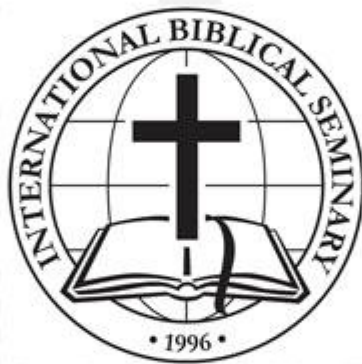


Mentor

One on One



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IBS

International Biblical Seminary--Bivocational Ministry.

Chapter 8:

Relational developments in mentorship

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Chapter Eight: Relational developments in mentorship

Johnny was very disheartened after he preached for the first time; immediately he told me he would never preach again for he realized he was not meant to preach. Simply said, he 'confirmed' that he lacked the gifts of preaching. I got a problem, for I had mentored him for a while and believed he needed the opportunity to minister with God's words. I did not want to discourage him. He and his wife, Pauline came to our church already Christians and began to involve in ministry very quickly. I knew he might never be a charismatic leader but the church needed more of the centurion type of leaders, those who are team players and work very well within a structure. On the other hand, I did not think he was limited to a secondary role of just listening and carrying out chores.

The first thing I said to him when he felt so inadequate and ready to quit, was, "Johnny, don't compare yourself with me; if you have to compare, then compare yourself with a former me of no preaching experience." Then I told him how bad I was the first time I preached. I was willing and full of confidence, but the outcome was just as undesirable. Fortunately for me, I was already committed to full-time ministry and had burned all bridges behind me. With or without encouragement, I had no alternative but to press on humbly. Being humble was not a problem with Johnny, for he would never be proud even if he would wear a crown of laurel tomorrow. Reluctantly he agreed to give it another try. Today, he is still not a dynamic preacher but a very balanced leader; when he preaches monthly people listen and learn for he has substance in what he says.

My sister graduated high school either a valedictorian or a solitarian, all her friends call her 'brain' till this day, but she told me her frustration after we lost our parents. One day when we were sharing the memories of our parents, comforting each other, she said, "I envy you; you were such a ham when you were 3, you would begin to sing 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star', whenever the grown-ups snap fingers. I was so envious, for I did not get much of an encouragement." I was so surprised for I respect her so much and was always proud of being her kid brother. I said, "You were so smart and outstanding academically, besides, you have so many talents." The dam broke; as if of remorse she said, "Did you know? When I brought back my first report card in seventh grade, ranking number one, and showed it to mom, did you know what she said?" Of course I would not know, for I only brought back my cards for signature and not praises. Then my sister mimicked what mom said, "What is so special about it? All my report cards were number one ranked." I listened, was shocked and felt my sister's pain. I don't think mom was intentionally mean; she was just giving a simple fact which was confirmed often by all our aunts in many a casual conversations. Perhaps mom just wanted to challenge her daughter to strive for the best—as she did; but she did it in a wrong way. It did not help my sister, who forever felt 'mom was hard to please', even though she stuck it out in her own painful way.

I am glad I was never ranked number one or I would have heard the same 'encouragement' my sister

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received. It is so easy that we treat our mentees the same way. We forget why we were, and how to be, their mentors. Though their models, we must never consider ourselves superior to the ones we are guiding! I have seen too many people, mostly talented themselves, forgot and defeated the purpose of mentorship, because of the little residue of competitiveness in them.

Mentorship is 'fluid dynamics'; we are in a moving, flexible relationship.

When we first start to mentor, we are in a 'big brother' or 'father-son' relationship; but the situation must change and keep changing. If it stays the same way forever, we already fail as a mentor and might as well never start the relationship at the first place. Maturity of mentee is a given and expected outcome. A few pages earlier I have said that the main business in mentoring is the development of relationship; we are building trust before mentoring happens, and once it happens the relationship deepens. But, maturity is a mutual trust; once your children grow into adolescence you must release some trust to them; if you don't, it is more a denial of your success in the past. For the first twelve years your child was under your care; and if now you admit that you have not done your job of educating them to a basic standard so that you can trust them, then I say, "Forget it, you are not likely to mold them anyway. Why don't you send them over to an institution at once?" Don't get mad at me, of course I am exaggerating, but there is a lot of truth in it. I know, the kids always says, 'Trust me, mom,' but they really cannot be trusted; yet, if we don't trust them once, or twice, how do we know they cannot be trusted? Trust them, and that's the only way we will know if they can be trusted. If we did trust them it would be easier to correct them when they are themselves convinced that they need us and heed our advices.

