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MENTORING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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MENTORING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

Mentoring has radically impacted my life. So many things that I do are a result of the mentors that God has placed in my life. Some mentors were intentional. Others were instinctive. But all have been used to make a radical impact in my life.

Mentoring is God's primary method to develop His leaders. We see numerous examples of this all through the Bible. In this series of posts on my blog, I want to briefly look at several examples of mentoring from the Bible. I hope to challenge us to be mentored and to teach us how to mentor others.

But first, what is mentoring? The word "mentor" is both a noun and a verb. The dictionary definition is "an experienced and trusted adviser" or "to advise or train." Here are some ways that other people have defined mentoring:

- "A relational process between an older, more mature, more knowledgeable, *or* more skilled person and another person who learns in some intentional way." (G. C. Newton)
- "A relational experience in which one person, called the mentor, empowers another person called the mentoree, by the transfer of resources (such as insights, skills, values, connections to people who can help, finances, other materials)." (R Roberts)
- Mentoring is a concept and process that every responsible Christian who is serious about passing on the faith should be involved in at some point. It is a critical component of parenting as a parent guides, nurtures, and prepares a child for life. As believers, we should be committed to the process of mentoring another in order to ensure the ongoing success of the church. (M. J. Anthony)

The first time the word "mentor" is used is in Homer's *Odyssey*. In the book, Mentor is a wise man asked to over see Ulysses' house while he is away fighting. Mentor is specially tasked with taking care of Ulysses' son Telemachus. Mentor and Telemachus develop a lasting relationship through which Telemachus matures, grows, and and succeeds.

Mentoring is one of the most exciting and effective ways to prepare people for life and leaders for ministry. I hope that you will enjoy this study of mentoring in the Bible as much as I have.

Jethro and Moses - Part 1

One of the first instances of mentoring in the Old Testament is the example of Jethro and Moses. Notice several things we can learn about mentoring for their relationship in Exodus 18.

First, the foundation of mentoring is a close relationship (Exodus 18:1-8).

In these verses, we see the closeness of these men. They greeted one another. They were concerned about each other's welfare. They spent time together talking. They told each other about what was going on. No doubt, this relationship had been cultivated over the forty year period that Moses was a shepherd in the wilderness (Exodus 3:1).

Often, we focus too much on the mentoring and not enough on the relationship. Without a close relationship built by trust, love, and mutual commitment, mentoring will not work.

Second, the only way a mentoring relationship will work is for there to be transparency (Exodus 18:8).

Moses had a willingness to tell what was going on ("Moses told his father in law all that the Lord had done...") Moses was willing to be vulnerable. He was willing to admit fears, weaknesses, mistakes, and concerns. And I have no doubt the Jethro was just as transparent as Moses.

Third, the mentor must genuinely desire the best for his protégé (Exodus 18:9-12).

Jethro was very excited about how God blessed and used Moses. Moses' victory was Jethro's victory. He was happy when things were going well for Moses. He got at least as excited if not more excited than Moses over what God had done for him. He threw a big feast for Moses, Aaron, and all the elders of Israel.

We need to learn to celebrate the successes of those we are mentoring. We should be their biggest cheerleader. Instead of bragging on our accomplishments, we should brag on how God uses them.

In the next post, we will at two more mentoring lessons from Jethro and Moses.

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Jethro and Moses - Part 2

This is part two of a look at mentoring lessons from Jethro and Moses. We already observed that: 1) the foundation of mentoring is a close relationship, 2) the only way a mentoring relationship will work is for there to be transparency, and 3) the mentor must genuinely desire the best for his protégé.

Here are two more lessons about mentoring that I think we can see from these men:

First, mentors make positive investments in the lives of those they are mentoring (Exodus 18:13-23).

Moses' leadership lacked. He was a fairly new leader. He led Israel well in times of crisis, but he was not so good at overseeing the day to day affairs of the people. Moses had to learn that different seasons of leadership require different leadership skills. A mentor is there to help continue developing those he is training.

Moses tried to do everything himself (18:13) He did all the judging. We are not sure why he did. Maybe it was a lack of trust. Maybe he did not know he should train and delegate to others. Whatever the reason, he thought he was doing right (18:15-16). Like, we often do, he made many spiritual excuses for why he was not training and mentoring others.

Jethro helped Moses develop as a leader and trainer of others. He questioned Moses' method (18:14). He then pointed out why his method was not good (18:17-18). It was not good for Moses, because he was going to wear away. It was not good for the people who had to wait all day. It was not good for the work of God, which was being hindered by his trying to do everything.

