

## Mentoring for Christian Leadership

From Smalling's book on [Christian Leadership](#)



### Chapter Nineteen: The Heart of Mentoring

Great news! Leadership training is simple.

I did not say *easy*. The core concept is simple. People are complex, each with his personality and sins.

In Chapter One we discovered there is only one Christian philosophy of leadership: servant leadership, willing to suffer for followers and serve them with the dignity due God's image.

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#### **There is one biblical method for training leaders: *Mentoring***

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Just as there is one biblical philosophy of Christian leadership, so there is one biblical perspective of leadership training: mentoring.

#### **What is mentoring?**

**Mentoring is relational**

Mentoring is a process involving a relationship between a leader and one being prepared for leadership.

This word incorporates abstract concepts, all revolving around relationships. Though the word "mentor" is absent from scripture, the Bible portrays it throughout.

This relational process shows up in Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Christ and his disciples, Paul and Timothy, and between Timothy and his elder candidates.

### Mentoring is holistic

Mentoring for leadership encompasses the whole man...body, soul, and mind. Academic disciplines are important, but not a priority. Relationships take precedence in a specific order; with God, then man.

Christ, for example, was more concerned about the relationship of his disciples with him as Lord than their performance in the ministry or whether they understood the Law of Moses. Without this relationship, we are lawbreakers anyway, even if we have kept the letter of the law, because we have broken the spirit of it.

This is why in our Visión R.E.A.L training system, the devotional life course comes first. It's about our relationship with God. The leadership course is second...our relationship with others.

We hear this approach in Paul's exhortations to Timothy, a young pastor. Paul considered every aspect of Timothy's life to have a bearing on leadership, and therefore he addressed each area of Timothy's life.

Paul even expressed concern for Timothy's health and gave counsel regarding it.

*For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things,... 1 Timothy 4:8*

Paul's training of Timothy reflected nothing of the compartmentalized thinking in current Western culture. Today, some may consider such a procedure intrusive. Paul assumed it was natural to counsel Timothy in these private areas. His love and concern for Timothy made it possible.

### The intellect is important

Does mentoring replace academic preparation? In no way!

In diagram one, the circles are different sizes. This is deliberate. Mentoring is first and most important. The academic is valuable, though secondary.

Why? If a person has been discipled but lacks knowledge, he will be motivated to pursue knowledge, even if he must educate himself with books alone. God will use him despite gaps in his knowledge.

What if a man has a dozen diplomas but is poorly disciplined? What if his devotional life is lacking, his family is in disarray, and he disputes with his colleagues? His knowledge is no substitute.

Certain mentors in the Bible wrote extensive books they expected successive generations to study and master. Moses, Paul, and James were no anti-intellectuals. They were bright guys who put a high value on scholarship.

Avoid influences that devalue the intellect. Such notions degrade the image of God in man, regardless of how much they may emphasize other aspects of Christian living or gifts. The academic is indispensable, though not a priority.

## **The mentor's toolbox**

When we talk about mentoring relationships, we mean two specific areas in this order: relationships with our colleagues, as we saw in Chapter Eighteen, and then with those to whom we minister.

Precisely what does the mentor do? What methods does he employ?

## **Modeling and teaching**

Modeling: “Watch me do this. Then you do it also.”

Teaching: “Here’s why I do it this way and not some other way. The reason why you tried it and it did not work well was because...etc.”

How do we translate theory into practice? Many theories propose answers. The Bible response is “a mentor.”

Christ, the supreme leadership trainer, modeled how to cast out demons and heal the sick. Then he sent his disciples out to do it, and it worked.

One day, they failed to cast out a particular demon. (Mk. 9:28, 29) Then Jesus revealed this kind required a different approach...prayer.

This was an excellent didactic scenario. First, Jesus taught the basic procedure. Afterwards, he permitted an exception, modeling how to handle that as well.

Why is modeling effective? Learning becomes easier the more sensory faculties we employ. If we hear a fact, this involves only the ears. If we hear it and see it written, this engages both the eyes and the ears. If we hear it, see it, feel it, and talk about it, retention multiplies exponentially.