Do you remember what Jesus said when He was about to leave the disciples? He called them friends. (John 15:15) It was not only a boost of morale but a reflection of their relative maturity. Jesus taught them all He heard (learned) from the Father; He considered His work done and now He could trust them to do the jobs they were trained for. Jesus did not have to live to be 34-year-old. We do not, on the other hand, let go a moving relationship for we do not have the confidence in the people we mentor. We don't trust them; we don't think they are mature enough. Yah, right! They are not as mature as you were 30, 20, 15 years ago! Sadly, a few of my mentors never thought I was mature enough to fly solo. They may be right that I will never measure up to what they were but my time was up and I needed to make my share of mistakes in order to grow up further and continue my spiritual journey.

Although I was not as bitter as my sister was to my mom, Joseph caused my pain. Joseph challenged me to study theology and was my mentor when I went to seminary. He was knowledgeable, intelligent, compassionate, understanding, kind and generous. He would be easily, hands down, one of the best teachers. However, I was always treated as his student, even when I served as the VP in the seminary

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where he was the President. I tried to help him when there were troubles in the school, but all my suggestions were only 'suggestions'. It troubled me that our relation soured. Once out of frustration I told him that he had only students but no friends, and he needed none; he agreed! He looked at me and announced, "It is hard to be my friend." I agreed. It bothered me for a long time while we were working together, trying to right the seminary ship. It bothered me: Was I doing too much or was he too proud? Until one day, he scolded a graduating student on work-scholarship, "Now, you think you are ready to spread your wings!" In such a terse tone he spoke, she was startled and instantly shut up; but I suddenly realized then, that he was an 'equal opportunist' for he treats all students the same way—once his student, always a student! I felt bad for her being chastised, but I felt even worse for him. I wanted to be his friend, but I was rejected. I did not feel bad for myself, I felt bad for him. Joseph was very lonely.

I do not want to single out Joseph, for I see a pattern. A mentor sometimes does not want to let go a changing relation, a moving situation. Only with anticipation and by design can a changing relation move toward a good ending. A 'big brother' or 'father-son' relation can be developed into a beautiful friendship and spiritual partners for life, if we prepare ourselves to welcome it. Don't get stuck or trapped in a situation where we will be emotionally handicapped, sometimes even crippled when our kids leave home for college. Don't feel sorry for yourself. Congratulate, instead! Our emotions can be complicated with such a weaning experience. Are you sad when you see the ones you once mentored move on? I would liken it to marrying off your daughter: bitter-sweet, but mostly sweet.

One of the reasons John remains a good friend is that he recognized my growth. When I invited him to the Board of *For All Saints Team Ministries*, he immediately accepted, for he recognized my visionary leadership. This did not diminish his leadership for I always proudly declare: If I had any talent at all, my talent is to find the people who are better than myself and work with them as a team. *For All Saints* is a mission; our vision is 'to **serve all saints**, until **all saints serve**'. If all saints of God caught the vision, to receive training and mentor others, we would never have a shortage of leaders. One of my colleagues asked me, in our *FAS* formative days, "What if others copy our vision and duplicate?" He worried if we would be trumped. My answer was, "Praise the Lord! Good job! We just worked ourselves out of our jobs!" Then I said, "First of all, it was never my vision, or our vision; if it is a vision it has to be God's vision. We do not have ownership of the vision, we are owned instead by the vision. When our 'competitors' are all doing the same *For All Saints* things, then there would be no need to call on others to the attention of *For All Saints*; isn't it? Besides, if they do what we would do, then, we don't have to finance the ministry, do we?" My friend was amused. The truth is: that the mission is not accomplished; so we still have to mentor for yet a while.

It helps, if we realize that we don't have to do everything God has led us to see. He calls a team, a group, a multitude, an army, a fleet, not just one person. Remember the 7,000 in Elijah's time and in

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his deep frustration? It also helps us to let go easier as mentors for we are each responsible to mentor people of graded maturity. There are different degrees of maturity, per Apostle John's and Apostle Paul's teaching. John did not expect all became fathers all together, Paul recognized there would be babes and carnal Christians always. The solution to maturity is mentoring. In fact, if all have mentoring in mind, each help another to mature one step at a time, there would be no shortage of pastors or other caregivers. Think of elementary school teachers: not all have a doctoral degree, but some do; yet they are committed to teaching young children instead of becoming university professors. Are they any less in influence? Not necessarily; maybe more. They will be happy to see their cares go on to higher education. The students move on every year, the teachers also move on to another new class. Let go; that's maturity, too.

