

## C H A P T E R 1

# The Biblical Basis of Mentoring

In the last few years the concept of mentoring has come into vogue in many business and educational settings. Experts are writing books and hosting seminars to describe and teach the basic concept of mentoring. (For an example of what is available today, take a look at these secular Web sites on the subject: [www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org) and [www.whomentoredyou.org](http://www.whomentoredyou.org). A selected bibliography is also included in the back of this book.)

The word “mentor” supposedly originated in Greek mythology. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, “Mentor” was the character entrusted with tutoring Odysseus’ son and providing guidance and instruction in the absence of his father.<sup>2</sup> “Mentor” illustrates the concept of mentoring.

I define mentoring as *a caring adult who takes the initiative to develop a personal, growing relationship with an individual student to encourage spiritual and personal maturity.*

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The impetus is on the adult's showing the student that he or she truly cares and wants to be involved tangibly in the young person's life. The adult initiates the relationship because he or she understands that the student needs in-

struction and guidance.

Many of us were the recipients of that kind of attention when we were kids. Most likely, our lives are lined with caring people who took the time to be personally involved with us. Do you remember the impact of caring adults in your life? It is probably the little things those adults did you for that you remember the most. In the same way, mentoring is not necessarily a commitment of a huge amount of time on the part of the adult. Quite the contrary, mentoring often involves little things, such as showing someone attention and encouraging his or her walk with the Lord.

The Harvard Mentoring Project challenges us with these words: "Growing up, were there people in your life who encouraged you, showed you the ropes, and helped you become the person you are today? Think about family members, a teacher or coach, a neighbor, a boss, or family friend; those people were mentors to

you. Most successful people say they had mentors along the way who guided and encouraged them. . . . General Colin Powell points to the influence of his father; Senator John McCain credits a high school teacher and coach whose example helped strengthen his resolve during years of imprisonment in North Vietnam; and Oprah Winfrey cites a fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Duncan, who taught her to believe in herself.”<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly those mentors made a profound influence in the lives of their students or protégés.

This book, *Mentoring the Next Generation*, focuses on the spiritual impact that caring, godly adults can have on the lives of the impressionable students in our churches.

God’s Word contains real-life illustrations of spiritual mentoring relationships. To get a glimpse of the Biblical basis for this kind of ministry, let’s take a look at some key New Testament passages.

**Mentoring often involves little things.**

#### 1 THESSALONIANS 2:7–12

We discover Biblical principles that form the basis for mentoring in passages such as 1 Thessalonians 2:7–12. Note verse 8: “So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.”

The apostle Paul shared the gospel and his life with the Thessalonian believers. These two priorities form the foundation of a mentoring relationship. Effective mentors take time to teach God's Word to students. In addition, they share their lives with students. Paul indicated that he was "affectionately desirous" of the Thessalonian people. This wording demonstrates a constant



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yearning for an intimate and personal relationship. We can translate the phrase "we were willing" as "delighted," or "thrilled." Paul "delighted" to share these things with the Thessalonians.

Let me expand on these two basic priorities for a healthy mentoring relationship. First of all, a spiritual relationship begins with a commitment to communicate the truth of God's Word. Notice the emphasis that Paul placed upon "the gospel" in 1 Thessalonians 2 (see verses 2, 4, 8, and 9). Spiritual mentoring is not just developing a personal relationship between a caring adult and a maturing student. The mentor bases that relationship upon the precepts of God's Word. Paul did that during his ministry with the Thessalonian believers. He also emphasized this priority in the account of his ministry in Thessalonica, recorded in Acts 17:1–15. Note, for example, verse 2: "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures."

The second basic mentoring priority is a desire on the part of the mentor to share his or her life with the student. The word Paul used for “souls” is the common word for “lives.” We discover in the book of Acts that the apostle did not spend a significant amount of time in the city of Thessalonica; however, when he was there, he demonstrated his love by sharing his life with the Thessalonian people. Mentoring is not easy; it takes a commitment of time and effort. First Thessalonians 2:9 supports that thought. “Remember, brethren, our labour and travail: . . . labouring night and day.”



