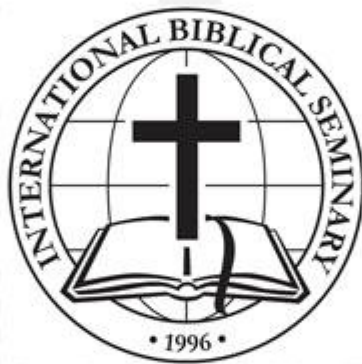


Mentor

One on One



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IBS

International Biblical Seminary--Bivocational Ministry.

Chapter 3:

Qualities of a mentor

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Chapter Three: Qualities of a mentor

I have a New Scofield Reference Bible on my desk, all beat up; the binding had been fixed several times. It was a gift from Cornell Chinese Bible Study Group (CBSG), dated January, 1968, commemorating my conversion just several days ago.

John Huang was the leader of the group and my first mentor, not because of he was the leader but because he cared. Every time when I hear the word mentor I think of him. That's how deep he was in my heart. Years and distance did not separate us.

When we first met, he had no idea how big a bundle of troubles he had gotten into. I went to Cornell in September, 1967, not a Christian yet; I immediately joined CBSG, not by my own will but to keep a promise to my fiancée. CBSG had just been rebooted after a year of disorganization and John was willing to accept responsibility. What kind of harms can a 21-year-old graduate student do to a group of Christians? Well, not much, unless this guy happens to be an opinionated, loud voice, emotional, uncompromising, sharp and quick tongue in debates, heavily built, and otherwise happy-go-lucky, extremely friendly and easy to make friend, fun-of-the-party type of a guy. John was an introvert.

Imagine how much fun it would be; for me, not for John, of course!

The weekly Bible study meeting was alright, not particularly boring. We met in Saturday afternoons. I went regularly, for food and for fun, and ah, yes, for singing. (I knew, and soon they all knew, that I was a good singer.) Oh, there was a segment of time to study the Bible? Actually, this was my favorite part for I got to express freely my opinions, and they let me. I could easily form my opinion when and whatever they pulled the subject out of the Bible. That was not hard, was it? Any time I didn't like what they were saying, I would 'belch out in an operatic baritone voice' (John's description), "I object!" and everybody froze and listened to me.

Imagine the surprise of John and others when I announced to the group, returning from a Christmas vacation that I met the Lord in a church retreat in Missouri! Hearing my testimony, they knelt down and thanked God for me. John was really happy and praised God in tears. He was not an emotional man. That evening we started our first prayer meeting, a tradition they have followed till this day. If anybody wonders why CBSG held the regular prayer meeting on Tuesday nights, now you have the answer.

Many, many years later, I returned to that church in St Louis as an Interim Pastor, I invited John to give a seminar. He began very seriously to thank the church for giving him such an opportunity. This was not an courtesy speech or introduction; he elaborated that "Years ago a young man returned from this church to Ithaca, NY announcing his new found faith in Christ, which greatly uplifted my spirit and

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strengthened my faith.” He continued to describe what the Bible study was like, and added: “I was in such a terrible situation that the group was in a shamble for we could not invite newcomers; if some people did come, they were either persuaded away from the faith by this young man’s loud ‘I object!’ or pretty upset or annoyed of the atmosphere of contention. There I was, pleading with God, ‘Why do you give me such an unbearable burden? I thought it was quite clear your will for me to reorganize the study group, but I did not anticipate this! Lord, why? Why?’ but no answer.” (Pause) “Then, this happened,” and John continued his story, “This young man returned to us, and so zealous to share the gospel. Now you could hear him corralling people, ‘Come, Hear ye the Gospel!’” John finished his story and bowed to the audience, “So, let me say a belated ‘Thank you, Gospel Church!’”

As John was unfolding the story, people in St Louis church had no idea what and whom he was talking about. Though the same church this was not the same congregation 40 years ago. Never mind the whole development of story, they had no clue whatsoever, until they saw me rolling to the ground, bending over, doubling up in roaring laughter!

