

A GUIDE TO MENTORING

Few Christians have lived fulfilled and productive lives in isolation from their fellow believers. God created His people to flourish in community and relationships. *Growth* and *maturity* are common Biblical themes. Paul exhorted the Ephesians “... *Speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*” Eph. 4:15. It has been observed that the Christian life is more “caught than taught.” A mentoring relationship with another Christian who will encourage, support, and hold his friend accountable is a vital aspect of developing the life-sustaining maturity that God desires for His people.

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is the activity of fostering growth in a man’s life through a relationship with another man, who has potentially helpful resources to offer him. Mentors possess life experiences, skills, relationships, knowledge, wisdom, and Biblical insight that can be helpful to his mentee. While primarily designed for the mentee’s benefit, the relationship is meant to benefit the mentor as well. The mentoring process brings two men into a “sharpening” relationship in which both parties will grow. Typical mentoring involves periodic meetings in which the mentee shares his needs and goals for growth and the mentor provides practical input to help meet his mentee’s need. In between meetings, both individuals may have “tasks” to complete for each other.



THE ROLE OF THE MENTEE

Mentees (or protégés) have a desire to grow or mature in one or more areas of their lives and are willing to share their need with another man and come under his influence. The mentee drives the mentoring relationship by providing the direction of the growth and the goals that he desires to reach. The mentee sets the agenda, and the mentor helps the mentee to navigate the pathway to growth and maturity.

THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR

Mentors act as advisors, guides, coaches, cheerleaders, and models of godly living. They desire to enable their mentees to develop and reach the goals that they have set for themselves. The overriding concern on the part of the mentor is his mentee’s interests, whatever they may be. A mentor does not need to be a trained counselor, a Bible scholar, or otherwise “perfect” in his own life. In fact, passing on his “lessons learned” to his mentee may be one of the most valuable services he provides his mentee.

HOW TO START A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

FOR MENTEES

If you don't yet have a mentor, start by looking around you for someone to fill that role.

1. **Start by building the relationship, a simple friendship.** That will take time! Be patient and meet consistently. Share your stories. Just get to know each other during your initial meetings.
2. **Find some common interests on which to build your friendship.** Men without any shared affinities will likely not remain in a productive relationship for long. Those affinities could be hobbies, career interests, life skills, service activities, and family or spiritual affinities.
3. **Keep the initial expectations modest and reasonable.** Growth is a long-term process and small steps are to be celebrated.

FOR MENTORS

Look around you to identify men who would benefit from a relationship with you.

1. **Do you see someone to whom you could offer support as he faces a need?** Don't be bashful in offering to come alongside that man. Just as the mentee should do, start by building the relationship. Find affinities with your mentee that will foster a friendship.
2. **The mentee typically has something on his mind and wants to talk about it.** Mentors need to ask good questions and listen! Let your mentee bring up the things that he wants to talk about, issues that matter to him. If action items come out of the first few meetings, they should be bite-sized tasks, where success is likely.
3. **As your relationship grows, you may find that you need to help your mentee clarify his growth objectives and then determine how your mentoring can be of greater service to him.**

KEYS TO A PRODUCTIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

1. **Effective mentoring occurs when no topic is off limits.** While the mentee will drive this, be open to talking about anything—job issues, parenting concerns, sin struggles, relationship difficulties, etc.
2. **Transparency is a key to growth.** Without it conversations remain superficial. Admitting failures, by both parties, often opens the pathway to eventual progress. An effective mentor is willing to share openly about his life—the good, the bad and the ugly.
3. **Mentoring requires confidentiality.** Your conversations are just between the two of you. Mutual trust between mentor and mentee can only be built upon shared information that remains confidential.
4. **Mentoring involves consistent meetings.** Agree on a schedule and stick to it as much as possible. That might mean meeting weekly, bi-weekly, or even monthly. Are you feeling too busy to mentor? Most mentors find that two one-hour meetings per month works well, often over lunch. What's two hours over the course of a month? You can do it!
5. **Remember, mentoring is usually not a teacher/pupil relationship.** Rather it is "life on life." So, the relationship should not become one of duty or obligation to fulfill the mentor's requirements.
6. **Most importantly, keep the focus on Jesus.** The mentor is not the hero of this story. Jesus is! Look at the Scriptures together, talk about them and pray together. Mentors should be faithful in praying for their mentee. Keeping a journal for prayer requests and using it to direct future conversations is a good practice to follow.

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR MENTORING

In Bible times mentoring was the primary mode of handing down skills and wisdom from one generation to the next. Key Scriptural passages encouraging mentoring include ***“as iron sharpens iron, one man sharpens another”*** (Proverbs 27:17) and ***“follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”*** (1 Cor. 11:1). The Bible is filled with mentoring type relationships, from Moses and Joshua to David and Jonathan to Paul and Timothy. Barnabas mentored both Paul and John Mark, and Paul routinely urged his converts into discipleship relationships. Jesus commanded his followers to ***“go and make disciples of all nations”*** (Matt. 28:19). *Mentoring* and *discipleship* have a great deal of overlap in their purposes and activities. All Christians would benefit from mentoring relationships, as both mentors and mentees.

REFERENCES

- Hendricks, H. and Hendricks, W. (1995) *As Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship*. Moody Press.
- Dungy, T. (2011) *The Mentor Leader*. Tyndale Momentum.