

Mentoring: A way of life

How can experienced ministers impart their wisdom, knowledge, experience, and skills to the next generation of leaders?

Until recently, mentoring¹ — the process by which an experienced person counsels or trains another to help in their professional development—was a way of life between generations. “Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” ([Deut. 11:19](#)).² Some biblical examples of mentoring are Jethro to Moses, Moses to Joshua, Eli to Samuel, Elijah to Elisha, Mordecai to Esther, Jesus to His disciples, Barnabas to Paul, Paul to Timothy and John Mark, and Timothy to all the faithful Christians who mentored others. This mentoring chain equipped believers to carry on the work of God.

In this article, we will deal with the art of professional mentoring— how experienced ministers, paid or volunteer, can impart their wisdom, knowledge, experience, and skills to the next generation of leaders. I will give biblical and personal examples of how this can be done. I will also list the qualifications of the mentor and of the mentee and the expectations of the relationship.

Biblical examples of mentoring

A Christian mentor is known as someone who supports another believer, friend, or fellow worker through a relationship for the purpose of long-term, developmental growth.³ Christian mentoring in the church becomes important for the spiritual and professional growth not only of the person being mentored but the one mentoring.

Note how Jesus and Paul and the rest of the disciples mentored the new generation of ministers and the lessons we can learn from them. Jesus modeled wholistic and effective mentoring relationships with His twelve disciples. The group watched how Jesus modeled living in the will of His Father, His nights of prayer, the journeys they took together, and how He treated people. Because He was with them constantly, He was able to impact them by using teachable moments. They also had plenty of opportunities to watch each other, contrasting their behavior with that of Jesus. The disciples were able to learn from each other as Jesus sent them out two by two. They became sources of support and encouragement as they shared life experiences with each other.

Robert Coleman summarizes how Jesus mentored His disciples. Through intense prayer, Jesus selected the disciples to be with Him as He taught them about the heavenly Father and how to do ministry. Christ sent them out with the power of the Holy Spirit to make a difference in the world, to preach and have authority to drive out demons (see [Mark 3:13–15](#)). Jesus also expected His disciples to reproduce His likeness and to lead others to Him, teaching them to make new disciples (see [Matt. 28:18–20](#)). God's method included men and women, not programs, ceremonies, or organizations. That is why Jesus spent three and a half years mentoring disciples.⁴

The apostle Paul also was a great mentor. He never did ministry alone; he always took someone with him to build the person into a leader and help him become all that God wanted him to be. He captured the essence of mentoring in [2 Timothy 2:2](#): "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." This passing of the torch has gone from generation to generation through our time, and it will continue until Jesus comes again. The church exists today because of this chain of mentoring and witness that includes Jesus and continues today.

The need for mentoring

During 2016, I talked to more than 50 young pastors from three different conferences. Only five of them seem to have received adequate mentoring in preparing for ministry.⁵ Seasoned pastors must take time to share their wisdom and skills with the next generation of pastors in order to be certain that effective ministry and preaching are ensured and that church growth remains progressive and strong.

God introduced mentoring as part of the training of the younger Levites. Listen to what God instructed Moses to do in preparing and mentoring the next generation of Levites in the ministry. "The Lord said to Moses, 'This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting, but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the tent of meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites' " ([Num. 8:23–26](#)).

Retirement at the age of 50 did not end the Levites' work.⁶ They were to start a new phase of ministry:⁷ assisting their brothers in the tent of meeting in carrying out their duties ([Num. 8:26](#)). By designing that mentors to the younger Levites should pass on their judgment, wisdom, and skills, God built a universal mentoring system.⁸

Thus mentoring becomes a significant part of the DNA of the church, where experienced and young pastors learn how to engage in this art. This can be successful only if accompanied by reasonable accountability and evaluation.

Personal journey

Mentoring has been a part of my life since I became a pastor. When I was studying at the seminary, three of us ministerial students met two hours a week to share our problems and needs and to minister to one another. We spent the first hour in worship, Bible study, and prayer. Then we shared effective ministry ideas, discussed books we were reading, and preached to

and then critiqued each other. That was one of the best things I did at the seminary. I grew in knowledge, skills, grace, and spirituality. All three of us benefited from the experience so much that we continued to do it for many years, two of us even to this day. I look forward to the times when my friend and I meet in person or on the phone. We definitely receive a blessing.