An example is the tangible impression Christ made on the Apostle John.

*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 1 John 1:1*

Elijah and Elisha were so similar in ministry style, I get confused about who did what. Is this similarity mere coincidence? I doubt it.

Elijah was the mentor, and Elisha an attentive student. How do we know he was attentive? When Elijah was taken away to heaven, Elisha began to act just like him, with the same tone of authority.

With a good mentor, Elisha had a big head start and developed his own style later.

## **In the forum**

Let's look in on three seminary students and a professor discussing the mentoring concept. The professor is Jay, also a respected and successful pastor. Bill, a student, works part-time as an accountant and is studying for the pastorate. Jack is in his last semester and works as a youth pastor in a local church. He is a no-nonsense, athletic type. Susie is in her second year, a vivacious and quick-witted girl. The four are in a conference room, following a class with Professor Jay.

"Hey, this sounds like catching smoke," Jack sighed, leaning forward. "I don't like ambiguities, and the whole idea of relationships seems ambiguous to start with. Unless this mentoring thing takes form pretty soon, I'm out of here. Philosophy bores me."

Jay started to explain, but Bill jumped in. "No really, Jack. I think I'm beginning to see where Jay is coming from. The idea of relationships seems fuzzy until we get into them. As a relationship develops, it stops being an idea and becomes a reality." Bill paused a moment. "In fact, it would seem the deeper and longer the relationship, the more concrete it becomes."

"It sounds to me like there's no quick way to prepare leaders," Susie interjected.

Jay chuckled, "And it sounds to me like you're getting the point, Susie."

"O.K., Jay, I'm starting to get it," Jack spoke up. "I have a question though. You said it was easy. But relationship building is not easy. How do you square that with what you said before about mentoring being fundamentally easy?"

"Jack, I did not say it was *easy*. I said it was *simple*. I mean "simple" in its root idea. The process itself is anything but easy, because people are not simple."

"No shortcuts?" asked Susie.

"Oh sure, there's a shortcut. It is the one many take for preparing leaders. It's easier, quicker, and represents no threat to anyone's ego. Want to hear what it is?"

Jack laughed, "I already know what you are going to say. Send them off somewhere to take a series of courses. You mentioned that before."

"Or even better," said Susie a bit sarcastically, "you can have them take correspondence courses."

Jack picked up on Susie's sarcasm and grinned. "That way they get credits and a diploma without having to interact with anybody. They have proof they have been "prepared" for leadership and can hang that proof on the wall."

Bill whispered loud enough for everyone to hear, "Jack's getting it."

“Hey, man, I got it at first. I talk it out to think it through. Courses, credits, and diplomas are not really a shortcut. They’re a way for both parties, leader and trainee, to avoid the time-consuming, ego-threatening process of relationships. That kind of training may seem good, but it leaves something out.”

“Yeah,” exclaimed Susie, “the *something* left out is Christianity!”

At this the whole group laughed. Jay put his hands on the table to signal he wanted their attention. “Maybe that exaggerates a bit, but it’s close. It leaves out the heart and soul of Christianity...relationships! And what is a body without a heart and soul?”

The group replied almost simultaneously, “DEAD!” Everyone laughed.

## **The western concept**

The groups’ last comment exposes a fundamental defect in current leadership training today: the academic dominates.

Seminary catalogs describe leadership training as a series of ‘courses.’ Correspondence programs are also based on this same premise: “Take these courses and be prepared for Christian leadership!”

How did this mindset develop? The answer involves a difference in worldview. Eastern philosophy tends to be holistic. Eastern cultures view reality as a unit, spiritual and material blended. Western is more dualistic, seeing reality as two realms, spiritual and material.

This is why pantheism permeates eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism. Pantheism says everything is God. They do not mean God is everywhere. Pantheists assume a tree, a dog or a man is literally a part of ‘god.’

Martial arts movies reflect Eastern holistic thinking. These films often depict a close bond between the hero and a mentor who trained him in martial arts.