Jethro offered wise counsel (18:19-23). He did not suggest that Moses stop judging, stop being a representative of the people to God, stop being God's spokesman to the people, or stop teaching the people God's laws and how to live (v.19-20). Jethro came up with a very helpful, practical solution (v.21-22). He told him to choose out of the people able men of character who could help and to let these men help with the judging. As a result of Jethro's counsel, things were easier for Moses and the people were better serve (v.22-23).

If we are going to mentor others, we must be committed to positively investing in others. It is not about using people to build our ministry; it is about using our ministry to build people. Mentoring only works that way.

Second, mentoring only is helpful if we are teachable (Exodus 18:24-26).

Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law! There were many reasons, he could have not listened:

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- Moses had already been greatly used by God.
- Moses was already leading a huge amount of people.
- Moses could have thought, “You are just my father-in-law, what do you know.”
- Moses could resist letting others get involved and losing control.

Moses was known for his meekness and humility (Numbers 2:3). The fact that he listened to his father-in-law and took his advice shows teachability. Moses did not think he had arrived and that he did not need any help.

Moses followed Jethro’s advice to the letter. He hearkened and did all that Jethro said. He chose able men out of Israel and set up heads over the people.

Often we complain about not having a mentor, but mentoring will only work if someone is willing to be taught!

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Moses and Joshua

There are quite a few passages that deal with the relationship of Moses and Joshua. I would encourage you to look at each, but here is a summary of what we learn from their mentoring relationship.

Joshua was a good person for Moses to mentor because he showed potential early on in the exodus (Exodus 17:8-16).

Joshua was chosen to be Moses' minister following the victory over Amalek (Exodus 24:12-14).

- He was given more opportunity to learn and develop as a leader because he had proven himself at this battle. His "promotion" was to a position of service.
- He was given the opportunity to go places and see things that even the 70 elders did not get to experience (Exodus 24:12-14, 32:15-18).
- When mentoring others we need to exercise patience. Moses did not make Joshua second or third in command, he just gave him an opportunity to serve. We need to be careful to not push people forward to fast.

Joshua showed love for and dedication to the the Lord and the tabernacle of the Lord (Exodus 33:9-12).

- Joshua was constantly around, learning, watching, growing, and maturing.
- Must preparation for leadership is often behind the scenes and under the radar. More than just leadership abilities, a knowledge of and love for God is essential in our growth and preparation

Joshua learned a lesson about humility from Moses (Numbers 11:24-30). Here we see that:

- Good mentors are secure in their calling and do not feel threatened by the gifts and blessings of others.
- Good mentors don't envy when they see God using someone else.
- Good mentors don't need to defend their position.

Joshua proved himself to have courage despite the fears of the majority (Numbers 13-14) While others focused on the obstacles, Joshua saw what the Lord could do for them. Because Joshua and Caleb tried to convince the people to trust God, they would be allowed to enter the land 40 years later. From Joshua we learn that those who would be Godly leaders must stand for what is right even when everyone else wants to do wrong. They must not be intimidated or allow fear to control them.

Moses prepared Joshua to receive the baton of leadership (Numbers 27:12-23). He honored him in front of the people, encouraged him, challenged him, and reminded him that God would be with him (Deuteronomy 31). From this, we learn:

- Of utmost important to us should be who will be our successor.

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- God will ultimately choose the man, but we can help to prepare the men that God just might choose.
- As we prepare our successor, we need to honor him and do all in our power to encourage him and to make him a success.
- We are not a success until we have a successor and we make him a success.

The day came that Joshua had to step up and lead the people without Moses' help (Joshua 1). The right kind of mentoring will prepare men for the day they will have to stand alone without their mentor. We must learn everything we can because one day our opportunity will come to lead.

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Moses and Caleb

Relevant Scripture Passages: Num. 13; 14:6–9; 34:16–19; Josh. 14:6–15).

The mentoring of Moses is not something that is directly described in the Bible but more implied. It appears that Moses groomed Caleb for leadership, and inspired in him an unswerving faith in the Lord's promises.

He was chosen to be one of the spies. He had the courage to still the people and challenge them to possess the land despite a resistant majority. Because he had another spirit, God allowed him to live on to go in to possess the land.

Caleb was chosen to be one of the spies as well (Numbers 13:6). Even at 85 years of age, he had not lost his vision, his courage, and his desire to do something big for God.

The spirit, the zeal, and the courage of Caleb was no doubt inspired by the example of Moses. Moses became the leader of the people at age 80. Caleb learned from him that it does not matter what age you are, God can still use you and do great things through you. Moses' mentoring of Caleb was probably less formal than Joshua, but it still had a big impact in his life.

Samuel and Saul

Saul was a young man with great potential and much natural ability. Saul started out well relying upon his natural ability, but his reign quickly deteriorated due to a lack of character and godliness.

