

Finding Your Place as a Woman of Influence

Isn't it exciting to see how God is using women in our day? In greater and greater numbers, He is releasing us into anointed service and ministry. What is even more exciting is that we are being nurtured and empowered through our relationships with one another.

The Lord is helping many of us to form strategic friendships and mentoring relationships. In place of intimidation, He is building intimacy. In place of competition, He is showing us the joy of companionship. As we become transparent with one another, we are learning how to minister to God's people from hearts that have been bonded together in trust and confidence.

The value of such strategic relationships cannot be overstated. They provide training, guidance and much-needed encouragement when we out to fulfill God's plan for our lives.

Recently, Dotty Schmitt and Brenda Kilpatrick joined together with other female Christian leaders in our country to begin teaching women about the significance of mentoring relationships. In this article, they share their personal stories and thoughts on the subject.

A LIGHT TO FOLLOW (DOTTY) As a young bride I spent the initial 15 years of my married life in northern Minnesota. One of the first things I learned was how to drive in deep snow. I was told that when I found myself in a desperate situation I should look for a snowplow to follow.

Why? Because I would know I was fairly safe, even when I couldn't see too clearly, if before me were the taillights of a snowplow that was lighting my way as well as clearing the road before me.

This is how I view a mentor! She is a woman who provides a light you can follow while at the same time clearing a path ahead of you. She is someone whose life gives you deeper insight, inspiration, wisdom and understanding about how to live your life. She is also someone who has gone ahead of you by virtue of her knowledge, experience, successes and failures. Often mentors are women who have paid a great price to open pathways so that others may more easily walk in them.

Since the Lord captured my heart in March 1951, I have had the privilege of developing relationships with many women who have tremendously impacted my life. There was a Sunday school teacher whose love for the Lord and gentleness made an indelible impression upon my life. Then there were the inspiring role models I had in college among the leadership of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

These staff members were an example of godly character and radical commitment to the Word of God. I remember observing these women as they led Bible studies, taught us how to pray and counseled young college students by the hour. They brought us into their homes and exposed us to the values of a Christian family.

How vividly I recall being at a nice but rugged leadership camp in northern Michigan! One afternoon six of us aspiring "women in leadership" were invited to the cabin of one of the women on staff, Gladys Hunt. Gladys was a respected author and leader, as well as a devoted area director, wife and mother.

When we went into her cabin, we saw before us a beautifully set table with real china and linens. I remember how surprised we were to find such elegance in such a rugged setting.

During the tea party, Gladys led us in a stimulating discussion of what Paul meant when he encouraged us to "adorn" the gospel of Jesus "in all things" (Titus 2:10, KJV). The creativity and beauty of that afternoon was forever etched on

my own soul, and countless times since that day I have attempted to follow Gladys' example by creating beauty and inspiration for other women in the most unexpected places.

SOMETHING MISSING (BRENDA) Unlike Dotty, I suffered from the lack of a godly mentor when I was young. I grew up in a home where I never received a hug or heard the words, "I love you." My mom hadn't received love herself, so it was difficult for her to nurture me.

Though she was faithful to take us to church, I didn't establish close relationships with older women there who could take me under their wings and train me up either in practical areas or in the things of God. At home, there was little communication between family members, and I learned to cope by simply retreating into a private world of my own.

I married at 19, and two years later my son Scott was born. When I was just 22, my husband and I started pastoring our first church. I was a rookie at being a pastor's wife and knew nothing about ministry. I thought saying "yes" to everything would win me the approval of all the people.

I was also easily intimidated. And I knew of no books that could teach me to be a good pastor's wife. Not even the annual conferences we attended provided the practical guidance I needed. Wearing the different hats a pastor's wife must put on left me stressed and fatigued, especially when complaints and discord resounded throughout the congregation.

If only I had had a mentor, colleague or confidante to help and encourage me through the early days of ministry!

MENTORING IN ACTION (DOTTY) During the years I have learned that we can be mentored by many women in many different ways. There is a mother of eight children who continues to inspire me in the area of motherhood. There are those whose marriages provide me with effective tools for my own marriage. There are

pastors' wives who, as my peers, have been rich sources of hope and encouragement in my times of discouragement. Then there are those women whose passion for the Lord and revelation in the Word have deeply inflamed my heart to follow Him more intensely.