In simple terms, an eastern mindset claims the universe is one thing. A Western philosophy regards it as two or more. Western thinking is also humanistic, focusing on the glory of man.

This dualism and humanism originated in ancient Greece. Alexander the Great conquered the ancient world, and so did Greek humanism.

Greek philosophy assumed knowledge produces wisdom and virtue.

The Stoics supposed the study of nature would gain them insight into the meaning of the universe and the force that sustains it. They failed.

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## **The intellect is essential**

## but not central

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The Bible contends wisdom is essentially relational...first with God and then with others. Acquiring knowledge is a part of wisdom, though not its foundation. Intellect is essential but not central.

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10*

By the fifth century, Christianity dominated the western world. In the early Middle Ages, scholars became enamored with pre-Christian Greek culture. They referred to the Greek epoch, before the Roman conquests, as a “golden age.” Greek philosophies seemed so profound, so right.

What if they could merge the best of Greek culture with Christianity? Wouldn't Christianity be the better for it? Surely a new golden age would be born. Scholars failed to consider the humanistic roots with their emphasis on man's intellect.

Medieval scholars invented the university system. Theology, accompanied by Greek and Roman classics, was required for everyone. If a young man aspired to be a doctor or a lawyer, he took courses.

What if a student desired to become a man of God? Likewise, he took courses to become a Christian leader. Was this successful? Hardly!

Bible schools and seminaries often do a commendable job of preparing Christians academically. However, these reflect the university system in a religious form with similar philosophical assumptions. They may inadvertently duplicate historic errors by reversing priorities.

The point: The Bible is an Eastern book. Its message is holistic, without distinguishing secular from religious or spiritual from material. Biblical leadership training reflects this holistic worldview.

## Leadership Training: Biblical versus Western Philosophy

BIBLICAL	WESTERN TRADITION
Relational	Academic
Personal relationship with a mentor.	Relationships with teachers are not essential. Some teachers even discourage relationships in order to remain 'objective.'

Wisdom is acquired through relationship with God and man.	Wisdom is acquired by knowledge, especially philosophy.
Teaching method: Modeling. (Do it like I did. Here's why we do it that way.)	Teaching method: A series of courses with professors. (Here's the theory, now go out on your own and try to put it into practice.)
Learn by doing	Learn by hearing
Theory and practice are learned simultaneously through ministry.	Theory precedes practice.
Academics are essential but secondary.	Academics are all-important.

### From this chapter we learn

- Biblical leadership training is a discipleship process involving a personal relationship between the mentor and the trainee. This is primarily relational via a mentoring process.
- Mentoring is holistic, comprising the whole person in all areas of his life.
- Mentoring is inseparable from the academic.
- The means for mentoring are modeling and teaching.
  - The mentor shows by example how to minister.
  - The mentor explains why he does things the way he does.
- The western concept of training focuses on the academic as priority.
- Western tradition places theory before practice, while biblical procedure makes theory and practice simultaneous via a mentor.
- Some schools claim they do leadership training when it is more accurate to describe it as academic training.

### Study Questions for Chapter Nineteen

1. Describe the mentoring philosophy of leadership training.
2. What are the two tools of the mentoring procedure, and what do they entail?
3. What are the three aspects of mentoring described in this chapter.
4. What are some of the fundamental differences in assumptions between biblical leadership training and Western tradition?

## Chapter Twenty: Who Is Competent to Mentor?

Your call to biblical leadership embodies competence to mentor. Why? It's part of the package.

Remember: The primary product of a Christian leader is other leader. This is a *major* part of your job description.

*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. 2 Timothy 2:2*

So, if you are called to a biblical leadership office, such as pastor or elder, you are called to mentor.

Do you feel competent? Probably not. Wouldn't it be *nice* to feel competent? No. It would be arrogant. Even the Apostle Paul did not feel competent.

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. (6) He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant... 2 Corinthians 3:5, 6

**"I will never be competent for any function in God's kingdom."**

Like a tightrope walker with a balancing pole, we must hold to these two realities: I will never be competent for any function in God's kingdom. By the grace of God, I can do anything.