Samuel did his best to try to shape the character of Saul. Even when Saul rebelled against the Lord, Samuel kept challenging him to repent and return to God.

From the story of Samuel and Saul in 1 Samuel, we learn a few things about mentoring:

- 1. Mentors can only do so much.** The people they mentor must be willing to obey God and must be willing to let God develop their character.
- 2. Mentoring can be a heart-breaking thing.** When we open our hearts up to love and help people, we are vulnerable to getting hurt. Samuel was excited about the young king and wanted the best for him. (10:1) Saul made mistake after mistake that cost him the kingdom (13:8-14, 15:9-35). Samuel mourned for Saul because he was rejected from being king (16:1).
- 3. We should not get all of our hopes and dreams so wrapped in one person that we cannot move on and help others when that one individual does not work out (16:1).**
- 4. Who we choose to mentor may not always be the guy with the greatest potential or the one that everyone would pick first (16:6-13).**

Jonathan and David

Jonathan and David were friends but more than that. Jonathan was most likely older than David and certainly of a higher status, but he was willing to do everything in his power to make David a success. Notice several things about their mentoring relationship:

First, Jonathan was a mighty man of God himself. He won several decisive victories for Israel and single-handedly took on a whole garrison of the Philistines (1 Samuel 13-14).

Second, Jonathan became a very very close friend to David after the victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 18). Jonathan made a covenant with David, and his friendship was the most precious gift David was ever given.

Third, Jonathan demonstrated loyalty to David despite very adverse circumstances. Jonathan defended David before his own father, continually spoke good about David, and was at peace about David becoming the next king in his own place (1 Samuel 19-20).

Fourth, Jonathan was committed to encouraging and helping his friend. When David was running for his life, Jonathan endangered himself by going to David and encouraging his hand in God (1 Samuel 23:16-17).

Mentoring lessons:

- For mentoring to take place and be most effective, there must be trust, loyalty, sacrificial love, and no envy.
- The key to making others a success is unconditional love, sacrificial investment, and unselfish joy at another's advancement.
- If we want to mentor, we must relinquish our claim on the throne and do all in our power to exalt another to the throne!
- To effectively mentor, we must be committed to being a friend, an encouragement, and a help even when it may cost us greatly and put us at great risk.
- We need to be sensitive to key times of discouragement and crisis and be there to help and lift them up.

Where would the great king of Israel, the man after God's own heart, have been if it were not for his friend and mentor Jonathan who loved him, encouraged him, and believed in him? Read 2 Samuel 1:17-27 to see how David felt about Jonathan.

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Elijah and Elisha

One of the best examples of intentional mentoring in the Old Testament is found in Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah was God's prophet, and God used him in powerful ways. He commanded it to not rain, and it did not rain for three years and six months (1 Kings 17:1, James 5:17). During the drought, He was supernaturally sustained by God at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:2-7) and later through the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16). When the widow's son died, Elijah, with God's help, raised him back to life again (1 Kings 17:17-24). He prayed down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel and then killed the 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40). Later, Elijah prayed and it began to rain again (1 Kings 18:41-46, James 5:18).

But, Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are (James 5:17). He was a man who got weak and tired like anyone else. He got discouraged and ran for his life after the great victory on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 19:1-3). Despite his weaknesses and frailties, God greatly used him and helped him to be a wonderful mentor to Elisha. Elijah shows us that we don't have to be perfect to train others. It is important that a mentor be willing to be transparent so that others can identify with them.

Elisha jumped at the chance to be trained for ministry (1 Kings 19:19-21). Elisha already had a job and some wealth, but, judging by the way he responded to Elijah's invitation, he was not happy. He jumped at the chance to follow Elijah. He was willing his work, his possessions, and his family the ministry. His sacrifices are similar to the ones Christ asks of His disciples (Luke 14:26-27,33). Elijah on the other hand did not beg Elisha to follow him. Just like Christ, he did not want a half-hearted disciple (Luke 9:57-62). Over the few years, Elisha served Elijah. As Elijah's servant, Elisha learned through watching, helping, and being with him. He was extremely committed to Elijah, as seen in 2 Kings 2. He would not leave Elijah's side, and, when it came time for Elijah to leave, Elisha became his successor. He would go on to be used in even greater ways than his mentor.

What are some lessons we can learn about mentoring from Elijah and Elisha.

- Before we can really mentor and train others, we must be who we ought to be.
- Mentors are not perfect people, but they are willing to be transparent and to invest in the one being mentored.
- Mentoring requires a deep commitment by both parties.
- Mentoring is about service not position.
- Mentoring is a long-term commitment.
- Mentoring produces some of the finest leaders, who often do even greater things than the one who mentors.