

## Mentoring in Ministry

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Mentoring is a form of teaching that is widely promoted today as an important part of adult, and youth, education.<sup>1</sup> The name comes from Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. Odysseus, king of Ithaca, placed his aged friend, Mentor, in charge of his entire household before leaving on what turned into a ten-year trip to Troy. One of the tasks Mentor had was to raise the king's son, Telemachus, in the way Odysseus intended.

Over time **mentoring** has come to be practiced largely in a voluntary manner (though as will be considered below, a nonvoluntary dimension is now also being employed). A less experienced (usually younger) person has self-selected a more experienced, wiser, and skilled (usually older) person, who has a good track record of accomplishment, from whom to learn needed knowledge and wisdom and to receive help to develop essential skills in order to perform adequately and sufficiently in a particular aspect of life, often including but not limited to his or her work. At different times and circumstances throughout life the less experienced person has chosen more than one mentor. The mentor-mentee relationship has been informal and typically pro bono.

Mentoring is related to several other types of teaching and has some overlap with them, though the terms are not completely synonymous. These other terms are apprenticeship, coaching, and discipleship.

An **apprenticeship** is formal, is part of an employment procedure, involves intentional direct instruction about work-related knowledge and skills in an extended time frame whereby the apprentice can implement what he or she has learned under the supervision of the skilled worker, and has always involved more than mentoring even while including aspects of mentoring. The amount of overlap depends upon the relationship between the worker and the apprentice. If they have a good relationship beyond the formal requirements, and if the apprentice observes the other as having more to offer than job-related insights and capabilities, more mentoring may and likely will be sought.

**Coaching** is also advocated in churches and other organizations. The term coaching is also a form of teaching related to mentoring, though as with mentoring the literature does not typically refer to coaching as teaching. Distinguished from mentoring and apprenticeship, which occur over a sustained period of time, coaching is done in a shorter time frame and focuses more on

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<sup>1</sup> Much, though not all, contemporary literature on mentoring avoids, and some negates, the concept of teaching in the explanation of mentoring. Generally this literature portrays and emphasizes mentoring as a relationship of mutual learning where the mentor is referred to as a "guide on the side." Nevertheless, in the historic understanding of teaching such counsel is also an informal type of teaching and should be examined as to how it can be used most effectively in the educational ministry of the church.

specific day-to-day matters. Its objective is to help the one coached become effectively oriented to and productive in an organization. Mentors coach, and some but not all coaches are mentors. Coaching is done not only by one's mentor but by other specified and unspecified employees, and primarily but not always to help an employee avoid and overcome problems at work and in his or her life in general, problems in either case being perceived as usually having a negative affect on workplace relationships and productivity. Organizations assign coaches to other employees for specific purposes and also encourage their employees to voluntarily coach especially newer hires as needed. The formal aspect of coaching in organizations is often highly structured with measurable procedures and goals.

### **Biblical Mentoring**

Does mentoring occur in God's Word? Since we must maintain careful adherence to well established hermeneutical principles in our interpretation of Scripture, we thus acknowledge the fact that neither the word mentoring nor its derivatives are recorded in the Bible. We cannot find in God's Word a chapter and verse that describe and prescribe mentoring per se.

Yet this basic acknowledgement and premise does not mean we cannot infer indications of mentoring in Biblical accounts and capture glimpses of contexts and occurrences of the practice. Mentoring may be seen as occurring in the context of being an aide or a disciple where God was preparing that person to eventually take on and take over that work. In fact discipleship involves a more structured type of mentoring. Discipleship is usually initiated by the discipler (stemming from Jesus' commission to his disciples to "go and make disciples"<sup>2</sup>) and contains more intentional direct instruction, but its ongoing relational context involves mentoring as well. While the apprentice relationship is necessary and usually required by an employer, the discipler-disciple relationship is voluntary and informal. Notice in the Scriptures below that there is no indication that God forces an aide or a disciple into this relationship against the will of the one he is calling.

Consider Joshua, who served as an aide to Moses. The Hebrew word translated aide is *meshareth* (> *sharath*), which is also rendered attendant, assistant, servant, minister, lieutenant. A study of the Biblical accounts about Joshua's relationship with Moses reveals that Joshua was being prepared for taking over for Moses when he died.

Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you." (Exodus 24:13-14)

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses...As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Joshua 1:1-5 NIV)

Elisha was Elijah's attendant. The Hebrew word translated attendant is also *meshareth*. Similarly we see Elisha being prepared to take over for Elijah when God took the latter to heaven.

[The LORD told Elijah] Also anoint...Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet...So Elisha...took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant. (1 Kings 19:19-21. See also 2 Kings 2.)

As previously mentioned, mentoring is part of the discipleship process. Discipleship involves much more both in selection and teaching, but mentoring is very much included.

[Jesus] called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. (Matthew 10:1)

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: love each other. (John 15:14-17)

While they were together Jesus and his disciples had many times when they could talk with him as their mentor. We catch glimpses of the opportunities the disciples had to voluntarily ask Jesus questions and learn from him. An example is when the disciples asked him to explain the meaning of a parable.

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." (Matthew 13:36)

Recall also the time when Jesus, Peter, James, and John were returning to the other disciples after Jesus' Transfiguration. The disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't deliver a person from a stubborn demon.

<sup>14</sup> When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.

<sup>15</sup> As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

<sup>16</sup> "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

<sup>17</sup> A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.

<sup>18</sup> Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

<sup>19</sup> "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

<sup>20</sup> So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered.

<sup>22</sup> "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

<sup>23</sup> "'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

<sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

<sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

<sup>26</sup> The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead."

<sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

<sup>28</sup> After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

<sup>29</sup> He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:14-29)

Of course these are accounts of discipleship activity, but here is where discipleship and mentoring overlap, or where the former provides the context for the latter. It is an example of the opportunity for mentoring that surely occurred in the conversations Jesus and his disciples had as they walked from place to place and in private conversations as in these two incidents.

In addition we see intentionality in Jesus' desire to teach/mentor his disciples in places where they could have private conversations without interruption. For example in the very next verses after the above passage we read the following:

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." (Mark 9:30-31)

We also see such a relationship between Paul and Timothy.

[Paul] came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived. (Acts 16:1) To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith... Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. (1 Timothy 1:2-4, 18-19a)

Consider also Paul's relationship with Titus. Similarly, notice what the apostle says to Titus about the relationship of older and younger women.

To Titus, my true son in our common faith... (Titus 1:4)  
Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women...so that no one will malign the word of God. (Titus 2:3-5)

The teaching of the older women likely included parenting and grandparenting as well as modeling. However, one implication of what Paul is saying to Titus is that the older women will be mentoring the younger ones. Their maturity in the faith, their growth in sanctification, their reverence in the way they live will attract the younger women to them; these qualities in the older ones give them the credibility, credentials, and opportunity to help those younger. "*Then* they can train the younger women..." who sense their elders have something they need and from whom they can learn much of value for their lives.

## Contemporary Mentoring

In today's common parlance, in conversation and in the literature, mentoring is described as sponsoring, guiding, modeling, counseling, and facilitating as well as teaching. Again, all of these terms have historically been seen as a type of teaching in the broadest understanding of the term. Mentors also affirm where possible, support, encourage, and raise questions that broaden the perspective and vision of their mentees, and sometimes also challenge their ideas.

Characteristics of effective mentors include willingness to take time to help, availability, patience, and respect. Such mentors freely share their failures as well as their successes, the former illuminating potholes in the road of life their mentees can thus avoid. These mentors point out problems in a mentee's plan but do not coerce the mentee's compliance with the mentor's suggestions (i.e., "permission to fail" is understood and assumed). Failure is addressed but not judged; evaluation and amelioration are explored.

Many if not most secular educators today base their thinking on the philosophy of humanism.<sup>3</sup> One essential thesis of humanism is the rejection of any form of theism with the attendant conceptualization that human reason is the ultimate standard of and basis for decision making.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, humanism contains the correlative philosophy of egalitarianism, which holds to the basic equality of all people and the relativity of values. If there is no higher authority above human beings to which to appeal, there is no standard to judge one person's values over another's.<sup>5</sup> Regarding mentoring, these educators are thus inclined to downplay

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<sup>3</sup> We must be careful to distinguish the anti-theistic philosophy of humanism from humanitarianism, with which it is often confused and even used synonymously. The latter is a concern for and action to help people in need, usually those who are experiencing serious plights in their lives. A humanitarian concern is consistent with Christianity; humanism is essentially antithetical to the Bible and historic Christian theology.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., the Humanist Manifestos I, II, and III and their signatories. All three versions have been available online at <http://www.jcn.com/manifestos.html>, accessed August 21, 2007. Much of the anti-theistic vitriol of the first two humanist manifestos has been removed from the Humanist Manifesto III, which is less pejorative than the first two documents, but which still holds to the essential tenets of this philosophy and does not replace the first two manifestos. The signatories attached to the end of the Humanist Manifesto II reads like a virtual contemporary Who's Who in public education.