The competence.

The

issue is *call*, not

*But by the grace of God I am what I am... 1 Corinthians 15:10*

**"By the grace of God, I can do anything."**

*am what I am...*

Let's step into the forum again and observe the students struggling with the competence question:

"I have a confession to make, Jay," Bill said. "The idea of going up to somebody and saying I want to be their example of Christian living..."

Jack interrupted, "It sounds proud, Jay. Like I have it all together? I just got started in ministry, and I'm going to be somebody else's model? Yeah, right!"

"Actually, the word 'proud' crossed my mind too," Bill agreed. "But I didn't want to say it outright."

Susie interjected, "You're polite."

Jack shook his head. "Come on, Susie, get serious."

“Hey, hear out the professor,” she shot back. “I bet that’s not the end of the story.”

Bill interjected, “Let me tell you why I said that. I’m teaching a class on apologetics to a group of laymen. The truth is, I’m not so good at apologetics, and I’m supposed to be the professor. I’m one chapter ahead of them in the book. Pray they don’t find out I’m a fraud!”

Jay sat up. “You’re not a fraud, Bill. Neither are any of us. In fact, if you felt any other way, I would be disappointed.”

“But you’ve been around a while in ministry,” Susie objected. “Like thirty years or something?”

“Thirty-eight, to be exact. But let me tell you a secret. I’m still incompetent.” Jay paused. “Not as incompetent as I was thirty-eight years ago. But I will die incompetent. Take another look at this verse. Paul declared he was incompetent also and I’m no Apostle Paul.”

Jay read,

*Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. (5) Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. 2 Corinthians 3:4, 5*

Jay continued, “Paul’s sense of competence came through his relationship with the Spirit, not because of his brains, experience, or anything else. His personal walk with God, along with knowing what God had called him to do, was the ground on which he stood. He declared his dependence on God for his ability, and then God used his brains and experience as the means to mentor.”

Susie leaned back in her chair. “Yeah, that’s a kingdom paradox for sure. We have to recognize our inability in order to be competent.”

“Like we have to admit our dependence on the Lord to mentor correctly,” Bill added. “There ought to be a name to describe this.”

“Yes,” Jay said, “it’s called ‘faith.’ Remember what I said at the beginning of the course about God’s grace for ministry?”

Jack replied, “Like ‘there is no such thing as a job in the kingdom of God you are competent for. All of them work by grace.’”

“So...,” Susie paused, “God is saying, ‘You’re incompetent. Now go do it.’”

“Exactly,” Jay said, “now you guys go out and do it.”

A predicament in South America

Still feeling inadequate? I hope so. It's hard to beat my experience in a small Latin American country with a fledgling denomination of about forty churches.

The leaders had discovered literature on reformed government and theology and loved it. They asked me to mentor the whole denomination in these two areas.

It struck me I was their first and only model of what a reformed minister should be. Was God joking? I almost asked him to send somebody else. Then I recalled Moses got into trouble for trying that.

How was I going to hide my faults so the nationals would not copy them? In the past, the only person who presumed I was good at concealing my faults was myself.

I've taught twice in that denomination in three cities and am still the only model they know. Yet they are growing. I do not know if God shrouded my faults or granted the nationals grace to ignore them. Either way, he used me, and they are on track.

### **Our faults are necessary**

Thank God for the faults of Bible characters. Without them we would lack a well-rounded concept of ministry realities. God has a toolbox for perfecting his people. One of the tools is our faults.

The Lord does not count on our goodness to accomplish anything. He desires our willingness.

A chat between Jay, the professor, and Jack, the youth director, underlines the point:

“So God overlooks our faults in the mentoring process and uses us anyway, right?” Jack questioned.

“More than overlook them, Jack. He uses them as tools in the process.”

Jack rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully. “Now that's a paradox if there ever was one. It gives me goose bumps.”

“But it's liberating when you think about it, Jack. I used to think we had to be a really good guys to be a mentor.”

