

GROWING

young leaders

A practical guide to mentoring teens

Ruth Hassall

Contents

Foreword	6
Part 1: What do we mean by mentoring?	
Chapter 1 A biblical perspective	8
Chapter 2 Models of mentoring.....	18
Chapter 3 Benefits of mentoring.....	26
Part 2: Mentoring teenagers	
Chapter 4 The changing world of adolescence	34
Chapter 5 Creating a safe environment	43
Chapter 6 Putting a mentoring scheme in place	50
Part 3: On being a mentor	
Chapter 7 Characteristics of a mentor.....	60
Chapter 8 Key skills and tools for mentoring.....	69
Chapter 9 Sharing the journey.....	74
Part 4: Mentoring for leadership	
Chapter 10 Identifying young leaders	84
Chapter 11 Created with purpose.....	91
Chapter 12 Not too heavy a load.....	100
Appendix: A plan for meeting.....	103
Notes.....	111
Bibliography.....	115

Part 1

What do we mean by
mentoring?



Chapter 1

A biblical perspective

The Bible clearly shows us that God's primary method of investing in the emerging generations is through a mentoring relationship.¹

Mentoring is not a new phenomenon, a fad that the whole world and his wife, including the church, is adopting. It is actually based on one of the oldest models of learning, with its roots way back in the golden era of Greece, many centuries before Christ was born.

Mentor was the name of a character in Homer's *Odyssey*, who in his later years befriended King Odysseus. When Odysseus left to fight the Trojan war, he appointed Mentor to watch over his son, Telemachus, charging him with his care and asking him to teach the young man wisdom and prepare him to assume his royal responsibilities one day. Mentor demonstrated many of the key characteristics that are needed by those who instruct young leaders-in-training—wisdom, good character and a commitment to teaching the next generation. So the word 'mentor' was adopted firstly to describe the method of teaching both professional and manual labour skills to the next generation, and, more recently, to define the process of encouraging the growth of a young leader.

Cultural anthropologists tell us that almost every society has 'elders' of some kind. Whether they are tribal chieftains, village headmen, clan leaders or family patriarchs, nearly every social unit across history and around the globe includes clearly recognized adult role models or wisdom figures. They are usually older, more experienced, stronger members of the group to whom the younger ones look for a sense of identity.

There are many current ways of defining mentoring, and in Chapter 2 we'll look further at some models of mentoring and how they work in practice, but for now it might be helpful to understand the definition that I'm using as I write this book:

Mentoring is a relationship in which one person helps another to grow in their faith and leadership ability by sharing the God-given resources of skills, wisdom, knowledge and experience.

Often, when I talk about this subject in relation to Christian youth ministry, it's not too long before this question is asked: 'Mentoring is all well and good, and obviously a really useful tool... but is it biblical?'

Good point. If you were to look up the word in a Bible concordance, I can pretty much guarantee that you wouldn't find it. Even in the modern paraphrase *THE MESSAGE*, it only appears three times (Proverbs 5:13; Isaiah 54:13; James 5:10). The word 'mentor', then, isn't a biblical word, but the concept of mentoring is woven right through the Bible, throughout the Old Testament in the lives of the patriarchs and prophets and through the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus and the apostles—as well as in the instructions for the churches that we find in the epistles.

I'd like to take the next few pages to look at some of these relationships, which take different forms. Some of the relationships are quite short-term and are about passing on wisdom and advice; some focus on instructions about hearing and responding to the word of God; some are simply concerned with sharing life together. All of them involve some kind of commitment between two people.

Old Testament

These are just a few of the mentoring relationships that can be found in the Old Testament, and, interestingly, if you follow them through you will often discover that there's a chain developing. As one person has been mentored, he or she goes on to identify and mentor others.

Jethro and Moses

Exodus 18 gives us a brilliant insight into the relationship between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. Moses' wife Zipporah and his two sons have been living with Jethro, and, when word reaches them about the amazing things that God has done for the Israelites, Jethro comes to visit Moses along with Zipporah and the boys. While there, Jethro sees what Moses has been facing with all the people of Israel—queues lining up to complain about one thing or another so that the burden has become too much for Moses to carry alone. Instead of just sympathizing with him, Jethro takes Moses aside and introduces him to the idea of delegation, giving him wise advice on how to manage effectively such a large group of people without suffering burn-out in the process.

Moses and Joshua

Having received this good advice, Moses recognizes that he needs to train up someone who will take on the overall leadership role when he dies. He identifies Joshua, son of Nun, as the person with the potential to do this (Numbers 27:18–23). Joshua had been part of the group sent into Canaan to scout out the land: out of the twelve that went, only he and Caleb had had the confidence and courage

to trust God to deliver on his promise of giving them the land even despite massive opposition (Numbers 14:6–9). Moses appoints Joshua to be his assistant and trains him up so that when the time of Moses' death finally comes, Joshua is ready to take on the role of leading the Israelites into the promised land and is recognized by the people as God's chosen leader (Joshua 1:16–17).