<sup>5</sup> Some Americans like to point to the phrase in the Declaration of Independence referring to "all men are created equal," the full text of which is available at [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration\\_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html). What we need to point out in such circumstances, and from the Bible where our Founders obtained this concept, is that while all human beings are *created* equal before God, i.e., none are innately superior, that does *not* mean everyone's *values* are equal. Just for starters see Jeremiah 2:5, "This is what the LORD says: 'What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.'" Remember this reality when selecting a mentor. Pick one whose values are Biblical and rooted in Christ Jesus.

any superiority the mentor may have and to emphasize that the mentee has as much to contribute to the relationship as well.<sup>6</sup>

A humorous anecdote illustrating the flawed logic, as well as the errant theology, of humanism is seen in the story of two humanists who were having an argument. One said “I’m a firm believer in X,” to which his opponent acquiesced, “Well, I believe in non-X, but that’s OK; we’re both right.” Such nonsense, artificially allowed by humanistic relativism, commits the logical flaw against the law of noncontradiction, which states that it is unreasonable and illogical to hold to both X and its contradiction, non-X, at the same time. Mentees must be careful who they ask to be their mentor. It should be someone who thinks carefully and preferably a believer in and follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While undergoing changes today, which are discussed below, the practice of voluntarily selecting a mentor has been and is done for its several advantages. Mentees observe that their mentors have developed much more knowledge, wisdom, and skills that they need for their own life, including work. Mentees typically initiate the relationship, and when they self-select mentors they are more motivated to learn, will learn more, and will relate more willingly, more often, and over a longer period of time than if they are assigned a mentor without their input or acceptance.

Further, mentees have not only initiated the relationship but also the subject matters discussed. Mentors, already having enough to do, go about their daily life and work and are approached by mentees who have questions about certain matters they want to discuss in order to obtain the mentor’s insight, information, wisdom, and/or help with skill development. However, mentors do well to occasionally ask their mentees how they are doing and how things are going for them. Such open-ended questions permit the mentees to either engage in a conversation or just say, “Fine,” and move on to other matters. These occasional expressions of caring are valuable, however, for continuing and developing the relationship and facilitating further interactions.

Regarding mentoring, can older persons initiate opportunities for mentoring rather than wait until they’re approached by younger persons? The thinking that it’s

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<sup>6</sup> Relatedly, these and others they influence also like to refer to children as teachers. While we can learn from observing children and connect to our previous understandings what we see them do, and while young children do sometimes utter an observation that has profundity (likely beyond what they themselves comprehend), such occurrences are rare and hardly make them our teachers. Teenagers, however, who function with full cognitive structures (see Jean Piaget’s research) and have studied weighty subjects, can teach adults and children certain facts and concepts. However, most adolescents are still themselves formulating a meaningful and cogent integration and articulation of cognitive and affective data, are functioning with other cognitive limitations and developmental constraints (see, e.g., Lawrence Kohlberg’s research), are relatively immature in the sanctification process, and still need to develop much wisdom. Some exceptions to the contrary notwithstanding, it is thus a stretch, and not without problems, to call them teachers of adults.

preferred to wait until being asked has at least three significant problems. First of all, God has not called us to be silent. Secondly, such silence rarely if ever provides the opportunity to help, which opportunity occurs mostly in Hollywood films. Thirdly, younger generations typically function with the unwarranted assumption that older people don't understand the situation; are out of touch with their generation's perspectives, needs, and values; and older people's ways may have worked in the past but are unlikely to help as effectively in these new times.

