

Mentoring Sparks Spiritual Maturity in Men

When elephants overcrowded South Africa's Kruger National Park, the government authorized killing adult elephants and relocating their children to other parks.

As the orphaned male elephants became teenagers, they were clueless about what "normal" behavior looked like. When their testosterone levels spiked the orphaned males turned aggressive.

In one park, they savagely killed 36 rhinos. A park ranger watched as one elephant knocked over a rhino, trampled it, then drove a tusk through its chest. The situation was out of control.

Then rangers brought six adult bull elephants into one of the parks. They mentored the younger bulls to see what normal behavior looked like. No more rhinos were killed after the bigger bulls arrived.

Younger Men Need Older Men

Everyone knows we have a "men problem." Unfortunately, the problem is getting worse, not better. And young men especially are paying the price. Many are in chaos, and all are struggling to figure out how to do life.

Recently I've been mentoring a young man in his late twenties. On our fourth visit—long enough for him to size up whether or not he would trust me—he sat down and said, "I have a mediocre business, a mediocre marriage, and a mediocre relationship with God."

That's because he's never seen "normal."

Many young men today are growing up as "practical" orphans.

They've been left to "guess" at what normal male behavior looks like. There has to be a better way.

Who will take responsibility for these men—to mentor them in the ways of manhood?

It Takes a Man to Teach a Man How to Be a Man

A man told me he was converted at age 12, but it wasn't until he turned 20 that a man came alongside him and showed him how to walk the Christian life. That's mentoring in a nutshell. God has given us a solution to bring young men to maturity. It's for mature men to take younger men under their wings and show them how to walk the Christian life.

A mentor is "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher." Christian mentoring, however, is uniquely centered on the Word of God. Jesus said some men hear the Word, but it gets choked out by life's worries, riches, and pleasures. As a result, those men never grow to maturity. But other men hear the Word, obey it, persevere, and produce a big harvest (Luke 8:14-15).

Mentoring is all about growing men to maturity. How many young men never get asked? That is the apex of this problem.

Many single moms do a great job teaching their boys character. But a mom can only go so far. What's a mom going to do? Say, "I'm your mother and I'm going to teach you how to be a man! Now, come here and let me help you pick out something cute to wear."

There are things about manhood that only a man can teach another man.

It takes a man to teach a man how to be a man. And God has ordained that His best men invest in other men. "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of reliable witnesses, entrust to other men who will also be qualified to

teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

So how does it work?

What’s to Know About Mentoring?

1. *Mentoring is the intergenerational transfer of spiritual wealth.* Psalm 78 talks about passing down stories from generation to generation, telling the next generation about the glorious deeds of God, and teaching the commands of God to our children—and they in turn to their children. The gospel applies to everything—how to treat people, conduct your business, and honor Christ.
2. *The principle method of mentoring is fathering.* Let’s keep it real. No one else cares about your family like you do. You have to be strong, and you have to set boundaries. No one else can, or should, take responsibility to mentor your children. That one’s on you. Your most important small group, prayer group, fellowship group, discipleship group, and ministry is your family. Until you get this right, you really shouldn’t be doing ministry anywhere else. Resist the temptation to give the best years of your life to people who really don’t care about you as a person at the expense of those who do. Look around the next time you’re at a funeral and see who’s crying—and who is glancing at their watches!
3. *What if there was no dad in the picture?* If you mentor a young man today, there’s a good chance his dad wasn’t there to mentor him. That can be devastating. Even the practical things can be missing. For example, my friend Tom Skinner told me that in his urban ministry young men learned to urinate sitting down. Fatherlessness is all the more reason we need to mentor younger men. God is a “Father to the fatherless” (Psalm 68:5), but He does that by “ordaining” men to

invest in younger men.

4. *Young men need other mentors in addition to their fathers.* Every man needs someone besides their dad to speak into his life—sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. My first discipler, Jim Gillean, saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. He allowed me to be part of his small group. What really got me was that he believed in me more than I believed in myself. He spoke words of encouragement that I'd never heard before. That released something inside me. He gave me a vision to become the man God created me to be. That released the power to become a man I didn't even know was there.
5. *Mentoring is very situational.* I can't mentor men by teaching them in a large Bible Study. I can teach them truth and principles, but they need situational guidance, such as when a young man is trying to figure out why his wife thinks he's neglecting her. Or whether to walk away from a home mortgage that's twice as much as the home is worth. Or why he keeps repeating the same sins.
6. *Disciples cannot be mass-produced.* You can teach up to a dozen men in a small group—Jesus gave us that model. But you can't mentor (act as a wise and trusted counselor) twelve men together. Very small groups can work—think Peter, James, and John. But mentoring works best when it's one-on-one. Why? Think about how abruptly any one-on-one conversation you've ever had changed when a third person pulled up a chair. The smaller, the deeper.
7. *It takes a long time to make a disciple.* When I ask men, "After you became a Christian, how many years did it take you to really do business with God?" the answers are almost always a decade or more. God doesn't make "90-day wonders." Consider Paul. Even though his conversion may be the most dramatic ever, it was not

until as many as 13 years later that Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch to begin his public ministry. Mentoring is all about turning Sauls into Pauls. For this reason, most younger men will need many mentors over many years.

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