Deborah and Barak

Deborah comes on to the scene at a time of war. She was a prophetess and the fourth and only female judge of pre-monarchic Israel; her story is told twice in chapters 4 and 5 of Judges, where we read the account of the victory of Israelite forces led by General Barak.

From the account, we can see that when Deborah calls Barak he is reluctant to go and fight, and with good reason—the enemy army is huge. Barak sets the terms for his participation by insisting that Deborah has to go with him (Judges 4:8). Deborah agrees and proceeds to teach him what it means to go to war trusting in God.

Eli and Samuel

In probably one of the best known stories of the Bible, we have what could be argued is the first recorded example of residential youth work (1 Samuel 3)! Samuel's parents had dedicated him to God, to serve in the shrine at Shiloh, and it was Eli's role as priest to train him in the duties that were involved, but also in how to hear and respond when God speaks. The first time God calls Samuel, the young boy doesn't realize that he is hearing the voice of the Lord, and Eli needs to instruct him about what to say and do when he hears the call again (vv. 7–9).

Elijah and Elisha

Elisha, probably most famous for raising the Shulammitite widow's son back to life, is selected by God to be Elijah's successor as prophet, and is appointed by Elijah to be his assistant and disciple (1 Kings 19:16–21). On meeting Elisha, Elijah goes over to him, throws his mantle over Elisha's shoulders, and at once adopts him as a son, teaching him all that is necessary for him to take on the role of prophet. At the end of his mentor's life, Elisha asks for, and receives, a 'double portion' of Elijah's prophetic spirit (2 Kings 2:9–15).

Mordecai and Esther

Esther, in the book of her name, is an orphan who has been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. She is just an ordinary Jewish girl in exile, until one day she finds herself caught up in the Persian king's beauty pageant (Esther 2:8) and God's rescue plan for the Jewish nation. Mordecai supports Esther, challenging and advising her as she approaches the king to help save the Jews from genocide (4:13–14).

New Testament

Jesus

In many ways, Jesus can be held up as the ultimate mentoring model, as his whole ministry was dedicated to investing primarily in the lives of twelve people. In the context of CPAS's *Growing Leaders* course, we call this the Jesus Principle: 'for the sake of many invest in a few'. Jesus understood very clearly that, as mentoring author Robert Clinton puts it, 'more time with less people equals greater impact for the Kingdom'.²

As we know, Jesus spent a lot of his time travelling around preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons and getting alongside people who were marginalized, but, as we read through the Gospels, it's staggering to see how regularly he took time out to be with the twelve disciples:

*Jesus' focus was always on relationship and his ministry was in perfect balance: he gathered and spoke to crowds but never allowed their size or adulation to trick him into thinking he had done his work. Rather, while speaking and ministering to the many, he also found a few young men and women to invest in deeply, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, that band of followers turned the world upside down. This generation needs that to happen again.*³

In Mark 3:14 we're told that 'Jesus appointed twelve that they might be with him'. He shared the whole of life with this small group. He wasn't inviting them on a ministry training course; he was inviting them into a life-on-life discipling relationship that would develop them from immature followers to mature, godly leaders.

Barnabas

Barnabas was a man with an incredible ability to spot the potential in others. His real name was Joseph but the apostles nicknamed him Barnabas because it means 'son of encouragement' (Acts 4:36). What a great reputation to have! We're also told that he was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (11:24). If anyone embodies what it means to be a mentor, it's Barnabas.

It was Barnabas who recognized the potential in Paul when the other believers wanted to keep their distance from him because of his reputation as a persecutor (9:27). He stayed faithful to Paul and was willing to stand by him. However, he wasn't blind to Paul's faults, and, when Paul showed himself unwilling to give John Mark

a second chance to participate in ministry, Barnabas challenged him strongly, ending their partnership (15:37–39).

Paul

It's no surprise that Paul went on to mentor others in the same way that Barnabas had mentored him. Most notable among Paul's mentorees are Timothy and Titus, Silus, and Priscilla and Aquila.

On one of his missionary journeys, Paul met Timothy and spotted great potential in this young leader. Paul invited Timothy to travel with him, giving him opportunities to serve and to grow in leadership experience (Acts 16:1–3). The two letters that he wrote to Timothy continued the mentoring relationship even when he couldn't be there in person, giving good advice for the different situations that Timothy was facing. He also encouraged Timothy to continue the mentoring tradition by reaching out to other potential leaders: 'You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others' (2 Timothy 2:2).

