

You Have /Are a Mentor Now What?

Mentoring is an important concept in Christianity. We use mentors in order to grow as people and as Christians; we become mentors in order to pay it forward and serve God by serving others. However, while many of us desire to have a mentor or be a mentor, few of us know how to make this kind of relationship work to our advantage.

Frequently, we find a mentor (or a person to mentor) and we stop there. We mistakenly believe that the key to the relationship is simply having a relationship. It is believed that by simply entering a relationship with the intent to mentor, amazing things will happen. We tend to believe that we will instantly have a deep, meaningful relationship just because we define it as such. The false assumption that these types of relationships will be effortlessly meaningful often leads to their inability to change our lives in the manner in which we desire.

The first mistake is the belief that, by definition, these relationships are deep. It is **simply impossible to instantly have a deep connection with anyone**. There are three stages that we must progress through. First we start as acquaintances; we discuss the weather, sports, current events, or politics. The next step is finally revealing a deep truth about yourself, this is fellowship. You may have experienced this in a small group when you were encouraged to share a struggle or private sin in your life. You may enter fellowship by admitting that you are having marital difficulties or struggle with an addiction. It is great to reach this point of fellowship but you can go even deeper. The final step is to enter life-walking. When you begin to life-walk with others, you don't just share your deep dark secrets, you actually work together to change your life and make it better; you find ways to make your marriage better, overcome addictions, or conquer that sin that has dogged you for years.

Another mistake that people make is to **believe that there is no need for structure in these relationships**; they believe that because the relationships are supposed to be "deep" it is unnecessary. The truth is that these relationships will wither and die without the nourishing environment that structure provides. In Opportunity Season, this structure comes in the form of a daily phone call. In accountability groups this structure can come with a regularly scheduled meeting to check in. It doesn't matter what structure you put in place, it simply matters that you begin your mentoring relationship with high structure. It is this high structure that allows the relationship to quickly and easily move from acquaintance to fellowship to life-walking. The fact is that once you start life-walking, you begin to need less and less structure to keep your relationship going; you will just desire to be in the relationship because it is so good.

Another interesting thing that can happen in a good mentoring relationship is **cross-mentoring**. In most, if not all, mentoring relationships, there is the mentor and the person being mentored. It is a unidirectional affiliation. The mentor listens to you, supports you, and gives you advice. You know very little about the personal life and

struggles of your mentor and your mentor knows everything about your personal life and struggles. In a mentoring relationship that intends to move beyond fellowship and into life-walking, it is possible and in fact preferable to have a situation in which cross-mentoring occurs. When you are cross-mentoring, you are both sharing deep life issues, supporting, and giving advice. A structure like Opportunity Season allows for cross-mentoring to occur almost effortlessly. In Opportunity Season, all participants are working towards improving their lives and all participants are supporting each other in the struggle to grow and change. Small groups can also be a great vehicle for cross-mentoring. In groups where there is no defined leader and all participants take an active roll in leadership responsibilities, cross-mentoring is quite natural. When you are life-walking in a deep relationship with a solid structure, you begin to cross-mentor and it doesn't matter if participants are different ages, genders, personality types, etc. God just moves and it is natural for all participants to move across these barriers that typically divide us and mentor and support each other.

In the past, you have probably experienced unfulfilling mentoring relationships simply because you didn't structure the relationships to enhance the possibilities of success. As you have seen, it only takes a few simple steps. Start with a high structure assuming that you are not yet in a deep relationship with the other person. **Be intentional and consistent about contact (daily contact is best in the beginning).** Don't assume that one person is the mentor and the other is being mentored; allow for cross-mentoring to occur and don't be concerned with trivial differences that may prevent you from receiving all that God has for you in a mentoring relationship.

Pick someone, commit, and ... begin mentoring. Your life will never be the same.

Opportunity Season (Tate Publishing) provides a simple structure and road map to facilitate Life-Walking. For more information on Life-Walking or Opportunity Season visit www.life-walking.com or www.opportunityseason.com

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