

## **Mentoring**

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Mentoring is one of those words which has become very popular in recent years in youth ministry, and many churches I know are seeking to put an effective mentoring programme into place for their young people. *Yet it's not a word you will find as such in the Bible.* So why then do so many pastors and leaders regard it as an essential element of effectively discipling young people?

It's because they see the immense value of an ongoing relationship between mature and experienced followers of Christ, and young people who are seeking to grow in faith, understanding, maturity and Christian character. In a world which is rapidly changing, the value of having a caring and godly adult alongside young people for encouragement, guidance and support cannot be over-estimated.

Young people have always had to work through questions, change, and choices as they grow into adults, and develop their own identity, goals and future direction. But the world they live in now is presenting them with far greater challenges and choices than ever before. Many traditional beliefs and ways of doing things are being questioned, they are constantly bombarded with messages from the media that contradict Christian values, societal attitudes and moral values, the influence of the Internet is huge, and often there is diminishing input from adults and parents into young lives.

*In such a world, the value of a steady influence and godly role model cannot be overstated.* Many young people today are crying out for adults to share with them the truths in life that they have already learned and applied, and are seeking relationships that are authentic, empowering and transforming.

Mentoring has been defined in many ways, but at the heart of almost every definition is the key element of relationship. Here are some definitions people have written:

- "Mentoring is a one-on-one relational experience in which one person empowers another person by investing their God-given wisdom and resources."
- "Mentoring is a dynamic relationship of trust in which one person enables another to maximise the grace of God in his/her life and service. It has a sound Biblical and theological basis with Jesus as the ultimate model, retaining all that is consistent with his life and teaching." **John Mallison - *Mentoring to develop disciples and leaders.***
- "A mentor is a brain to pick, a shoulder to cry on, and a kick in the pants." **John Crosby.**

*When done effectively, mentoring impacts lives.* It helps young people grow in faith, character, and Biblical understanding; it builds fellowship across generations; it provides a safe and supportive place where young people can grow, question, doubt, fail, and succeed; it provides guidance, accountability and support; it offers opportunities for learning and growing; and it gives young people mature role models who will walk alongside them with individual time and attention.

***Let's go back now to the Bible.*** As I mentioned earlier, we may not read the word 'mentoring', but the reality is that we see it occurring over and over through the pages of Scripture, and discover it is a very Biblical model for us to implement. The Bible shows mentoring to be an intentional and God-centred relationship between people: look at Moses and Joshua, Eli and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and His disciples, Barnabas and Paul, Paul and Timothy, Elizabeth and Mary, and Ruth and Naomi. Each

relationship reveals an intentional investment of time, encouragement, support, role modelling and personal growth. *Mentoring is a way of sharing not just information, but life itself.* We read in 1 Thess. 2.8 - *"We loved you dearly - so dearly that we gave you not only God's message, but our own lives too."*

### **Key elements of mentoring:**

- **M - Modelling.**

*Who the mentor is as a person is really important.* It's not just about giving someone information, but about showing the other person through personal example how to live, and by letting them see how the mentor lives out their faith in a whole variety of situations. *"You know from watching me that I am not that kind of person. You know what I believe and the way I live and what I want. You know my faith in Christ and how I have suffered. You know my love for you, and my patience."* **(2 Timothy 3.10 - Living Bible - Paul to Timothy)** In these verses, we see that Paul modelled many things for Timothy - values, lifestyle, priorities, beliefs, choices, and fruit of the Spirit.

Mentors are not parents or friends: they are people who model their faith in Christ, integrity, Christian character, fruit of the Spirit - *who they are says a lot more to their young person than what they say.* When young people have a chance to see God working up close in a relationship they have with their mentor, they will grow.

- **E - Exploration and evaluation**

Mentoring is not telling someone what to do, but rather exploring together: discussing goals for spiritual growth, lifestyle choices, ways to handle life situations, decisions, issues of faith. Wise mentors don't just tell someone the answers, but explore the options with young people, helping them see how particular choices relate to each other, and what the potential outcomes of each decision might be.

Mentors also explore the future with young people: *How can you grow beyond where you are now?* They offer a wider view, suggest options, and explore possibilities – and help work through failures or disappointment. Their role isn't to tell others what God is saying, or take over from the Holy Spirit, but rather to help young people see and be excited about what God is wanting to do in their lives.

*Evaluation* includes giving feedback about what mentors see in young people's lives: it celebrates successes, and gently probes weaknesses. It isn't afraid to hold young people accountable for goals they have set, or decisions they have made, but does so in a gentle and loving way. Mentors ask questions, help young people see what they are doing well, and then assist them to see any things that might need to change.

### **N - Nurturing**

Mentors are people who nurture the spiritual life, Christian character, gifts and ministry of others through support, encouragement, and affirmation. They notice good decisions and affirm strengths; they encourage the developing of spiritual gifts and ministry to others; they're prepared to help in any way they can. Young people need older adults who believe in them - who aim to encourage them and build them up, not tear them down, criticize or condemn them. **Hebrews 10.24-25.**

## **T - Translation**

One of the elements of effective mentoring is empowering young people to *translate* what they are learning into real life. Being a Christian disciple is about far more than just knowing *facts* or Bible stories - it is about putting into practice what you learn in Scripture; it is about being transformed into the likeness of Christ; it is about thinking through the implications of the commitments that have been made.

