

# Mentoring

by Tony Horsfall

Mentoring is not a new idea, but it is currently finding renewed popularity. It has been described as 'promoting the work of God in the life of another'<sup>1</sup>. It is an idea which has been renamed and re-shaped to fit the changing context of the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The pressures on leaders today have created a felt-need for trusted companions who will serve as mentors, to listen, pray and stand alongside those on the frontline. Mentoring is seen, too, as one of the best ways to develop emerging leaders and to tap the potential of the younger generation. Those who long for greater intimacy with God are also recognising the value of 'soul friends' who will share their journey and point them in the right direction.

Mentor was a character in Greek mythology who cared for the son of Ulysses, helping him to grow and develop into a brave and upright young man. Mentoring is very much centred on the development of others. In business, education and health care, mentoring is already common. Now the Church is beginning to awaken again to the rich potential within a practice embedded deep in Christian tradition.

## Biblical Background

Mentoring has always had a place both in Biblical thought and Christian history. We can think of Moses with Joshua, and Elijah with Elisha. Jesus nurtured the Twelve, and apprenticed them into ministry, often in a one-to-one situation. Barnabas saw the potential in Saul, whilst Paul (as he became) took Timothy under his wing. Celtic Christians spoke often of the importance of 'soul friends', whilst many of the great mystics had their own spiritual director. Augustine said 'No one can walk without a guide'. Calvin was known as a 'director of souls'.

Perhaps the scripture which best promotes mentoring is 2 Timothy 2:2, one of the foundation stones in the ministry philosophy of the apostle Paul: 'The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others'.

It can also be seen as the best practical way to fulfil the call to make disciples in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), and as a concrete expression of all the 'one another' verses scattered throughout the epistles. It is one of the ways in which we 'spur one another on to love and good deeds' (Hebrews 10:24). It is a tried and tested means of spiritual formation.

Perhaps the clearest working definition of mentoring is that given by John Mallinson.

**'Christian mentoring is a dynamic, intentional relationship of trust in which one person enables another to maximise the grace of God in their life and service.'**<sup>2</sup>

Looking carefully at his definition we can highlight the main characteristics of Christian mentoring.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition given by Rick Lewis, Bawtry Hall, December 1999

<sup>2</sup> Mallison, Mentoring, p. 8

- **A relationship:** usually on a one-to-one basis, and always with a background of friendship, it provides an accepting and safe environment in which to grow.
- **An intentional relationship:** it is planned and purposeful, and not left to chance. Expectations are clear, commitments are made, and boundaries are set.
- **A relationship of trust:** confidentiality is fundamental, but so too are mutual respect and appreciation, which provide the initial stimulus for a mentoring relationship.
- **A dynamic relationship:** it is going somewhere, it has 'life', it is meeting a felt-need.
- **An enabling relationship:** it does not create dependency but liberates and empowers others to reach their full potential. It does not control or manipulate.
- **Maximising the grace of God:** it points to God and to His sufficiency to meet individual needs, and it brings a challenge to reach out and to receive the resources available in Christ.
- **In life and service:** it brings an application to the whole of life – to home, to work, to our walk with God. It takes a holistic view of life.

### Qualities of a Mentor

What does it take to be a mentor? Generally speaking they are in short supply because mentoring requires a certain level of spiritual maturity and experience. In seeking a mentor there are many characteristics which we could look for, but ideally someone who:

- is established in God themselves, that is, they have been on the Christian journey for sometime and have proven themselves to be faithful and effective in serving God.
- genuinely seeks to develop the potential in others without wanting to dominate or have authority over them.
- can discern the ways of God and has a degree of wisdom to share when appropriate.
- is loving and affirming, non-judgemental and 'shock-proof'.
- has the patience to listen, and the time to give to developing a relationship.
- can confront when necessary.
- is prayerful and supportive.

No-one begins as a perfect mentor. Most learn on the job and through experience. When choosing a mentor is important to find someone whom you respect and admire, to whom you can look up, and who will challenge you to grow beyond where you are.

Mentoring is not to be confused with the 'shepherding' movement of the 1980s. It is not directive or authoritarian in its ethos. Rather it is enabling, empowering and releasing. A mentor is not looking to bring people under their own influence, or to reproduce themselves in another. They seek to point away from themselves to God, and to encourage others to hear God for themselves. In this sense mentoring is primarily the work of the Spirit and the mentor's chief role is to learn to facilitate, and not obstruct, the action of grace.

### Roles of a Mentor

Since it is a dynamic relationship, the role of the mentor may vary from time to time according to the needs of the mentoree. A variety of roles come under the heading of 'Mentoring', and each individual mentor will have their own emphases to bring.