Nevertheless, yes. Such initiation is possible, but it's most effectively done by tapping into the internal motivations of others. A prospective mentor can begin by indicating interest in what a younger and/or less experienced person is doing, demonstrating that he or she cares about the young friend, and developing a relationship with him or her. Over time the older person "earns the right to be heard." Early in the relationship the older person can raise pertinent questions, e.g., "If you do (such and so), how will that affect...?" If the younger person senses the older one has information, perspective, wisdom, and skills helpful for accomplishing his or her objectives, a mentor-mentee relationship may develop to a greater or lesser degree, i.e., with more or less interaction involved.

Often the younger person may not even use the word mentor to describe his or her relationship with the older person, which is unimportant; but whether or not the word is used, the effects can be the same. When someone selects a mentor, it can, and often does, take the form of a friendship with an older, wiser, and more informed person where the mentee periodically "picks the brain" of his or her mentor.

### **Organizational Mentoring**

However, in part due to the reluctance of younger people to acknowledge and tap into the knowledge, expertise, and wisdom of older people, especially those in a previous generation, in our time a new approach to mentoring is being undertaken. Many churches, denominations, institutions of higher learning, businesses, and other organizations are implementing plans that *require* younger or recently hired people to be mentored by someone older or more experienced in a structured process that is very detailed with formal protocols. Typically the younger or newly hired person is assigned a mentor and obliged to meet with that person for a specified period of time. Is this approach to mentoring the most effective?

A required mentor program has both pros and cons. Those favoring this approach correctly observe that some people do not otherwise select a mentor. In the highly individualistic, egocentric to the extent of narcissistic, and competitive culture of 21<sup>st</sup> century America, many focus only on themselves. Though not as numerous as in the baby boom generation, a considerable number of younger adults still think older people don't understand them, have not kept up with



changes in our time, and don't have anything to teach them.<sup>7</sup> Also, some who do select a mentor without guidance or direction make an unwise selection. Another reason given for requiring mentoring is that some learn from and develop relationships with people they would never otherwise have met and learned from. Some older people become mentors, who might not otherwise, and they are blessed with the joy of helping others, especially those who are younger, who in turn benefit from what they've learned. In such cases the organization of which the mentor and mentee are a part also benefits from the positive relationships that have been established and the increased productivity as a result of the learning that has occurred.

Those who oppose making mentoring required question the basic premises of that approach and cite other reasons for not demanding the practice. It is an unwarranted assumption that certain knowledge, wisdom, and skills can only be developed, or done so best, in one manner. It is also unwarranted to assume that an insufficient number of employees develop a relationship with a mentor; many do even though not formally or even calling that person a mentor. Mentoring occurs in unplanned ways even for workers who will not willingly seek out a mentor or admit to doing so.

Moreover, not a few mentors who are required by their employer to engage in this process will also demonstrate reluctance for numerous reasons. These reasons include fear of increased workload and the results (such requirements are usually accompanied by several specifications, e.g., number of mentees, number of meetings, length of time, and required reports that effect productivity and even personal time), ability to teach (employers and others frequently fail to recognize the reality that not everyone who is knowledgeable and skilled in his or her field is able to teach those understandings and skills to others), concern over personality conflicts (a problem for mentees as well), and trust issues.

Regarding workplace relationships, anthropological theology provides valuable guidelines. Part of the Biblical doctrine of the image of God in which we've been created, and that constitutes an essential dimension of our being, is freedom to choose. Wherever possible, utilizing this innate freedom of choice is to be preferred in order to avoid resistance to the objective, even when that objective is understood to be good.

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<sup>7</sup> This generational bias has led to the concept of peer mentoring. Throughout time it has generally been observed that some peers have valuable insights and skills that are helpful and from which others can learn, yet with the obvious limitations of their age and experience. Moreover, these understandings essentially apply to knowledge. Mentoring deals with much more than knowledge; its major value is in the *wisdom* that those older and more experienced have to offer that younger peers have not yet developed. When people of any age only turn to their peers for help, they limit their growth potential. That proclivity, combined with an impoverished knowledge of history that characterizes the contemporary U. S. citizenry largely as a result of the mid-twentieth century decision to not require the study of history in public schools, is a significant though not the only factor in many of the social and spiritual problems being encountered today.

