

MENTORING

By Dr. Isak Burger

Mentor vs. father.

Is a mentor and father the same? I wouldn't exactly equate the two. A father, as a rule, will also be a mentor, but a mentor is not necessarily a father. Fatherhood includes somewhat more than being a mentor. For example, you can be a father to many spiritual children, but mentorship is usually restricted to a maximum of 12 people during a lifetime. So you can be a mentor without being a father. A mentor is not a coach - we'll come later to the difference. A leader is different also from a mentor. You can be a mentor without being a leader and vice versa. A mentor is different also from a teacher or a lecturer, although they can fulfil important aspects of mentoring. In distance-training this dimension gets totally lost. There are points of agreement between discipling and mentoring, also many differences.

Where does the word mentor come from?

The term does not appear in the Bible, but there are many examples of such relationships. The word **mentor** comes from Greek mythology. Mentor was a friend of Odysseus. When he went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted his whole kingdom to Mentor and appointed him as patron, guardian, counsellor and guide to his son, Telemachus. In time the word **mentor** became synonymous with a trusted friend, wise adviser and father figure.

What is mentoring all about?

Definition: *Mentoring is a long-term relationship, in which a mentor helps a protégé/mentee reach his or her God-given potential.* In mentoring, the question "how can I help you", is more appropriate than "what can I teach you?"

Mentoring is a peculiar and very special kind of relationship. It is natural with a strong element of friendship that lasts often for a lifetime. Mentorship is usually an informal and relaxed relationship. It is a relationship at a "behind-the-mask" level.

In the past mentoring took place naturally, almost unnoticed. In traditional or more primitive societies, a boy or girl was mentored alongside mothers, fathers, and extended family members. From the earliest years, these mentors gave children a sense of "maleness" and "femaleness" and taught them what work was all about and how it was done, what character meant, and what were the duties and obligations of each member of the community.

An example of earlier mentoring in spiritual context was that of the 18th century revivalist-preacher Jonathan Edwards and his wife Sara. They usually had one or more 'disciples' living in their home where there was ample time for the learner to observe the quality of marriage, personal spiritual dynamics, and the vigorous pursuit of pastoral activity.

In contrast, the mentoring function today is in short supply. It is certainly not found in those homes where children part company with their parents for the better part of each day and accumulate an average of only 8-11 min. of parent-child conversation a day. Indeed, mentoring has all but disappeared in our high-tech society. I believe the shortage of mentoring and modelling are two of the main reasons for the confusion of many people in of their roles, relationships and sexuality. Yet, there is a growing alertness to the void left in many spheres of life and also in the church. Fact is that almost all training of people in the Bible happened in the mentoring context. Mere preaching, teaching and the acquisition of Biblical knowledge are not enough to develop the kind of Christ-likeness which is a major segment of the church's mission in the world.

A mentoring relationship is more than reaching a goal. It is a lifelong process with the purpose of growing to maturity. Both the mentor and mentee experience growth and development in this process.

The mentoring relationship becomes significant when the mentor turns to the protégé and says: "I love you, I believe in you, I want to help you succeed. I want to make my experience and resources available to help you in any way I can to become all that God wants you to be."

A mentor is sincerely interested in your dreams and priorities and how he can help you to accomplish it. The most essential question a mentor will ask, is: How can I help you get where you are going? In other words: "What are your priorities (dreams/challenges/problems) and how can I help?" The primary basis of interchange in mentoring, is not so much content than relationship. In other words: It's more caring and helping than teaching.

What about accountability? Although accountability is more appropriate within a father-son relationship, it is not to be the main focus in a mentoring relationship. The focus here rather is supporting, strengthening and encouraging

An allegory that will be helpful to understand mentoring, is that of someone who is ahead of you in climbing a mountain (even though he may not have reached the summit himself), and who pauses and stretch out his hand to you to help you further. Having this vivid picture in mind, do you have someone who qualifies as a mentor to you? Is there anyone who is looking to you like the one lending a hand? Are you such a person to someone else?

In research done in the corporate world, 98% of those in a mentor/mentee relationship testified about the value it had in their lives. However, only 38% ever had the benefit of such a relationship. These figures bring the very relevant question to mind: How many of our pastors can testify to such a relationship in their lives? No other relationship or any training can serve as a substitute.

A study in America reveals that among senior pastors of 100 of the largest churches there is one common denominator: each had at least one mentor.

Who is a mentor?

To identify someone who can be a mentor to you, it has to be someone:

- *Who truly loves you
- *Who believes in you
- *Who you can really trust - a person of integrity
- *Who encourages you
- *Who sees your potential
- *Who is committed to your success
- *Who wants to see you win
- *Who seeks only the best for you
- *Who challenges you
- *Who is available
- *Whom you like
- *Whom you love to be around with
- *Whom you respect
- *Whom you admire.

A mentor needn't be old, although life-experience is more important than academic knowledge. They needn't have to know all the answers.

A mentor also needn't be perfect. Modelling is an important part of mentoring but a model and a mentor is not the same. You can for example have a model you don't even know - like some Bible figure.

Jesus as mentor.

Jesus certainly was the perfect Mentor to His disciples. He fulfilled all the requirements of a mentor. In Christian context, Jesus wants to mentor every believer through another. Although mentoring is applicable in almost every sphere of life, it is possible to be perfected within a Christian framework and value system.

Paul in mentorship.

The best example of a mentor-mentee relationship apart from Christ and His disciples is that of Paul and Timothy. If you keep in mind what was said about a mentor, you would agree that it fits Paul like a glove. The question can, however, be asked: Did Paul have a mentor?

Take a look at the role of Barnabas. What would have happened to Paul had it not been for Barnabas who believed in him when no one else did? It's obvious up to Acts 15 that they had a very special relationship. That's why the break between them was so tragic.

Mentor vs. coach.

Some people equate the two. There are however basic differences. Think in terms of the coach of an athlete or a sports team. A coach focuses on skills-development. A mentor on “all of life” development. Where a mentor focuses more on the person, personal maturity and relationship-building, a coach focuses more on skills, performance i.e. outcome based. Mentors allow the protégé to discover his own direction. A coach has a set agenda to reinforce or change skills and behaviours. Mentoring is a long-term relationship; coaching usually for a much shorter period; e.g. the Springbok rugby coaches. Mentoring is a voluntary relationship. A coach comes with the job and at a price. Mentors needn't be experts. Coaches are.

In church we do have many coaches/experts in different areas and we should make full use of them. However, I think we do at this stage have a greater need for a culture of mentoring.

Who asks whom?

Does the mentor ask the protégé or vice versa? Ideally, a mentor takes the first step in the mentoring relationship. He chooses and approaches the protégé because the mentor is committing himself to a lifetime of attention, interest and encouragement. It's a major commitment!

Realistically, a protégé may need to approach a mentor. Some people whom you would want to be one of your mentors may not feel confident initiating the relationship. Don't wait for your ideal mentors to come to you. Until a culture of mentoring has developed in our church - go ahead and take the initiative!

Excellent books on mentoring: Bobb Biehl-**Mentoring**- published by Broadman + Hohman Publishers. Howard +William Hendricks-**As iron sharpens iron**.