



Effective Mentoring

A practical guide to developing powerful, life-changing relationships with the women around you.

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The Other Side of the Table



What a mentor taught me about tough times.

by Janine Petry

My life is not marked by the imprint of a faithful, time-tested mentor. I can't say any one woman has intentionally sought me out or poured herself into me over the years. Instead, I have been touched by many women whom God has had in just the right place at just the right time, just for me. And even based on my limited experience with these godly women, I have all the proof I need of the powerful, lasting impact an effective mentor can have.

One woman in particular stands out. When Jean came alongside me, I was a nervous wreck. I was anxious, depressed, and burned out. She was a coworker at the ministry where we served—in fact she had trained me and befriended me right from the start. She was classy, confident, and twenty years my senior.

When I could take no more pain on my own, I reached out for someone. And she was there. Each week, we'd go for sandwiches or coffee. She'd listen and ask lots of questions. Then she'd share her own experiences, encouraging me through the lessons she'd learned when she was in my shoes. And she directed me to helpful Scriptures. She inspired me simply by being there, healthy and joyful.

Out of all of our conversations, these are her words that I remember most: "Someday, you'll be on the other side of the table. You'll be doing what I'm doing—recounting your experiences to help someone else, even though you will have put them long behind you."



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At the time, I was convinced I would never put my tough times behind me. I could see no light ahead. But she'd been there too. And she was right. Now almost a decade later, I've been on the other side of the table many times. And I pass on her encouragement to those I talk to: "Someday you'll be on the other side of the table."

Her words weren't meant to be prophetic. Instead, they expressed a truth that she had learned over the years about how God goes before us, sometimes clearing a way with the footsteps of others. Second Corinthians 1:3-4 puts it like this: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

Like Jean, women in leadership are presented with opportunities to influence those around them daily. This collection of articles, from authors who understand your unique role as a mentor, will help encourage and direct you as you become an effective mentor to the women around you. And whether the time you spend as a mentor is measured in years or simply in hours as mine was, it can be nothing short of life-changing.

Blessings,

Janine Petry
Contributing Editor, Gifted for Leadership
Christianity Today International

Introduction



BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Why God Made Mentors

Here's what you need to know to have a lasting impact.

by Eric Johnsonheads

Why do the trades have apprenticeships and medical professions require internships? Because personal attention from experienced practitioners helps learners master essential skills, attitudes, and knowledge. This, of course, is no surprise to Christians familiar with the mentoring relationships of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Naomi and Ruth, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and the disciples.

What is a Mentor, Really?

A mentor is “a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction,” according to The Uncommon Individual Foundation, an organization devoted to mentoring research and training. It reports that mentoring is the third most powerful relationship for influencing human behavior, after marriage and the extended family.

Randy MacFarland, who helps train mentors as vice president of training and mentoring at Denver Seminary, says, “When we consider the fragmentation of the family, the speed of change demanding the constant learning of new skills, and our mobile society separating extended family members, the need for mentoring increases.”



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The Uncommon Individual Foundation identifies three things people need to succeed: a dream, someone who believes in them, and determination. MacFarland says, “Now, we certainly add the whole matter of God’s call and empowerment. But we often forget how powerful it is when someone believes in us.” That’s what mentors do, and it shapes lives.

“I started thinking about mentoring relationships in our church when young parents of infants asked me, ‘Who can we talk to? We don’t know what we’re doing!’” says Don Payne, who was pastoring at Southern Gables Church in Littleton, Colorado, at the time. “Or I’d hear from a young family, ‘We’re not doing well with our finances and we really need some help.’ Networking my contacts in the church, I did some matchmaking—younger couples with more seasoned veterans.”

How the Mentor Benefits

Lots of people would like to *be mentored*, but those willing to mentor are harder to find. What are the benefits of being a mentor?

One advantage of mentoring is the sense of significance you receive. As Don Payne says, “In vocational ministry you often wonder if what you’re doing is making a difference, or if your efforts are just being dumped into a black hole. But in a mentoring relationship, we’re usually dealing with people hungry to grow, eager to learn, and there is a more visible return on our investment.”

A second benefit is personal growth. As a mentor discusses character issues with a mentoree, both are forced to look at their own character issues.

Rodger Schmidt, who not only continues to be mentored but also mentors others in a student ministry at Galilee Baptist Church in Denver, says, “I can’t look at someone else’s life without evaluating my own. I have people looking to me for answers. It holds me to a different level of accountability. They’re evaluating my life. It is very beneficial.

