

Pastoral Perspective on Shepherding Future Shepherds

by
Michael Harding

A mentor is simply one who is trusted as a wise counselor and teacher. Mentoring presupposes that the mentor is in some kind of leadership capacity over the one being mentored. The number of books, monographs, articles, and seminars devoted to the topic of leadership is staggering. The term “leadership” when searched on *amazon.com* produces over 10,000 entries. There seems to be no shortage of advice when it comes to leadership and its subsequent influence over one’s followers. But how does one define leadership? At the very least, the concepts of **initiative** and **influence** come to mind. One sees a need, exercises initiative to meet the need, and exerts influence upon others to accomplish the objective. The outcome to a large degree depends on the character, motive, and agenda of the mentor/leader.

The purpose here is to construct a profile of the kind of mentoring which effectively promotes God’s mission in the world and meets with God’s approval. Though the Bible is not a textbook on mentoring, it sets forth examples of godly mentoring. Moses mentored Joshua laying a pattern for Joshua’s meditation and total dependence on God’s authoritative revelation in leading the people of God (Josh 1:8). The boy king Josiah under his godly mentor Hilkiah calls the people to national renewal “in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2 Kg 23:25). Timothy’s mentor, the apostle Paul, leads from the conviction that the Holy Scriptures instruct, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness so that the student is fully equipped to lead the New Testament local church (2 Tim 2:15; 3:14–17).

I. Definition of Biblical Mentoring

Biblical mentoring takes the initiative to influence people on a personal level in order for them to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the glory of God’s name through the extension of Christ’s Lordship in the NT church throughout the world (Rom 1:1–5; Phil 2:5–11).

A. Proactive

A biblical mentor looks for, pursues, and follows up on opportunities to positively move others toward holiness of character and obedience to the divine agenda in a Spirit-energized determination to seize the day of opportunity.

B. God centered and People oriented

The purpose is to grow in godliness in order to obey God’s agenda of extending His salvific rule over the people groups of all nations. Thus mentoring is people-oriented rather than program-driven, focusing on the spiritual maturation of those under the mentor’s care (Col 1:28–29). Second, the purpose is gospel-driven over against organization-driven, seeking to help people find their niche whereby they can make their most significant contribution to the extension of God’s saving rule in the world (Rom 12:4–8). This kind of mentoring can be exercised in both formal and informal settings.

II. Profile of the Biblical Mentor

God often uses unattractive “jars of clay” (2 Cor 4:7) to counsel, teach, motivate, and exemplify future biblical servants—a betrayed brother, a reluctant desert herdsman, an overlooked shepherd boy, a burdened cupbearer, and a Galilean fisherman to name a few.

A. Character—Who the mentor is and is becoming

Character is one’s moral constitution, embedded with a stable set of values. Paul establishes a set of criteria for overseers and deacons that centers around moral virtues which spring from godly character (1 Tim 3:1–13; Tit 1:5–9). Character trumps personality, position, role, temperament, or gifting. Future ministers will succeed in their pastoral ministries to the degree that they give careful attention to growing in godliness and exemplifying faith toward God, love toward man, and integrity toward one’s self (1 Tim 4:7–8, 12, 16; Tit 2:7–8, 15; 3:8). The steadfast confidence in God’s goodness and sovereignty, the daily choices to sacrifice one’s personal preferences for the welfare of others, and the congruity of claim, character, and conduct that provides the moral authority to direct others are indispensable elements in the mentoring relationship.

Moses believed he was ready to lead at age forty (Ex 2:11), but God removed the privileged son from the Egyptian princess to the Midian desert for forty years to tend the flocks of Jethro. At age eighty he was prepared to lead. He mentored Joshua who spent his youth as Moses’ apprentice and was consigned to watch his entire generation die off during the forty years of wilderness wandering (Ex 24:13; 33:11; Num 14:28–34). David endured twenty-two years of flight from the murderous hand of Saul before he was crowned the undisputed King of Israel (2 Sam 5:3). Nehemiah was greeted by broken down walls, burned gates, determined enemies, physical threats, a demoralized work force, internal dissension, and grave personal danger (Neh 2:10, 13; 4:8–10; 5:1–5; 6:2). Paul commended Timothy to the Philippians only after twelve years of difficult missionary work as his most trusted associate (Phil 2:22). Leaders with proven character are those who have learned to trust God in the hard experiences of life. “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn your statutes” (Ps 119:71).