## **O - Opportunities**

Good mentors help young people find places where they can both learn new things, and also *apply* what they are learning. They 'open doors' for their youth, and help them find opportunities to discover, express or grow their skills and gifts within the church or community. They suggest ideas or opportunities to which young people otherwise might not have access. *Such experiences change young people's lives, and they are hungry for them.*

## **R - Relationship**

Relationships are incredibly important to young people in today's world, and it is absolutely crucial that they have adults who are closely involved with them. What changes young people's lives isn't more information, but a sense of being supported, cared about, and understood by another person who won't give up on them. They can find fun and entertainment in a variety of places, but what really impacts their life is someone who takes the time and makes the commitment to form a significant relationship with them.

They can be impressed from a distance by someone, but they only get *impacted* by a person who takes the time and intentionality to come close. We all need people we can be honest with, and know that no matter what happens, someone still cares enough to listen and be there. Young people must have the freedom to be honest, to express doubt and failure, and to share their opinions or feelings honestly with a caring adult.

## **I - Individual attention and investment.**

We all know that discipleship can't be taught in just a weekly programme or Bible study. *It's a way of living.* And people, especially young people, need individual help and support as they seek to grow. Mentoring gives that opportunity to spend 1:1 (*or maybe a small group of 2-3*) time with individuals - hearing their struggles, celebrating their victories, talking through their choices, just being a sounding board where they can share their concerns or doubts, without being afraid of rejection or judgment, really sharing in their life. Wise mentors work out with individuals what they need to really know and follow Jesus more closely in every aspect of their life.

## **(N) G - Growth**

*In summary, mentoring is about facilitating and encouraging growth in a young person: growth in character (courage, compassion, commitment, fruit of the Spirit); growth in faith, spiritual gifts and ministry; and personal growth in maturity. It can be summed up in the words of Ephesians 4.12-16.*

Mentoring is an intentional commitment to the growth and maturing of a young person in a supportive, yet accountable, relationship.

### **Qualities of a mentor.**

Mentors need to be godly men and women - prayerful, people of integrity and good character, trustworthy, servanthearted, sensitive, and showing the fruit of the Spirit. They need to be able to nurture faith in others, and also to have the wisdom to help a young person see where God is in a particular life situation. They also need to be willing to share their lives with a young person, their own learning experiences, and to be sensitive to the feelings and responses of young person they are mentoring.

*They must be prepared to be committed to the person, and the mentoring process: ready to listen, encouraging and empathetic.*

### **Keys to Setting Up Effective Mentoring Relationships**

#### **1. Building a firm foundation.**

- Set clear goals and guidelines for your mentoring programme, and communicate them clearly to everyone involved.
- Establish a healthy process to select and train appropriate mentors, and young people who will be mentored
- Think through the details and practical issues of time, places to meet, and content.
- Clarify expectations for both mentors and young people - what can each expect from the other? What does the young person hope to achieve through the process? How can the mentor help them achieve their goals?

#### **2. Building on the foundation - *putting up the walls.***

- Grow the relationship. If the mentor doesn't know the young person, they need to spend time getting to know them as one of the first priorities - asking about their life, hobbies, interests, family.
- Deepen the relationship - *discovery and sharing through questions, Bible study and discussion, and careful listening.* Mentors need to be prepared to also share themselves as it is appropriate - being willing to be open and transparent is a key way to grow the relationship.
- Be consistent - both in your attitude and commitment, and also practical considerations. Stick with the time you have agreed to, and the goals you are aiming for. Schedule your meetings ahead in a place which is appropriate, safe and comfortable.
- Try to keep things interesting and relevant. Look for material and Bible studies appropriate to the level you are working with. *Key elements of an effective mentoring session include a review of the past week or fortnight, discussion of how things have been since the last meeting, reflection on the overall goals and any specific goals set at the last meeting, Bible study of some kind, helping the young person explore where God has been in the young person's life and experience, setting one or*

*two personal, spiritual or ministry goals which tie in with what the young person shares and is motivated to achieve, and prayer.*

**3. Putting on the Roof - getting an overall perspective.**

It is worth stopping from time to time to consider how the mentoring relationship is going. Has the young person grown? Is it being helpful? Would they like to continue to meet? If not, finish it well, and commit all they have learned and shared to God. If yes, review the format and plan to continue.

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Merrilyn began her youth ministry career as Youth Pastor of Wellington South Baptist Church in 1980 and served as a regional consultant in Canterbury and Wellington before taking on her current role as National BYM Leader in 2004. Merrilyn loves to equip young people and youth leaders to be the very best they can be for God! She has a special heart for teenagers on the edge of society and longs to see their lives transformed through genuinely loving and life-giving youth ministries and churches.