“For example, I often tell my mentorees, ‘Ministry is not about me; it’s not about me.’ Well, one day I was under a lot of pressure, and I was frustrated, distant, and grumpy. As I began to share my frustrations about the ministry and how I was not able to concentrate at home because of all the things that needed to get done, my mentoree looked me square in the face and said, ‘Is it about you or not?’

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“I was not modeling my philosophy very well and he felt free enough in our relationship to say, ‘This is where I thought we were headed. Is it true or not?’ He became very honest with me. I had to learn the lesson I was trying to instill in others!”

In the Beginning

What does a mentor actually do? At first, the tasks are:

- 1. Set the tone.** Once contact is made between mentor and mentoree, it is up to the mentor to create an environment where trust blossoms. One way to deepen that trust is simply to tell your story. This opens doors and generates discussion. Sharing some of your struggles has a way of taking the relationship to a deeper level.

The setting is usually informal. Some mentorees become like another member of the mentor’s family. They spend time at their home playing with their kids and eating meals. Other times a mentor will simply invite a mentoree along on appropriate occasions.

- 2. Clarify expectations.** A safe place for this kind of learning requires three things: openness, hospitality, and boundaries.

Mentors do not want mentorees to expect too much or too little. Both problems can be avoided if expectations are discussed openly. Everything from “Is there homework?” to “Who pays for coffee?” should be agreed upon ahead of time so there will be mutual understanding. Unrealistic or unexplored expectations can come back to haunt you later.

Then agree on meeting length, frequency, time, place, purpose, and level of accountability. Pray together and commit to praying for the relationship between meetings.

“A mentoree may expect you to be empathetic and offer a shoulder to cry whenever they feel the need. Well, that may not

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be your best contribution as a mentor,” says Don Payne, who now trains mentors in suburban and rural churches. “Or the mentor may expect something that the mentoree is unwilling or unable to give. In the beginning, both need to say, ‘This is what I think I can give, this is my gift mix, this is my experience range. My life is like a box—there’s a lot of stuff that’s outside this box, but you’re welcome to whatever is inside.’”

Sharpening Your Mentoring Skills

Once the relationship is established, the mentor does several things.

- 1. Maintain Trust.** After trust is established, it must be maintained. This means being honest, open, and transparent. In addition, mentors should keep to the point, follow through with commitments, be available and flexible.

It also means appropriate confidentiality; private information stays private. It may take months for mentorees to open up, but it takes only a minute to shut them up with inappropriate sharing.

At the outset mentors and mentorees should discuss the kinds of information that would be appropriate to share (1) with anyone, (2) with other mentors, and (3) with each other only.

In addition, mentors learn as well as teach. Mentoring relationships are not one-way, hierarchical relationships. While it’s true that one has more experience than the other, the “life sharing” goes both ways. Thus, an additional responsibility of a mentor is to “accept the mentoree’s influence.” This builds trust.

- 2. Have an agenda.** At the top should be the mentoree’s questions. But be flexible enough to recognize teachable moments. Jesus engaged his mentorees in hours of “debriefing” after healings and miracles and public debates. If mentors today send mentorees on risk-taking, faith-stretching, kingdom-building adventures, there will be plenty to talk about!

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3. Offer your network. Much of effective ministry is not what you know but who you know. If the mentoree asks, “Who knows something about this?” and you don’t, then your assignment is: Who knows somebody who knows something about that?

4. Offer perspective. By virtue of their extra years, mentors have something mentorees do not: experience. A mentor should therefore offer mentorees the gift of perspective.

A student once told Janet McCormack, chaplaincy training center director, “What I really like about you, Chaplain Janet, is that you focus on the purpose of ministry when I get lost in the details.”

That’s what mentors do—keep things focused on why we’re doing what we do and who we’re doing it for.

Asking Good Questions

One of the most important duties of a good mentor is to ask the right questions. A mentor is not “the answer person,” but rather, “the one who gets the mentoree to do helpful self-reflection.” Sometimes questions identify a deeper issue. Other times questions lead to personal fears that need to be confronted. Questions also challenge assumptions.