I remember sitting in a women's gathering several years ago at which Iverna Tompkins was speaking. As she taught on a specific Old Testament passage, such revelation pierced my own soul that I sat there thinking, As a Bible teacher and woman with leadership responsibilities, I want to learn from this woman of God.

When my dear friend, Jean Coleman, and I discussed a "mentoring possibility" with Iverna after the meeting, something beautiful and life-changing was birthed. Every year for eight years, a group of about 25 to 40 women met with Iverna for one week of in-depth teaching, training and interaction with one another. For one week we lived, ate, prayed, laughed, cried and learned together.

These were such blessed times! Many of us formed relationships that have forever enriched our lives, expanded our vision and empowered the fulfillment of God's call upon our lives.

NEED FOR NURTURING (BRENDA) Recently the Lord gave me a dream that made clear to me how great the need for mentoring is. In the dream I saw a young woman take a newborn baby out into a field and place it in a ravine filled with flowing water. I knew the woman had left the baby to die, so I went over to see if I could save it.

The baby was naked, with the placenta still attached and blood covering its body because it had not been cleansed after birth. Even more horrifying, it had a plastic bag over its head. Moved with compassion, I picked the baby up and pulled the bag away from its head. When I did, the baby began to cry. It was alive!

At that point the dream ended. When I awoke, I realized that the woman in the dream was a member of our church.

I asked the Lord to help me understand what He had showed me, and He revealed that the baby represented the ministry and gifting that had been birthed in the woman's life. Because she did not know how to nurture it, she was stifling it.

I could easily see how the dream applied to the woman in our church. She had a brilliant gifting in the knowledge of the Lord, but because of a lack of maturity, she often offended people by her forceful presentation and her constant desire to "give a word from the Lord."

She was pregnant with the purposes of God but lacked understanding and had not spent enough time in God's waiting room. I knew God was showing me her need—and by association, the need of many other women in the body of Christ—for a mentor.

YIELDED VESSELS (DOTTY) During the recent years of the fresh moving of God's Spirit, a number of women in leadership from around the country have touched the "revival rivers" that have been flowing and have received a deeper impartation of God's life into our hearts. In the process, we have been impressed, as Brenda was by her dream, by the obvious need of Christian women for the love, guidance and encouragement of other women. Sovereignly, the Lord has knit our hearts together in love for Him, for one another and in a special way, for women.

Our message to women everywhere has become that they, too, can be vessels of great influence if they but yield to Him. God is not looking for "strong pulpit" women; He is looking for yielded women who will say, "Yes, Lord, here I am, use me!"

MARYS AND ELIZABETHS (BRENDA) Mary, the mother of Jesus, was such a woman. In Luke 1, we read about Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, who both were pregnant with the purposes of God. When an angel appeared to Mary and told her that she would

give birth to the Messiah, she did not hesitate to accept God's plan for her life. She said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38, NKJV).

Mary also acknowledged what the angel told her about Elizabeth's being with child by going to stay with her cousin for a time. Elizabeth confirmed Mary's announcement of her conception and thus encouraged Mary to believe that what the angel had prophesied to her would come to pass.

I believe God is calling the younger women in the body of Christ today to be like Mary, willing to abandon themselves completely to Him and saying yes to His will no matter how it might affect their reputations.

He is calling the mature women to be like Elizabeth, pregnant with the purposes of God and giving birth to the ministry of "preparing the way of the Lord" for the young Marys who are coming forth. They are to be forerunners, the "older women" Paul speaks about who are willing to "admonish the young women" to love their husbands and children and live godly lives (Titus 2:3-5).

This is what I want to be! My constant prayer during this season of my life is: "O God, You have taught me from my youth; and to this day I declare Your wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come" (Ps. 71:17-18).

Whether you are young or old in the Spirit, remember: It is as we joyfully love God and then humbly serve, nurture and encourage one another that we as women will become deeply envisioned, equipped and empowered to serve the purposes of God for this generation and become the nurturing mothers and anointed mentors God intends.

Brenda Kilpatrick has ministered for years alongside her husband, Pastor John Kilpatrick. She was a vital part of the Brownsville Revival, especially as she ministered to women through Awake Deborah conferences and events. **Dotty Schmitt** is co-pastor with her husband, Charles, of Immanuel Church in Silver Spring, MD. Both women travel and minister at churches and conferences around the country.