



Christian Mentoring

JOHN MALLISON MINISTRIES

FINISHING WELL (2)

I once read that of the 400 people identified by the writer as leaders in the Bible only 100 finished well. I find it hard to verify that information but anecdotal evidence would suggest that it may well be right. This startling statistic is certainly true of today's Christian leaders according to Dr J. Robert Clinton's (of Fuller Seminary) extensive research. He concluded that more than 70% of leaders do not finish well. This is also supported by a national survey of 4,500 Australian senior church leaders conducted some years ago by the National Church Life Survey which found that burnout was not an issue for only 21%.

C.S. Lewis said that as Christian leaders we need to "remain firm at our post" irrespective of circumstances. This is no easy task with all the pressures, allurements and distractions relentlessly confronting us as leaders.

Billy Graham, in his early years, had two contemporary promising evangelists who did not finish well. They were Chuck Templeton and Bron Clifford. Templeton left ministry in 1950 and pursued a career in radio. He became an atheist and proclaimed his unbelief on radio. Clifford eventually became an alcoholic and died in poverty of cirrhosis of the liver at 35.

We all need to continuously heed Paul's wise words: "If you think you are standing firm, be careful you don't fall." (1 Cor. 10:12).

In my mentoring of a broad cross-section of Christian leaders nationally and internationally, I have found that the major problems many Christian leaders experience are essentially in the spiritual, emotional and physical areas of their own lives. Often a significant issue is a lack of Christ-like relationships in their family life, in their marriages, in their ministry teams and with others they seek to serve. Some are confused and discouraged by rapid change and lack of perceptible results. Others need help in the direction of their ministry, in practising what they preach, in managing overwork, and in dealing effectively with unrealistic expectations, criticism and abuse from those they seek to serve. Other issues include poor self-image, loss of motivation to keep developing their knowledge and understanding, poor time-management, absence of realistic boundaries, financial concerns, spiritual conflicts and feeling socially isolated - as well as many more. However for quite a few, lack of intimacy with Christ is the major issue which is adversely effecting most areas of their life and ministry.

Chuck Colson once said, "It's a holy trust to be called to ministry, made all the more difficult by the recognition and adulation and authority that some of us in Christian ministry receive. That's why I need a group to hold me accountable in love. I believe we all need this."

I am firmly convinced that leaders need a support framework around them. I seriously wonder if I would have made it to where I am now without such support. Increasingly, those who take their Christian discipleship and service seriously are seeing the value of having a friend and adviser with whom they can share openly and honestly and to whom they can be accountable and from whom they can receive advice and encouragement. As the wise old sage said, 'Two are better than one' (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

The New Testament is full of 'one another', 'each other' and 'together' passages indicating that Christianity is relational; it is about community, the power of togetherness. Rugged individualism and do-it-yourself spirituality are contrary to New Testament spirituality. As John Wesley put it in his 'General Rules for Methodist Fellowships' (Societies) ... 'Watch over one another in love.' Authentic Christian discipleship and leadership is essentially about interdependence, evidenced in caring relationships which are motivated by divine love and require unhurried allocated time.

Mentoring enables us to walk the road with at least one other – providing a means of being accountable and a significant aid to enable us to finish well. It has been defined in various ways. In its broad application to Christian disciples and leaders, I define it as 'a dynamic, intentional relationship of trust in which one person enables another to maximise the grace of God in their life and service.'



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There are three ways in which we can be involved in mentoring. The first is a receiving relationship with a more mature, more resourced person, who has been faithful in the long haul. They become our mentor and we, as mentorees, benefit from their wise advice, modelling and encouragement. Lawrence Crabb says 'Mentors speak three messages: 'It can be done! You're not alone. I believe in you!'

The second way, generally referred to as peer mentoring, is a shared relationship with a peer - a person of similar age and interest and commitment to Christ. It is an equal relationship between two people who value and respect each other and believe each can enrich the other. The relationship is less formal than either the previous or the following ones. Often it simply involves making a present friendship more intentional by asking the right questions, sharing openly and honestly and keeping one another accountable. This ought to be an enjoyable and relaxed relationship. Unfortunately this readily available and most effective form of mentoring has been overlooked by many, or not developed to reach its full potential.

The third way of mentoring is the reverse of the first. Here we develop a giving relationship with a less experienced person. We exercise a similar role to that of our mentor in the receiving relationship. This person becomes our mentoree. Sometimes this person will seek us out but often it requires us to take the initiative with those who we think may benefit from our help. As we actively listen to people, we may hear their silent or spoken cries for help and offer to stand with them in this way.

Being in this 3-dimensional network helps us maintain the balance of authentic Christian discipleship and Christian leadership by both receiving and giving. It can also lessen the possibility of dependency developing.

Meeting in small groups or small faith communities provides another dimension for mentoring. I have greatly benefited from meeting in groups of three or more in which we are open and honest with each other in a framework of grace and then pray for each other.

To be a good Christian mentor we need: an adequate idea of God; a sane estimate of ourselves and others; the ability to ask good questions; active listening skills; to know our limitations and be able to set boundaries; to understand how adults learn; to have the time to give; to believe in the power of prayer; to be familiar with the Bible and its application to daily living; and, above all, to have a living relationship with God. Essentially we need to operate under the guidance and empowerment of God, the Holy Spirit. God is the mentor; we are but the channels through whom he works. Our intimacy with Jesus is our best preparation.

Some of the best mentoring is done by very busy people who are disciplined with the use of their time, and who know how to slot mentoring relationships into busy schedules.

Mentoring is a fulfilling role for seniors who may have less time restraints than they had previously. As a senior, I find mentoring emerging leaders one of the most satisfying aspects of what has been a very diverse and fulfilling ministry. I am inspired by the idealism, enthusiasm and responsiveness of the leaders with whom I work. They rejuvenate me! I find great joy in seeing them grow, and they help me keep growing. I am passionate about mentoring. I am committed to trying to enable leaders to both serve and finish well.

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