

leadership: mentoring

John Greenall encourages us to seek out mentoring relationships





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What comes to mind when you think of a mentor? Perhaps you think of Dumbledore or Yoda or, if you are old like me, Mr Miyagi from the Karate Kid (still one of the greatest films around!).

I want to suggest that mentoring is a hugely helpful and perhaps essential part of growing as a leader; both being mentored and then mentoring others. There are many helpful and comprehensive courses on mentoring which you may cover in your studies; here we will focus on mentoring as applied to spiritual growth and to your work.

what mentoring is

Mentoring is a relationship with someone who likes you, believes in you and wants to see you win in life. Otherwise stated, a mentor helps his/her mentee reach his/her God-given potential. In our context a mentor is likely to be further on in their faith and healthcare journey than you are.

Mentoring carries elements of imitation. I feel I have been mentored from afar by several writers like CS Lewis. Whilst of course I never knew him, I feel I have got to know him and want to imitate aspects of his life. I have also been informally mentored by others around me like my rugby coach and my best friend's dad.

Whilst most of us have been informally mentored from time to time, the mentoring I am referring to is that which 'intentionalises' a relationship. The Apostle Paul was very deliberate in his mentoring of Timothy. In 2 Timothy 3 he writes, '*you, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings...*'¹ going on to exhort Timothy to '*continue in what you have learned...and from whom you learned it*'.² Elsewhere Paul says, '*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*' (1 Corinthians 11:1). So being mentored involves walking alongside someone and looking to imitate them, whilst always measuring their words and conduct against Scripture.

why I love mentoring

Personally, mentoring has made a huge difference to me and helped me navigate difficult stages of life, from exploring working cross-culturally to my work as a Christian doctor in the UK. I currently meet with a mentor myself and then mentor five people.

Furthermore, most of us do not get formal leadership training. Having a mentor has taught me so much about leadership and life and has accelerated my growth.

what mentoring is not

Mentoring is not 'discipleship': instead, it is a subset of discipleship. Discipleship is more global; it happens in the context of your local church as you hear and apply the Word of God and develop your relationship with God both alone and in groups.

the heart of a mentoring relationship is to grow in your love for Christ

Mentoring is not 'coaching': coaching is often focussed on a specific issue for a specified period. It can also happen with people you work with and can be aimed at skill development. Life coaching can sometimes overlap with mentoring, but coaching is usually a more formal and perhaps monetised agreement with someone who remains more emotionally detached from your situation. That said, do not get too hung up on the terminology.

Mentoring is not 'friendship': Many mentoring relationships grow from an initial friendship, and many will grow into friendships potentially moving beyond mentoring. In general, for it to remain a mentoring relationship rather than primarily a friendship, there will be some sense of the direction of advice flowing more from mentor to mentee.

Mentoring is not an 'accountability partner': Although there will inevitably be elements of accountability, this is not the focus. Instead, the focus should be on supporting, encouraging and strengthening. I would encourage you to form other relationships, ideally in the context of a local church, which contribute to your whole-life-discipleship journey of growth and accountability.

Mentoring is not uniform: Whilst below I am giving some recommendations, every mentoring relationship will be different.

being mentored involves walking alongside someone and looking to imitate them

how I choose people to mentor

I have always looked for 'FAT' people, but one writer³ helpfully adds an I and an H to make a better acronym. So, try and be someone who is:

1. **Faithful** (to your previous commitments)
2. **Available** (you make the time to meet regularly)
3. **Initiating** (you are self-motivated)
4. **Teachable** (you have a teachable spirit, indicating humility and integrity)
5. **Hungry** (you are passionate to grow spiritually and personally)

the foundation of mentoring⁴

1. **Christ-centred** – the heart of a mentoring relationship is to grow in your love for Christ. For mentors, that ideally includes a commitment to pray for you as the mentee.
2. **Trusting** – it is so important to walk alongside one another honestly and by honouring commitments.
3. **Relational** – mentoring requires good character, an interest in developing others, and clear expectations of what you want to discuss. Ideally the relationship has elements of fun; you enjoy spending time together.