Questions Mentors Can Ask

- **How is your ministry or job affecting your relationship with God?**
- **How is your sense of God’s call being clarified?**
- **Where are your skills being tested?**
- **Where is your character being tested?**
- **What are your hopes and dreams for your future?**

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- **How can I help you?**
- **What evidence can you point to of the presence and power of God in your life?**
- **As you assess your growth, where do you see areas you need to work on? What are your felt deficiencies?**
- **What are some new things you could try?**
- **What pain have you experienced and what were some of the effects of that pain?**
- **How has that shaped who you are?**
- **How might God use your past to prepare you for ministry in the future?**

Push in the Right Direction

Mentors often nudge their charges in directions that at first feel uncomfortable.

For example, youth ministry interns sometimes chafe when scheduled to work in the nursery, attend board meetings, or write reports. They want to do the “teen things” they’re already good at. Why make them work with babies or boards? To stretch them. Wise mentors suggest, “Let’s see what else you’re good at.”

McCormack trains her chaplain mentorees that way. She tells them, “You may be inexperienced here. You may prefer one-on-one counseling, but if you’ve never organized a social event for singles, now’s the time to try. You may not like it, and that’s okay. You need to stretch. I won’t let you fail. If things fall apart, I’m here to catch you.”

As MacFarland says, “One of the life-long lessons in the Christian life is learning dependence upon God. Taking risks and working outside of our previous experience promotes growth and dependence upon God.”

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Competent to Confront

A final skill mentors should hone is the skill of correcting. Mentors are like mirrors helping mentorees see what's preventing them from being all that God wants them to be. "I'm not going to attack their character," says Burns. "I just want to hold up the mirror and say, 'Do you see this?'"

If the mentor has built a relationship of trust and safety, the mentoree is more inclined to accept correction. They will think, "My mentor cares for me so I can hear what they're saying."

On one level, all Christians are accountable to follow Christ with integrity. But in a mentoring relationship, we have an even greater platform for accountability. If a mentoree's actions or work habits are inconsistent with their stated goals and commitment, the mentor needs to mention it.

Those in a Hurry Need Not Apply

Mentoring is not for the impatient. While it is one of the most effective means of developing effective Christians, it is also time-consuming.

"In a culture that presses for instant results by following a few key principles," says MacFarland, "the mentoring process can seem slow. But there is no short cut for equipping people to become theologically astute, godly in character, and competent in ministry."

The seemingly slow pace of mentoring is offset by its universal suitability for people of all ages, all races, and all nationalities. And all of life.

"Mentoring is a ministry never confined to vocational or organizational boundaries," says Don Payne. "A person can retire from a pastorate or a program, but as a mentor you're never without a ministry."

And since no one ever outgrows the need for increased character and competency, the need for mentoring continues. We all need a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.

Adapted from "How to Be An Effective Mentor," by Eric Johnsonheads. This article first appeared in the Spring 2000 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

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Thought Provokers

- *As a woman in leadership, would you agree with the author that, “Lots of people would like to be mentored, but those willing to mentor are harder to find”? What obstacles do women in particular face when it comes to being mentored or mentoring?*
- *In the section titled “Sharpening Your Mentoring Skills,” which of the four skills would you consider to be your strength as a mentor? How can you continue to grow in this area? Which of the four skills would you consider a weakness for you? How can you strengthen this area today?*
- *The author writes, “We all need a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.” Would you agree? How might the women in your sphere of influence benefit from a mentoring relationship, regardless of their life situation?*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Time to Mentor

Do you have what it takes to be a good mentor?

by Lesa Engelthaler

Nobody has time to mentor. In fact, conversations with Christian leaders reveal that the number one reason they don't take on a disciple or facilitate a mentoring program is that they simply have no time.

And yet, the leadership of Richland Bible Fellowship (a 1,500-member congregation in Dallas, Texas, a Palm Pilot mecca that heralds its Starbucks-infused 70-hour workweek) takes the time.

Here is one of their success stories.

For more than 15 years, Mark Engelthaler, executive pastor, has mentored one man per year, and now many of these men mentor others. Almost 10 years ago, Mark's wife, Lesa, began a women's mentoring program. As full-time ministry leaders or committed volunteers, everyone feels the time crunch. Mark and Lesa are no different. But Lesa points to something Dallas Theological Seminary professor Stan Toussaint, who was one of Richland's first pastors, once said: "Love is eternal. People are eternal. Therefore loving people is eternal."

Consider this story and remember that mentoring is simply spending time loving people. Everybody has time for that.



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Lesia's Story

Much of my formative spiritual growth resulted from older Christian women saying yes to my cries for help. I was clueless about the sacrifice they made to add me to their schedules. They were busy pastors' wives, college professors, or women with careers, all deeply involved in ministry. Even so, these women took time to invest in me. Because of their modeling, I felt compelled to do unto others what they had done unto me.

