

Mentoring

Dear Amy,

The best pastoral advice that I have received, and that I can offer is: *Find someone to mentor you, and be a mentor to another!* This advice comes out of my twenty-five years of pastoral experience, the most profitable and enjoyable being those in mentoring relationships.

It is clear from Scripture that Paul and Timothy had a special relationship (see 1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 1:2). Timothy was Paul's *son in the faith*, meaning Paul was instrumental in his conversion. He wrote two letters of pastoral instruction to his dear friend and ministry colleague. Paul mentored Timothy both by presence and instruction.

However, this was a two-way relationship, undoubtedly good for both Paul *and* Timothy. Paul stated that he had no one with more compassion and commitment than Timothy. When Paul faced the end of his ministry and death, Paul asked Timothy to come be with him. Timothy was in essence, a co-laborer with the apostle, a partner in the gospel ministry. These two spiritual giants, who glorified God in their service to the church, seem to be bolstered by a very special relationship.

There are other biblical examples of ministry relationships that I could cite here, the most obvious being that of our Lord and the disciples, but I think the example of Paul and Timothy should suffice. I only want to establish the fact that

relationships, particularly mentoring relationships, are important and valuable to successful ministry in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It seems a little ironic to me as I look back over my early years of ministry, that although I knew what the Bible taught about discipleship, the thought of mentoring never entered my mind. This was probably due to my youthfulness, my individualistic nature, some *Lone Ranger* role models, and most likely a lack of awareness concerning mentoring. And I haven't been alone. It seems like many churches have majored on discipleship, rather than mentoring.

But discipleship and mentoring are different. Discipleship represents a teacher/pupil relationship. Mentoring represents a friend/advisor/coach relationship.

Amy, I shudder to think how many dark nights, painful experiences, mistakes, and near fatal falls I have faced all by myself. This was not, and is not, God's plan for us. He gives us His Holy Spirit, *and* He also gives us one another. Our God is patient, longsuffering, merciful, gracious, loving, and compassionate. And most often He reveals these gifts through the people He sends our way. We all need friends, especially in times when support and counsel is required. This shouldn't surprise us. After all, the *one anothers* in Scripture are quite clear.

As pastors we have so much to share, and yet so much to still learn. Personally, I like to help younger colleagues with concerns like working with the church board, dealing with powerbrokers, managing the church when you don't have natural management ability, handling conflict and building healthy congregations. I frequently address these issues individually, but our church has

also established a Pastoral Mentoring Institute. At the institute regular times of sharing and prayer are included, so that pastors, prospective pastors and church leaders can feel understood and supported.

Let me share a mentoring analogy with you. I love racquetball, and in my learning of the game I discovered a principle that is equally applicable to pastoral mentoring. If you want to be good, you need competition at three levels: first, you need someone who is not as good as you are, so you can practice your shots and still win; second, you need someone whose skill level is equal to yours, so you can be stretched to the limit of your ability; and third you need someone who is better than you, so you can gauge your progress, still learn and remain humble.

Pastoral mentoring needs the same three levels.

First, I have pastors who I am helping. I have drawn toward me several younger, less experienced colleagues. Their questions allow me to think through and share what I have learned and am learning. This affords me the opportunity to be a big brother to other pastors and make an impact on their lives.

Second, I have friendships with pastors who are at a similar stage of development with me. Our ministry experiences and churches are similar. In these relationships, we share what God is doing without the need for bragging or trying to *one-up* each another. Yet we also stretch one another. These relationships allow me to compare notes with pastors who are almost exactly in the same ministerial shoes.

Third, I am developing relationships with pastors who are farther down the road than I am. A number of them have been pastoring effectively for more years than I have; some have ministries that are larger. These relationships allow me to expand my vision, my thinking, and my creativity. They allow me to learn from those who have faced more challenges than I have experienced. They graciously provide help, advice, coaching and support.

So, if I could offer any advice about ministry, it would be *don't go it alone*. For the Kingdom's sake, and for your well being, develop mentoring relationships with other pastors.

Your friend in Christ,

Joey Johnson

The House of the Lord, Akron, Ohio

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work.

If one falls down his friend can help him up.

But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10