This was John, my mentor. He would keep it to himself for all these years until the right moment. Then, he let it all hang out. A humorous man, a good story teller, and a kind brother, too. He never let me know how I bothered him; that was the first time I heard from this man’s mouth how I created such a nuisance for him.

After I became a Christian, John intentionally took care of me. Before I had a car, he was my set of wheels; he picked me up for church, prayer meetings, Bible studies, and everything in between. After I bought a used, used car (a ’58 Beatle), he was my driving instructor before he was my mechanics. After I got married, we became neighbors in the same Married Student Complex. And at about the same time, somewhat more matured, I was more involved in CBSG. I supported John’s campus ministry; we visited new students together, we planned events together, we travelled to leadership trainings together. Of course I still had other outside activities; I was quite busy on campus: I joined the Glee Club; I was elected the President of the Chinese Club, among other extra-curriculum. He showed genuine interest in all the things I do, and whenever I needed him he was always there for me, even in his last year, the busiest year of his PhD program. But because of him church was always my priority; and I followed his footstep and became a leader in CBSG after he graduated. He was an upperclassman, only a few years senior to me but way more mature. He was a big brother I never had.

I suppose, ‘Big Brother’ is the best description of a mentor to his mentee, if the ages are not that wide apart—like father and son. Paul called Timothy, and Titus too, ‘my true son’, giving us the impression that Paul was much older than the two Ts. We don’t need to be a father before we mentor someone. Why was John so ‘naturally’ my mentor? Not because he was an upperclassman or older but because he would invest his time in me. What had changing oil to do with spirituality? Or, replacing a U-joint?

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(That happened to my big Bonneville.) He was willing to teach me, explaining patiently the mechanics of all these parts, their functions and how to fix the problems. He was a very good teacher. When I ate at his house, he explained to me why his disposable napkins were all half size. He has this weird habit of wiping his lips often in a meal, and he did not want to a semi-soiled napkin again. Solution: slice the paper ware in halves, in order not to waste too much natural resources. He would ask me, “If a half full cup of coffee is filled with water, hot clear water, will the diluted coffee look lighter in color than before from the top?” A strange question, isn’t it? Then he would demonstrate it and explained to me why it looked the same darkness *from the top*, but only from the top. I guess you can say that he was fun to be with, but these highly scientific teasers do not necessarily please everybody.

Oh, speaking of his scientific mind, John published 169 papers (shorter articles and longer theses) in his field of work before he retired to serve the church as a full-time elder. I am so proud that he involved me in this decision; I was able to pray for him before he announced it to the church. Actually, come to think of it, I also confided him in making my major decision to quit graduate school in response to God’s calling.

This happened in 1971. I met John in a Regional Summer Conference. By this time he had long finished his PhD in Physics and gone into his industrial and academic careers; but he still resided in the general area to attend loyally the Student Conference every year. In this Conference I thought the Lord called me into full-time ministry. Before we broke camp, I asked John to pray for me in seeking God’s will. I had just asked the Lord to extend a year in discerning His will for me. John prayed. I sought counsels. Most people showed concern that I already invested so many years in the pursuit of a PhD degree in Applied Physics, “Why give it up now?” John had his special reason: not for the potential better paydays but the opportunity to witness to the intelligentsia and the elites—just like he did in his specific field. He encouraged me, saying, “I don’t know what divine calling is, for I never had such kind of experiences, but I urge you to go on; don’t give up!”—as he always did in my frustrating times.

A year passed; in between I asked many spiritually more matured, famous ones too, and I was still confused. Then, there came the Annual Conference again. When we found each other the first thing John said to me was, “I think I was wrong . . .,” and then he continued, “Do you remember what you said to me when you came back from St Louis? You told me you wanted to serve God.” Right, but I almost forgot this episode! I did tell him so, for I felt, “If Jesus is truly God, is there any reason not to serve Him?” Back then, John advised against it, reasoned, “You are just a new Christian, how do you serve Him? You have not even finished reading your Bible once! Besides, God is consistent; if He leads you here to study physics, and He met you in St Louis for salvation, then this is where you belong.” I obeyed, for I trusted him and he was way ahead of me in things of God.