Yet, as I grew older and “did the math,” mentoring one woman a year didn't seem enough. In 1996, I prayed for God to show me other women in our church with the same passion. The answer to that prayer was for me to begin a program to partner women one-on-one for a one-year commitment.

It was not an easy decision. I'm a pastor's wife with a career and already involved in many areas of the church. Where would I find time? So I had one rule for the program: keep it simple. I didn't want something that took tons of administration, and the women involved certainly didn't need “one more meeting.” I promised that this program would help them get intentional about a ministry they probably already did—influencing and encouraging other women.

My keep-it-simple mantra came from C.S. Lewis: “Think of me as a fellow-patient in the same hospital who, having been admitted a little earlier, could give some advice.”

In the fall of 1997, at an all-church women's dinner, we announced the new ministry: *Disciples at Heart*. Then we had an informational meeting to explain details: our goal is not intense Bible study, but meeting for encouragement. The commitment is once a month for one year. The participants fill out an information profile, which helps us prayerfully pair them.

This is the hardest part, yet every year I'm in awe at how God sovereignly pairs up women we've never met. Then we contact each woman to provide her partner's name, and the program basically runs itself.

The only extra commitment is attending two group meetings each year.

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This has become a vital part of the ministry, because when women look around the room filled with others who think discipleship is important, it helps us see that we're a part of a bigger multiplication plan.

It surprised me that women I considered mentor-ready felt so unprepared. So two years ago, we added a mentor training element. It's been well received. The investment of my time to begin this mentoring program taught me that the experience, maturity, and spirituality of women helping each other creates a powerful reservoir of God-given strength that benefits our church.

Out of the success of the women's mentoring program came multiple inquiries: "Where's the men's program?" I began praying that God would help meet that need. Two years ago, he did.

Role Reversal

One thing I discovered about mentoring is that I often benefit from what my mentorees have to say.

As I slid into the seat across the restaurant table from my mentoree, Melissa, I had anything but "I'm the older godly woman" thoughts in my head. I'd come straight from work, preoccupied with a job-related frustration. Waiting for our dinner I silently uttered an SOS prayer, "Lord, you gotta show up because I have nothing to offer tonight."

I asked Melissa about her day, her family, how her personal time with the Bible was going. Then something happened that was so God-like. Melissa is about 10 years my junior, and she's also fairly new in her faith. Yet her profession as director of human resources makes her my "senior" in the work world. Melissa asked me about the situation I was facing. When I told her, then out of her mouth flowed the most amazing managerial wisdom, which was exactly what I needed to hear.

That night, God showed up, but not in the way I'd imagined. He used my mentoree to mentor me.

Lesa Engelthaler is a writer and a mentor in Garland, Texas. This article first appeared in the Summer 2006 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

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Thought Provokers

- *As a leader, what is the number one reason you would turn down an opportunity to disciple or facilitate a mentoring program?*
- *How might Lesa's promise to "keep it simple" influence you as a leader? How might this influence the mentoring relationships you have or help manage?*
- *In what ways could you help the women around you become more intentional about mentoring—influencing and encouraging one another?*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Making a Good Match

Learn the 8 characteristics of a healthy mentoring relationship.

by Fred Smith

Mentoring may seem new, but actually it is one of the oldest and best methods of learning. In times before degrees were mandatory, the mentoring system was the accepted one, not only in manual skills but in the professions, such as medicine and law.

As we look at Scripture, we immediately think of Paul and Timothy. From the text I don't know how much technical skill Paul gave him as a missionary, but we do know Paul was an excellent role model and sponsor. He let Timothy observe him at work. Paul promoted him to the churches.

The responsibility of the mentor is to be open, real, and personify consistently who he is so the young person receives a clear, consistent signal. The real responsibility is on the young person to absorb and to observe correctly.

Increasingly churches are starting mentoring programs. A common mistake is that older women visit with younger women without an agenda, eventually simply becoming Bible study or prayer times. These are excellent activities, but they are not mentoring.



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Mentoring is a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and mentoree for the specific and definable development of a skill or an art. One of my favorite mentoring stories is the young pianist who came to Leonard Bernstein and asked to be mentored by him. Bernstein said, “Tell me what you want to do and I will tell you whether or not you’re doing it.”

