



Christian Mentoring

JOHN MALLISON MINISTRIES

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

John Mallison

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 to whom they can be accountable. As the wise old sage said, **'Two are better than one'** (*Ecclesiastes 4:9*).

Mentoring has always been part of the fabric of society. Parents play a major role in mentoring their children, especially in their earlier years. The artisan-apprentice relationship, or the coach of an individual sports person or team, are common forms of mentoring or coaching. There is a growing emphasis upon mentoring at all levels of commerce, industry, education and public life. An abundance of secular training courses and resources on the subject are widely promoted.

World Vision have sponsored 'Kids Hope Australia', which is an innovative mentoring program, working with at-risk children in primary schools in Australia. The response from school principals, teachers, parents and local church leaders where the program has been trialled, has been universally enthusiastic. It is based on the highly acclaimed and successful 'Kids Hope USA' mentoring program that after a period of thorough training, etc, links a church with its local primary school.

Mentoring has been an indispensable part of my own life's journey. Many have invested their lives in me including my godly parents, my faithful wife, a number of clergy who took an interest in me from early in my ministry (one for over 40 years!) and some close friends. All have encouraged, advised, coached and to varying degrees kept me accountable.

I find mentoring leaders one of the most satisfying aspects of what has been a very diverse and fulfilling ministry. I'm inspired by the idealism, enthusiasm and responsiveness of the emerging leaders with whom I work. They rejuvenate me! I find great joy in seeing them grow.

Recently I received the following excerpt in a letter from a mentoree:

'Thank you for your input into my life over the past 12 months. Each time we have met I have been greatly encouraged and helped to see my situation from a different point of view. I have gained a better understanding of both where I am at, and where God may be leading me in the future.'

Mentoring was a way of life in Bible times. A few of the more prominent mentoring relationships were Jethro and Moses; Moses and Joshua; David and Jonathan; Barnabas and Paul; Lois and Eunice with Timothy; Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos and Paul and Timothy. Jesus, with his disciples, provides our prime mentoring model.

The New Testament is full of 'one another' and 'together' passages pointing to Christianity as relational, about community and the power of togetherness. Rugged individualism and do-it-yourself spirituality are contrary to New Testament spirituality.

John Wesley's General Rules for Methodist Fellowships (Societies) released in 1743 included, **'Watch over one another in love'**. This was the key to his success in retaining those who were converted through that revival. In class meetings and one-to-one, they cared for one another.

Although mentoring or discipling has always been practiced in the church to varying degrees, in more recent years there has been a renewed emphasis. There are a growing



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number of books and seminars addressing the subject.

The word mentoring comes from Greek mythology in Homer's *Odyssey*. **Mentor** was the wise and trusted companion and friend of Ulysses. He became the guardian of Ulysses' household during his ten-year absence at the Trojan wars and the most effective teacher and adviser of Ulysses' son Telemachus.

Mentoring 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.'**

There are **three ways in which we can be involved in mentoring**. Ideally we should endeavour to be engaged in each of these aspects at one and the same time to balance the **receiving** in personal mentoring relationships with a **giving** of support and encouragement to others.

A receiving relationship: In this dimension of mentoring we enter into a 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.

'Mentors speak three messages: It can be done! You're not alone. I believe in you!' (*The Silence of Adam* - Lawrence Crabb, Zondervan, 1995).

Mentors may also sponsor their mentorees by giving openings to widen their experience, making contacts with other significant leaders and involving them in new areas of ministry.

A sharing relationship: This involves **co-mentoring** 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. Often it simply involves making a present friendship more intentional by knowing the right questions to ask, sharing openly and honestly and keeping one another accountable. This ought to be an enjoyable, relaxed relationship, with a fun dimension.

Unfortunately this so readily available and most effective form of mentoring has been overlooked by many, or not developed to reach its full potential.

A giving relationship: Here we develop a relationship with a less experienced person exercising 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 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 by both receiving and giving. It can also lessen the possibility of dependency developing.



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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; know our limitations and be able to set boundaries; have the time to give; believe in the power of prayer; familiarity with the Bible and, above all, have a living relationship with God.

Mentoring is a very significant role every Christian disciple can fulfil, irrespective of age or experience. Indeed, despite the above list of what it takes to be a good mentor, it is often the most unlikely people who succeed in this ministry.

Some of the best mentoring is done by very **busy men and women** who are disciplined with the use of their time and know how to slot mentorees into less busy periods. .

Many who are **housebound** because of young families or physical disability mentor effectively by means of their phones or by inviting others to visit them.

Mentoring is a fulfilling role for **seniors** who may have less time restraints than previously. Like Caleb, who was still fired up at 85 ('Give me this mountain... '), many seniors who mentor regularly are growing older as participants rather than spectators! !

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