

Building One Another

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Titus 2:1-8

Sermons Series:
Best Spiritual
Practices

*Mentoring is
the impact
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Think of a person whose intentional influence on your life helped shaped who you are today. A parent. A teacher. A friend. A youth group leader. A person in your place of employment. I am sure you can name several. I sure can. I remember when I was in graduate school, my friend Stan Ide called me. “Meet me in the Sweet Shop,” he said. The Sweet Shop is the soda shop on the campus of Purdue University. He took out his Bible, opened it to the Old Testament Book of Daniel, turned to chapter four and said, “Read it to me.” I said, “Read it to you? What?” He said, “Read it.” So I read it. It is the story of how King Nebuchadnezzar, who had been warned by God to be humble, is full of himself and is strolling around one day saying to himself, “Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). Immediately, he was driven out of power for seven years to wander among the animals until he acknowledged God as the sovereign One who rules over all. After reading that, my friend Stan looked me

in the eye and said, “Take that lesson to heart, Stan!” In Jim Collins's latest book, *How the Mighty Fall*, Collins says the number one reason great companies fail is the hubris, the pride, the arrogance born of success. We hear reports of that every day in the news. I first heard it from my mentor friend Stan Ide and the story of Nebuchadnezzar, and I can see, looking back in my life, how much he helped me, and the negative consequences in my life when I have ignored his word.

A mentor is a person in your life who helps you develop, helps you become the person our Lord wants you to be. Your mentors may be older than you but can be your age or younger, as well. A mentor is a person whom God uses to help you grow, and you are a mentor as you help others grow. Mentoring is the impact and influence of life on life that imparts faith and other knowledge and skill. It is one life building life into another life! Now we have many mentors in our lives. Some from our growing up years, our schooling years, some who helped us learn our professions, others who helped

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us grow in faith or helped us learn the skills of living, from playing golf to cooking pies to balancing our bank accounts. They have been our parents and our grandparents, our friends, our pastors, our teachers and authors whom we have never met but who have deeply influenced us.

This summer, we are in a series on Best Spiritual Practices. Some of those practices focus inwardly as we spend time reading and reflecting on Scripture – the Bible, as we pray and as we spend time in self-examination and so on. Then, there are the corporate spiritual best practices that involve our families, friends and others in the fellowship of the church. Today, we talk about the corporate spiritual practice of mentoring and the role of mentors in our lives and of ourselves as mentors, and specifically, as spiritual mentors, whose aim is to build one another in our knowing of Jesus and being sent to serve him.

If you have been using the devotional guide that Glenda has prepared, you will have noticed the verses this week all relate to this concept of mentoring. So there is the famous 2 Timothy 2:2, “...and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.” We see four generations of spiritual mentors in that verse. “What you have heard from me” – I

am the first generation, you are the second. “What you have heard from me—generations one and two—entrust to faithful people—generation three—who will be able to teach others as well—four. Me—you—faithful people—others. As one of my spiritual mentors, Chuck Miller, put it, being a mentor is reproducing in others what the Spirit of God has done in your life and enabling them to pass it to a third generation. When you influence a person’s spiritual life, you actually have the capacity of influencing a great many people through them. In our text for this morning, we see how older people, men and women, may influence and be mentors to those who are younger and that everyone is to be a model of the Christian faith—mentors of the faith to still others.

When I was about thirty years old, I was living in in West Lafayette, Indiana. At the same time, Elton Trueblood was a great Quaker theologian and professor at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, about a two-and-a-half hour drive away. Elton had been tremendously influential in my life with his books, with great titles such as *The Incendiary Fellowship*, *The Company of the Committed*, *A Place to Stand*, and *The Humor of Christ*. Elton was about eighty years old at the time. I called him and asked him if I could spend some time with him. He said to come.

“One generation shall laud God’s works to another.”

-Psalm 145:4

When I arrived at his home, he invited me to sit with him on the little wooden swing outside, next to the house. So we were swinging back and forth and Elton was talking about the significance of the Bible, and reading and studying the Bible on a regular basis for anyone who wants to experience the reality of the God who loves us. Of course, I already knew that and, in a moment of the very hubris my friend Stan Ide had warned me about, I assumed Elton was being a bit glib, a bit superficial, a bit obvious. Then he began talking about the little wooden swing we were on and that when he built it he first excavated the area next to the house and had several tons of rock brought in. I raised an eyebrow. Several tons of rock under a little wooden swing? That didn’t make any sense to me. I knew that to install a little wooden swing all you need to do is go to Home Depot and buy two or three bags of Sacrete, a home concrete mix, and the swing would be very solid.