Bernstein essentially said to the young man, “You’re responsible for your playing and your practice. The one thing you can’t do is hear yourself as a great pianist hears you. That I can do and will do for you.”

The study of mentoring can be organized but not the application. Effective mentoring has no set formula. It’s a living relationship and progresses in fits and starts.

Making a Good Match

It is not difficult to make a list of desired characteristics in a mentor. However, like characteristics of a leader, they are in combination and mix, not equally balanced qualities. Each of these ingredients, however, in some degree should be in a mentoring relationship:

1. **Mentor and mentoree must share a compatible philosophy.**

Our goals and methods are really an expression of our philosophy. If the goal is to be Christian, then the philosophy must be built on divine principles. To me, wisdom is the knowledge and application of scriptural principles, not the citing of verses or telling of stories, but the actual application of the principles.

2. **The mentor should be knowledgeable in the subject and objective in her criticism.**

The mentor who says what the other wants to hear is irresponsible. She should not counsel in matters in which she is not expert or pass judgment in subjects beyond her limitation.

It is important that the mentor on occasion say, “I don’t know. I’ve had no experience with that.” It is good when she has a broad network of knowledgeable friends who might be helpful on such an occasion.



3. **The mentor must genuinely believe in the potential of the mentoree.** A mentor cannot do serious thinking about the needs of the learner or spend the necessary time without believing in that person's potential. A mentor isn't doing what she's doing just to be nice. There may be times when the learner loses confidence in herself, particularly after a failure, and she will need the mentor to help restore confidence.
4. **A good mentor helps define the vision, the goal, and the plan.** So many young people I talk to have several options for their life, and they are not equipped to choose the one. They hesitate at the thought of giving up the others.

Recently I had lunch with a young man who graduated from a prestigious European university with high marks and told me he had been "tested genius in 13 areas." Yet he had done nothing, though in his early 30s. I was talking to another man in the same general circumstances, and I said, "You could have married six or eight young women but you chose one. You will have to do the same with your goal."

Choosing a specific goal is the key to doing many other activities. The goal defines the discipline, creates the energy, and gives the measure of progress.

Clarifying the goal is a crucial step. It controls so many other elements. I try to find whether the individual's goal is formed by outside influences or internal. Are her accomplishments to please or impress others or to satisfy herself? The image of success has become so prevalent in our society; I want to know what gives her deep satisfaction. What, to her, has meaning? What does she do easily? What does she learn quickly and remember clearly? Is the goal realistic, considering her talent, opportunities, and facilities?

5. **The chemistry must be good.** The first evidence of this is clear communication. Each must clearly and easily understand the other. Before I start to work with someone, I will check this by talking a few minutes and then ask the person to repeat what



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I've said. Sometimes I'm amazed at what I hear. It's difficult to work well together unless each communicates well with the other.

Intuition, a feeling of the spirit of each other, is also important. When our spirits are in harmony, then we can work until our communications are clear. We won't jump to conclusions or get carried off into prejudices. I find this particularly true in working between races.

Communication, to me, is understanding, not agreement. I hear people say that the problem is a lack of communication when it may be genuine difference of opinion. No amount of communication will change that.

- 6. The mentor needs the experience and originality to develop options rather than decisions.** Some individuals with whom I work initially become frustrated that I will not give them advice but, rather, options from which they can choose.

If I give advice, then I'm taking over their responsibility for their decision-making, and that is not my function. Furthermore, how a decision is carried out is as important as the decision, and the mentor can't control the carrying out.

The mentor must never take over the decision-making responsibility for the individual. A good mentor is not a quick-fix artist.

- 7. The mentor must be able to commit to a person and to a situation.** Once I was involved in a land development requiring large amounts of money from a New England bank. The loan officer was careful in exploring all the details. He explained, "Don't think I'm being too careful. I don't want to get you halfway across the river." When we commit to be a mentor, we commit to taking the person all the way across. That will take time and thinking. I must be willing to take a phone call any time it comes from a mentoree in stress.

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8. The mentor must be given permission to hold the mentoree accountable. The mentoree must give this responsibility to the mentor. This helps keep the mentoree from becoming resentful or quietly rebellious or hostile.

I tell one of my mentorees that accountability is like a tail on the kite—it keeps things from darting around. Accountability is not control. In mentoring it is pointing out objectively what is happening and asking if that is what the mentoree wants. At no time should the mentor take over control of the other's life. The mentor is a counselor, not a boss.

