



Christian Mentoring

JOHN MALLISON MINISTRIES

MENTORING - IN GOOD COMPANY? ACCOMPANYING YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE FAITH JOURNEY

Outside of our church structures, mentoring has been prized as a method to increase productivity in the workplace, improve career possibilities, develop management potential in the work force and raise achievement in the classroom.

Our interpretation of mentoring should be distinct from the business world. Ours is not to increase the value of the 'company' but to provide company while we work towards an end that is the same for each one of us. Mentoring is a commitment to accompany one another on our respective faith journeys and much can be learnt by agreeing to go on this journey together.

Young people need adults in their lives, adults who show an interest in what they are doing and thinking, in their dreams and fears; who will share not only in their faith journey, but in their whole life experience.

A healthy mentoring relationship is one that respects the experience of each person involved. This creates space and opportunity for significant growth in a person's spiritual walk.

When adults take on mentoring roles with young people, it is very common for them to forget the principles of mentoring experiences they have enjoyed with other adults. Mutual respect is frequently replaced by a sense of superiority on the part of the adult involved. The adult will often see their role to instruct and direct or to bring the young person to a set point of being or to a religious ritual (Baptism, Church Membership, Church leadership etc). In essence they fail to display a sense of genuine relationship, even if they may be genuine in what they are trying to achieve.

The agenda ends up taking priority over the relationship we should be setting out to establish, develop and explore. I believe we often suffocate the work of God's spirit by setting ourselves such agendas and little space is provided for God to do his thing in his developmental timetable. However, when we do create space for God to work, and he does speak, it may be then that we can help give shape to the experience and watch young people grow. Equally, we may be surprised when God speaks to us and young people give shape to that experience and they observe us growing.

If we can offer genuine relationships to young people, nurture these relationships and offer a true sense of companionship on the journey of faith - then it may be the relational glue found in these friendships that will help them not only to remain within our faith communities but will empower them to lead us towards a more hopeful future.

Mentoring in itself is not always a helpful word, 'structured friendship' or 'companionship' may be more appropriate when referring to young people. Whatever words we use, we will be measured by the nature of our integrity in offering friendship and support to the young in years and the young in faith. I explore this in greater depth in my book, "Someone to Lean On".

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Someone to Lean On is a challenge to Christians - whether they be experts in youth work or not - to cross the divide and to build natural and expressive relationships with young people. Drawing on biblical principles, stories and personal experience, Paul Fenton demonstrates the wealth of benefits that can be gained when adults mentor young people effectively, and not only nurture them but choose to accompany them on a journey of faith.

Paul Fenton has worked extensively with young people in churches, the wider community and in schools. He is presently National Youth Ministry Consultant for Scripture Union England and Wales.

Someone to Lean On is available from your local Christian bookshop or contact Paul Fenton on his email: Paulfenton@aol.com

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