

# GROWING TOWARD *Spiritual* MATURITY

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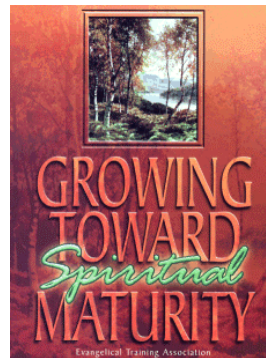
## Mentoring Others

Chapter 11 of *Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity*

By Gary C. Newton

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Mentoring relationships are one of the most significant ways Christians can help other Christians to grow spiritually. People have mentored one another since the beginning of time. Only the terminology has changed. The term *mentor* has become more popular today because of the increased need for one-on-one relationships to address contemporary culture's intimacy vacuum. The rise of technology and decline of the family structure have increased our need to bond through learning. Mentoring seems to provide the "high touch" in a "high tech" world.



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### What Is Mentoring?

Mentoring is a relational process between an older, more mature, more knowledgeable, or more skilled person and another person who learns in some intentional way. Age cannot necessarily be equated with a higher level of maturity, knowledge, or skill. One of the primary components of mentoring is the relational process itself. For this reason some people may be more skilled at mentoring than others. Relational skill is needed to make a mentoring partnership work. What distinguishes a mentoring relationship from other informal learning is intentionality. In a mentoring relationship the mentoree establishes with the mentor specifically what he wants to learn and together they establish how they will learn it. With the focus on learning, rather than teaching, both persons in the relationship will have a deeper level of responsibility in the process.

### Principles of Mentoring from Scripture

Mentoring has been used since early civilization to teach and train others for a variety of purposes. Throughout Scripture we find many illustrations of key biblical leaders being mentored. Mentoring is one of the primary ways God uses people to help others learn, grow, and develop as well as to mold them into the kind of people He wants them to be. We will examine three mentoring relationships from Scripture to identify principles we can use today.

### Elijah and Elisha

Elijah and Elisha were two prophets who fought against the evil influences of Baalism in Israel's early history. Elijah prepared the way by confronting the wicked Queen Jezebel and by

killing all the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Even after that tremendous victory, he felt alone and depressed. In his despair, God spoke to him and gave him hope. Part of that hope was in choosing a successor and companion for Elijah in the person of Elisha. This new relationship began as a result of God choosing Elisha. In 1 Kings 19:19 we find that “Elijah went from there and found Elisha.” Elisha then “set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant” (v. 21b). Elisha learned how to be a prophet of God by being with Elijah, watching him, and listening to him continually. We could refer to this as the first “prophet apprenticeship school.” Apparently Elisha learned his lessons well. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of God, Elisha immediately took up Elijah’s cloak (passing on of the baton) and all those watching realized that “the spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha” (2 Kings 2:11-15). Elisha went on to do even greater things than Elijah in his ministry. What an example of a successful mentoring relationship! A major principle of mentoring is to train others to accomplish even greater ministries than us.

### **Barnabas and Paul**

This next example dramatically illustrates the principle that our goal is to empower others to use their gifts and ministries even to the point of seeing their ministry reach beyond our own.

If you will recall the early life of Saul after his conversion experience, he was blind and without a friend. Ananias was the first to welcome him into the church fellowship (Acts 9:17), but the Christians in Jerusalem were still too scared to associate with him because of his past reputation. Barnabas was responsible for introducing Saul into the core group of church leaders (Acts 9:27,28).

Barnabas encouraged Paul to use his gifts of teaching and preaching wherever they traveled. When Luke records their travels together in the Book of Acts, he begins by always mentioning them in the order of “Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:26; 13:2). Yet after their ministry in Cyprus, Luke changes the order throughout the rest of the Book of Acts to “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:13). The reason for the change in order is obvious after reading the account of what happened in Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12). God chose to bless Paul’s ministry in such a mighty way that Paul apparently was looked upon as the leader of the duo from that point on.

What a lesson in humility for us in ministry today. Would we be willing to pour our lives into another person only to see their ministry overshadow ours? That is exactly the point of Barnabas’ ministry. Perhaps in heaven his reward will be even greater than that of Paul because he was willing to play “second fiddle” for the sake of the kingdom of God. Mentoring relationships are not always predictable. Possibly, the people we begin to mentor may even turn around and mentor us someday.