**Mentoring is  
not easy.**

In verses 7 and 11 of 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul used a family metaphor to identify the two key characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship: (1) a loving mother (“nurse”) and (2) a hardworking father. The Biblical language in verse 7 illustrates the gentle love of a nursing mother. Probably nothing could be as special as that kind of human relationship. There is something very warm and tender about a mother’s love for her children.

Have you ever watched a Sunday afternoon professional football game where a hulking defensive lineman has just made an incredible play in the mud and sweat? The camera zooms in on his dirty, toothless smile, and with a cheesy wave, the first words out of his mouth are, “Hi, Mom.”

Yes, there is something special about a mother's love. Just as mothers are absolutely indispensable to the growth and development of children, spiritual mentors are essential for the spiritual maturity of their students.

Paul's second illustration in this text is a hard working father. Mentoring takes time and hard work, and it

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certainly takes adults who love students. The fact that my father worked hard and diligently is my most vivid memory of growing up with Dad. Even now in his retirement years, he is not the kind of guy who can sit around with nothing to do; he still works hard. His

dad, my grandfather, was just the same. I remember his strong work ethic. At age sixty-five my grandfather faced a mandatory retirement from his work, so he got another full-time job that he held for more than twenty years—until he died in his late eighties.

By using the analogy of a hardworking father, Paul demonstrated that mentoring is indeed hard work. The wording in 1 Thessalonians 2 stresses that a father's role includes modeling and motivating. Notice verse 11 of our text: "We exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." Effective mentors enjoy this kind of ministry with their students. The next verse explains the goal of this extreme effort: to "walk worthy of God, who hath called you" (v. 12). Paul's goal for the Thessalonian believers must

be ours for our protégés. Obviously, we want them to grow up to live godly lives. The fulfillment of that goal requires gentle love and hard work, but isn't that exactly what we want for our students as well? Mentoring can encourage the fulfillment of that goal.

TITUS 2:1-8

We find another Biblical example of mentoring in what I call the "Titus 2 Principle." Notice the inter-generational emphasis in this passage. Older women are instructed to teach younger women; likewise, older men are to minister to younger men.

It is a shame that the modern church has gotten away from connecting the generations. I am afraid that we are making a terrible mistake in our church youth ministries if we totally separate the teenagers from other age groups. I have visited church after church where the teenagers have very little to do with the adults and the adults very little (if anything) to do with the teens. Don't get me wrong. I am a firm believer in youth ministry. I fully understand that culturally and socially teenagers need and want to be around other teenagers. It's just that our kids also need the influence of godly adults. I also believe that adults need the influence of youth.

**Modern church has gotten away from connecting the generations.**

Developing intentional mentoring relationships in

our churches can help restore the adult-to-youth connection. As well-known Christian educator Howard Hendricks has written, “Whatever you do, get different generations involved with each other, rather than segregated from each other, as is often the practice.”<sup>4</sup>

The Scriptures contain multiple illustrations of intentional intergenerational connections (for example, Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Paul with Timothy, John Mark, and others). Yet even a quick look at history reveals that our contemporary culture has done more to separate the various age groups than any at other time. Since the cultural advent of adolescence and a youth culture, we have separated and disconnected the generations in our schools, churches, and other social institutions. Our culture divides children, youth, and adults into separate age groups that have very little to do with the other age groups.

The Titus 2 Principle teaches us that this age group

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division is not the standard for the church. In fact, I believe that it is natural for older people to want mentoring relationships with younger people. Titus 2 encourages older people to mentor younger people in the following general categories: the teaching of

Biblical truth and the development of character qualities, people skills, family relationships, and outreach.

Paul taught that older men and older women are to

teach and model godliness in order to encourage the younger men and women in specific areas. The word “teach” in verse 4 could be translated “to train,” or even “to encourage.” Kenneth S. Wuest puts it this way: “to make sane or sober-minded, to recall a person to his senses.”<sup>5</sup>

These intergenerational relationships are essential. Older women can and should train and encourage younger women; likewise, older men can train and encourage younger men. The church is supposed to work this way. Instead, our churches normally divide people by age groups; therefore, the youth and adults have very little to do with each other.