- **Discipler:** This is most appropriate with younger believers when the purpose is to ground them in the faith, help them develop Christian character, and to identify their gifts and service opportunities.
- **Spiritual Guide:** Here the focus is on developing the inner life and greater intimacy with God, usually with someone who is already mature in Christ.
- **Coach:** When it is necessary to impart particular skills, whether to do with ministry (Eg.: public speaking, leading a home group) or life in general (Eg.: time management, computer skills).
- **Teacher:** If it is necessary to impart some form of truth or understanding to encourage the individual's growth.
- **Counsellor:** Only occasionally, and then not to any depth.
- **Sponsor:** Opening doors of opportunity for the development of gifting and potential.
- **Soul Friend:** Keeping the focus on the importance of friendship and spiritual growth.
- **Resourcer:** Pointing in the right direction for further help.

It obviously important that the mentor knows which of these roles they are best suited for, and when it may be helpful to point the Mentoree in the direction of someone else who could give more effective help in a particular area.

### Tools and Skills For Mentors

What can mentors do to do a good job? Apart from their experience and maturity, what particular skills is it helpful to develop?

Obviously, in a Christian context, **the Bible** will have a central role. It will be the source of inspiration and guidance for the mentor, and often it will be towards the Scriptures that the attention of the mentoree is drawn. Relevant passages will be selected for study and meditation, and the wisdom of God digested, and applied, through reflection and discussion.

The ability to **listen actively** is a vital skill which underlines the whole ministry of mentoring. Unless we truly hear what people are saying to us, how can we properly help them? Many people think that listening comes automatically, but in fact most of us are by nature poor listeners. It is an acquired, practiced discipline that requires real effort and concentration. Anyone who would be a mentor should attend at least a basic course on Listening Skills.

Active listening involves:

- concentrating on what the other person is saying, not thinking what I am going to say next
- reflecting back to them what I understand them to mean, so we are both clear about what has been said
- asking questions as appropriate for clarification, but without interrupting
- not being afraid of silence or pauses in the conversation

- letting the person say what they want to say, and not assuming I know what they want to say.

Alongside the skill of active listening comes the ability to ask **meaningful questions**. A mentoring session is not an inquisition, but the use of good questions can help the mentoree find their way through the confusion of their own thoughts.

Good questions are:

- open-ended, allowing the other person to continue talking (Eg.: Why did you feel that way...? What would you have done if...?)
- reflective, helping the person to evaluate their thoughts (Eg.: What did you mean when you said...?)
- probing, gently helping the person face up to things they might avoid (Eg.: But what about...?)

There will usually be certain key subject areas that the mentor will want to talk through and to ask about: feelings, physical well-being, spiritual matters, important relationships, character issues. One question always to have ready is 'How can I help you?'

By asking questions in this way, the mentor helps the mentoree to work through issues for themselves, rather than presenting them with ready-made solutions. This is part of the empowering process inherent in mentoring.

When working with a mentoree, there are two tools which many have found particularly helpful. The first is journaling; the second is goal-setting.

**Journaling** provides the opportunity to write down one's innermost thoughts, and then to be able to reflect on what is written. The very act of writing things down brings a sense of perspective, and often of clarity. It is amazing how fuzzy-thinking is sharpened when you discipline yourself to write it down! Likewise, it can be startling how many new ideas come as you begin to brainstorm and make a note of the possibilities that surface as you write without stopping to evaluate.

Journaling is especially useful when it comes to the deepening of spiritual life. Recording thoughts and feelings can be a great way to process things in time of difficulty. Noting what God has said at a particular time not only captures it for the moment, but also for the future when one can look back over things and be reminded of God's promises or guidance. Journaling is currently a neglected discipline, but once discovered it pays rich rewards to those who develop the habit.

**Goal-setting** can also be constructive within a mentoring relationship. Helping a person to set realistic goals for their lives can bring a new impetus and release of energy to their lives. Knowing that they are accountable (however lightly) to the mentor is an incentive to the mentoree to realise their goals.

For some, the writing of a personal mission statement has been helpful. For others, working on an action plan has clarified the way ahead. A friend of mine developed goals for himself which covered different aspects of his life such as:

- Physical (Eg.: to lose 12 lbs in weight, to exercise twice a week),

- Emotional (Eg.: to work at coping strategies relating to stress),
- Spiritual (Eg.: to plan a regular Quiet Day once a month).