“If God uses our faults as part of the program, then...” Jack hesitated. “Then we're free to be ourselves...like more authentic.”

Jay smiled. “Now let me ask a question. Which kind of mentor would God most likely use...authentic or nonauthentic?”

Jack put his hand on his head, astonished, “Wow! That hurts! It sounds like you’re saying God wants us to just be ourselves and let him use our faults to do the job.”

“Let me tell you a secret about myself,” Jay confided. “It took me a long time to quit being afraid of my faults when I’m mentoring.”

“What you’re implying is good news!”

“Actually, it’s the *good news* of the gospel itself.”

## **Do I have the anointing for this?**

Assume the anointing is there and proceed accordingly. Why would God call us to ministry and not equip us for the job? The Bible tells us,

*...the anointing you received from him remains in you...1 John 2:27*

*...for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. Romans 11:29*

## **Do I have the right personality for training leaders?**

A friend applied for service with a mission agency. Extensive psychological testing, along with an interview with a psychologist, was part of the application process.

During the interview the psychologist said, “I regret to tell you that your psychological test shows you are not apt for missionary service. I cannot recommend you to the mission board.”

The psychologist was unaware my friend had served as a missionary for 25 years, was instrumental in planting several churches, had been a field and team leader in two countries, and had trained many for the ministry.

The next day, when my friend appeared before the mission board, the moderator said, “You realize the mission psychologist did not recommend you. We have learned to take his recommendations lightly. We look more at experience and accomplishment. Welcome to the family.”

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**The Bible underscores virtue.**

**The world values personality.**

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For decades, corporations embraced the latest psychological theories about management. Psychological profiling is still mandatory in many large businesses before appointment to leadership.

Profiling influences Christian organizations as well. This trend is just that...a trend.

Contemporary research into business management shows no relationship between personality types and success. Instead, key virtues make personality differences irrelevant.

Integrity, the courage to take risks, and total commitment to a vision make personality typing secondary. Any given personality, however extroverted, strong-willed, or forceful, will fail in leadership if lacking these qualities.

Management studies have discovered quiet types zipped past some aggressive personalities and outperformed them...**IF** they possessed the above character qualities.

The Bible underscores virtue. The world values personality.

### **How will my trainees recognize my call to mentor them?**

In Ecuador, a student displayed a hostile attitude during a course I was teaching. He would ask feisty questions in a disrespectful tone. As a professor, I welcome questions. This student, a civil engineer in his late 30's named José, clearly disliked me as well as the subject I was teaching.

A year and half later, my wife ran into him at a grocery store. He expressed he wished to visit me and insisted it was important.

He sat on our couch and said...

“Do you remember your class I attended?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“I gave you a rough time. I'm here to repent for the sin I committed against you.”

It seemed he was too serious when a simple apology would do. But he continued...

“Let me tell you what happened. Since I saw you last, I lost my job, my house, and nearly lost my family. I was falsely accused of fraud and almost landed in jail. I have been cleared, but I asked God why he allowed these things. He showed me I was arrogant and proud, self-sufficient and independent. He reminded me of the way I treated you in class.

“José, I forgive you.”

“One more thing, before I finish,” he said. “God told me I should sit at your feet and learn.”

“If your pastor is in agreement, I'll do it.”

“He is,” José replied. “I already asked him.”

For a year I mentored José in Christian leadership. He was an excellent student and was ordained as an elder in his church shortly thereafter.

Incidents like these are rare. Usually the mentoring process occurs in more natural ways. It illustrates in a dramatic way, however, the answer to the question: How will our trainees recognize God has made us competent to mentor them?

Answer: Don't worry about it. One way or another, God himself will tell them.

### **From this chapter we learn**

- Anyone called to a biblical leadership office, such as pastor or elder, is called to mentor.
- We need the grace of God to mentor, just as in other areas.
- People who *feel* competent to mentor probably should not do it.
- Personality types have nothing to do with success in mentoring, managing, or leadership in general.
- Our faults are not a hindrance to mentoring because God employs them as part of the process.
- We assume we possess the anointing of the Holy Spirit for mentoring because God always bestows anointing with the call.
- God himself will tell your trainee to submit to your leadership.