### **Paul and Timothy**

What Paul learned from Barnabas, he invested into the life of Timothy and countless other young pastors. Yet Timothy was special to Paul. He probably led him to the Lord during his first trip to Lystra (2 Tim. 1:2) and taught him the foundational principles of the gospel. Paul asked Timothy to accompany him on his second missionary journey and from that point

onward began to invest in him as his co-laborer in the Gospel. Timothy shared in most of Paul's ministry—from Macedonia, to Achaia, to Ephesus, to Corinth, to Asia Minor, to Jerusalem, and even to Rome during Paul's first imprisonment. After Paul's release, Timothy again traveled with him visiting various churches, but eventually Paul had him stay at the Ephesus church to take care of some problems. Their close relationship is verified by the fact that Paul names him as co-sender of six of his letters. Paul's challenge to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:1,2) is a commission for all of us who will be involved in mentoring relationships.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

The pattern of mentoring, begun by godly men and women in biblical times, leaves us with valuable principles for mentoring relationships today.

### Various Forms of Mentoring

As we have seen from Scripture, mentoring relationships may take various forms. Stanley and Clinton, in their book, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, identify seven types of mentoring relationships moving along a continuum from the most intensive and deliberate to the least. Their main points can be outlined as follows.

#### Intensive

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|--------------------|--|
| 1. Discippler      | Enablement in the basics of following Christ   |
| 2. Spiritual Guide | Accountability, direction, and insight for questions, commitments, and decisions affecting spirituality and maturity |
| 3. Coach           | Motivation, skills, and application needed to meet a task or challenge   |

#### Occasional

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 4. Counselor | Timely advice and correct perspectives on viewing self, others, circumstances, and ministry |
| 5. Teacher   | Knowledge and understanding of a particular subject   |
| 6. Sponsor   | Career guidance and protection as leader moves within an organization                       |

#### Passive

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 7. Model:    |   |
| Contemporary | A living, personal model for life, ministry, or profession who is not only an example but also inspires emulation |
| Historical   | A past life that teaches dynamic principles and values for life, ministry, and/or profession                      |

In this chapter we will concern ourselves only with the intensive and occasional mentoring relationships.

Under the intensive category of mentoring we have the discipler, spiritual guide, and coach. When most people think of mentoring, they usually envision this more intensive type of

relationship, focusing on helping a person to grow spiritually and utilize their spiritual gifts in ministry. It may be difficult, however, to always separate mentoring relationships into three such categories. Often a relationship overlaps in all three areas or moves from one area to another as the relationship develops. I am a little uncomfortable with using the term “discipler,” as the authors do, since it is not used in this context in Scripture. Jesus Christ is the only person who makes disciples of Himself. We make disciples of Jesus Christ. By calling a mentor a discipler, we run the risk of usurping the authority that belongs only to Jesus Christ. It would be like calling someone a “Christianizer.”

There certainly is a tremendous need for mentors of seekers and new Christians who will help them to learn the basics of what it means to follow Christ and then to get them established in the fundamental disciplines of the Christian life. In the first few centuries of the early church, this was a very structured process that all new converts went through. Yet it is one of the greatest weaknesses of the discipleship process in the church today. I believe that new believers need mentors who will get them grounded in the basic disciplines of the faith like prayer, Bible study, fellowship, confession, etc., and stick with them until they are integrated into the nurturing body of the church. It is difficult to estimate how long this process might take. For each person it may be different. The most important thing is that the mentor sticks with the person until successful patterns of growth are established and the new believer has become interdependent on others within the larger church fellowship. This transfers the responsibility, over time, from the individual mentor to the collective body of Christ—the group that has been given the primary responsibility to “make disciples.”

A mentor will often take the role of a spiritual guide, to help a younger Christian deal with issues, questions, and concerns. The goal in this relationship should be for the mentor to guide the learner to Christ and His Word for answers. One danger, however, in such a relationship is for the guide to become like a “spiritual director” to the mentoree, fostering an unhealthy, long-term dependence on the mentor. While there may be a reason for a mentor to be very directive with a mentoree, it should not be done to gain control over the life of the mentoree, but rather to help the mentoree to learn the value of submitting to the authority of Scripture.

Coaching is probably the form of mentoring used most. Usually it refers to the role of a mentor in helping another Christian to learn a skill, task, or ministry. It could be teaching a person how to study the Bible, teach Sunday school, counsel troubled youth, or one of the many other tasks or ministries within the church. It could take the form of an apprentice relationship, in which the mentor would work side-by-side with the mentoree, or it could look more like an occasional coach’s huddle, in which the mentor would periodically get together with a person to review strategies and failures. The intensity of the relationship and frequency of the interactions would depend on many factors.

