

# Good Principles for Mentoring

## ***1. Successful mentoring focuses on the growth needs of the mentee.***

A mentor's influence has the greatest impact when the relationship addresses the mentee's current life needs. What does a mentee want to learn, or how does the mentee desire to grow? This is usually a good place to start a mentoring relationship. Quality conversation, one where the mentor asks questions and listens to learn, helps identify mentee needs.

## ***2. Mentors serve as guides.***

The myth that mentors must be fountains of wisdom or possess thorough Bible knowledge discourages many from mentoring. The process becomes much simpler when mentors understand the proper focus is not on what the mentor knows—it is on what the mentee wants to learn. The mentor serves as a resource and guide for the mentee's learning process.

Guides are people who have traveled a path before, learned some things along the way, and are willing to assist another traveler. When mentors serve as guides they show a younger trekker the way, offer helpful information, warn of dangers, share their own experiences on the road, and provide first aid if necessary.

Although mentors need not be experts on the Bible, the goal of Christian mentoring is life change, and application of biblical truth is an indispensable part of that process. If you find your mentee needs to grow in an area unfamiliar to you, do not drop out. Undertake the learning process together. Mentees often love this collaborative learning approach.

## ***3. Mentees are active partners.***

Mentees are not passive receptacles to be filled by a mentor, but active partners in the learning process. They initiate discussions, bring their questions, contribute their knowledge, and set the direction and duration of their mentoring relationships. Effective mentoring flows from a reciprocal relationship between mentor and mentee.

#### ***4. Mentoring requires an authentic relationship.***

Even though mentees admire mentors, they will lose interest in one who pretends to have it all together. Mentees yearn for a more experienced person who will discuss life honestly—the good, the bad, the raw.

Authenticity happens when both people share real-life experiences that include not only stories of success, but brokenness and healing. Young people hunger to hear about their mentor's mistakes and experiences of grace. This type of honesty deepens their understanding of faith, gives them hope, and provides strong learning opportunities.

#### ***5. Mentoring is a fluid process.***

Fixed schedules can be helpful. However, growth takes time, and people usually learn on their own timetable. A mentee who shows up just because a meeting was on the schedule may not be particularly receptive to learning. Sensitivity to an appropriate pace provides the mentee with time for the critical reflection that is essential to growth.

Mentoring needs are also fluid. A mentee may initially request only one or two meetings with a mentor but desire an ongoing relationship at a later time. It is not unusual for the mentoring process to start and stop according to the life experiences of the mentee.

Because God often uses more than one mentor to grow a person, it is natural for a number of mentors to flow in and out of a mentee's life. No one person can meet all the needs of another, so the process works best when multiple mentors are available to mentees.

#### ***6. There are many ways to mentor.***

When we think of mentoring, a weekly one-on-one meeting usually comes to mind. This is a good option but only one among many. Mentoring takes place in a number of ways:

- **Formal scheduled relationship:** Mentor and mentee formally agree to meet according to a predetermined schedule to address a topic or work through a curriculum.
- **Informal, organic relationship:** Meetings take place when the mentee desires a mentor's input on everyday life. The content of the meetings varies according to

the mentee's needs or interests. Although unscheduled, many turn into ongoing relationships that last for years.

- **Discipleship focused relationship:** Meetings focus on specific spiritual disciplines to be developed by the mentee.
- **Coaching relationship:** A mentoring coach provides practical help for the development of specific skills. The coach trains, identifies harmful habits, oversees opportunities for practice, and provides feedback. Once the mentee demonstrates competency, the relationship concludes.
- **Group mentoring:** Several people desire to spend time with a particular mentor and address a specific subject such as perseverance, fasting, disciplining children, or leadership. Group mentoring is usually short term.
- **One-time mentoring:** A mentee seeks a mentor's input to process a situation or solve a problem. A single conversation is adequate to move the mentee forward.
- **Passive mentoring:** This mentoring takes place during serendipitous encounters or conversations. One person makes comments or performs actions that teach another.
- **Distance mentoring:** Those who do not even know us sometimes serve as mentors. An author, a conference we attend, a large group teacher, or the pastor who faithfully teaches each week can mentor from a distance.
- **Counseling relationship:** This mentoring address deeper heart issues that hinder a mentee's growth. It might focus on subjects such as recovery from a past abortion, marriage conflict, pornography addiction, grief recovery, sexual abuse, etc. Depending on the extent of the problem, a professional counselor may be the best choice. However, trained lay people can also offer substantial assistance.

## ***7. Unwise approaches can sink mentoring relationships.***

The following common mistakes can damage a relationship:

- Unrealistic expectations on the mentor's part. If the mentor expects the mentee to always follow his/her advice or expects to see rapid change in the mentee, the relationship will be strained.
- Unrealistic expectations on the mentee's part. This happens when mentees expect a mentor to meet all mentoring and personal needs or become their best friend.
- No purpose for the relationship. Mentoring is more than hanging out. If the time spent together is not intentional and valuable, both people lose interest.

- The mentor feels responsible to fix the mentee's problems. The mentors role is to be a guide, not a fixer. Mentees are responsible to apply this guidance to their life and work out their own problems.
- Lack of confidentiality. Revealing information gained through a mentoring relationship destroys trust.
- Mentor assumes the role of parent. A mentor feels like a parent if he/she tells a mentee what to do. It works better if mentors suggest, not direct.