When I graduated from the seminary and went to my first church, I asked from my ministerial director the names of the five top pastors in the conference. I called each one of them and asked whether they could mentor and coach me to be a better pastor. Three of them agreed. Most of the time, I called them to find out how to do ministry effectively. That experience was invaluable in learning new ministerial skills and in avoiding many mistakes that may have negatively affected my ministry. I learned and grew from the experiences of those who had gone before me.

Since I benefited so much from being mentored, I, too, decided to mentor younger pastors who served with me later. I spent considerable time with them to build up their skills and help them become effective in ministry and grow in their love for Jesus and commitment to Him. We spent Monday mornings in prayer and Bible study. During this time, we shared ideas about ministry and discussed the challenges of pastoral life. We went out to minister once or twice a week. I was blessed to take the time to share what I had learned and watch those pastors mature and become effective in their own ways. They too, I am sure, felt a sense of growing in ministry.

Now while teaching at the seminary, I continue the tradition of mentoring—this time, with future pastors. I begin about noon with one hour of prayer walking, circling the Andrews University campus. I take three students (that is about the maximum for effective mentoring), and as we walk together, we share our lives with each other. We talk about classes, ministry, and spiritual growth. Then we spend about 15 to 20 minutes in prayer and sharing Scripture with each other. In addition to prayer walks, I make myself available to many students who are ready to go into the field. Our conversations cover

such fields as prayer for different occasions, coaching in performance of ministerial duties, training lay leadership in churches, encouraging witnessing by church members, or just being a listening ear. These experiences have been a source of great joy and growth for all of us.

Mentoring colleagues

Lately, I have been convicted that I need to mentor four or five teachers so that they can teach my classes on spiritual growth both here at the seminary and in different parts of the world field. Right now, I am mentoring friends who plan to hold training sessions in Spanish-speaking areas, Romania, parts of Africa, and the Philippines. I have shared all of my class materials, PowerPoint presentations, and exercises with these potential teachers and invited them to sit in on my classes to observe. I sat with them for hours and shared what I have learned, encouraging them to improve on my materials. Sharing our own experiences becomes essential for knowledge to pass on from generation to generation with the hope that it will be improved upon by the next generation.

Mentoring church members

I never conduct ministry alone. I always take somebody new to the ministry, with the hope that he may learn something new. Last year, I took Craig with me to give Bible studies to a family in our area. I showed him how to give Bible studies and lead people toward a decision. When this family got baptized, I had Craig with me in the baptistry and told the whole congregation about his essential role in bringing this family to the Lord. This year, Craig is doing the same mentoring to another person.

This lies in harmony with what Jesus did. Jesus gathered His disciples, showed them how to minister to others, and sent them out to do the same. I have been mentoring in one way or another for more than 36 years. I define *mentoring* as "a relational process between a mentor and mentee for the

purpose of transferring knowledge, wisdom, and skills gained through experience in order to facilitate continued growth in spiritual, professional, and overall wholistic development."

Eight things a mentor does

The following are eight principles I learned from experience, reading, and reflection about successful mentoring:

1. *A mentor listens.* Listening means the mentor tries to get inside the other person's perspective or worldview and to understand how the other person thinks and feels. This listening is done with unconditional acceptance of the person. Often we tend to think of what we are going to say or the advice we are going to give rather than listening. Listening helps us know the heart of the issue and conveys to the mentee that we care.

2. *A mentor intercedes.* After listening well and understanding the other person, the mentor takes that person's needs to God in prayer. I often pray for all my mentees daily and claim Bible promises on their behalf.

3. *A mentor models.* Modeling does not mean that the mentor seems to be perfect but that the mentor is growing. Let your mentee see your flaws and watch you deal with them. The greatest gift you can give your mentee contains your sincere example of a fellow pilgrim who also travels on a journey.

4. *A mentor asks questions.* Asking questions encourages critical thinking and self-reflection. This practice elicits feedback and promotes self-disclosure and self-learning.