Under the occasional forms of mentoring, Stanley and Clinton identify the roles of the mentor as a counselor, teacher, and sponsor. The role of the mentor as counselor serves to help the mentoree to deal with specific problems or issues in life. Such a relationship usually does not last more than a few sessions. Often a person might visit the mentor later on to deal with either a similar or different problem.

The role of a mentor as teacher is a one-on-one form of informal teaching that usually lasts for a given period of time until the mentoree has learned what was intended. Many times such mentoring relationships rise out of a more formal classroom situation in which a student wants more understanding or a deeper level of insight on a particular topic. In both of these mentoring situations involving either counseling or teaching, the mentoree usually initiates the relationship based on a significant problem or need. This point of contact becomes a “teachable moment” in a student’s life that usually precipitates a learning experience the student will never forget.

The role of the mentor as sponsor is one in which the mentor introduces the new person in an organization or church to individuals, systems, and procedures that will help the new person become successful. The initial relationship between Barnabas and Paul was that of a sponsorship. In that relationship Barnabas integrated Paul into the life and ministry of the church. Although such a relationship could last a long time, it may only last until the new person establishes themselves into a network of relationships in the new situation. As you can readily observe, it would be ideal to match every new believer or church member with such a mentor to assimilate them into the life of the church.

Mentoring relationships do not need to be long term to be significant. The key factor is the student’s desire to learn, grow, or develop, and the mentor’s willingness and ability to serve.

### **Establishing Accountability Structures in Mentoring**

Over my years of mentoring different people in various ministry settings, from youth and pastoral ministries to college and seminary ministries, I have come to appreciate the need for structure in mentoring relationships. Yet whatever structure we develop to hold people accountable for their growth, we must keep it flexible and person-centered. Whatever accountability structures are used, they need to be developed cooperatively, with both parties having input. I have found that it is most effective if the mentoree takes the responsibility for establishing “what” they want to learn and “how” they plan to learn it. The mentor then helps the mentoree to work out a more formal “contract” to document these learning goals and how they will be measured.

A format that has evolved from my practice over the years is based on God’s challenge to His people in Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” The big idea from this text is that each person needs to love God with every aspect of their being. In more practical terms, it is helpful to divide the task of fulfilling this challenge into three major aspects:

1. Heady/Knowing—intellectual growth
2. Hearty/Feeling—emotional growth
3. Handy/Doing—growth in our skills, behavior, or practice

At the beginning of each new mentoring relationship, the mentoree is asked to set one to three goals in each of these areas and under each goal to identify one to three specific ways they will accomplish each goal. These goals and the action plan to accomplish the goals become the structure for the mentoring relationship. It keeps the mentoree focused on specific goals and it

reminds the mentoree what must be done to learn those specific things. It provides both parties with an accountability structure. In their periodic meetings the two persons discuss the mentoree's progress towards the goals and deal with any issues or problems that have come up.

I have appreciated this format because it can be adapted to be more or less structured depending on a person's need or temperament. Yet it holds the mentoree responsible to plan and design his/her own strategy for growth. As we mentioned earlier, when a person is a part of the planning process, they are much more apt to see a plan through. This format has been very helpful in helping people to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth and development.

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### Summary

Mentoring relationships are some of the most effective ways to help others to grow and develop in their relationship with Jesus Christ. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). God has used such mentoring relationships to prepare some of the greatest leaders in the Bible. With the variety of different types of mentoring, people can plan and structure their relationship to meet a variety of needs. Intensive relationships may involve following up new believers, guiding someone in their spiritual growth, or coaching someone to develop a particular ministry skill. Occasional relationships may involve counseling a person related to a specific problem they may be having, teaching a person one-on-one, or sponsoring a person until they become a part of a church body or group. To be effective, mentoring relationships need to have some form of accountability, so that both parties know what is expected of them. Yet it is important to keep the structure flexible to the mentoree's needs and personality.

### For Further Discussion

1. Why does there seem to be a greater need within our society for mentoring relationships?
2. What are some of the risks that are a part of mentoring someone?
3. Why might it be unwise to mentor someone of the opposite sex?
4. How would you feel if the person you mentored eventually took your place of ministry?
5. Why is accountability structures needed in a mentoring relationship?

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