### **Study Questions for Chapter Twenty**

1. How do we know if we are called to mentor others for leadership?
2. What makes us competent to mentor?
3. Describe the role our faults play in the mentoring process.
4. What is the relationship between personality type and effectiveness as a leader? Why?
5. Describe the weakness in psychological testing as a criterion for determining leadership competence.

## Chapter Twenty-One: The Mentoring Covenant

In the previous chapter I mentioned José, whom God humbled and came for mentoring. We had an informal agreement.

In contrast, a young minister in Ecuador named Ricardo from another denomination asked to join our movement because of a change in his theology. The Presbytery appointed me to mentor Ricardo in Presbyterian government and practical leadership style.

This particular mentoring situation was formal. The mentoring arrangement was initiated by the Presbytery and recorded in the official minutes.

In yet a third circumstance, a medical doctor desired ordination in our denomination. It happened we were good friends and worked together on several projects. In retrospect, mentoring was occurring naturally.

This third example was informal, unwritten, and initiated by God himself.

Each of these mentoring opportunities required a different approach. The result was the same. All three candidates were eventually ordained.

The mentoring relationship may be formal or informal, conscious or assumed. Either party can initiate it. However it happens, a mentoring covenant is an agreement between a mentor and a trainee about the training process.

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### **All relationships have rules**

Even the most casual relationships between neighbors include certain unspoken rules about respect of property and privacy. Relationships, like marriage, include more extensive rules.

Mentoring in leadership also involves rules. It is helpful to define the rules since leadership preparation includes private life.

If the relationship is formal, you may need to write out the rules. If your relationship with the trainee is informal and has already existed, this may not be necessary.

**In our Visión R.E.A.L training system, we clearly articulate the rules:**

- The mentor and trainee will meet at least once a month to discuss the mentoring process...problems and plans in ministry.
- Every trainee will have a ministry assigned to him to develop.
- The mentor will evaluate the trainee every three months, in all areas of life, using an evaluation form we provide. This will require vulnerability and openness.

The mentoring covenant therefore contains a mutual commitment: Both agree to be candid. The trainee agrees to correction and instruction in every area of life, not just ministerial performance. The mentor agrees to care and train in a nurturing manner.

## **Commitment to change**

Have you ever met a person committed to remaining exactly the same? We each have a certain natural resistance to change. Some people, though, seem to make a point of it.

The trainee, therefore, must be committed to change in all areas of his life if he expects to attain leadership.

**Tip:** In local church situations, avoid telling people you are training them for leadership. It is better to say you are preparing them to serve the Lord according to their gifts.

In Ecuador, we created a serious problem when we appointed a dynamic businessman as a leadership candidate. We were sure his skills in business would transfer smoothly into a church setting.

Arrogance and unwillingness to accept correction eventually required removing his candidature. He regarded this as public humiliation, and he tried to avenge himself by slandering the leadership among church members. His real motive for leadership was for his own honor, not the honor of Christ.

If you cannot avoid letting the person know he is a leadership candidate, at least try not to advertise it broadly in case of failure.

## **Who do you select as trainees?**

Our missionary team in Latin America had a silver-tongued young national named David lined up as a pastoral candidate. An immature field leader had appointed him as a candidate without consulting the team. Since David did not have a job, the leader promised him a scholarship out of the team's budget.

David was habitually late. He never completed a single assignment, and his excuses were creative. He was the kind of persuasive guy who could sell sand to Arabs.

One day his pastor pleaded, "Brother Roger, *please* help us remove David as a leadership candidate. He accomplishes nothing and condemns the leadership for all his own faults. We've struggled with this man for five years, and he is still unreliable."

## **Principle one: Faithfulness**

Is it our job as mentors to make unfaithful men faithful? The Apostle Paul, in 1 Timothy, narrows the prospects for leadership to faithful men.