5. *A mentor teaches.* Teaching happens through many venues, such as sharing each other's joys and concerns, reading, and going to seminars together. However, the ultimate goal is not to impart information but to transform through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.

6. *A mentor sets the pace.* As a mentor, you may be a step ahead in areas of personal, professional, and spiritual growth. Lead the way in being transparent in your mentoring relationship. Model spending quality time with God. Share your experience of a balanced life and impart professional skills.

7. *A mentor involves the mentee with other Christians.* Expand the relationships of the mentee to include others. Contact with others will prevent your mentee from being merely an echo of yourself.

8. *A mentor gives options, not answers.* Guide your mentee through the decision-making process by discussing options together, sharing multiple perspectives, and talking through any potential consequences, allowing the mentee to ultimately choose the best. Do not assume that your mentee will want to do exactly what you want. "The most effective mentors guide rather than direct their mentees."⁹

Mentoring: The resurgence of an ageold art

Mentoring is an ancient practice that involves a relational process where experience and values pass from one generation to another. Throughout the Bible, mentoring was the primary means of passing on faith, knowledge, and skills. It has also been the means of passing on the torch of faith from generation to generation.

Mentoring can happen in a variety of ways and with a variety of people. What seems to be required is a willingness by both parties to engage in a developmental relationship for the purpose of learning and growth.

Sidebar 1: How to be an effective mentor

1. Be able to communicate what you know. Let what you communicate be on a level that the mentee can understand.
2. Be prepared. Know from your mentee what topics or subjects he or she

wants to talk about beforehand, outline the key focus points, and have a plan ready for effective delivery.

3. Select a mentee whose philosophy of life you share. Make sure you are philosophically and theologically compatible.
4. Choose a person with potential in which you genuinely believe. The secret to mentoring would be to help a person get to where he or she wants to go.
5. Evaluate a mentee's progress constantly. Be objective in your appraisal.
6. Be committed, serious, and available to mentees.¹⁰ Establish a set day and time for regular sessions or meetings. Keep your commitments wholeheartedly and be ready to listen with an open mind, with willingness to provide counsel and guidance.
7. Be honest and gracious, candid and straightforward. Help facilitate an open, lively dialogue. Give constructive feedback. Say what the mentee needs to hear from you, not what he or she wants to hear from you. No matter what you do, always allow the mentee to make his or her own decision.
8. Be a lifelong learner. Continue learning about what's going on in your field, as well as the world at large. Keep an eye on trends and culture, especially as it relates to the relationship you have with the mentee. If your mentee asks a question for which you do not know the answer, make that an object of team research.
9. Be transparent and fair. Ensure there is no hidden agenda or ulterior motive involved in this relationship. You do not owe your mentees any favors, and they do not owe you anything except gratitude.
10. Show compassion and genuineness. Convey your interest and desire to provide one-on-one help and guidance. Be selfless about sharing what you know. Model positive behavior and successful performance, and offer

guidance and advice toward reaching a specific goal.¹¹

11. Motivate and inspire. Support, validate, and encourage your mentee. When you help link your mentee's own goals, values, and emotions to the kingdom of God and the mission of the church, the mentee becomes more engaged in his or her work and development.¹²

12. Set professional boundaries. Mentors should stick to mentoring. Boundaries should be set in order to avoid dependency upon one another for emotional support.¹³

Sidebar 2: How to be an effective mentee

Because mentoring relationships are reciprocal, we also find it important to know how to be an effective mentee. Just because you have reached a certain level of professional growth does not mean that you cannot benefit from being a mentee. Here are some practical steps for being an effective mentee:

1. Learn from the mentor how to ask the right questions, where to look for the right places, and how to stay interested in searching for the right answers.
2. Focus on improvement, not perfection.
3. Accept a learning position. Do not let your ego get in the way of growing.
4. Respect the mentor, but do not idolize him or her.
5. Immediately put into effect what you are learning: learn, practice, and assimilate.
6. Be disciplined in relating to the mentor. Arrange for ample time, select the subject matter, and do your homework to make the sessions profitable.

