

Women's Mentoring...

Hear from Woman to Woman Mentoring Author

Chris Adams/ www.lifeway.com

I recently interviewed Janet Thomson , Christian author and speaker, and founder of Woman to Woman Mentoring and About His Work Ministries. She is author of several books including Woman to Woman Mentoring How to Start, Grow, and Maintain a Mentoring Ministry (LifeWay Press). Sharing life's experiences and God's faithfulness is the premise of Janet's books and speaking.

How have you seen mentoring in the church change over the last 15 years?

The church has become increasingly aware of the need for intentional mentoring, with a significant focus on helping women connect to each other. But facilitating and nurturing the mentoring relationships still has tremendous room for growth. Many women today live far away from family and long to spend time with another woman further along in her spiritual journey: a mentor willing to share godly wisdom and spiritual insight. Churches with a Woman to Woman Mentoring Ministry have seen the value in helping women help each other.

You have written several books, but through each, you continue the thread of mentoring. Talk about how you did that in your "prodigal" book.

Yes, the thread of mentoring runs through my writing and speaking. The best compliment someone can give me regarding my books is that it's as if I was walking along beside the reader through her journey. Titus 2:3-5 is the basis for the Woman to Woman Mentoring Ministry, and I like to paraphrase those verses as: "Teach what you've been taught so you can train others to teach what they've been taught..." Teaching encompasses using life lessons God has taught you to encourage others going through something similar. Then someday those you have mentored will be ready to mentor others. Often the first step in our own healing is helping.

Mentoring is taking our been-there-done-that life experiences and sharing with another woman how God helped us through and He'll be there for her too...and so will we. I was the mother of a prodigal and I, along with numerous mothers of prodigals, use our testimonies of God's faithfulness to mentor and encourage other hurting parents in my book, Praying for Your Prodigal Daughter: Hope, Help & Encouragement for Hurting Parents. We share how God saw us through this difficult and heart-wrenching time and the things that helped us survive, maintain our faith, and keep praying for our daughters. And my prodigal daughter, Kim, along with other prodigal daughters, also mentor other parents and daughters by sharing their struggles during their wayward years.

How are you also mentoring as you developed the infertility book?

Dear God, Why Can't I Have a Baby: A Companion Guide for Couples on the Infertility Journey is part of a "Dear God" series, the first being, Dear God, They Say it's Cancer in which I mentor breast-cancer sisters from my own personal journey through breast cancer. Since not every reader

has the same type of breast cancer as mine, 40 other breast-cancer-sisters also mentor from their journey.

Likewise, in *Dear God, Why Can't I Have a Baby*, two of my daughters, along with other mommies and daddies-in-waiting, share their infertility journey and testimony of God's faithfulness, even when their faith was waning. For many years women were hesitant to talk about infertility, and women suffered in silence, but today with 1 in 6 couples experiencing the struggle, women are desperate to talk and learn from each other and to obtain godly wisdom and council from those who have walked through this difficult journey before them. Most of my books and Face-to-Face Bible study series include a "Mentoring Moment" section. In *Praying for Your Prodigal Daughter* it was called Parent-to-Parent. Here is where I mentor through practical tips and encouragement.

What is the "key" to helping women develop a mentoring lifestyle whether or not they have a structured in their church?

Always be looking at who you want to pattern your life after and looking over your shoulder to see who is patterning her life after you. Mentoring is living your life in a way that others replicate. For mothers of daughters, I ask women to consider if they are the woman today they want their daughters to become because we're their closest role model of a godly woman. That may sound intimidating, but it shouldn't; it should encourage us to live a life pleasing to God.

A mentoring lifestyle is open and vulnerable and willing to let God use you. God doesn't give us character building experiences just for our own benefit. He's going to put someone in our life going through something similar, and He expects us to willingly reach out of ourselves to help that person. And I believe He'll continue to put people in our path until we "get it" that our circumstance wasn't all about us—it was about allowing God to use us to minister to someone else. Mentoring isn't only crisis-oriented; mentees may be in a new season of life such as newly married, a new mom, or new in the community or at church.

You don't have to write a book or be a conference speaker to impact lives. Like Jesus, it's one changed life at a time.

How would you want to encourage women's leaders to live out Titus 2:3-5?

I'm so glad you asked because I just wrote a book that does exactly that: *The Team That Jesus Built: How to Develop, Equip and Commission a Women's Ministry Team*, releases June, 2011. I have been teaching on this topic for many years. As Women's Ministry leaders, we need to be active in selecting and developing the next generation of rising leaders. Every ministry leader should be developing an apprentice and a team that can carry on in her absence: her team is her legacy.