I discussed this point with a missionary on our team. He wanted to ordain four men right away, without going through the training established by the church planting team.

“Roger,” he said, “all the scriptures require for ordination is good character.”

“Where do you get that idea, Sam?” I asked.

“In First Timothy, Paul talks about faithful character as a condition for ordination. We don’t need anything more than that.”

“Sam, take a look again at the text. Paul says, *They must first be tested*. He does not say, ‘ordain them as soon as they have good character.’ He says, ‘take men of good character and then train them.’ The qualifications in First Timothy are NOT qualifications for ordination. They are qualifications for *candidacy*.”

“Well then, where are the qualifications for elders if not those?” Sam asked sarcastically.

“The rest of the pastoral epistles are the qualifications. Those epistles tell us all elders must be able to evangelize, refute false doctrine, and perform other duties. The character qualifications in First Timothy Three are simply the skeleton on which these other leadership aspects hang. Character alone does not qualify them.”

Sam eventually conceded the point.

Faithfulness is foremost. However gifted your trainee, if his character is unstable, he is not teachable. No matter how talented he is, he is disqualified as a candidate.

Principle number one in selecting a trainee is therefore:

Select for faithfulness

## **Principle two: Openness and vulnerability**

At a missionary training school in London where I ministered, we had a new missionary arrive. He and his wife lived in an upstairs apartment. One day I had to ask him about something. I knocked on the door, and the door opened about three inches, with only an eye visible.

During the entire conversation, the door opened not a centimeter further. I ignored this incident because I assumed his wife might be dressing or resting. This occurred so regularly that others noticed it.

This reflected his personality. His private life was closed to everyone. Ministry for him was a day job. He accomplished next to nothing and left the ministry after one term on the field.

In contrast, we visited a missionary family in Argentina ministering to youth. Their door was wide open. Young people were going in and out. A young man from out of town who had been there for three weeks occupied one of the guest rooms.

I asked the missionary's wife, "How do you ever get any privacy?" She laughed, "Privacy? What's that?"

During the four days we were there, a young man from a dysfunctional family said, "Before I met the Smiths, I had decided to never marry. To me, family life was a nightmare. I've changed my mind. Now I know what a real family can be like."

The Smith family's home reflected their open hearts. Remember: *Leadership and privacy do not mix.*

At some point, you as a mentor must make it clear that the mentoring process will involve every area of their life. This includes family life, relationships with colleagues, personal quiet time, and ministry competence.

To some people, this may feel intrusive. If you show concern for their welfare and respect for their persons, they will not take it as such.

Mentoring covenant involves mutual vulnerability.

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### **Mentoring involves mutual vulnerability**

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#### **Openness is mutual**

We cannot expect others to open their lives and hearts to us unless we do the same. Like the two missionary couples above, one successful, the other not, the difference was in openness and vulnerability to others.

**Tip:** Beware of *Mr. Incognito*

This is the type of person you can only contact if he wants it. He arranges his life so no one can contact him unless he chooses to be reached. You call at his house and no one answers, so you leave a message. You never know where he is. Their entire demeanor says, "Don't call me; I'll call you."

This kind of person decides whether contact takes place or not. Mr. Incognitos are disqualified for ministry, especially leadership. The reason is not just a bad habit or peculiarity of temperament. Mr. Incognitos do not really care about people.

If your candidate is a Mr. Incognito, you may want to calculate whether or not you will be able to bring him out of this syndrome. If not, go ahead and give him work, but not ordination.

Principle number two in selecting a trainee is therefore:

Select for openness and vulnerability.

### **Principle three: Self-starters**

What were the disciples doing when Jesus first met them? Sitting around waiting for somebody to tell them what to do? No. They were working.

Some had their own businesses, such as fishing or tax collecting. Jesus did not go to the marketplace to recruit people standing around looking for work. He found people we call today "proactive." This means self-starters, men with initiative who did not need someone to light a fire under them to get them to produce.

Before meeting Christ, Simon the Zealot belonged to an anti-Roman movement, which taught that violence was legitimate. "Zealot" was the name of this movement. He had vision and zeal for political change.