B. Motive—Why the mentor does what he does

Nothing short of a doxological motivation will enable a mentor to have an abiding, deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his students. Moses pleaded for the welfare of Israel on the basis that their destruction would damage God’s reputation among the nations (Ex 32:11–13). Joshua imitates his mentor when after the demoralizing defeat at Ai, he prays for Israel’s deliverance arguing that the Canaanites will “cut off our name from the earth. And what will You do for Your great name?” (Josh 7:9). David, “the man after God’s own heart,” despite his colossal failures, defended God’s honor against the insults of the Philistine giant (1 Sam 17:45–47) and re-established the joyful worship of the Lord at the center of national life (2 Sam 6:12–22). Daniel at the peril of his own life announced God’s judgment upon Belshazzar who exalted himself “against the Lord of heaven . . . in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified” (Dan 5:23). Nehemiah worked tirelessly for the physical and spiritual

restoration of God's people "out of reverence for God" (Neh 5:15). The actions of mentors must be expressions of grateful hearts attuned to the glory of God, lest they be self-serving acts performed to attract the approbations of one's peers (Mt 6:2-4; 5-8; 16-18).

As one continually guards the heart as the "wellspring of life" (Prov 4:23) and the place of decision and destiny, the pitfalls that commonly attend positions of influence can be avoided such as concerns for personal reputation, status, image, popularity, recognition, or worldly definitions of success. Pursuing God's glory and the welfare of God's people releases one from being inflated by triumphs or dismayed by setbacks. Rather than seeking visible monuments to one's accomplishments, he seeks divine benediction (Mat 25:21-23).

C. Agenda—What the mentor pursues as the defined mission

Mentors are faithful stewards of the divine mandate—to fish and to feed, to evangelize and to teach, to pioneer and to pastor. They focus with laser-like concentration on God's clearly stated agenda, that is, the evangelization of the lost, the edification of the saved, the establishment of vital churches, and the expansion of God's effectual rule over individuals throughout the world. Paul is the premier example of missional leaders driven by the divine agenda. His clearly defined mission was to "preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 1:17). Paul, therefore, avoided missional ambiguity, drift, and confusion.

1. Take the initiative by seeking opportunities to impact others for the sake of the divine mission.
2. Concentrate on personal character and godliness in order to impact others toward a life of holiness.
3. Face ministry hardship with persevering faith so that one's character reveals a refined resiliency.
4. Put off self-aggrandizing motives and exercise one's mentoring ministry before an audience of one as opposed to simply an audience of many.
5. Make certain that one's focus on God's singular mandate is not lost due to competing agendas that tend to be organizational and programmatic.

III. Power of the Mentor

What is it about personal mentoring that leaves such a lasting imprint on the life of its beneficiary? The power of personal mentoring is clearly exemplified in the life of Barnabas, “the son of encouragement.”

A. Sacrificial Giver

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, is presented in Acts as a sterling example of the spirit of generosity (Acts 4:32–37). The Apostles appended to him the nickname Barnabas, literally in Aramaic-- “son of prophecy,” but explained by Luke as “son of encouragement.” His monetary gift to the church is the first in a series of ministries of encouragement to which Barnabas dedicated himself.

B. Bridge-builder

After Paul’s conversion when he first arrived in Jerusalem, the disciples were unwilling to receive him. Saul was their former persecutor responsible for the incarceration, torture, and death of many of their fellow believers (Acts 7:58; 8:1–3; 9:1; 22:3–5). The disciples feared that Saul was pretending conversion in order to infiltrate their ranks and wreak havoc upon the Christian community (Acts 9:26). At the same time, Saul’s former Jewish colleagues were incensed at him for advocating the cursed Nazarene as risen Lord and Messiah (Acts 9:20–23). At this moment Barnabas steps in, “laying hold of” Saul and brings him to the Apostles (9:27). Barnabas related the story of Saul’s conversion and that Saul had fearlessly proclaimed Christ in Damascus. Barnabas was a trusted advocate and witness. He demonstrated biblical love that protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres (1 Cor 13:7).

C. Teacher

A large number of pagan Greeks had embraced the faith of Christ in Antioch and needed follow-up and teaching. Barnabas was chosen to lead and develop the new work (Acts 11:22). Barnabas saw evidence that the grace of God was at work in the lives of the new believers and it gladdened his heart (11:23). He avoided cultural issues with the Greeks that had no moral bearing and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all of their hearts (11:24). Luke mentions that Barnabas was a good man, morally upright and generous-hearted, a man under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit, and one who had a confident trust in the Lord directing his words and deeds (11:24). The result was that a large number of people came to the Lord.