In adolescents and adults where motivation is largely internal, institutional policy tends to be more effective when voluntary compliance is built in as much as possible. Where requirements are needed, rather than simply assign relationships, such organizations could stipulate that their members self-select mentors and obtain their assistance. If necessary, the mentees could also be required to report who their mentors are and at least one or more statements as to what they've learned from them. Then if any are either not selecting a mentor, or are selecting mentors who are deemed problematic for one or more reasons (e.g., are under discipline themselves or have had poor track records in their work), their supervisors can help them find and select more appropriate mentors. If they will still not select and relate to a mentor, they can be treated as any other employee who is not performing as desired. The organization, e.g., a church judicatory, can also offer interchurch conferences on subjects of interest and need that will bring together potential mentors and mentees and facilitate their meeting and, at least over time, establishing relationships that will likely lead to mentoring.

Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that people typically select mentors and add new ones as they progress through the life stages and encounter new tasks. Even those with an assigned mentor will self-select additional mentors on their own. Depending on one's type of work, he or she may need more than one mentor at a time. It is sometimes desirable to have a mentor who can help with one aspect of his or her work and another mentor to advise on a different dimension of ministry. For many years I specialized in the educational aspect of the ministry. I had at the same time a mentor for the theological aspects of my work and another for the educational dimension. Since I perceived my theological mentor as especially wise, helpful, and caring, I consulted with him from time to time on aspects of my personal life as well.

Regarding those who felt little or no need for a mentor earlier in life, we should note that as people age they usually mature in the process, grow in wisdom, and generally improve in their decision-making. It is thus likely that some will look to mentors later in life who did not do so earlier when they thought they "knew everything" and when they may have had a weaker ego and lower self-esteem that hindered their ability to seek help, thinking that would be an admission of inadequacy.

The challenges of life and work, including entering the next stage of life with its new tasks, sooner or later tend to cause sufficient disequilibrium in the minds of normal people that motivates those who sense a calling in ministry to self-select as mentors those they perceive who can be most helpful in their particular situations. Further, since people are different, and their circumstances are different, it is difficult to require a "once size fits all" approach to mentoring. Thus, the voluntary approach to mentoring should be preferred to the popular concept of reversing a time-tested practice and assigning mentors, especially when input from the mentees is not part of the process. Those who are inclined,

as are many people, to select a mentor and learn from him or her, will learn and produce as expected. Those who don't can learn in other ways.

Mentoring is a helpful and useful way to teach and to learn. It will be introduced and implemented most effectively more by encouraging younger and newer hires to select a mentor from whom to learn than by force of requirement or some other way, such as various forms of manipulation, e.g., badgering. Insights from the field of diffusion research are also very helpful for an institution to implement such an innovation.<sup>8</sup>

Churches and other organizations that insist on assigning mentees to mentors can overcome many of the negative aspects of that approach by making the assignment time bound and then afterward allowing the mentee to decide to continue on with his or her assigned mentor or select another. In many cases the initial period of the assigned relationship is sufficient for a relationship to begin and strengthen to the point where a mutual decision is made to continue when the time limit expires.

### **Mentoring Youth in the Church**

In Scripture elders are given oversight of the spiritual development of the church. (1 Timothy 3:1-6; Titus 1:6-9) Therefore, in most congregations today their responsibilities include facilitating the nurture of church members and others, children, youth, and adults, and authorizing their instruction as well as their confessions of faith. Thus, elders approve the selection of church teachers and curricula.

As part of the process of fulfilling these responsibilities, I propose a procedure whereby elders establish relationships with specific youth in the church, so that each capable elder relates intentionally but informally with at least one of the church teen-agers on a periodic basis.<sup>9</sup> For example, once a month during the fellowship hour after Sunday worship the elder could have a cup of coffee or juice with a church teen, or take a walk around the church grounds, and ask how he or she is doing.<sup>10</sup> The elder can use the following questions as conversational

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<sup>8</sup> An overview of this research and its application to ministry is in my essay, "Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church," which can be accessed on my Web site at [www.fromacorntoak12.com](http://www.fromacorntoak12.com).

<sup>9</sup> In so doing, make sure the elders are mature, able, and willing to perform such a role well. For example, in this age where young adults are put on the elder boards of some churches for reasons that are sometimes more utilitarian than Biblical (there is a reason why such leaders are designated in the Bible by the term elder) and thus lack maturity themselves, those should not be matched with young people for mentoring. Similarly, some older elders have been placed on the elder board for utilitarian reasons, with insufficient attention given to their level of sanctification, and should not be mentors either.

