

MENTORING – Relationships that Make a Difference

BY KAREN O. ALLEN



WE all have them. You know, the people we look up to and wish we could be more like or the one who challenges us to be better than we are. Maybe it's the person who believes in us or listens to the cries of our heart. You may know them as your parent or grandparent, your neighbor or friend, an older sister or brother, a church leader or business partner. They hold a special place in your heart. They are your mentors. They want to bring out the best in you, to help you see beyond the moment to a deeper self. They are the men and women who invest themselves into your life creating a legacy of hope and love.

The Bible recognizes the concept of mentoring and refers to it in the book of Titus. In that book Paul writes a letter exhorting Titus to teach the older men and women of Crete how to live in a way that honors God. These elders would in turn train the younger men and women. Both the Old and the New Testaments identify several mentors: Moses who mentored Joshua to lead the Israelites to the 'promised land'; Eli who mentored Samuel to become a revered priest and prophet; Naomi who mentored Ruth to capture a husband;

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and Barnabas who mentored Paul to convert the Gentiles. Wisdom, experience, and knowledge were key elements in each relationship that fulfilled a specific purpose. We, too, can offer those same qualities to those for whom we come in contact who desire to be mentored. You don't have to seek out the mentoring relationship; God will bring it to you.

You may argue that you are not qualified to be a spiritual mentor. One does not have to have a degree in psychology, theology, or sociology to be an effective mentor. The basic

requirements are to have a heart for God, a willingness to share your life's experiences, and a sincere love and compassion for people. That's it!

The development of any meaningful relationship takes time and effort so in order to succeed as a mentor you must make yourself available, which can mean making sacrifices. Keep in mind your mentoring relationship is an investment of eternal significance. Good teaching and listening skills are excellent ingredients for the mentoring relationship. Having a flair for creativity is also a plus. Without exception, a good mentor must exemplify solid biblical principles and "practice what they preach." Creating an environment of security and safety opens the door to deeper levels of understanding. Unlocking hidden abilities through mentoring is a fulfilling goal. The spiritual teacher, or mentor, points to something already present which differs from the classroom teacher who presents something new.

Mentors do not usually plan to be cast into the role as mentor. I didn't. I was sitting with my husband on the back pew in church one Sunday evening and noticed a young woman sitting near us whom I had never seen. I assumed she came to hear the guest musician. After the service, she asked if I would pray for her. I complied and later asked why she picked me among many others around her. The reason she gave? Because I sang without a hymnal! A mentoring relationship began that night that has lasted over 12 years and opened the door to other mentoring relationships, none of

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which were preconceived.

Through my mentoring experiences, I have identified several different types of mentoring relationships. All have the same general qualities described earlier but they are characterized in different ways depending upon the need. Let me illustrate with some examples. A common mentoring type is the *discipleship* mentor in which spiritual accountability and growth are the primary aim. My mentoring relationship with Sharon, the young woman at church, began as a discipleship mentor at her request but has since evolved into a deeper "God-mother" relationship. I have become her spiritual Mom: "spiritual" in the sense of the discipleship and "Mom" in the sense that I took on pseudo-parental responsibilities. With her parents deceased, Sharon finds comfort in referring to me now as her godmother. This mentoring relationship is by far the

most challenging and time-consuming one I have. Without question, however, our lives have been enriched by one another. This relationship will be life-long but most mentoring relationships are not.

A second type of mentoring relationship is the *encourager*. Eve and Gail have chronic illnesses with no curative solutions so encouragement is the focus. Providing an outlet for open communication and offering a listening ear are crucial. There is little I can do but encourage. A third type of relationship is the *confidant*. All mentoring relationships require discretion and confidentiality but this type tends to share secrets of the heart, mind, and soul. Advice is sometimes given but prayer is the priority. Vanessa and I spend much time in prayer and conversation as we meet to walk twice a week. We have the assurance that our words will be left on our walking path. It is an uplifting relationship as we watch God answer our prayers of

agreement. In truth, we have become mutual mentors for one another. The fourth type of mentoring relationship is the *shareholder*. This is where common ground serves as a bonding force to unleash powerful prayers of mercy, love, and compassion that can render miraculous results. Maria and I are both cancer survivors. We understand things about each other that bond us in a special way. Although she and I don't see each other often, she claims my mentoring has marked significant milestones in her life.

While I serve as a mentor to several women, I too have my own spiritual mentors each with their own purpose. Proverbs 27:17 says "iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." I need that so that I can continue to be a sharpening tool in someone else's life. **CL**

Karen O. Allen is the author of the Bible study "Confronting Cancer with Faith". Visit www.confrontingcancerwithfaith.com to learn more.



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