

A Christian Recording Artist Shares Advice on Choosing a Mentor

When I was growing up in Australia, my parents' record collection included a few albums by a smiling, petite singer named Evie. I'll never forget some of her song lyrics: "I'm only 4'11", but I'm going to heaven" and "Come on ring those bells, light the Christmas tree." I didn't know that 20 years later, God would cause this little lady to have a profound impact on my life.

My parents became acquainted with Evie when she was on tour in Australia. Because of the relationship they developed, she and her husband, Pelle, came to our shows whenever we were in Florida, close to where they live.

Each time I saw Evie, she would encourage me personally and in my ministry. I felt we were kindred spirits.

Our personalities, our love for God and our zest for life connected us. The bond between us was strengthened by the fact that she had walked where I was walking—as a female Christian vocalist in the spotlight.

Over a period of time, I became increasingly aware of my need for a mentor. I'd watched countless Christian artists lose their passion for ministry and become jaded, hurt and hardened by the constant barrage of physical, emotional and spiritual demands to meet schedules and expectations.

As a performer, there is also pressure to become too focused on entertainment, proud, self-absorbed and money-hungry. I wanted to stay soft before God and as a woman. I didn't want what I did as my profession to cripple me as a person.

After one particular visit with Evie, I felt a desire to ask her to mentor me. I highly respected her, and I saw her as someone who'd been through everything I was going through and yet had maintained the type of glowing, radiant love for Jesus that I wanted.

I prayed about the idea for months, but I hesitated to ask her, not knowing what her response would be. Finally one weekend, early the following year, I sent Evie an e-mail expressing my desire.

The next day she called to say that she "just happened" to be visiting Nashville, Tennessee, where I live, and she asked if we could get together that night. I was excited to see God confirm that this mentoring relationship was right.

In her Opryland Hotel room, Evie and I talked, shared and began what is now one of the most treasured relationships of my life. I had found my mentor.

Friendships Among Women The Bible often talks about older Christians helping younger ones along in their journeys. One such passage is found in 2 Timothy 2:2: "You have heard me teach many things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Teach these great truths to trustworthy people who are able to pass them on to others" (NLT).

Evie teaches me what she has learned. I teach others what I have learned, and they teach others what they have learned. That's the godly mentoring model.

Previous generations found mentoring more commonplace. In the past, people learned how to grow into their roles as wise men and women by sitting at the feet of other wise men and women.

They learned their trades from experts who were willing to share their expertise. They learned how to avoid certain pitfalls in life from those who had managed to navigate their way through.

Our current individualistic society changed that paradigm, however. Mentoring has been replaced by mantras of the day such as "I'll do it my way," "Who are you to tell me what to do?" and "I'll do whatever feels right."

We have forgotten we're social beings in need of other social beings. Homes and families are so splintered and fragmented that we often don't take time to help those coming behind us.

To some degree mentoring within the church family has similarly fallen by the wayside. We don't hear often enough about the vital role mentoring plays in our spiritual and emotional growth.

The word mentor comes from mythology. When the Greek warrior Odysseus went off to fight in the Trojan War, he left his young son, Telemachus, in the care of a trusted guardian named Mentor.

The war lasted 10 years, and it took another 10 years for Odysseus to get home. When he did, he found his son had grown into a fine man under Mentor's guidance.

Among Christian women, mentoring can be defined as a friendship in which one woman helps another woman become the person God designed her to be. The mentor's goal is to be a sounding board, to offer insights about life and faith, and to lead the mentee in a growing relationship with God so she can manage her own life and become empowered to pass on the mentoring she's received.

The mentee's goal is to be teachable and pliable. The following statements will define what mentoring is and what it is not:

- Mentoring is assisting not fixing.
- Mentoring is guiding not telling.
- Mentoring is walking alongside not lording it over.

- Mentoring involves looking forward not back.
- Mentoring helps us grow past hurts rather than rehashing them.
- Mentoring involves learning to depend on God through someone else, not depending on that someone.
- Mentoring encourages capitalizing on God-given strengths not focusing on weaknesses.

Understanding the breakdown of responsibilities for the mentor and mentee is essential. But finding (and becoming) a mentor also requires that you know what you're looking for and where to search.

