

The ultimate source of true life transformation is the Holy Spirit plus the Word of God, skillfully and prayerfully utilized by those called as mentors within the Body of Christ. Prison ministry mentors are change agents that walk alongside their mentees, setting an example of how to live a Christian life.

God's Purpose for Mentoring

Mentoring entails more than merely passing on knowledge about God. It involves showing people how to love and serve God.

The concept of mentoring is at least as old as the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. In the following passage, God provided a biblical format of mentoring within the family to ensure that faith in the one true and living God would be passed from generation to generation.

- Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

In the New Testament, Jesus added another dimension to this relational learning process. Here, He extended this command to the community and explained the primary purpose of mentoring.

- “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:36-40)

Relationships are the primary means God established for learning about and preserving His commandments. However, these close relationships are often lacking in today's society. Mentoring is a way of raising up mature Christian disciples within the Body of Christ.

- Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)
- As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)
- I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)

Jesus, the Divine Mentor

Prisoners and ex-prisoners need to see Christian principles modeled and demonstrated within the context of relationships, just as the disciples did with Christ. Jesus provides us with an excellent example of how to mentor.

Jesus imparted knowledge and values through His words and actions. He showed the disciples that values of the kingdom of God were different from values of the world.

- He went into their synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored... (Matthew 12:9-13)
- Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there. (Matthew 19:13-15)

Jesus taught the disciples they should be servants. He showed them the behavior He wanted them to copy by first doing it himself.

- Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:3-5)
- When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (John 13:12-15)

Jesus sent the disciples out to do ministry after they had spent time with him. He wanted them to practice doing what He had shown them.

- When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere. (Luke 9:1-2, 6)

Other Mentors in the Bible

Even though the term "mentor" is not in the Bible, there are many instances of someone who is wiser and more experienced in the ways of the Lord acting as a mentor to someone younger or newer in the faith.

- Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, acted as a mentor after observing Moses trying to solve all the disputes of the Israelites. (Exodus 18)
- Early in the wilderness journey, Moses began to mentor Joshua. Years later, God chose Joshua to be the next leader of the Israelites because he had Moses' spirit and had been mentored for the leadership position. (Deuteronomy 31 & 34)
- Elisha was prepared for his prophetic ministry through his close relationship with the prophet Elijah. When Elijah was taken up into heaven, his mantle fell on Elisha and he received a double portion of his mentor's spirit. (1 Kings 19 and 2 Kings 2)
- The Book of Ruth portrays Naomi as a mentor to Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law. Ruth had such a strong relationship with Naomi that she refused to leave her for any reason. Naomi helped Ruth understand the laws and customs of the Israelites. (Ruth 1-4)
- Luke tells us that Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, mentored Mary after she learned she was to be the mother of Jesus. Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, reaffirmed the work of God in Mary's life. (Luke 1)
- Barnabas was a mentor to Paul when he was a new Christian. Later they were sent as missionaries into Cyprus. The apostle Paul became a great spiritual leader and authored 14 books of the New Testament. (Acts 4, 9, & 11)
- Paul was a mentor to Timothy and described the young man as being "like-minded" with him in his commitment to serving God. Their relationship was so strong that Paul called it a father-son relationship. (Acts 16, Philippians 2, and 1 & 2 Timothy)

The Mentoring Process

At the beginning of a mentoring relationship, it is important to ask: Where is my mentee in his or her relationship with the Lord? Prisoners and ex-prisoners have very diverse spiritual needs. Remember that God catches his fish first, then He cleans them. Therefore, we must minister to people where they are spiritually rather than expecting them to come to where we are.

Although prisoners and ex-prisoners may profess to be "born again," they may have habits, attitudes, and viewpoints that are very worldly.

- Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)

It is vitally important for mentors to model biblical principles for mentees, providing an example of how God wants us to live and demonstrating Christianity in action.

- To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)
- And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Mentees may view seeking advice as a sign of weakness. But mentors are prepared to offer insights and point out alternatives, while remembering that mentees must ultimately make their own decisions.

- The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death. (Proverbs 13:14)
- Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

When mentees need help, mentors help them learn to look to the Bible for answers. God's Word is our spiritual nourishment and it provides wisdom on every aspect of life.

- Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither — whatever they do prospers. (Psalms 1:1-3)
- All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Most importantly, mentors show their mentees that God is our ultimate, most significant source of wise counsel.

- Jesus said: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:16-17, 26)
- If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (James 1:5)