

Living Life as a Mentor | JoHannah Reardon

It's easier and more natural than you think.

I was having a midlife crisis, and I wasn't even out of my 20s. It seemed ridiculous. While others were moving up the economic and social ladder, I was dissatisfied and feeling empty. I wanted my life to count for something.

I was having a crisis because I'd just left my job to become a mother. I realize now that my experience isn't unique. Many women who have active careers are suddenly moved into a world of diapers and spit up. That doesn't mean they necessarily want to go back to work. They're fiercely loyal and committed to the young life that has been entrusted to them, but they want something meaningful to happen in their days that will make them feel as though they're a valuable member of society. Deep down we mothers know we are, but we don't get to see the fruit of that for years to come and that can be disconcerting.

A turning point came for me when I began to see that I had time to invest in a whole new group of people—other young moms. I was in a neighborhood that was crammed full of preschoolers who were inevitably attached to mothers.

I joined a neighborhood Bible study with other stay-at-home or working-part-time moms. Those in the study were from all kinds of church, family, and social backgrounds. Friendships began to form naturally in the group as women spent time together in other settings. I've always been drawn to those who are hurting, struggling, or wounded, so I connected with a young mother, Gloria, who was from an abusive background. Her father had regularly beaten her, which left her with a terrible sense of worthlessness and lack of confidence about raising her own children.

Gloria began to call me every day to ask all sorts of parenting advice. We discussed allowances, chores, discipline, and childhood diets. Because of her past, she second-guessed everything and wanted affirmation that what she was doing was right. Because I'd had a fairly healthy upbringing, I felt a lot more confident about those daily decisions and was able to offer her reassurance.

In spite of me being the one who was offering advice, I still gained a great deal from the relationship. Gloria had developed a remarkable sense of humor to combat the horror in her life, and she kept me giggling all the time. In fact, often when I was uptight or frustrated with my child, she said something silly about the situation that completely restored my perspective.

Another way we were able to help each other was through prayer. At first she gave me prayer requests constantly and never seemed to consider that I had needs too. However, after she began to gain confidence and stability in her life, she was able to see past her own needs to the needs of others. She began to ask me what I needed prayer for and our relationship became more give and take instead of me just constantly giving.

Although Gloria was a Christian, she made decisions in her spiritual life based on emotion. She didn't have a solid grasp of the Scriptures so her only source of wisdom came from what seemed best to her at the time. This led to a lot of poor decisions and ruined relationships. I wasn't a

Bible scholar, but I knew more than she did, so I was able to guide her to passages that related to her situation. She also learned through our conversations how I made decisions and interpreted God's Word to guide my daily life.

Finally, she was able to be around someone who was emotionally healthy. Gloria had been immersed in unhealthy relationships for so long that she had no idea how to work her way out. Simply by being with me and my friends, she began to see lives that were lived on a more even emotional keel.

This relationship happened naturally. I didn't befriend her in order to become a mentor to her. I simply felt drawn to her. In fact a few years later, when someone from church asked me if I'd consider mentoring someone, I felt completely intimidated. I didn't think I had anything to offer another woman. It wasn't until she pointed out that I'd already mentored someone that it dawned on me what I'd done.

Through this experience, I've learned a few things about mentoring:

Look for someone you like.

Don't look for someone to mentor who you feel needs to change. There are no guarantees, and I didn't change Gloria; I simply gave her some direction. Our relationship would never have worked if we hadn't liked each other. The enormous amount of time we spent together would have been impossible if we hadn't gotten along.

That doesn't mean that you get along perfectly. Gloria and I had plenty of disagreements and misunderstandings, and sometimes I got downright tired of her at first. But we liked each other enough to hang in there. Gloria had never had anyone stick with her over the long haul, and my sheer tenacity won her over.

To mentor someone, you must have some common interests. That may simply be the fact that you are both mothers, work in the same office, like to do aerobics, or merely go to the same church, but you'll have to have something basic in common in order to spend much time together.

Look for someone you're one step ahead of.

The terrifying thought of mentoring someone is the feeling that you must have everything together or have all the answers. In fact I'd say if you do feel you have everything together and have all the answers, you'll probably be a terrible mentor. The conviction that we're on a journey together and can learn from each other is what will allow you to offer something of value. Nobody wants a mentor that marches five miles ahead of her. Every woman wants someone to take her by the hand and lead her one step at a time.

In order to mentor someone, you need to simply have one area of your life figured out better than she does. This may mean that you know the Scriptures better, come from a healthier background, or are simply older and have already walked through the doors the woman you're mentoring is

now facing. You should have the feeling that you have something to offer but can learn from her as well.

Look for someone who wants to grow in Christ.

There's an old joke that asks how many psychiatrists it takes to change a light bulb. The answer: one, if the light bulb wants to be changed.

When looking for someone to mentor, look for someone who sincerely wants to change. This person may not even know what needs to change, but she should hunger to do things God's way, whatever that takes. I mentioned earlier that you shouldn't mentor someone in order to change her, and that's true. But you should want to see God change her as much as you want to see God change your own life. Henry Blackwell's premise in his book *Experiencing God* is to look for what God is doing and join him. That's especially true in mentoring.

If a person is resistant to God, then nothing you can say or do is going to make any difference in that person's life. The one you want to mentor should be someone who is surrendered or at least willing to surrender her life to God. She doesn't need to know much—only that she wants God more than anything else. After all, it's God who transforms lives. And we're transformed just as much when he uses us in the life of another.

Above all pray God will lead you to the one he wants you to have this kind of relationship with. He made you both and knows exactly what she needs and you can handle.

Further Resources on Mentoring:

ChristianBibleStudies.com

Gifts of Gold: Gathering, Training & Encouraging Mentors, by Betty Huizenga

Woman-to-Woman: Preparing Yourself to Mentor - revised ed., by Edna Ellison, Tricia Scribner

Finding a Mentor, Being a Mentor: Sharing Our Lives as Women of God, by Donna Otto