take every opportunity to teach younger people about God. This can be done by praying with them and for them, by bringing them under the means of grace, by instructing them in the principles of the Bible, teaching them their duty to God and man, and setting for them good examples of a holy life. This should be done by taking into consideration their age and capacity for understanding.<sup>3</sup>

## **Mentoring by spiritual mothers**

A friend of mine, Ashley, shared her mentoring experiences with me recently. As a young adult, she moved far from family to another state to start her career. A mature woman from the local church took Ashley and another young woman under her wing, and the three ladies formed a mentoring relationship. The mentor and the two young ladies met every Thursday to pray and discuss their lives. Their mentor would take the time to intentionally listen to, teach, and guide these young women. Along with these acts, the mentor would invite the young ladies over for Sabbath lunch, bike rides, shopping, and other social activities.

What Ashley learned most from her spiritual mentor was how to hear God's voice, especially in decision-making. When she was struggling to make a major decision as to whether to leave her comfortable job and go back full-time for her master's studies, she weighed the pros and cons with her mentor over a period of months. Finally, it became clear what to do when her mentor posed the question, "What does God want you to do?" Ashley knew she had been ignoring God's Voice, and right then she made the decision to go back to school.

After moving back to school, Ashley found another spiritual mentor in a woman, with whose family she ended up living. By living with her mentor, Ashley could see how her mentor lived by example. This mother took time to walk with Ashley each evening, discussing spiritual matters and the happenings of the day.

Both mentors are highly respected by Ashley. She loves them deeply and considers them both adopted moms, as they consider her an adopted daughter. She takes their advice seriously and is grateful for their wisdom. They have shaped Ashley into the woman she is today as she grows in her spiritual walk with God. The mentors' time commitment impacts Ashley's eternity.

The psalmist calls us to share God with the next generation just as these women shared with my friend: "One generation commends your works to

another; they tell of your mighty acts" ([Ps. 145:4](#)). These mentors were to Ashley as Naomi was to Ruth. Though we do not know the details about what Naomi did for Ruth, we know that Naomi made God attractive by example and teaching and as a result Ruth gave up everything, including her family, her heritage, and her homeland, to follow Naomi and her God ([Ruth 1:16](#)). Likewise, Ashley's spiritual moms led her to become a more mature Christian through their examples and teaching during this time in her life.

Mentoring by spiritual dads Michael grew up without a father and with a disengaged mother. As a teenager, Michael was invited to church by a friend. The friend's family picked him up and took him to church. On the way back, the friend's father, John, could tell that the young man did not want to go home, so he invited him over for lunch and a Sabbath afternoon walk in the park. This became a weekly routine—Michael joining the family for church, lunch, afternoon activities, and evening worship. He became "adopted" by this family. During this time, Michael learned how to read the Bible and pray, worship and share testimonies as a family, and enjoy God's nature.

As the years went by, Michael drifted away from the church. Over a two-year period, he would come up with excuses as to why he could not go to church and would sometimes just not answer his phone. John, the "adopted" dad, was persistent, though, and would not give up on Michael. He would call Michael every week and show up at his house on Sabbath mornings, telling Michael he wanted him to come and spend the Sabbath with them because he was part of their family.

The family consistently prayed for Michael during that two-year period of rebellion that included experimenting with drugs and gangs. Eventually, Michael came back to the church. He credits the "father's" perseverance and the family's love and acceptance as the reasons he is in the church today.

If the "adopted" dad never gave up on Michael, how much more does our God, the Father, never give up on us. God sought Adam and Eve hiding in the

garden, and today He continues to seek us. He promises to never leave us nor forsake us: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" ([Deut. 31:6](#)). His love and faithfulness toward us endure forever ([Ps. 100:5](#)).

## Wholistic spiritual mentoring

Spiritual mentoring, in order to be totally effective, must be wholistic. The following six steps will help us discover the biblical way of wholistic spiritual mentoring:

1. *Pray for them.* Jesus prays and intercedes for us ([John 17:20](#); [Rom. 8:34](#); [Heb. 7:25](#)). The apostle Paul prayed for his mentees ([1 Thess. 1:2, 3](#); [3:10–13](#)). The common denominator of the spiritual mentoring stories includes prayer. Michael came to the Lord because his "adopted" family interceded on his behalf daily. Ashley grew spiritually through the prayers of her "spiritual moms."
2. *Share your life with them.* Jesus spent three and a half years with His disciples. During that time, He taught them how to pray, how to minister, and how to live the kingdom life. Paul was intentional about sharing his life and time with all of his mentees ([1 Thess. 2:8](#)). In all the mentoring experiences, we note a pattern that mentoring included sharing life experiences, opening up homes, and spending time together.
3. *Be available in their time of need.* Jesus was consistently there for people in their time of need. He healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, and calmed the storms. Ashley repeatedly told me that her mentors were always available to her in times of need. Recently, after Ashley went through a breakup, one of her mentors took time to listen, comfort, and give advice—something Ashley desperately needed.
4. *Confront negative behaviors.* Jesus confronted the self-centered and negative attitude of James and John when they placed before Him their concern for being the first in the kingdom of God ([Mark 10:35–45](#)).