<sup>10</sup> Some elders invite their young people to meet with them in a coffee shop or at their workplace. The latter approach offers other obvious benefits.

gambits or discussion starters, though not all at once and some after meeting for considerable time:

- How are things going in school and with your friends and family?
- What do you like to do in your spare time? Do you have any hobbies? Do you like to fish? (Elder: mention how you'd answer these and the other questions.)
- Do you like music? What is your favorite music, and who are your favorite musicians?
- What do you want to do in life, and how are you preparing for that occupation?
- How do you see God working in your life? (If the young people have difficulty seeing God's involvement in their lives, mention James 1:17, and ask them to tell you of some of the good that they see in their lives; then say, "There you see evidence of God's presence and blessing.")
- How often do you pray and read the Bible?
- Do you have a plan for reading the Scriptures (instead of hopping and skipping around the Bible at random)?
- What do you believe about Christ? (Include the question, "Do you 'confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,' [Romans 10:9]?" This text is what I have often referred to as "the bottom line" of the Christian faith. Be sure to explain the concept of the Lordship of Christ and what that means in a believer's life. Relate Christ's Lordship to obeying him and bearing fruit. See, e.g., Matthew 7:15-23; John 14:21; 15:9-17.)
- What are you doing to serve the Lord?
- Are you a member of the church?
- Are you giving, especially tithing?

Over time some of these elder-teenager relationships will develop into a mentor-mentee relationship. Those that don't will still be helpful and provide opportunities for the elder to accomplish his or her work and provide useful information for decision-making in church board meetings. Further, the youth will grow in their sanctification, in their sense of their importance in the church, and in their sense of being valued by and connected to the church.

In the Bible we see that pastors are also elders. (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:1; 5:17) Some pastors have demonstrated excellent uses of mentoring in their ministry.

The solo pastor in my home church was a very youthful and youth-oriented pastor and related very well to the young people of the church. He invited a small group of us teen-agers on a trip. He took a special interest in us, and we went on many other trips and special events with “Mr. Van.” We did a lot of fun things together and of course learned much from him on these ventures. God used our admiration of and relationship with our pastor to lead several of us into professional ministry. I am one of them.

When mentoring is used with adolescents in church education, e.g., as some churches are doing in a confirmation program, it should be done very carefully and in consultation with the young person in order to establish an effective match that will accomplish the desired results. Choice can still be implemented by giving the young person the opportunity to select among several possible mentors who have been approved by the church board and/or other authorized personnel involved in the process.

Since God has given parents the primary responsibility for raising his and their children in the faith (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Psalm 78:1-8; Ephesians 6:1-4), as always, the parents must be an integral part of the process, including giving final approval to any mentor assigned to their children. As with all programs involving minors, careful background checks and other precautions (e.g., mentor-mentee meetings only in open and even public places, especially in mixed gender relationships) must be implemented and monitored.

Much care should also be undertaken with regard to the curriculum selected for such a program. Good curricula are already available (log on to the Calvin College and Seminary Ministry Resource Center for examples) that are prepared to offer the whole counsel of God, employing engaging and tested teaching models. I have seen materials produced by youth ministers untrained in curriculum development that have left much to be desired, including omitting such key concepts as God’s trinitarian being! I asked the youth leader who wrote that material how he was preparing his young people to fulfill their God-given calling to witness effectively to the many Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheistic, agnostic, and other teens moving into their neighborhoods and schools who do not believe in God as a trinity.

If you are a youth worker and are tempted to write your own curriculum, as many do, consider the fact that it is a very time consuming task to do well and that most churches do not consider curriculum writing part of your job description. Thus, to do so will take away valuable time from your work and family. In fact curriculum construction is a science in a whole subfield in education that has developed principles and procedures that are valuable also for Christian education in general and church education in particular. Unless you have been trained in this field, and even if you have, for stewardship of time and other reasons you’ll be wiser to

select the curriculum that will best match your needs and adapt it to your specific requirements.

### **Summary**

Mentoring is a very useful form of teaching. To utilize its strengths most effectively in the church, carefully facilitate the development of possible mentor-mentee relationships for yourself (as both mentor and mentee) as well as for others. In youth ministry match the most mature church members with those who are younger in a way that includes the mentee in the selection process, remembering that it is Biblically imperative to involve the parents as well.