

On Mentoring

I give a care about the next generation. I'm hoping they will be better shepherds of God's flock than I was. I'm wanting them to be a better spouse and parent to their children than I was to mine. I want them to grow old without becoming bitter. The kingdom of God is worth betting their life on. I'm cheering them on to learn how to listen without thinking about what they are going to say back. I want them to reject the failure narrative and know that God is always at work remaking broken things. But mostly, I want to invite them to live their faith adventure. I'm having mine. They get theirs and if there is something I can do to help, I want to try.

There's a word for this; we call it mentoring. Historically the word 'mentor' is understood as "let me walk with you as you become the person you were meant to be," not "let me show you how to do a task." The priority is presence, formation, and trust. I think the word 'eldering' is a fitting synonym as well. We use our experience, education, failures, mostly failures, and our hearing from God practices to come alongside those who are willing. We sit with them and we mentor.

"But what does it look like?" you ask. "I want to be a helpful mentor. I want to sound wise, but I sincerely want to make a difference more than thought of as smart," you say. If that describes you, let me see if I can help.

A broker of healing resources

To get things started, I think you should know the title I give myself as a mentor is, "A Broker of Healing Resources." A broker connects things. Their service is in making connections. They are a dealer in resources. People resources, curriculum resources, institutional resources, to name a few examples. And to be clear, crystal clear, a mentor is not signing up to be a friend, a therapist, a surrogate parent/grandparent, or a banker. It's possible, but never thought probable, that one or more of these roles becomes an outcome of the mentoring relationship. But even the hint of a dual role I find can derail our work. Plus, it's not honest. As the mentor, I'm not signing up to be that. I agree to be this... **a broker of healing resources**. Then I say, "Let's find what will get you what you need to take a next step."

The R.E.P.A.I.R. model

During my doctoral studies I wrote a paper for our Advanced Pastoral Counseling course where I developed an acronym as a memory aid for potential help for the person sitting in front of me. I call it the R.E.P.A.I.R. model.

R- Relationships. Where can we find healthier relationships for purposes of vulnerability and connection?

E- Experts. If the mentee's need is a financial one, let's find a budgeting coach. If the need is physical, they need diagnostic help from the medical community. If doubt is the impediment to spiritual growth and the individual is struggling with reconciling the Bible and science, let's find a theologian gifted in apologetics.

P- Podcasts and Publications. This used to be titled publications, but the landscape is changing and age of digital media has dawned. A fitting podcast or a published book or an article provides knowledge at the click of a button at any hour of the day whether at home or at a local coffee shop.

A- Attendance. The big idea here is to encourage the mentee to place themselves in regular contact with teaching where the Scripture is taught with both clarity and relevance. Participation in a faith community participating in the practices of an UP (Godward,) IN (one another,) OUT (persons of peace & justice causes,) and WITHIN (spiritual formation) focus is essential for maintaining a flourishing life.

I- Invest. This is an invitation to live with purpose. I ask the one I'm coming alongside, "If you make progress in this area, if you get past this loss or betrayal, if you get better, would you be willing to come alongside someone else who is struggling with what you are going through?" I've never had anyone ever say no. All Christian formation is not only for us, but also for the sake of others. A motivation for healing and maturing is the privilege to mentor someone else in the future.

R-Recovery. The axioms embedded in the 12-step program of AA are gold. Do you know what step zero says, "Maybe we're not okay."¹ Some of the manifestations of our flesh need the intervention of a 12-step or a 12-step like program. So, get them with them in some form or fashion. As a mentor, know your capacity. Recommend those you mentor to attend Celebrate Recovery, DivorceCare, Griefshare, AlAnon, OA, or to sign up for a pornography addiction program, etc.

Having this REPAIR model readily available reminds me to stay in my line and embrace my own humanity. I only have this much to offer, not all of that. It takes a village to keep me healthier than I would be without these resources. I tell the mentee as I communicate this list, "I didn't create this list for you and the others I walk with. This resource list was created for me. I need them. Follow me as I follow Jesus and engage these sources in my pursuit of a flourishing life."

How can I be with you today?

Once the mentee and I get settled with coffee in hand and the customary lollygagging needed to get comfy, I default to the same question each time, "*How can I be with you today?*" That's it. My mentoring posture gives priority responsibility to the mentee for the session's agenda. What challenge are they facing? What God question are they asking? What insecurities are constantly on their mind?

Using the following criteria, I then begin by...

1. Reminding myself and them that God is the source of all good things.
2. Restating their question. Then ask, "Did I get it? Is there more?"
3. Asking clarifying questions about their question.
4. Sharing from my experiences wisdom they may find helpful.
5. Using the REPAIR template, I may make a referral to other sources of help.

On occasion, I may come to the appointment with an agenda for them. In my own prayer time, I am occasionally prompted with something I sense they would benefit to know or hear. Examples

¹ John Ortberg, "Steps: A Guide to Transforming Your Life When Willpower Isn't Enough." Tyndale Refresh, 2025.

of this may include asking them their motivation for something I observed them do or say in a public space, offering gentle correction when needed, or a follow up perspective prompted by a previous conversation.

Life-mapping is a tool I often employ. I introduce the mentee to the work of Robert Clinton, “The Making of a Leader”² and Terry Walling’s “Creating a Post-it Note Timeline.”³ This hands-on activity of naming 3-5 (positive and negative) key people and events in each season of the mentee’s timeline helps focus the nextgen leader toward identifying their unique contribution. How God redeems the pivotal experiences of their past informs what they care about and why. As a result of this exercise, the mentee’s ‘holy discontent’ about what needs to get done in their world gets clearer.