Confronting people in love is always constructive. Hopefully, it will lead to a better life like it did in the case of the Zebedee brothers and as it did with Michael. When Michael started to fall into drugs and gangs, his "adopted" dad confronted him and showed him that there is no future going that direction but that the better future is with Jesus. He cited [Jeremiah 29:11](#): " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' " This confrontation, done in love, brought Michael back to the Lord and to the church.

5. *Model spiritual life and disciplines.* Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, worship, do ministry, and live the Christian life. Michael learned the joy of the Christian life from his "adopted" family, which was a better life than the life he was living in his own home. He also learned the importance of going to church and of family worship, which now he leads for his own family.
6. *Help your mentee shift paradigms.* Jesus confronted His disciples with a radical paradigm shift in their thinking when He called them to be fishers of men rather than fishermen (Matt . 4:19). This radical shift that Jesus brings is all throughout the Gospels. He brought people from darkness to life, from preoccupation with this world to preoccupation with God, from being obsessed with money to being obsessed with Him. Ashley was encouraged to look at God's perspective when making important decisions in her life. Michael's paradigm shifted when his "adopted" dad told him God had a better plan for his life.

Remember, as the mentor, you are there to set the pace in spiritual and personal matters, to lead them to look to God as the problem solver: the One who meets all their needs.

## **The nature of spiritual mentoring**

Establishing a relationship with another person is always a two-way process, a partnership. Expectations must be defined as to what the mentoring

relationship will include. These expectations may be a desire to know how to hear God's voice, to receive help with painful problems, to find answers to spiritual questions, and to acquire new ideas for ministry. You will both make decisions about when and where to meet each week, which day and hour, and who may be included. We find it best to set starting and ending points. For some, three months may be the ideal time for a healthy mentoring relationship. Celebrate the close of the mentoring relationship with some special event, such as going out to dinner. Then, if both desire to continue for another three months, you may do so. At that time, spell out in detail the new expectations you have for each other, and stick to them.

A spiritual mentor should reflect the character, love, and grace of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> As an experienced mentor, Paul was very conscientious of imitating Christ because he knew his disciples would imitate him. "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" ([1 Cor. 11:1](#)). A mentor lives as an example for the mentee to follow. Therefore, the mentor should pay very close attention to his spiritual walk with God, allowing the Holy Spirit to shape him, making him more and more like Jesus (see [1 Cor. 4:6](#)).

Paul also tells the second generation of mentors to be spiritual examples to their mentees. He told Timothy: "Set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" ([1 Tim. 4:12](#)). People are always looking at us; therefore, we need to be spiritual examples for them.

When I was in college, one professor took a special spiritual interest in me. He prayed for me on a regular basis, taught me how to pray, instructed me on how to read the Bible, and showed me how to worship. But what I admired most was that he lived the way Jesus would live. He taught me the value of representing Christ in everything. I was often inspired to imitate his example to become more and more like Jesus. He was an exemplary mentor. Today, I aspire to be like him and do the same for my students. "It is heart missionaries that are needed. He whose heart God touches is filled with a great longing for those who have never known His love. Their condition

impresses him with a sense of personal woe. Taking his life in his hand, he goes forth, a heaven-sent, heaven-inspired messenger, to do a work in which angels can co-operate."<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

Mentoring is a process of learning and maturing. It takes time and involves various kinds of relationships and accountability. Mentoring is not define the latest fad or buzzword. For Christians, mentoring becomes rooted in the biblical principle of discipleship. It comes about by mutual edification.

Through the time you spend together, you should experience emotional and relational growth, as well as personal and spiritual nurturing.

## Sidebar: Mentoring: The biblical command

- [Deuteronomy 6:7](#): "Impress them [the commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."
- [Deuteronomy 11:19](#): "Teach them [Moses' words] to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."
- [Psalms 71:18](#): "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come."
- [Proverbs 1:5](#): "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance."
- [Proverbs 9:9](#): "Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still; teach the righteous and they will add to their learning."
- [Proverbs 13:20](#): "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."
- [Proverbs 22:6](#): "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."
- [Proverbs 27:17](#): "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens



another."

- [Ecclesiastes 4:10](#): "If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up."
- [Matthew 28:19, 20](#): "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
- [Philippians 4:9](#): "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."
- [1 Thessalonians 2:8](#): "So we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."
- [2 Timothy 2:2](#): "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."
- [Titus 2:3, 4](#): "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children."
- [Hebrews 13:7](#): "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."

## Notes:

1 For 15 significant biblical references to mentoring, see sidebar.

2 Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

3 *John Gill's Exposition of the*

*Bible*, [www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-](http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-)

[bible/proverbs-22-6.html](http://bible/proverbs-22-6.html).

4 For more detailed analysis, see N. Ashok Kumar, "Mentoring: Training the Second Line of Leadership," *Ministry*, March 2013, [www.ministrymagazine.org /archive/2013/03/mentoring:-training-the-second-line-of-leadership](http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2013/03/mentoring:-training-the-second-line-of-leadership).

5 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 150.