

Mentoring Insight No. 1: Vision for Spiritual Mentoring

By: Amy L. Peterson

Like any other task, mentoring does not happen on its own. It requires that one have knowledge, skill, and desire. This article is the first in of a series of articles on the topic of mentoring. The goal of this article is to define the term “spiritual mentoring” and to cast a general overview of the vision for mentoring. Future articles will include a variety of practical mentoring-related topics like how to find a mentor.

Much of Christian faith is learned by observation and imitation. This example is seen in the life of Jesus when He used the simple command “Follow me” (Mt. 16:24). This simple command dictated the way Jesus lived, in community sharing his life with his disciples. Jesus later expressed the need for others to be trained in the Great Commission (Anderson and Reece). Where Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20).

The term, “spiritual mentoring” is often used for Christians who are encouraging each other to pursue following Jesus and the example laid out in the Bible. The mentoring relationship is centered on helping the person being mentored to reach his or her God-given potential so that the person being mentored can grow personally and make a contribution for the kingdom of God (Anderson and Reece).

Leaders produce leaders. Leaders have the powerful charge to carefully steward the resources that they are entrusted with. The charge of leaders includes the need to steward and shepherd their followers. Those who have already embarked on the journey towards growth and maturity in Christ have something to offer to those who are closer to the beginning of their journey. Fundamental law of mentoring is, “mentoring involves relationships, not a program” (Hendricks, p. 231).

Bobb Biehl, an author and expert in the area of mentoring, noted that many churches have people who sit together and work together on projects, but do not have the type of relationships with one another that allow them to shed tears or to undergo deep heart-level bonding. People are together but remain relationally disconnected from one another (p. 32).

“There is a longing for spiritual navigation that broods in every Christian. We want to know the routes through the perilous courses of life. We want to know how we will reach our journey’s end. We want a map or charts to guide us on the way. This is a yearning, however, that isn’t satisfied by the normal fare of personal study, prayer and worship. It is a desire for more, a “more” that is impossible to define or explicate; it is a longing to know the richness of “the deeper life” or “mature faith” or “spiritual power.”...[After looking in many places] We come to the realization that we need help, that we are not meant to make this journey solo. We learn to listen to the voices of mentors, not as absolute experts with the final authoritative word but more as the shrewd and discerning expressions of those who have traveled this way before” (Anderson and Reece, pp. 17-18).

The cry of the heart of a person who is hungry to grow desires someone to spend time with them. They desire someone to provide positive encouragement by telling them that they have what it takes. They desire to be pushed to pursue God while observing the example of how others pursue God themselves.

The heart of the hungry person desires to be taught so that knowledge is gained in both areas of strength and weakness. The heart of the hungry person desires to be pointed in the right direction when they make wrong turns and desires encouragement in their areas of weakness.

A mentoring relationship would involve addressing and working through issues together, praying about problems that arise, and working through life's inevitable difficulties. A mentor would share wisdom gleaned through their personal life experiences. The goal would be that over time the person being mentored would progress towards the full, maturity that should be found in a Christian adult (Biehl, p. 25).

Often there are many different people mentoring a person at a given time. Each brings something different and unique to the table. However, the important part for many young people is to have at least one person who they let into their life and who is allowed to ask them hard questions. A person that they allow to ask pivotal questions like, "What are your priorities? How can I help you?" (Biehl, p. 24). Mentors are people that people being mentored can look up to for help during times of struggle, not as someone who knows all of the "right answers," but as someone who has gone before.

Mentoring, as described in the previous two paragraphs, is especially important for young adults. Young adulthood is the time in life is when many important life decisions are often made, decisions such as: post-high school education, where to live, what to do for employment, and (for most people) who to marry. Sharon Parks, a researcher who wrote a book about young adults, noted that young adults have the challenging task of figuring out where they fit in the world, reconciling the bigger questions of purpose, vocation, and belonging (p. 65). Thus mentoring during the young adult phase of life would have far reaching impact on their future.

Since as community we want to follow Jesus, we need to recognize that mentoring is a vital part of the fabric of *Communitas'* identity. As young adults, we need to embrace a Christian lifestyle that values mentoring; both being mentored by someone with more life experience and are seeking out others to whom we could be a mentor!

References:

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