

Chapter 4

Help! Where Are the Mentors?

That is a heart cry from some young and older Christians who want to be mentored by a Christian they respect. They want to live for the Lord and serve Him better. The cry goes up – where are the mentors? But why is mentoring rare? Here are a few thoughts relating to the lack of mentoring:

One reason we have referred to is that many do not know what mentoring is, so there is need for teaching.

A **second** reason relates to a failure to recognise the need for mentoring, possibly related to assumptions made by Christian leaders. For example, it is suggested that the main means of grace such as Sunday preaching meetings and weeknight Bible study/prayer meetings are adequate for Christians, especially when supplemented in Christian fellowship. There is no need for mentoring.

Mentoring is never intended as a substitute for the means of grace when the church meets to hear God's Word and pray together. Mentoring is supplementary, more personal, and seeks to encourage and develop the potential and gifts of an individual in going on with the Lord and serving Him. Some may soon become church leaders or assume leadership in a Christian movement aiming to evangelise and disciple people. Here is an additional need not necessarily met by the means of grace.

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A **third** reason is that some Christian leaders have no time to mentor. Some Christian leaders are under enormous pressure and even suffer discouragement, burnout, and exhaustion. One must feel sympathy, for, too often, pastors or other leaders do not receive the support or understanding required.

A **fourth** reason is that a leader can doubt whether he or she is suitable for, or even capable of, being a mentor. The subject of mentoring may arouse a sense of fear and inadequacy, which often may not be expressed but is felt keenly by those who struggle in some areas of their lives and their work for the Lord. They need to be understood and mentored too!

A **fifth** reason is that often Christian leaders are unaware of the needs of others, which can be due to a lack of good interpersonal relationships and skills. What do I mean? There are several aspects that need teasing out here. For example, fellowship between Christians is often at a superficial level and conversations after and between meetings, even if reasonably serious, remain at a relatively superficial level, without developing into more personal engagement with individuals. Christian fellowship, of course, is much more than sharing a coffee or cake after a meeting, talking about the weather, health, work, or family. How can we get beyond polite, general conversation and fellowship to share real needs? Acceptance of one another, mutual respect, confidentiality, and genuine love are required to move forward in this area, with the need for one or two individuals to take the initiative in breaking through these 'polite' barriers in fellowship sensitively, without being brash and overbearing.

There is need, especially for leaders, to know their people well pastorally, and to care. We are all different in terms of personality, temperament, and background, but often shyness can keep us back from sharing openly, or even

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approaching someone who needs support. One lesson I learned was the value of listening to what people say. Too often in conversation a person may not really be listening and may then be perceived as being disinterested. Genuinely listening to people is an indication to a person that we care, and care enough to listen well. Here is one way we can engage in genuine fellowship and begin to know one another better.

There is one **final** reason why mentors in Christian circles may be in short supply. Too many Christians are ill-equipped to serve as a mentor. Let me explain. I meet young Christians in their teens and twenties who are serious in living out the principles of Matthew 6:33: *'But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.'* They are passionate about loving and honouring Christ in their lives. They are eager to serve the Lord well. Some have considerable leadership potential and need to be encouraged, advised, prayed for, and befriended. A mentor needs at least to be as Christ-like as *they* are and be respected for his/her lifestyle and commitment to Christ.

I re-emphasise the need for more quality mentors, especially for young Christians. Age is not the determining factor but rather integrity, Christ-likeness, and a deep interest and concern to see believers growing in grace and being enabled to live their Christian lives consistently and fruitfully. Prayer needs to be at the heart of any mentoring relationship, as well as trust and confidentiality. Could you, with the Lord's enabling and grace, become a mentor for a young Christian, irrespective of age difference?

Mentoring has been described as 'the missing key' in equipping Christians. Underlying this question is disappointment regarding the lifestyle and lack of spirituality of Christians, including peers. This is a generalization, of course, yet young Christians need an example of consistent Christian living that they can respect and follow. And

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they are not alone. Kevin DeYoung, in his book *The Hole in our Holiness*, thinks there ‘is something missing in the contemporary church scene’, namely consistent Christ-centred living, marked by obedience and a passionate love for the Lord.¹

There is more. A reasonable grasp of the Bible is needed, and wisdom in relating God’s Word to situations and varying needs. Maturity in the Christian life and a prayerfulness that is authentic in private life, as well as in meetings, are qualities that are essential in mentoring. To be able to share concerning our ongoing personal experience of the Lord and what we are learning about Him in the Word are, again, important for a mentor. You may think you are not qualified to mentor. That’s how I always feel, but by the Lord’s grace and the Holy Spirit’s enabling we are privileged to model the Christian life. Where are the mentors? They are amongst us, but we need to practise Matthew 6:33 and take our privileges and responsibilities seriously. Are we living under the lordship of Christ?

1. Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in our Holiness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 12.