7. Reward your mentor with consistent progress. If you show appreciation but make no progress, the mentor feels as if he or she has failed. Your progress comes as the highest reward.

8. Learn to ask critical-thinking questions that prove you have been thinking between sessions and show progress in your perception.

9. Do not threaten to give up. Let your mentor know that you have made progress. Then he or she knows they are not wasting their time.

10. Expect accountability. Growth implies responsibility for one's own progress and a willingness to be held accountable for one's own goals

1 There are many definitions of mentoring, but the essence contains a trust relationship between two people where one is willing to take the time to impart knowledge and skills (mentor) and another individual seems interested in receiving that instruction. The trainer becomes the mentor, the receiver is the mentee. According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, the definition of mentor is "someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person." (*Merriam Webster, s.v. "mentor,"* noun, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mentor.) According to Grads of Life, in the mentoring relationship, the mentor moves beyond imparting and skills to making sure that the mentee grows and is successful in applying what he or she has received. "Mentoring is a development strategy for a young person's successful path to adulthood. It's all about developing a structured, trusting relationship between a professional (mentor) and an aspiring professional (mentee)." ("Mentoring Guide," *Grads of Life*, accessed June 28, 2016 gradsoflife.org/tools-to-act/mentoring-guide/?gclid=Cj0KEQjwwMi7BRDGptbvwOCDj8oBEiQAIALyDLh_kZooVIk5o4893r5hh1OS5VsN-tWjleAk_m0f8TlaAsVq8P8HAQ).

2 Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

3 "The Differences Between Coaching and Mentoring," Management Mentors, accessed July 21, 2016, www.managementmentors.com/resources/coaching-mentoring-differences.

4 For detailed analysis of how Jesus did mentoring, see Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2010), see also Tom Grove, "Developing Spiritual Leaders Like Jesus," *Ministry*, December 2015, www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2015/12/developing-spiritual-leaders-like-Jesus.

5 Thom S. Rainer found that mentoring was missing in more than 90 percent of church leaders today. Thom S. Rainer, "The One Common Factor of Effective Church Leaders," January 20, 2016, thomrainer.com/2016/01/the-one-common-factor-of-effective-church-leaders/.

6 According to [Numbers 4:3](#), [23](#), [30](#), a Levite's time of active service in the tent of meeting was to begin at age 30 and last until 50, yet their formal training began at age 25, with a five-year apprenticeship. "This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the tent of meeting" ([Num. 8:24](#)). The New Living Translation is even more emphatic, using the word begin. " 'This is the rule the Levites must follow: They must begin serving in the Tabernacle at the age of twenty-five' " ([Num. 8:24](#)).

7 "Retirement From Regular Service ([Numbers 8:23–26](#))," Theology of Work Project, accessed July 21, 2016, www.theologyofwork.org/old-testament/numbers-and-work/retirement-from-regular-service-numbers-82326/.

8 For more on how seasoned pastors can serve the younger pastors, the church, and their community, see "Mandatory Retirement," Christian Retirement, accessed July 21, 2016, www.christianretirement.com/content.asp?id=368392.

9 Diane Paddison, "3 Things Every Mentor Must Do," Today's Christian

Woman (TCW), December 2015,

www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2015/december/3-things-every-mentor-must-do.html?start=2.

10 Ted Engstrom, [The Fine Art of Mentoring: Passing On to Others What God Has Given You](#) (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1989).

11 Adapted from Jayson DeMers, "7 Key Qualities of an Effective Mentor," *Inc.*, October 1, 2014, www.inc.com/jayson-demers/7-key-qualities-of-an-effective-mentor.html.

12 Adapted from E. Wayne Hart, "Seven Ways to Be an Effective Mentor," *Forbes*, June 30, 2010, www.forbes.com/2010/06/30/mentor-coach-executive-training-leadership-managing-ccl.html.

13 Adapted from Subha Ramani, Larry Gruppen, and Elizabeth Krajjic Kachur, "Twelve Tips for Developing Effective Mentors, *Medical Teacher* 28, no. 5 (2006), 404–408, www.bu.edu/sph/files/2012/01/Ramani_Twelve-tips-for-developing-effective-mentors.pdf.