Signs of Fruitful Mentoring

To measure a mentoring relationship, look for these characteristics:

Trust and confidence. All the cards are on the table. Anything given in confidence should be held in confidence.

Unvarnished truth. We should come to the place in the relationship where we can be direct. My two great mentors never had to preface the truth or hedge their statements with me.

Climbs and plateaus. We progress by climbing, then plateauing for assimilation, then climbing again, plateauing again—repeating the process as long as we live. Don't stop when you reach a comfortable plateau.

Character development. The mentor teaches, but the Spirit changes character. Although I've been mentoring actively for over 40 years, I cannot claim any success in improving character in adults. Character improves only through spiritual experience.

Mentoree initiation. The mentoree is responsible for all contact. She controls the continuation of the relationship. Sometimes a mentoring relationship becomes non-productive and should end. I accept this as normal.

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Joy in the doing. A mentor has accomplished great good when she has taught the individual the joy of accomplishment. That has become so much a part of my life that when I get low, I immediately start to do something that I feel will be worthwhile. The joy of living returns.

Adapted from "Mentoring Matters," by Fred Smith. This article first appeared in the Winter 1999 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

Thought Provokers

- *Of the eight characteristics of a healthy mentoring relationship, which characteristic comes most easily to you, and to the women you mentor? Why do you think this is true?*
- *Of the eight characteristics, which do you find most difficult to reflect in your mentoring relationships? Why? What can you do to encourage change in your mentorees and in your mentoring relationships?*
- *Do you see the signs of fruitful mentoring in your relationships? Which ones would you like to see more of? How can you invest in the growth of those today?*



BRINGING IT HOME

Spiritual Mentoring

Discover how a spiritual director can help grow your faith.

by *Agnieszka Tennant*

Her palms open heavenward, Helene sets them on the couch by her thighs and then starts with a prayer. On occasion, she rings a brass bell to separate the clamor from the quiet. Sometimes she lights a candle, as if to remind us that the Holy Spirit is with us, interceding on our behalf with words we don't even know how to find.

For the next two or three hours, Helene listens intently with me for God's voice. We sit in her sunroom, chatting about my everydayness: the job, the migraines, the mother, the husband, the sex, the prayer life, the joys, the mistakes. Sometimes we read Scripture; in it we find people with the same concerns as mine. In it all, I slowly notice God beckoning.

Helene isn't a mystic or a saint. The title I use for her—spiritual director—isn't helpful, either. As any decent spiritual director is quick to say, the term's a misnomer. Helene doesn't tell me what to do or try to answer questions only God can answer. In her sunroom, we listen for—and sometimes hear—the Holy Ghost.

Once, as I and my biological clock neared 28, I came to her distraught over my feelings of inadequacy as mother material. "Have you talked to God about it?" Helene asked. "Not yet," I replied. "Why don't we ask him now what he thinks," she proposed. She prayed for guidance, and we sat in silence for about five minutes.



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There was nothing I wanted more than to hear God’s words of comfort. But as the minutes flew by, I felt—pardon the expression—spiritually constipated, unable to discern God’s voice. I finally gave up trying. As soon as I did, a thought popped into my head: *You can’t make this happen!* I suddenly realized that just as I couldn’t make God answer my questions immediately, I couldn’t resolve my feelings toward motherhood when I wanted to. Both require waiting—but would be resolved in time. When I conveyed this to Helene, she said, “See, there’s your answer.”

Like a growing number of evangelicals, I’ve turned to spiritual direction because I want to know God better. My life is so hurried and unexamined these days, I need someone older and wiser to accompany me.

In a typical session, a director may start by asking you about your life, and then begin inquiring, “Where’s God in this?” or “How have you prayed about it?” Direction can take place on the phone or by e-mail, and sometimes even in small groups of people who function alternatively as mentors and mentorees.

Spiritual direction is not necessarily for everyone; many people have encounters with God without it. But if you’re curious about how it might help in your faith journey, here are five points to consider.

Spiritual direction is *not* psychotherapy. People usually see a psychotherapist because they want to solve their problems. Once their crisis is remedied, they stop seeing the professional. Spiritual direction isn’t designed to “fix” people or solve their troubles.

Thirteen years ago, Ruth Haley Barton, author of *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, stumbled upon spiritual direction when, as a church leader, she went to see a Christian psychologist. The professional helped Ruth realize her questions weren’t mainly psychological in nature; they had more to do with faith and God. The psychologist surprised her by suggesting they find out where God was in her struggles.