Then Elton said, “Stan, I was married to my first wife for twenty-five wonderful years and she became ill and died, and I experienced a time of very deep grief. After awhile, I was remarried and my second wife and I were married for twenty-five wonderful years and she has just died, and I am again in very deep grief.” He turned to look me in the eye:

“Young man, build your life on a foundation.” That went in pretty deep. Suddenly, his talk to me about the Bible and the gigantic crushed rock foundation under his little wooden swing didn’t seem go glib, so superficial. In fact, they went together! He was telling me the Word of God would hold me up and connect with Jesus, who loves me when life is rough. He was right.

And he wasn’t finished. When I was getting ready to leave, Elton Trueblood said, “I want to show you something in my living room.” There on the mantle over the fireplace, he showed me a small, wind-up clock. Tick-toc. Tick-toc. He said, “My mother wound that clock every day for most of her life and now I have wound it every day for many decades. Young man, there are some things in life you must do *every day*.” He was referring to the reading of God’s Word and the inward best spiritual practices that sustain any Christian. He was teaching me the rhythm of your day; how you begin it and how you end it in preparation for the next day are central to your faithfulness. Two weeks ago, a young man in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, emailed to ask if I would help him grow in his faith. Guess what I have asked him to read? Two books by Elton Trueblood! As the Psalmist said, “One generation shall laud God’s works to another” Psalm 145:4. The

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spiritual mentors in your life have reproduced in you what God has done in them so that you may be a mentor to others and pass it on.

The finest mentor in all of time and eternity was and is Jesus Christ. As Mark 3:14 says, “He chose twelve to be with him...in order to send them.” Jesus knew the essence of mentoring others is deliberately sharing life with them, the with-me principle, and passing your faith and life skills to others. It is why introducing our children to Jesus and talking about our faith with them is the most significant thing we can ever do for them. Long after we are gone and our ability to counsel and mentor our children, including adult children, is no longer physically possible, if we have connected them with Jesus, he will be their lifelong mentor and lover of their souls from now to eternity.

The most significant Christian mentor in my life besides Jesus was Jim Tozer, who taught me to know and grow in Jesus. When I first met Jim, I was twenty-one years old and a new Christian but not very churched. Driving to a K-Mart one Sunday morning, I got lost and drove up in front of a Covenant Presbyterian Church, where Jim was pastor. I thought, “I think I’ll go in.” Jim had just returned from a seminar on how to speak about the Christian faith to others and

invited people to join his class. I went up to him: “Dr. Tozer, I would like to join your class.” Remember, he had never laid eyes on me before. He said, “My class is full but I visit patients in the hospital every Monday afternoon. Why don’t you come with me.” It was the pure use of the with-me principle. He didn’t invite me to accompany him to the hospitals to teach me how to visit sick people but because it was a time in his busy schedule we could be together. He taught me to share my faith, and I witnessed his love for Jesus, which inspired my own love. I remember he named his fishing boat “The Word” because he liked to spend time in the Word! Years after I left him, I came across the copy of a letter that had been written to him many years earlier objecting to the construction of a new addition to the church building complex. People objected to the cost and the effort involved, and it was signed by 135 very substantial members of that church. You can just imagine how difficult it would be to receive such a letter and, yet, Jim never stopped, never wavered, never yielded. He not only preached courage, he was courage and he taught me about courage. They built that building and the church flourished. He was mighty in spirit and loved to say, “With sustained enthusiasm you can accomplish anything.” He was a mentor in

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my life whom God used to shape me into who I am today.

Does mentoring mean forcing others into the mold that is you? By no means. It is you reproducing in others what the Spirit of God has produced in you, so that they may grow into the unique persons God intends them to be. As Dick Halverson, one of my mentors, used to say, "Allow the Holy Spirit the same freedom with the next person that the Spirit had with you!" Last Sunday, after the 9:30 service, I was in the hall when I felt my phone vibrate and saw that our daughter Shelley, who was out of town, had called. Thinking it was unusual for her to call on a Sunday morning, I went to a quiet place and returned the call. She said, "Dad, I have been reading Ephesians, Chapter 6 in the New Testament and I want to read verse four to you." Now while I have read Ephesians 6 many times, my mind was blank, and I didn't see this one coming as she read, "Fathers (I thought, "uh oh.") Fathers, do not exasperate your children." While she was laughing with glee, I said, "What about your mother? Are you saying she has a clear shot on goal?" "No, Dad, this is talking only to fathers!" Of course you get it. Mentoring is equipping and encouraging a person to grow, but if it is over burdensome, the person is crushed not encouraged to grow into unique person God wants him or her to be.