John spoke again, interrupting my memory; what he said next totally surprised me. He said, “God

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spoke to me not long ago before the Conference. He reminded me, ‘You stopped him when he came to you and said he would serve Me . . .’” John paused, as if God paused and he, too, did not want to finish the statement, or, because he was still in awe of how powerful that reminder was. Then, recovering, John continued warmly, “Dare I not to stop you. I will support you in your decision if you have not changed your mind about going into full-time ministry.”

John’s was the final confirmation I needed to step out in faith to serve Him.

John’s gift as an evangelist sharpened, once he went into full-time ministry; he has been a highly-in-demand speaker to students, especially in Gospel Camps for seekers. They trust him because of his scientific knowledge and reasonability. He would present facts and analyze them as a true scientist, but never force an opinion on anybody. Back in my time, he already impressed me to be a very humble person. I would ask a lot of questions; some of them theologically challenging as I see them now. He would readily acknowledge that “I don’t have an answer to this.” Yet, in his mild mannerism he was making a short version of a longer statement, that “No matter how hard we may try to learn, still, nobody knows everything—except God.” Authority and arguments do not; but humility and gentleness win people over to the Lord. Early on, I learned it from my mentor.

John is not perfect; nobody is—except God, but I see in John the quality of a good mentor:

- A mentor cares for people, for the well being of the whole person, not just the spirituality
- Being introvert is not a handicap
- A mentor does not broadcast his ‘achievements’ on his mentee
- A mentor is of pleasant personality; such as humorous, witty, etc
- A mentor is a kind, gentle, loving, patient, and considerate person
- A mentor is intentional, purposeful, active in reaching out, willing to help others
- A mentor is a big brother or a father to the mentee
- A mentor would invest his (her) time in the mentee; time is life
- A mentor is a good teacher
- A mentor is an interesting person, fun to hang around
- A mentor has good achievements to be respected in his (her) field of specialty

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- A mentor is an intercessor, whose prayer life is vibrant
- A mentor looks out for the spiritual development and gifts of the mentee to serve God
- A mentor is a good encourager, a good counselor
- A mentor willingly admits, “I was wrong” or “I don’t know”, knowing nobody is perfect
- A mentor trusts God in his best and growing capacity, in order to give advices to the mentee
- A mentor wins trusts by his personal integrity, honesty, knowledge and openness
- A mentor does not force, compel or coerce people to follow his opinions
- A mentor is a mature person but keeps learning, growing and developing gifts; these are manifested in the ministry to the mentees
- A mentor is a well balanced person, with sensitivity to others
- Humility and gentleness, mild in demeanor are strengths of a mentor
- A mentor is never perfect but he (she) points to a perfect Savior

You may find these questions useful in group discussion:

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages for a mentor in terms of being ‘extrovert’ vs. ‘introvert’.
2. How do you mentor a strong character, a strong-will person?
3. Why is common sense and reasonability (being logical) very important in mentoring?
4. How do you know a person is sensitive to God; and sensitive to people? Can a person be one and not the other?
5. How dangerous is it: if a mentor tries to control or to mold someone into somebody the mentor desires? (If this is done intentionally, the mentor is a cult leader.)
6. Why is it important that a mentor being aware of the stages of spiritual development and gifts of his mentee?
7. What are the differences and effects of these two mentoring relations: big brother vs. father-son?
8. Have you realized: it is more important to develop, improve and grow as a mentor, than to mentor others?

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9. Discussion: Find ways to invest your time and your life in others.
10. Why is prayer life important for a mentor? How is your prayer life affecting others?
11. What makes you a good counselor, an encourager? Enlist three things from each person in the group.
12. Be transparent and easily admit your imperfection; do you think these are good ways in mentoring? Why?
13. What is true humility? Each participant, please give three points.
14. Why is a good, moderately 'successful' professional career a plus for mentors?
15. Why are 'small human defects' sometimes a good thing for a mentor?
16. Bonus discussion: Describe your first mentor; characters, strengths, what impressed you most, and what did you learn from him or her?

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