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1

Mentoring and the Developmental Process

The Development of Character

AS A YOUNG PASTOR, I was dismayed at my lack of effectiveness and my inability to see God's power working in my life and ministry. I decided to take at least a year to study the Scriptures and observe manifestations of God's power in the Bible. I would analyze each of them and uncover principles or insights that could help me. As I finished my preliminary evaluations of the study and began to look for patterns, I discovered that the kind of people God used significantly were those whose character conformed to Christ's.

Although this insight in itself is not very profound, at the time it was profound for me because I had been looking for a magic formula that would help me see more results in my life and ministry. I found that the secret had to do with issues of the heart and character. In Romans 8:29, we are promised that as children of God we are predestined to conform to the image of Christ. God's primary purpose and passion is for us to take on His character and reflect His grace. No matter how much we may excel in any aspect of life, no matter how much success we attain and no matter how effective we are perceived to be, the "success" we reach for in life

will ultimately be limited without character development.

I also discovered that in a successful ministry there is often a revelation of God's power in a dramatic way, in addition to people taking risks and putting their faith on the edge (which can also put it on the edge of disaster). People of character and integrity who take risks are most often the kind of people who see God's power and the fullness of His blessing upon their lives and ministries.

I have learned much more about this as the years have gone by, but I repeatedly go back to the simplicity of this understanding: It is heart, character and integrity, trusting God beyond my own ability and risking faith that really demonstrate His power. Ministry in general and mentoring in particular can be summarized in this same way. As emerging leaders are mentored through stages of personal, spiritual and emotional development, character formation takes center stage. It is the primary component and a constant in the mentoring and developmental processes. If we can follow the pattern set out in the Bible and focus on character formation, God can use it in our lives and ministries. We will be receptacles for Christ's character and power.

Developing the Person in Ministry

Individuals move through stages of life development at many different paces. The order of the stages is far more predictable, however. The following figure, created by Paul Stanley, shows the lifelong developmental phases through three general stages of life.

Lifelong Developmental Process ¹			
Birth-18-----	18-30-----	30-50-----	50+-----
	Age of Learning	Age of Contribution	Age of Investment
	Who am I?	What do I do?	Invest in whom/what?

Stanley's chart helps us identify the changes of focus and perspective that a person needs as he or she progresses through the stages. The "Age of Learning," from ages eighteen to thirty, focuses on being "unbusy," enjoying new experiences, gaining perspective and having a mentor or coach to help in the process. In the "Age of Contribution," from ages thirty to fifty, the focus moves to clarifying all the experiences of one's life to avoid becoming unfocused and reaching a plateau. The goal is to sharpen one's life message or goal for purposes of maximum impact. Peers as well as a mentor will aid in this process. The "Age of Investment," from ages fifty and older, focuses on leaving a lasting legacy and passing on the passions that have driven one's life. At this point, peer mentors are crucial for keeping focus and perspective.

Mentoring is viewed as the facilitation of the lifelong developmental process whereby individuals move through various stages of human, emotional, spiritual, educational, intellectual and other aspects of development. With this view, we can then work with the "big picture" of the formative process rather than getting lost or stuck in one particular aspect or stage of mentoring.

Perspective

In any given week, I receive several phone calls from young leaders who have "perspective" questions. Some-

times the questions are theological, other times they are about personal perspectives on a particular topic, and still other questions are about trends, histories, etc. The emerging leader often ends the conversation with a word of appreciation and a statement about how challenging it is to get perspective.

Throughout the mentoring process it is common for a mentoree to ask for perspective. Sometimes the perspective is historic, subcultural, a local or regional issue or maybe even a theological reflection. The mentoree becomes keenly aware that the mentor has both experience and wisdom that can prove helpful. The process is most effective when the mentor offers insights, reflections and perspective rather than answering the question and settling the issue. It is true that good questions don't lead to answers but to more questions.