While Simon was trying to figure out how best to kill Romans, Matthew was starting his own tax-collecting business. Peter was running a fishing outfit.

Christ did nothing to quench Simon's vision and zeal. He simply redirected it to God's purpose. Nor did he stop Matthew from collecting. He merely taught him to collect something other than taxes...souls. Neither did he hinder Peter from catching fish. He just taught him to catch two-legged ones.

These were men on the move. Each ended up with a vision for God's glory and the advancement of his kingdom.

Initiative! Drive! Instilling vision in proactive people is not particularly difficult.

The point? Rarely do we observe people with vision just letting life happen. The key distinction between an ordinary Christian worker and a genuine leader is *vision*...a burning desire to accomplish something significant for God. Vision is usually born out of the hearts of self-starters.

Principle number three in selecting a trainee is therefore:

Select self-starters.

### **Principle four: Giftedness**

The Bible speaks a great deal about gifts for ministry. Experience is important, but giftedness is indispensable.

God called and gifted Jeremiah as a prophet. Though he had no experience, God told him to confront the elders of Israel. The Lord told him to ignore his own youthful appearance. (Jeremiah 1:5-9) Jewish custom looked to seniority when it came to protocol in addressing a group.

Likewise, Paul told Timothy not to let others despise his youth. (1 Timothy 4:12) We know nothing of the age difference between Timothy and his leadership trainees. Some may have been older than he.

Suppose you must choose between two candidates to teach the adult Sunday school class. One has had experience but no clear gift of teaching. The other is a gifted teacher but has never taught an adult Sunday school class. Which do you choose?

Choose the gifted. Though he will make errors at first, he will learn fast and soon surpass the other. It's like two runners, one of whom has a head start but is slower. Given time, the faster will win.

Experience alone rarely rises above mediocrity. To have excellence in your ministry, you must first select on the basis of talent and gifts. The combination of talent and experience is the dynamite that will make your movement grow. If you fail to follow this principle, you will condemn your movement to mediocrity.

Principle number four in selecting a trainee is therefore:

Select for giftedness

## **Pitfalls in mentoring**

### **Beware of cloning**

I admit a fault: I have a strong desire for my students to be theologians and writers. I'm glad it won't happen. It would make for a boring world.

It's a common tendency for mentors to want their trainees to be like them. Your job as a mentor is to make your trainee more of what he already is, not more of what you are. Your job is to discover his gift and help him develop it, regardless of whether you have the same gift or not.

### **Avoid rules**

When you assign ministry to your trainee, avoid giving him a lot of rules. You take away his ability to make choices and be creative, frustrating the mentoring process. Let him do the job his way, within the general parameters you proscribe.

### **No leftovers**

Do not let anyone dump on your candidate scraps of ministry nobody else wants. When you assign him a ministry, make sure it is worthwhile and fulfilling.

### Well-rounded nonsense

A fallacy in leadership training is making candidates focus on weak areas so they will be well-rounded. The only well-rounded ministers in history were the apostles and they are dead. Focus on your candidates' strengths and make them stronger.

Christ taught this principle,

*Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Matthew 12:13*

### From this chapter we learn

- A mentoring covenant is an agreement between a mentor and a trainee as to the procedures in the training process.
- The mentoring covenant involves mutual openness.
- In choosing trainees for leadership we select for...
  - Faithfulness
  - Openness and vulnerability
  - Initiative
  - Giftedness
- We must beware of common pitfalls in mentoring.
  - Trying to make the trainee like ourselves.
  - Supervising too closely.
  - Assigning ministry scraps.
  - Focusing on his weaknesses rather than strengths.

### Study Questions for Chapter Twenty-One

1. Describe what is meant by *mutual vulnerability*.
2. Describe the criteria mentioned here for selecting trainees.
3. Explain why giftedness is secondary to experience in selecting trainees.
4. Describe at least two pitfalls in mentoring, plus one you may have observed or experienced that is not mentioned in this chapter.