D. Developer of a Promising Leader

The leadership team in Antioch consisted of five members led by Barnabas with Saul who was perhaps the youngest member since he is mentioned last (Acts 13:1). Barnabas and “Saul” had been set apart by the Holy Spirit through the congregation to undertake a difficult pioneering work in Cyprus and Galatia. John Mark, the young cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), joined the two missionaries as their helper (13:5). After they completed their work in Cyprus, they sailed north to Perga. There John Mark left them and returned to his home in Jerusalem (13:13). Mark may have been homesick, ill, or unable to withstand the rigors of the work. The narrative, however, points to the change in leadership of the team from Barnabas to Paul as a possible reason for Mark’s departure. A shift in terminology occurs in Acts 13:9 where Saul is designated for the first time by his Roman name, Paul. Until this point the two are always referred to as “Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:26, 30; 12:25; 13:2, 7; cf. 13:13). Upon arrival in Perga the group is identified as “Paul and his companions” (13:13). After this the regular order with a few exceptions becomes “Paul and Barnabas” (13:42–46, 50; 14:1, 3, 20, 23; 15:2, 22, 35). The scene in Lystra is telling. Barnabas is equated with Zeus, the fatherly head of the Greek pantheon. Paul is compared with Hermes who is the chief spokesman and carries out the instructions of Zeus with speed and diligence. The indication here is that Barnabas was in the role of teacher and mentor, while Paul was in the forefront as evangelist and preacher. During the last seven years Barnabas had introduced Saul to the work in Antioch, helped him develop his gifts of evangelism and teaching, and supported his gradual ascent to leadership of their missionary team. When Paul began to step forward as the more dynamic preacher (cf. Acts 13:16; 14:8) and aggressive trail-blazer, perhaps Mark became disillusioned, only to return later to seek a second chance (15:37).

E. Defender of Truth

Though there was a brief moment where Barnabas had acted out of character and had been corrected by Paul (Gal 2:13), both men stood shoulder to shoulder when Judaizers from Judea arrived at Antioch and demanded that the Gentile believers be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses as a precondition of salvation (Acts 15:1). They vigorously defend justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the Law (15:2; cf. Gal 2:15–21) and report the great wonders that God has done among the Gentiles through them (15:12).

F. Restorer of a Failed Brother

After an extended six-month furlough (A.D. 49–50, October–April), Paul requested of Barnabas that they return to Galatia and re-visit the churches planted on their first journey. Barnabas desired to take John Mark along with them (15:36–37). Mark had returned to Antioch from Jerusalem and apparently requested to rejoin them. Paul denied this request since Mark had deserted them during the first journey (15:38). Neither man was able to give way. Their harsh disagreement separated a seven-year ministry partnership. Paul and Silas left for Galatia; Barnabas left for Cyprus with John Mark (15:39–41).

Paul may have been too harsh and Barnabas may have been too lenient. Nevertheless, in five years (A.D. 55) Paul salutes Barnabas as an example of one who has relinquished his right to have a wife for the sake of the ministry (1 Cor 9:6). Twelve years later (A.D. 62) Paul sends greetings from Mark, who is with him in Rome, to the church in Colossae (4:10) and to Philemon (24). Paul commands the Colossians to receive Mark when he comes to them. Later, Paul asks Timothy to come to him in Rome and to bring along Mark who is “profitable for the ministry” (2 Tim 4:11)—a striking commendation for a previous deserter.

Patristic evidence indicates that Mark became the amanuensis of Peter during the final years of the apostle’s life (Carson, Moo, Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 92–95) and eventually authored the Gospel of Mark. In the end Barnabas’ policy of giving the young man a second chance produced salutary results both in John Mark’s life and in the churches, a legacy that Paul acknowledges.

Conclusion

The “son of encouragement” gave so that there were no needy persons among them (Acts 4:34). His intercession with the Apostles enabled Paul to move freely in Jerusalem and boldly proclaim the Lord Jesus (9:28). His encouraging words contributed to the great number of new converts in Antioch (11:24). By using Paul’s evangelistic and preaching gifts, the pioneering work in Galatia was established (14:21–23). His second-chance policy helped turn a young deserter into a fruitful minister (2 Tim 4:11). It takes little foresight to carp at, harshly criticize, and deflate the struggling hopes of young, inexperienced men beginning to engage in spiritual warfare. The son of encouragement nurtures hope by drawing on the resources of the Lord to transcend human limitations.

One wonders, humanly speaking, whether Paul would have become the great pioneer to the Gentiles if Barnabas had not taken him to the Apostles in Jerusalem, had not rescued him from obscurity in Tarsus, had not fully incorporated him into the leadership team in Antioch, and had squelched the dynamic gifts of a young colleague in the missionary enterprise. One would also question whether John Mark would have recovered from his early failure to become a profitable servant of Paul, amanuensis of Peter, and author of the second Gospel, if Barnabas had not given John Mark a second chance. Though Luke provides only five vignettes of Barnabas, his influence far outweighs his coverage. Fourteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written by men helped on their way by Barnabas—a testimony to the incredible power of the mentor who facilitates the success of others.