Key Questions

Within the mentoring relationship, key questions are crucial to helping guide the mentoree in life direction and character development. These are questions that help the mentoree reflect on reasons behind personal issues or behaviors or establish personal guidelines for dealing with a particular issue. By exploring these issues, the root of the problem is attacked and resolved. This is the opposite of superficially mending the outer layer of the "mental" skin that the outside world sees and which inevitably tears in a time of crisis. By asking good questions and listening, and through effective feedback (both reflective and directive), the mentor aids the emerging leader with perspective and life development.

Coaching

After more than a decade of teaching pastoral theology in seminaries, I discovered a consistent pattern in student papers: They tended to focus more on behavior than on life direction. Several times each semester I would receive a paper from a well-intentioned student who had included some thought such as, “If I could only clean up my life. If I could only get rid of this besetting sin or this unresolved issue. If I could only be *holy enough*, then I would see God really at work in my life. Then I would be more effective for the cause of Christ and the kingdom of God.” These students think that if they could just get past one particular issue (usually one that seems most significant at the time), if they could only lead a life that was more holy, then they would see more of God’s power.

Mentoring is the facilitation of the lifelong development process whereby individuals move through various stages of human, emotional, spiritual, educational and intellectual development.

Over the past several decades the emphasis throughout North America, both in society at large as well as in the Church, has been on the development of cognitive understanding and behaviorism. The general consensus has been that if a person modifies undesirable behavior, thinks the right thoughts and creates a healthy environment in which he or she makes good decisions, he or she will be developing effectively. In simpler terms, if a person thinks the right thoughts and does

the right “stuff,” he or she will develop effectively. Therefore, in theory, this formula *should* develop the right kind of person. But behaviorism has often failed to produce balanced, healthy leaders, and what is missing is related to issues of character.

This is where the mentoring process can be used to facilitate the mentoree’s direction in life and the formation of character that will produce an effective individual. While behaviorism changes people from the outside in, the mentoring process picks up where behaviorism fails because in mentoring, people are changed from the inside out. It should focus more on *coaching* in life direction rather than on *modifying behavior* or *changing thought processes*. Since the mentoring process consists of forming the overall person, and character development in particular, it will be more useful to focus on facilitating the individual as he or she moves through the stages of development rather than concentrating primarily on behaviors, cognitive development or even skill acquisition.

It is important for the emerging leader to understand that issues related to personal and character development will not change quickly or be alleviated with some form of behavior modification. Changes will occur over time, with prayer and reflection, obedience and faithfulness, and often with more than one attempt. What is really important is the formation of character, walking with God over the long run and understanding His grace and forgiveness. *This* is the formation of godly character whereby one becomes the effective servant God can and does use.

The Power of Permission

Within many organizations, including the Church, there is often a subtle (and sometimes not so subtle)

pressure to conform to established guidelines and expectations, whether they are admitted and known to all or disguised and left to be discerned by the individual. They range from glass ceilings to age and education requirements, from attire to patterns of speech, from theological positions to political preferences. Some are blatant while others are masterfully disguised. But underneath each is the pressure to conform. These pressures can be overwhelmingly stifling to an individual's growth.

The power of permission may be one of the single most significant things a mentor can offer to a mentoree. It may be permission to fail or even to succeed wildly. It may be permission to work outside the general consensus or guidelines. It may be permission to be more passionate than controlled. It may be permission to work fewer hours in the office in order to pursue one of the personal development issues that the mentoree is currently facing.

The other side of permission involves the mentor allowing the mentoree to explore his or her motives, drive and passions and giving permission for the mentoree to be healthy, effective and faithful, but not necessarily amazing at any particular stage of his or her personal development.

One highly motivated young pastor told me of the time he took a course for personal development. As he finished penning a paper in which he articulated all of his goals, dreams and visions (in his mind, masterfully articulating what his life and ministry were going to look like), the professor gave him a few words of wisdom that changed the course of his life: "You have articulated everything

well. It is an ‘A’ paper. But what would happen if you weren’t ‘super’? What if you did not become this amazing person? What would be wrong with simply being faithful and effective and enjoying your life, faith and ministry? Why do you have to be ‘super’?”