Within the course of the year he achieved all his goals and felt much better as a person as a result. If a mentoring relationship is to be productive, it needs to have some simple measurable goals by which progress can be identified. This is what makes it a dynamic relationship.

### What About the Mentoree?

The mentoree is central to a mentoring relationship, but what qualities are we to look for here? Is anyone suitable, or are some people more ready for this than others? Mentorees themselves need to have:

- teachable spirit, being humble and willing to learn,
- clearly defined aim as to what they want to gain from the relationship,
- spiritual hunger and desire to grow in God,
- openness, and a willingness to be vulnerable,
- commitment to stick at it and to work at any suggestions that are made by the mentor,
- reliability in keeping appointments.

### Establishing a Relationship

The initiative in establishing a mentoring relationship can come from either party, but it is important that from the outset both are clear about their expectations. Some of the issues to be agreed upon are:

- Why shall we meet?
- Where shall we meet and for how long?
- How often shall we meet?
- What shall we do when we meet?
- What do we mean by confidentiality?
- What contact will we have between sessions?
- What goals shall we set ourselves?
- When shall we review how it is going?
- How will we terminate the relationship?
- Are there any financial costs to be considered?

A mentoring relationship should never be an exclusive or possessive relationship. A mentoree may need more than one person to help them, meeting different needs. They should, however, walk with integrity in all their relationships. With the passing of time a mentoree may naturally feel the need to move on to another relationship. The mentor need not feel rejected by this, but should see it as part of a natural and healthy progression. As with all close relationships, care must be taken throughout a relationship to avoid the inappropriate expression of affection or intimacy.

### How Can Mentoring Help the Church?

- 1) It is my firm conviction that leaders of churches and Christian organisations should each have a mentor, not just for their spiritual protection, but for their personal support, and as an incentive to growth and intimacy with God. Many casualties in church life could be avoided if

church leaders had an outside reference point, and if they were being helped to keep on top spiritually by spiritual friend or guide. Many could grow much deeper in their faith, and enjoy the Christian life far more, if they had the stimulus of a wise and trusted mentor.

- 2) Mentoring is an ideal way of developing other leaders. Those who have the potential for leadership should be encouraged early on to establish mentoring relationships that will help them to grow where they most need help. This applies to leadership at whatever level – in organisations, churches, youth ministries, children’s work, music groups etc. It applies equally to ladies as to men. Everyone needs someone to believe in them, to see their potential, and to give them opportunities to spread their wings.
- 3) Mentoring provides a model for apprenticeship, for gifted individuals to share their skills with others through on-the-job training. This might be in preaching, worship leading, cell group leadership, running PA systems, offering pastoral care or wherever specific skills are required. Often, just being with an individual, you can feel their heart and catch vision. There are still many things which are better ‘caught’ than ‘taught’.
- 4) Mentoring can function at the most basic level of church life, as a kind of ‘buddy system’ for new members coming into a church fellowship.
- 5) Small groups can meet together also for ‘peer group’ mentoring, building one another up and encouraging each other appropriately. This could be young mums or newly married couples, those recently bereaved, or those facing redundancy. The possibilities are endless.

### How Can This Become Reality?

Obviously we need to train men and women to become mentors, and to educate congregations as to its benefits. John Mallinson’s book *Mentoring* contains a do-it-yourself training course, whilst other Christian centres offer programmes in mentoring.

We will need to adopt a flexible approach, since if we become too structured and hierarchical, we may well strangle the life out of what is meant to be a dynamic and creative relationship. People need the freedom to choose their own mentors in their own time, and each relationship will function differently, with differing degrees of intensity, and always a variety of purpose.

Without doubt, though, there is a growing need in the post-Christian, post-modern context in which we minister to provide the kind of quality discipling relationship that mentoring offers. It is an approach ideally suited for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and could well be one of the brightest hopes for a renewal of spiritual vitality within the Church today.

December 2000

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## Helpful Reading

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>PUBLISHER</b>
Spiritual Mentoring	Anderson & Rees	Eagle
Mentoring	Mallinson	Scripture Union
Finding a Spiritual Friend	Jones	Scripture Union
Connecting	Clinton & Stanley	NavPress
Soul Friendships	Ray Simpson	Hodder
Soul Friend	Leech	DLT

## Mentoring – a relationship

Some keys words to describe a mentoring relationship:

- Sacramental
- Personal
- Expressive
- Responsive
- Accepting
- Accountable
- Empowering
- Safe

## Relational Capacities of a Mentor

- Love
- Perception
- Tolerance / acceptance
- Flexibility
- Patience
- Vision
- Encouragement
- Truth speaking