Then, there is peer mentoring, among the more matured. When a person is so used to working in teams, peer mentoring is a natural consequence for him (her) out of the desire to be a learner-for-life. My students may not know this; but I learn so much from them when I mentored them on theses. A professor does not always know the subject well, but in instructing the students he sublimes the best of their research results; yet the students thank him, thinking he has helped them tremendously. Of course I read my share of worthless papers, but the best students taught me. Although they are not exactly my peers yet, but if I can learn from my students, how much more can we learn from our peers in ministry. Each, with their unique spiritual experiences can enrich us greatly. Remember, as mentors we still have room to grow; be humble and God will send the helps along our paths.

Do you realize how the mentoring relations will change?

- Mentoring may start with a 'big brother' or 'father-son' relation
- The main thing in mentoring is building trust, trust deepens the relations
- This 'unequal' relationship is expected to change because of the gradual maturity of the mentee
- Maturity of mentee is a given and expected outcome
- With the maturity of the mentee, the relation moves toward a mutual trust and respect
- Always encourage, never discourage the mentee
- Never compare yourself with the mentee or let the mentee feel inadequate in comparison to you
- An unintentional harm can be just as painful, if not more
- Sometimes a mentee needs a challenge; but comparison (of others) is not a good way of

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motivation

- Jesus called the Disciples 'friends' when He finished mentoring and they were relatively mature
- A mentoring attitude or practice has to terminate at the right time, or the relation may turn sour
- The best mentoring result is turning a follower into a friend for life
- Unwillingness to let go his (her) mentee is a mentor's own denial of his (her) success in the past, and it defeats the purpose of mentoring
- If we don't understand and prepare for weaning, there can be unnecessary emotional setbacks when a mentee no longer needs a mentor
- There is always room for growth; parting ways of mentor and mentee can be a good thing for both will continue to grow
- There are different stages of maturity; it is in God's control how advanced we may lead a person onto
- It is healthy to develop a life-long learning habit, and we can benefit a lot from peer mentors

Let us discuss the following topics:

1. Do you think preaching is very difficult? Under what circumstances will you be willing to attempt?
2. What are the motivations for young children to achieve excellence in school or home? Are there different motivations for adults to perform well?
3. What have you learned as a mentor in motivating others? Are you good at it? Will you improve?
4. What is the 'residue of competitiveness'? Isn't competitiveness a good thing; and we ought to keep our edge sharp? Why is it harmful to mentoring?
5. Do you, or did you trust your children to choose their friends in elementary school? Did you give advices? More importantly, do they, or did they, think you trust them? [Trusting teenagers is a more complicated issue, for they (and you, too) need more guidance. We will skip the discussion.]
6. In a mentoring relationship, is it easier to trust for a mentor or for a mentee? Why? How do you develop mutual trusts?
7. Can you imagine the disciple's shock when Jesus called them 'friends'? In what kind of mental and

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spiritual conditions they were when they heard it, and when it sunk in? (Please read John 15)

8. Do you think I spoke out of turn when I told Joseph that he had no friends and needed none? That he agreed; does it bother you? Why is it hard to be his friend? Please generalize the principle behind the person.
9. Describe your feelings when your son or daughter went to college. Do you think you are better than average or worse, in retrospect? Why? [Those of you whose children are not in college yet can also learn from the discussion.]
10. Losing your job is bad, but under what conditions 'working out of a job' is good? Can this (good) also happen in secular world?
11. Why is it unhealthy for Elijah to think that he was the only one serving God? Can we fall into that trapping mentality? What is the difference of this and being genuinely faithful to God?
12. Can you give examples of peer mentoring? [Both in church and at work.] Is it easy to build team spirit from this and develop into ministry teams or teamwork?
13. What has mentoring to do with teamwork? What has teamwork to do with mentoring?
14. Are you a lifetime learner? Would you like to enjoy being one, and reap benefits?

Action Item(s):

Write down at least one action item for yourself, relating to this chapter. And do it immediately.

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