Setting expectations

“When can we meet again? Can we do this weekly?” they may ask.

“We can meet the next time,” I say. If you bring questions, I’m delighted to sit with you again and again and again,” I continue. “When you run out of the questions that I can help you discern answers, we will consider this season of our mentoring work done,” I conclude. “Deal?”

The role of a ‘divine appointment’ carries with it an appreciation for seasons in a mentor/mentee relationship. There may be more than one season. But there may not. A mentoring relationship is unique from a peer or a friend. A peer may be defined as one who prioritizes a mission (kingdom fulfillment, in this context) while maintaining a relationship. You didn’t choose each other without a cause. Performance and outcomes are at play. There are variables you both are subject to in a peer relationship. In a peer relationship, the primary goal is collaboration.

A friend has permission to prioritize the relationship over other things. If you ask a friend if he wants to read what you’ve written or hear about what you’ve accomplished, friends feel free to say, “No thanks, but I’m happy for you!” The benefits are reciprocal and not role-based like the other two. In a friendship the primary goal is connection.

Mentoring is inherently one-sided. While affection and appreciation may exist, the focus is formation. The mentor is coming alongside for a season to develop character, calling, and skills. In a mentoring relationship, the primary goal is competency.

According to academic conversations around the subject of mentoring, what I’ve described above is called periodic mentoring. The other options are intensive mentoring and indirect mentoring.⁴ Intensive mentoring is the work of discipling, spiritual direction, or coaching someone on how to do something you know how to do. This work is concentrated and feedback rich.

² “The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Stages and Development of Leadership Development.” J. Robert Clinton. 2nd edition. NavPress, 2012. ISBN: 978-1-61291-075-8.

³ Leaderbreakthru.com/timeline/

⁴ “Understanding Mentoring,” J. Robert Clinton, a free resource available at leaderbreakthru.com.

Indirect mentoring can be understood as influence without proximity. I've benefitted from indirect mentoring through the memoirs and biographies of missionaries, evangelical leaders, and public figures.⁵ Another example of indirect mentoring includes influential professors whose courses I took and said "yes" to my occasional invitations to further conversation after class or over lunch. Distant mentoring is the way I've described this experience.

But the work of 'periodic mentoring' is the one I'm describing and promoting in this essay. As maturing kingdom people, we make ourselves available to willing generations coming behind us to sit with them and ask, "How can I be with you today?" We are nearby as needed, always cheering them on, an email or text away. And contact that we, as mentors, initiate from time to time.

This kind of seasonal mentoring mindset has two advantages. One, it means I can be available for others when asked. And two, I avoid not knowing how to 'break up' when my season of usefulness has run its course. So, while I might say, "Let's plan to meet for the next three weeks to answer that question." I don't say, "Let's meet every other week (until the Lord comes back or one of us cries 'Uncle.')

If it's helpful, I also prefer to schedule all my appointments for 90 minutes instead of the customary 60 minutes with a 30-minute margin before the next one starts.

I don't correct the mentee when they introduce me to others as a spiritual father, grandfather, or a friend. However, I do not refer to myself that way. I say instead, "I am a mentor. I love mentoring you. It is a privilege to invest in you in this season." Expectations matter and I want to do my part in keeping them realistic.

Be the gift you are

In my ministry memoir entitled, *"The Power of a Whisper: My Unexpected Journey and the Everyday Wisdom It Holds"* I did something unexpected. Instead of turning to better-known theological scholars, political figures, business leaders, or pastors for endorsements, I invited some of those I have the privilege of mentoring to do so instead. Without exception, their look of surprise when asked was priceless. "Me?" they asked. "You want **me** to write an endorsement for **you**?" they clarified with an incredulous tone.

I was so glad I asked. Their responses were humbling and heartwarming. Here is a small sampling to illustrate the joy of what it means to mentor the next generation...

"Spending one hour with Rod is always a gift, so having a book filled with his words-what could we call that? Wisdom tied with tenderness is what you should expect from this book, and it is something I often find absent in the ministry world today." -Elliot

"Rod has been a mentor and spiritual father to me, so reading this feels like being invited back into the conversations that have shaped my life. Rod shares his journey with honesty and openness, and that makes the stories easy to connect with. He doesn't gloss over the

⁵ David Gergen's, "Eyewitness to Power: The Essence of Leadership Nixon to Clinton," Simon & Schuster, 2001 is a good example of the value of written resources as distant mentors.

disappointments or struggles but instead shows how God's whispers can guide us through them. The mix of real-life experiences and Spirit led reflection makes this book both practical and encouraging." -Jeremy

"Since I was a teen, I've had the privilege of sitting with Rod at a Panera or a HyVee cafe, learning from his battle tested wisdom. Most of his lessons included drawings he made with a Uniball pen on the back of a napkin. During my own two decades of working in pastoral ministry, I've wished to have a reference book filled with all those napkins and lessons. The Power of a Whisper is that text. Not many days pass that his shared knowledge doesn't inform my own decision making." -Grant

It's been said that "mentors lend you their ceiling until you build your own." It is a great privilege to invest in the next generation. Make yourself available to some in your part of the planet and I pray that these tested principles will encourage you to be the gift you are.

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