**Intergenerational relationships are essential.**

Adult mentors should be identified in our churches as those who have the ability to fulfill these instructional responsibilities in the lives of the upcoming generations. This concept will work if we give it a chance.

#### **BARNABAS**

Scripture gives a vivid illustration of one man who had mentoring relationships with almost everyone who came into his life. Those around him nicknamed him “the encourager,” or “the son of encouragement.” By now you know that I am talking about Barnabas. His real name was Joses, or Joseph (Acts 4:36), but his life

demonstrated such an encouraging spirit that the early church leaders gave him the handle of “encourager.”

**Barnabas  
mentored the  
apostle Paul.**

Barnabas is the person who mentored the apostle Paul. Soon after Saul (his name was later changed to Paul) came to Christ, Barnabas took him to the church leadership and defended his claim of salvation (Acts 9:26, 27). “Were it not for Barnabas, who knows what would have happened to Saul—or to the early church? Certainly none of the leaders at Jerusalem wanted anything to do with him.”<sup>6</sup>

The story continues in Acts 11:22–26, where again Barnabas strategically influenced the life of this new convert. Note verses 25 and 26: “Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people.”

We find another example of Barnabas’ mentoring ministry in the example of young John Mark. This account begins at the end of Acts 12 and continues in Acts 13. Barnabas, still providing a guiding relationship to the emerging leadership of the apostle Paul, was instrumental in taking his relative, John Mark (Col. 4:10), with them on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25—13:5). You probably know what happened next. John failed. He quit and went back home

to Jerusalem. We're not sure exactly why, but that missionary journey didn't go well for this young disciple. Acts 15:38 reveals that a major disagreement broke out between Paul and Barnabas over whether to give John Mark a second chance on the next ministry trip. It is fitting to realize that "Mr. Encouragement" split from Paul and instead took John Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:39). Barnabas continued his mentoring relationship with this young man even through the difficult times of John Mark's early failure. He did not give up on him.

A subtle yet interesting subplot is interwoven in the fabric of this story of

Barnabas and John Mark; we read it in a phrase at the end of Acts 15:39: "Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus." Church history indicates that during that time frame the apostle Peter was probably in Cyprus. Later on, Peter referred to John Mark as his "son," or son in the faith (1 Pet. 5:13).

Peter certainly knew what it meant to fail and then bounce back. He had denied the Lord three times at Christ's crucifixion, and yet he had come back strong to lead the early church. Perhaps it is significant that Barnabas' ministry with young John Mark included taking him to see Peter. John Mark had known Peter from the time Peter had visited his home, the place

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where the early church met in Acts 12:1–17. I am certain that Peter also had a significant ministry in the life of this young man.

**Barnabas did not  
give up on  
John Mark.**

Note that John Mark did not end up a failure. Sure he struggled; but in the end, even the aged apostle Paul wrote, “Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to

me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

These three Biblical passages and examples (1 Thessalonians 2, Titus 2, and Barnabas) form the basis of what true mentoring is all about. Mentoring takes work and requires the consistent, self-sacrificing love of an adult who is willing to invest his or her life to encourage and to teach a young person. It demands loving a young person through failures and immaturity and helping him or her mature into a life of service for the Lord.

## The Basics of Mentoring

One of the most important things a church can do is to build older people into the lives of its young people, and vice versa. Current post-modern thought often leads to a compartmentalization of life into separate and distinct categories. Churches can impact Millennials (today's high school students) through the consistent and loving interaction of caring adults who take the initiative to be involved in their lives. Although this task may be difficult to accomplish, its rewards are incredibly positive. Through hands-on involvement with adults, teenagers will gain an appreciation for other age groups. *Mentoring happens when adults develop an intentional and proactive personal and growing relationship with individual students to encourage them toward spiritual and personal maturity.*