As we read the letters that Paul wrote to the churches, we can find further examples of the way he invested in the lives of others:

- He was aware that our love for the young in faith must go further than simply sharing with them the good news: 'We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too' (1 Thessalonians 2:8).
- He knew that his life was a great resource in demonstrating what it meant to be a follower of Christ: 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ' (1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV).
- He wanted the young leaders to know that what he taught was trustworthy and was meant to provide practical skills for the work of mission: 'Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice' (Philippians 4:9, NIV).

Youth ministry trainer Paul Fenton sums up well Paul's understanding of what young leaders needed from him:

He knew that when the young in faith stumbled on rocky ground, they would need someone to steady them; when they reached the hilltops, they would need someone to join the celebration; when they faced a crossroads, they would need someone to share in the decision to take the narrow path; when they faced dark valleys of despair, they would need someone to lean on.⁴

Those were not just the needs of young leaders in the early Church; those same needs are present today.

Is this not 'discipleship'?

In previous generations, mentoring may well have been described as 'discipleship', and I think that discipleship still plays a large part in what we mean by 'mentoring' in the Christian context. This is reflected in the first part of our definition: 'Mentoring is a relationship in which one person helps another to grow in their faith...' Mentoring goes further, however, in that it's also about seeing potential in young people and helping them to identify and grow in their skills and gifts.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, mentoring isn't a new phenomenon. This kind of relationship has always been part of the Bible's story, but it seems to me that in recent years we have lost sight of it. Much has been done to improve the way churches provide for young people, recognizing that they have distinct learning needs, and so on. But over this last century I think there has been a tendency to become more concerned with education than with spiritual formation—or, if I'm honest, more concerned with entertainment than spiritual formation! We can only begin to fulfil the great commission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations

(Matthew 28:19) if we start investing time in the lives of young believers.

When I started working as a youth pastor in a local church, I was desperately looking for the one ‘great thing’ that would attract and keep young people. When I’d been at the church for about a year, I took some time away to think through the future direction of the youth ministry. I went armed with my Bible and a notebook, ready to hear from God some master plan that would transform the nation, but the only phrase that kept coming to my mind was ‘Spend time with them’. I have to admit, it took me a while to realize that this was God’s master plan and, in fact, always has been.

As we read through the Bible, we can see that it’s there right from the start. Deuteronomy 6:6–7, for example, commands parents to talk about God’s laws to their children—not in a classroom but in everyday life. It’s as if God says, ‘Do you want the next generation to share your values, the values I gave you? Then they’ll have to see those values demonstrated in your life so consistently that, no matter what you do, they shine out of you.’ Mentoring is not parenting—let’s be clear about that—but in some respects it uses the same ‘when you are at home and when you are on the road’ method that God gave to parents in Deuteronomy 6. The effectiveness of this kind of training is backed up by Proverbs 22:6, where we read, ‘Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it.’

When God wanted to communicate with his people in a definitive way, he didn’t create a programme. He sent his Son—Emmanuel, the God who is with us, who invested time in his followers and taught them to be like him. And the new heaven and earth, promised by God at the very end of the Bible, is a picture of a place where God is present with his people, where they see him face to face (Revelation 21:3; 22:4).

In many ways, the whole issue of mentoring isn’t really about youth work at all. It is about a way of life, a way that God intended from the start, and a way that Jesus has called us all to follow, as

soon as we realize that it is our responsibility to make disciples of all people.

Spiritual formation is never about how many training programmes a church runs or even about the quality of those programmes. It is about the quality of the people with whom young people are interacting, and the overall spiritual and relational quality of the community of faith.

Connie's story

When I was 14 I became a Christian after always having gone to church but never having realized that Jesus wanted to know me or that I could know him too. I was a very insecure girl without any idea of self-worth, who looked for anything or anyone to find identity in. My parents had split up when I was 11 and it had turned my world upside down. When I first felt God, all I could do was cry, and it continued like that for a long time. My youth pastor who became my mentor got alongside me and met up with me every week during my teenage years. She taught me so much about God and encouraged me to keep looking to him. Back then my behaviour had not changed very much but I never felt condemned by her. There were times when I hit rock bottom and my mentor was the person I called on. I feel God brought her into my life to show me love and to cause me to trust when I felt betrayed. With her support I have been able to overcome many things and become more the person and the leader that God created me to be.

Connie's testimony shows us that God didn't create people to be self-sufficient and move through life alone: we need healthy supportive relationships. This is recognized in many areas of life, but in no area is it so crucial as in the development of young leaders, to ensure that they are mentored in a biblical way.