The young pastor said that these remarks forced him to do a lot of deep reflection on some things he really did not want to think about. But he began asking himself, “So what if I am not ‘super’?” He admitted that while reflecting on his life he discovered that he had never been *great* at anything. He was a good athlete, but not great. He had been a B+ student who had had to work hard to get some A’s. He realized that he was never amazing. That same day he made a decision to work less and think more. He decided to focus less on success and being “super” and to enjoy his life, family and ministry more. He said that the result, to his surprise, was that not only was life far more enjoyable, but he was far more effective at everything he did. By trying less he actually succeeded more.

The words spoken by his professor were words of permission. Speak those words of permission to the next generation of emerging leaders so they can explore their gifts and strengths, so they can have less pressure to be “great” and more energy to focus on what God has given them in order to become effective leaders.

The Power of Intentional Development

A colleague of mine once told me a story of a time when he was a presenter at a conference. To his surprise, he discovered that one of his former college pro-

fessors was also presenting. The first morning they met together for breakfast. They reminisced and caught up on some acquaintances they both knew. As the conversation began to naturally wind down, the former professor said, “It really is hard to know when students graduate how they are going to end up, isn’t it?” They grew silent while they continued to eat their breakfast. After a while it seemed like the professor had something to say. He nervously tugged at his tie, stretched his neck, stammered a bit and then said, “Frankly, you have been a surprise to all of us.” My colleague responded, “What, did you peg me for a loser?” The professor said, “Not at all. But no one had any idea that you would develop as rapidly as you have and go as far as you did. It’s been great to see. But, frankly, it’s been a surprise to everyone.”



As emerging leaders are mentored through stages of development, character formation takes center stage. It is the primary component and a constant in mentoring.

When observing emerging leaders, whether they are interns, recent college graduates, seminary students, ministerial hopefuls or evangelist wannabes, it is nearly impossible to predict who will be highly effective, who will be faithful to his or her calling, marriage or church and who will finish well. Two key indicators that seem to point people to a successful end in the development of life, faithfulness and effectiveness are: 1) the lifelong pursuit of character formation throughout the various stages of life; and 2) the presence of a mentor(s) to guide them.

My colleague and his professor came back to this conversation more than one time during the conference. From the professor's perspective, the reasons behind my colleague's development, both in its quality and pace, centered around intentional development—intentionally pursuing and taking an active role in one's development—and character development. This book will analyze and discuss the principles of *intentional development* and *character development* that enable young leaders to be effective in their lives and their ministries. We will also recount the power of the mentoring relationship in relation to the developmental process.

Key Thoughts from This Chapter

1. Character development is the key to effective mentoring and leadership development.
2. There are three key stages to life development:
 - a. The Age of Learning, Ages 18-30
 - b. The Age of Contribution, Ages 30-50
 - c. The Age of Investment, Age 50 and older
3. Mentoring involves:
 - a. Providing perspective
 - b. Asking key questions
 - c. A focus on coaching rather than behavior modification
4. The power of permission that is given from mentor to mentoree involves:
 - a. Permission to succeed and fail
 - b. Permission to try new things
 - c. Permission to be different and not conform

- d. Permission to not be amazing, but to pursue excellence

Questions for Further Reflection

1. Since a primary key of mentoring is character development, what aspect of character formation needs to be developed in your life at this time?
2. Where do you see yourself in the stages of life development? Are you comfortable with your character development, the areas in which you've invested your life and your potential legacy at this time in your life?
3. Regardless of your age, as you look toward your next stage of development, will your focus be more on the character, emotional, spiritual or simply human dimension of your life?

Action Plan

1. Identify yourself by age and season of life. What are two things that clearly represent you at this time?
2. Begin to identify your two greatest mentoring needs or desires.

Note

1. *Mentor Training Seminar Manual*. Charlotte: Leighton Ford Ministries, 1996. Used with permission from Arrow Leadership Ministries, www.arrowleadership.org.