The psychologist-turned-director led Ruth into the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude. She remembers the director saying to her, “Ruth, you’re like a jar of river water all shaken up. You need to sit still long enough so the sediment can settle and the water can become clear.”

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“She knew I was all riled up, so full of words, activities, theology, and dogma, that I hadn’t had the courage to sit still long enough to hear my questions and find God in the midst of them,” says Ruth, who today is a spiritual mentor and the cofounder of The Transforming Center, a spiritual formation ministry.

“I think we’ve gotten to the end of what psychology can offer,” Ruth adds. “It cannot take us all the way to full spiritual transformation. We need a way to open ourselves to the work only God can do to transform our deepest brokenness.”

Like Ruth, good candidates for spiritual direction are people experiencing anxiety, change of identity, challenges to their faith, and a yearning for God. Some find direction helpful in steering them away from the kind of sin that tends to ensnare them.

Pick a spiritual director who’s further down the spiritual path. Many of us are blessed to have informal spiritual directors: our parents, grandparents, teachers, prayer partners, and pastors. In a way, spiritual direction is something mature believers should give each other without setting out to do so.

Yet while it’s true any believer can help another listen for God, the person seeking direction needs to look for someone from whom she can learn. Spiritual direction is different from spiritual friendship.

“There are questions we’re afraid to ask until we have support to do so,” says Ruth Haley Barton. “You choose someone who’s better versed in the ways of the soul than you are, someone who has submitted herself to training.”

Spiritual direction doesn’t equal mentoring, either. “People seek mentoring when they desire to develop particular competencies,” writes Jeannette Bakke in *Holy Invitations*. In a mentoring relationship, the mentor coaches the mentee, while the latter seeks to imitate the mentor or to learn skills from him. As such, mentoring often takes place between two professionals. In direction, the directee seeks to imitate Christ with the aid of the director’s discernment and experience.

The director has to have “a detached, loving presence,” adds Jeannette. “With family and friends, it’s nearly impossible to be open and neutral because their decisions sometimes affect us.” For this reason, she advises the director and directee not to become social friends.

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Spiritual directors don't have more access to God than you do. Be suspicious of anyone who claims to receive the guidance God has for you. And ask yourself why you're seeking a director. If you find it hard to speak to God directly, it may be worth considering whether your search for a director is one more way in which you're avoiding God.

Leanne Payne, author of *Listening Prayer: Learning to Hear God's Voice and Keep a Prayer Journal*, says that while there are sound spiritual directors out there—ones “deeply immersed in Christian reality and truth”—she worries when “hurting, needy people would much rather bend toward us and learn through us than go to the Lord themselves. And the flip side is just as hazardous: Immature spiritual directors can gain carnal control over the lives they direct.”

I like the way psychotherapist-turned-spiritual director Larry Crabb describes spiritual direction—listening to the Spirit on behalf of another. The director is there merely to accompany you through listening, questions, and prayer, as you notice the movement of God in your life.

Good spiritual directors should be hard to find. Author Leanne Payne, who is head of a pastoral care ministry, cautions that fine spiritual directors have been “few and far between” historically. There's good reason for that. She quotes 16th-century priest Frances De Sales' writings: “There are fewer men than we realize who are capable of this task. He must be full of charity, knowledge, and prudence, and if any one of these three qualities is lacking, there is danger. I tell you again, ask God for him, and having once found him, bless his Divine Majesty, stand firm, and do not look for another, but go forward with simplicity, humility, and confidence, for you will make a most prosperous journey.”

Run from directors who: a) are more interested in your story than in where God is in your story; b) often give you advice; c) make you feel manipulated; d) quote more from Carl Jung than from the Bible.

You don't have to get spiritual to participate in spiritual direction.

Some people don't think of themselves as “spiritual.” The good news is, Christ wants us to come to him anyway. You present yourself to God just as you are—even if it means hassled, depressed, stressed out, tired, or angry (I'd never go if it weren't the case!). A good director will help you find God's “holy invitations,” to use Jeannette Bakke's words, “whether you are glad or sad, overwhelmed by life or savoring it.”

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Well-known retreat director, author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, and recovering alcoholic, Brennan Manning has found spiritual direction, among other things, aids in keeping him away from the lure of booze. In a recent interview, he told me, “Goodwill doesn’t do it; lofty intellectual thoughts don’t do it. I’m a very vulnerable man. There’s no effective middle defense against the first drink. Similarly, in the spiritual life, there’s no effective middle defense against the relapse of sin. It’s a matter of pleading with God each day for the grace to stay faithful.”