Effective Christian mentoring is offered, not out of hubris or arrogance, but out of a humble heart that only wants to pass on what God has given you. It is you, running with the Olympic torch of faith in Jesus that someone else passed on to you, getting ready to pass it on. First you hold it. Then the person to whom you are passing it holds it with you and you let go of it and they hold it and keep on running, only to eventually pass it on again. So mentoring begins with you holding something, then sharing it and finally letting it go with another person. Chuck Miller taught me four phases of mentoring—of passing the baton of faith and the life skills God has given you to another person. These four phases work in passing on your practice of Bible reading to a child or your knowledge of Jesus or other matters in life—from how to change a flat tire, mow the lawn, cook a meal to participate in a conversation at table.

The four phases of mentoring are Phase 1: I do it. Phase 2: I do it and you are with me. Phase 3: You do it and I am with you. Phase 4: you do it. So take reading the Bible, making a pie or going fishing. First, I do it – whatever "it" is –read the Bible, make a southern gumbo, go fishing. Second, I do it and you are with me. You (perhaps as a child at home) are with me watching me do it – read the Bible, make the

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Phase 4: you do it.

gumbo, catch fish. Third, you do it and I am with you. Now you are giving reading the Bible, cooking, fishing a try while I am there to watch and to encourage you, offering counsel, as appropriate. Finally, you do it. I am out of the picture, in the background encouraging you. You can add a fifth step. You do it and someone else is with you. The cycle repeats.

For some years, my parents lived in New Orleans in a home near the shore of the beautiful Lake Pontchartrain. While visiting there, I frequently saw people using little round nets about two feet in diameter to catch crabs and thought it looked like fun. So, one summer I bought the nets and rope, got some chicken from mom, and the whole family walked up to the lake. My sister, Denise, worked in New Orleans, and she joined us for the adventure. I tied chicken wings to two nets and flung them out into the water. We threw Frisbees and flew a kite for about fifteen minutes. Then I pulled the nets up and saw there were no crabs. I tossed the nets out again and fifteen minutes later checked again and sure enough *there was a crab on the net*. I pulled it in quickly before it could crawl off the net and flipped it out on the ground. I assumed the crab would make a beeline for the water and instead it made a beeline for me! The crab and I

began to circle one another. No matter how I approached the crab, it turned, snapping its huge claw at me. At that point, my sister, Denise, walked over and in words I have not appreciated for the twenty-five years since said, "Is my big brother being a sissy?" The family loved it.

I replied, "No. I am just taking my time—observing the crab outside of its natural habitat." "Would you like me to pick it up?" she asked. I realized at that point that I should have remembered that she had lived in New Orleans for years and knew all about crabbing. "Well, okay." I said. Wham! Denise slammed her foot on top of the crab, pinning it to the ground. She reached behind the crab, picked it up, and tossed it into the bucket. Before I could even say thanks, she said, "Did you watch what I did?" "Sure," I replied. She picked up the bucket, dumped the crab out again, and to my surprise said, "Now you do it!" Back to circling the crab, I finally stomped on it, picked it up and threw it into the bucket. Denise came up and said, "Good job, big brother! However, you did not pick up the crab from the very center of its backside. You know that if that was a large crab [large?? I thought it was huge] and if you grasped it where you just held it, the crab would have bit you. You must hold them in the back like this," and she showed me again. So she used the four phases of

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mentoring. First, she did it. Second, she did it and I was with her watching and learning. Third, I did it and she was with me—offering counsel and guidance. Fourth, I can do it and if any of you want to go crabbing I can take you with me and teach you!

So who have been the mentors in your life? Thank God for them. If they are living, thank them personally! Their gifts to you and the influence of their lives on your life has helped shape you into the person you have become. If you would like the experience of having a spiritual mentor here at VPC, we have small groups specifically for those who want this spiritual mentoring. As we approach the fall, keep an eye out for opportunities to sign up.

As we grow as Christians, we are called to mentor others. True growth and transformation result in this leadership of others because our discipleship is for the sake of others. For whom is God calling you to be a mentor? A child or grandchild in your life? A neighbor? A co-worker? Others here in the fellowship of VPC? People eyes are the eyes of Jesus for people. See the people in your life through the eyes of Jesus, and trust that Jesus is the true mentor as you seek, on his behalf, to encourage others to grow.

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