4. **Vulnerable** – openness and transparency build relationships; being able to say 'I'm not perfect either'.
5. **Affirming** – much of mentoring is simply affirming – 'I believe in you'. 'You're going to make it'. 'Keep going'. I will always look for strengths in a mentee.

how does a mentoring relationship start?

It might seem a little 'un-British' to offer to mentor someone, but I have seen it happen and work well. For most people it will be 'mentee-initiated'. It is not about walking up to someone and asking them to mentor you, and you might not use the term 'mentor'. Instead, you might approach someone you see as a trusted person who you admire, and who can help you grow in certain areas, and simply ask them if you can ask them some questions. After having coffee (or a Zoom conversation) see how you think it went. If there is a sense that it was a mutually beneficial time you might say, 'I've really enjoyed chatting. Would it be ok to perhaps meet every month or so for me to ask you some questions? Every time we meet, I'll come prepared with specific priorities and ask for the help or advice I need to grow.'

how I conduct a mentoring session

Typically, I meet with a mentee for an hour a month. This may vary but the key is to set expectations early. Ideally the mentee prepares a list of questions beforehand. Then I listen. Not just to the words but instead deeply listen to what is being expressed. Often the issue becomes clear without needing to offer any advice, but sometimes saying things like 'can I clarify what you just said?' or 'you seem to be expressing x' can help. Beyond that I might cautiously offer my own experience, point to Scripture, or pass on something I have found helpful. I tend to avoid directly trying to solve people's problems; my role is to help my mentee take responsibility for his growth rather than solve his problems.

questions I ask:

- What are your priorities? – goals or problems, personal or professional.
- How can I help? – help them decide on a course of action.⁵

'I have found having a mentor such a helpful experience. Often even simple or seemingly obvious questions help me to think through aspects of problems I'd not considered. Having a mentor has helped widen my perspective in new ways and it's always uplifting to be pointed towards key truths and encouragements.' James, current FY2 doctor

how does a mentoring relationship progress?

Typically, I start with six months and review from there. It might be that it ends there, or it may continue (with ongoing review points).

Sometimes it's clear that it's time to end the more formal aspect of your meeting together, which is where a pre-set review point helps. You might suggest a decreased frequency of meetings or stopping altogether. It is always best to be open and clear. Take a deep breath and just have the conversation, being thankful and affirming of your mentor, remembering to thank them for all they have given to you, of course.

who are you mentoring?

Mentoring others is a great joy. I have found that giving away causes me to grow in joy and knowledge of Christ.⁶ And whilst I want to help others know their life purpose and calling, I am so often sharpened by my times with mentees.⁷ It is never too early to start mentoring. Indeed, if you are being mentored, I would challenge you to mentor someone else, perhaps someone a few years younger than you.

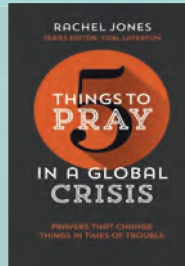
all the difference in the world

I believe mentoring is hugely significant for life and leadership. In my last piece⁸ we saw that resilient disciples had significant relationships with those

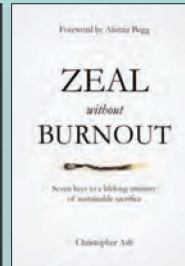


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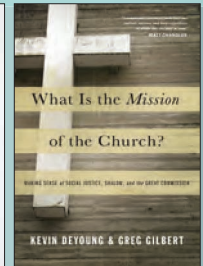
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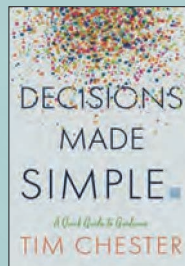
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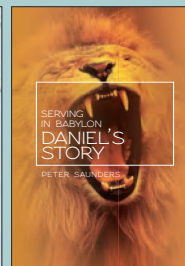
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older than themselves as younger adults. Who do you respect at the current time? Perhaps someone who knows your name, who says 'Hi, how are you doing?', someone you admire. Why don't you prayerfully consider approaching someone to mentor you, and then begin to intentionally look out for, pray for and meet with those who can learn from and imitate you? Such is the way of mentoring. I believe that such investment and care will reap a significant harvest for the Kingdom of God. ■

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