Maturity Not Perfection Begin the process with prayer. Tell God about your desire for a mentor, and then ask Him to show you where to find the right one.

Take time to list what you hope to receive from a mentoring relationship. Prayer support? Wisdom? Vision? Encouragement? Sounding board without condemnation?

Once you're sure you desire a godly mentoring relationship and know what you want from it, try these suggestions:

- Go to your church leaders and ask for recommendations and referrals.
- Keep your eyes open for someone who exemplifies the traits you desire.
- Call the woman you notice. Ask for an appointment to see her about a specific issue. Use a go-between to set up a meeting if it feels more comfortable.
- Get to know her better to see if God might be leading you to this particular woman.
- Ask her advice about a specific challenge you're facing or clarity on a Scripture you've read.
- Inquire about her mentors and other women she has helped.

Some of the best mentors are those who don't formally

see themselves as such. Wisdom is better than titles, and God has someone wise and special waiting for you.

The godly woman you find for your mentor should have a genuine heart both for you and for the art of mentoring. She should be willing to sacrifice time and energy and be willing to commit.

Your mentor should be a woman of deep integrity, who will keep the content of your times together confidential. She should demonstrate wisdom, patience and emotional and spiritual maturity, regardless of her age.

In his book *As Iron Sharpens Iron* (Moody Publishers), author Howard Hendricks describes the traits you should look for in a mentor:

- Seems to have what you personally need
- Cultivates relationships
- Is respected and consulted by other Christians
- Offers a network of resources
- Talks as well as listens
- Demonstrates a mature and consistent lifestyle
- Can diagnose your needs
- Shows concern for your interests.

Keep these qualities in mind as you look for a mentor. Perfection is not required, but maturity is. Your mentor shouldn't keep making the same mistakes; she should learn from them and use them to help others.

The role of a mentor is to help you become healthy, vibrant and mature. How that happens and specific areas where that happens depends on your own needs and desires. Soon you will begin to see God bringing into your life others who need what you have learned.

Ministry In, Ministry Out As the editor of Focus on the Family's Single-Parent Family magazine, my writing

partner, Lynda Hunter Bjorklund, used a “ministry in, ministry out” model to encourage her readers not only to find a mentor themselves but also to become one. Ministry in happens when we find someone to walk alongside us, and ministry-out happens when we walk alongside someone else.

We have a tendency to look through a straw at the issues we face today and at our search for someone to help us address those needs. When we dare to give the challenges to God, we’ll be able to notice people all around us in need.

God wants to use you in a unique way in someone’s life, and He can provide all you need to follow Him. He asks only for your willingness to trust Him with the concerns in your life. When you do this, there’s no limit to what He can do in and through you.

You may not have to search far for a mentee. God may, instead, bring her to you.

Ask God to provide the people He wants you to influence. Then watch! They may just come out of the woodwork.

One afternoon recently, I stood beside the small storage barn in my back yard, pouring out my heart to Evie on the other end of the phone line. She listened with a great deal of understanding as I shared with her my fears that I’d once again face burnout and that I would someday hit the wall and be crippled by the crash.

I’ll never forget what she told me that day. She said, “Rebecca, just your being aware of this weakness will help you guard against it ever happening and will help bring victory over it.”

Months later, a younger female friend for whom I’ve

become an informal mentor shared her heart with me. She told of insecurities in her life that she feared would turn into actions and then into hardness of heart. I began to share with her, "My friend, just your being aware of this weakness will help you." Once again I discovered afresh the joy and beauty of having and being a mentor.

Others are praying for what you have. You'll start noticing God-appointments throughout your day—noncoincidental encounters. When you throw your heart into helping others, ministry-out will become one of the most rewarding and healing experiences you could ever have.

Even if you didn't experience mentoring as a child, you can find and become a mentor as an adult. Start where you are with those women who are in your everyday life. Some relationships may develop into full-blown friendships; some may not.

Just remember that you are a possible mentor to everyone you encounter and to those who are observing your life. Don't force mentoring to happen or resist it when it does.

Let God express His love through you no matter how long the duration may be, so when other women go through tough times, they'll want what you have.

God pours into us through someone, and we pour out to someone else. Ministry in, ministry out—that's the ideal mentoring model.

Read a companion devotional.

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