On the way home from Helene’s sunroom, I’m encouraged to do just that. I sing praise songs in the car and usually even manage to take bad drivers in stride. The daily work of pleading with God for the grace to stay faithful in the midst of unanswered questions is still before me; no one will do it for me. But, thank God, a good, wise Christian is there to cheer me on.

Adapted from, “Drawing Closer to God,” by Agnieszka Tennant. This article first appeared in the September/October 2004 issue of TODAY’S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine.

Thought Provokers

- *How is spiritual direction and mentoring different from psychotherapy? What are the consequences of confusing the two?*
- *Why is it important for both a mentor and a mentoree to understand that spiritual directors do not have more access to God than anyone else?*
- *The author gives this warning: “Run from directors who: a) are more interested in your story than in where God is in your story; b) often give you advice; c) make you feel manipulated; d) quote more from Carl Jung than from the Bible.” How might women in mentoring roles adopt some of these behaviors, even without knowing it? What can you do to protect your mentoring relationships from reflecting these warning signs?*



LEADERSHIP TOOLS

Mentor Your Leaders

Use these guidelines to keep your leaders in the game.

from BuildingSmallGroups.com

As a leader, one of your jobs is to focus on the needs of your team to ensure that they want to stick around. Often just a little extra effort will pay off big. Let's take a look at three main areas. If you lead in a Christian organization, try mentoring with these questions. If you are in a secular environment, you can adapt these where appropriate.

1. "Who Are You?"

This focuses on relationship and friendship. To develop a deeper relationship with your leaders:

- a. Pray with them. Ask what you can pray for on their behalf.**
- b. Take a genuine interest in their family.**
- c. Write them notes of encouragement often.**
- d. Call them or send them cards on their birthdays or anniversaries.**
- e. Make sure you know their life story.**
- f. Make a point to have fun together.**



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2. “How Are You?”

This focuses on transparency and accountability to help in their personal growth:

- a. Share what God is teaching you—take them to Scripture.**
- b. Share personal struggles and victories.**
- c. Share the value of assessing a team’s “health” from your personal perspective.**
- d. Assess the health of the teams together and then work up a “health plan.”**
- e. Challenge and encourage your mentorees to take their next spiritual steps.**

3. “Where Can I Help You?”

The following focus on developing and equipping your team:

- a. Go through a book together.**
- b. Do a lunch-hour solitude experience.**
- c. Do a prayer-walk together.**
- d. Pray and fast together.**

Adapted from “Mentor Your Coaches.” This article first appeared on BuildingSmallGroups.com.

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Resources

Find more places for more help.

The Mentoring Assessment Pack from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**. This downloadable resource of handouts focus on the importance of helping people grow by being in relationships and will move your church toward establishing more mentors and mentorees. Each assessment conveniently fits on one page, so they're easy to print, copy and hand out.

Growth Through Mentoring from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. This downloadable study follows Pastor and writer Rick Lowry mentoring experience in “Mentoring that Produces Mentors” and examines the biblical basis and implications for mentoring.

Becoming a Woman of Influence: Making a Lasting Impact on Others Through Mentoring, by Carol Kent (Nav Press, 2006; 224 pages). Learn seven simple, life-changing principles Jesus used to influence others - like asking questions, telling stories, and offering unconditional love to others.

Finding a Mentor, Being a Mentor: Sharing Our Lives as Women of God, by Donna Otto (Harvest House Publishers, 2001). Whether you'd like to pass on God-given lessons to a younger woman or learn from an older friend, these selections from Otto's *Between Women of God* and *The Gentle Art of Mentoring* will help you nourish relationships that produce abundant spiritual fruit.

As Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship, by Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks (Moody Publishers, 2000; 272 pages). Whether you're looking for a mentor or wish to mentor someone else, *As Iron Sharpens Iron* provides specific, biblical steps to begin the relationship and make the most of it.



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Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction

by David Benner (Intervarsity Press, 2004; 240 pages). In this inviting guide, David Benner introduces readers to the riches of spiritual friendship and direction, explaining what they are and how they are practiced.

Spiritual Leadership, by J. Oswald Sanders (Moody Publishers, 1994; 189 pages). Sanders encourages strong leaders to be guided by God and devoted to Christ and to place their talents and powers at the disposal of God.



Do You Feel **Alone** as a Woman Leader?

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