



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

# MENTORSHIP: HOW TO FIND ONE AND BE ONE



BEAU HUGHES



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## INTRODUCTION

Having served as a pastor of a church filled with college students for the better part of the last twenty years, one of the most frequent questions I receive is, “How can I find a mentor?” The question is typically asked by a student or recent graduate who, surrounded by peers their age, is aching for wisdom, counsel, and relationship with someone who’s older and further down life’s road. Even if they’re not exactly sure what it means, they want a mentor. Many even assume it is a sort of birthright of the Christian life.

Inevitably, this desire and hunt for mentors from the younger women and men in our congregation provoked the question from the other side, “How do I mentor someone?” Though being older or in another stage of life may make you an automatic candidate, when someone asks you to mentor them, what does that mean? What are they really asking? What does mentoring someone entail? How do you do it?

Over the years, we've seen this dance play itself out hundreds of times in our church. People are eager to find a mentor. Others are eager to mentor. Yet neither group knows quite where to begin. More fundamentally, they're not sure what mentoring even is. The hope of this field guide is to provide a foundation for what it means to find and be a mentor.

### WHAT IS MENTORING?

Generally speaking, mentoring is godly guidance for all of life.

As Christians, it's the task of helping others bring the entirety of their lives under the lordship of Christ Jesus. Thus, mentoring involves guidance of all kinds, where one person shares their wisdom, knowledge, skills, and experience to help someone else grow in those areas.

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A mentor is someone whose life is worth imitating, one who intentionally invests in a mutually enriching life-on-life relationship. The mentee is eager to learn and grow, seeking wisdom and guidance from a worthy example. Christian mentoring, then, is a relationship where someone older imparts all-of-life wisdom to someone younger. This kind of relationship is broad and includes what we often call discipleship.

Beyond this description of mentoring, Scripture provides an instructive and clarifying example of mentoring that we now consider.



## PART I: PAUL & TIMOTHY

One of the clearest pictures of mentoring in the New Testament is the relationship between the Apostle Paul and Timothy. In fact, over the years, many people have even framed their questions and requests for mentoring around this relationship.

In the book of Acts and the two personal letters the Apostle Paul wrote to him (1 & 2 Tim.), we see that Timothy blossomed from a young disciple of Jesus to one of Paul's successors in ministry. The glimpses of Timothy's development under Paul's mentorship provide us a strong foundation and model for mentorship. What follows is a reflection on Paul's mentorship of Timothy as described in Scripture, followed by practical implications for mentoring today.

Though it is tempting to skip the theological reflections and go right to the practical implications, resist the urge. These reflections on Paul and Timothy's relationship is not theological throat clearing. It's meant to help us gain and articulate a theological foothold for what a distinctively Christian approach to mentoring entails. Again, how can you truly mentor someone

or be mentored by someone if you don't know what the aim of mentoring is? These reflections from Paul and Timothy's relationship provide a stable foundation and practical categories that will enable both mentors and mentees to confidently engage in their own mentoring relationships.

***Paul's Mentorship of Timothy: A Summary***

Although not much is known about Timothy's early life and faith, the correspondence from the Apostle Paul to Timothy informs us that he was trained in the fear of God from an early age by his Jewish mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (2 Tim. 1:5). These godly women were Timothy's first and most foundational mentors. From Timothy's childhood, these faithful women acquainted him with sacred Scripture and modeled the faith for him (2 Tim. 3:14–15).

The best we can tell, Paul's mentorship of Timothy began in the city of Lystra during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). By the time Paul discovered him, Timothy had already developed a good reputation among his church (Acts 16:2). That is, he was a prime mentee candidate. During his trip, Paul noticed something in Timothy that compelled him to bring the young man along with him on the mission (Acts 16:3). It seems Paul was active and opportunistic when it came to mentoring. He was on the lookout, seeking opportunities to mentor those who, like Timothy, stood out among the next generation. His mentorship with Timothy began this way.

As he left Lystra, Timothy was immediately immersed in the work of ministry as he followed and assisted Paul and Silas: Early into the journey, Paul left Timothy with Silas, providing him the first of many opportunities to step up and take on more responsibility (Acts 17:14). Paul also gave Timothy special assignments along the way (Acts 19:22) and entrusted to him more and more leadership. Paul poured into Timothy and worked tirelessly to raise him up in the ministry. Though the book of Acts provides a summary of the things Timothy saw, we are only left to imagine the lessons he learned and the commentary the young man received from Paul along the way. Undoubtedly, being plunged into such experiences caused Timothy to grow and develop quickly in his convictions, calling, character, and competencies. As the years unfolded, Timothy grew from one of Paul's many

mentees into one of the apostle's most trusted and faithful co-workers.

Seeing Timothy as more than a fellow worker (Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 3:2) and brother in Christ (2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 3:2), Paul considered Timothy his beloved and faithful child in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 1:2). In his personal letters to Timothy, Paul offers us a glimpse of their mentoring relationship, including his own hopeful expectations for how Timothy would continue to grow and flourish long after the apostle was gone.

Though Paul was apprenticing Timothy toward a particular vocational end — ministry — there is much in Paul's mentorship of Timothy that is applicable to any mentoring relationship. Indeed, one of the overarching themes emerging from Paul's two letters to Timothy is his intent to mentor Timothy in four particular areas of his life: his convictions, calling, character, and competencies. The Apostle Paul knew that these four areas of his mentee's life were foundational to his flourishing. Thus, we learn from Paul's example that nurturing a mentee in these four areas is the underlying aim in our mentoring. A closer look at Paul's two letters to Timothy help clarify these categories.

***The Letter of 1 Timothy***

Paul's first letter to Timothy focuses on instructing Timothy to lead and oversee the church in the city of Ephesus. As one of his special assignments, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to confront false teachers in the city.<sup>1</sup> It was an unenviable task. Although Timothy was in his early thirties<sup>2</sup> and still relatively young by the world's standards, Paul believed his mentee was up to the pastoral challenge. He wrote the letter to affirm Timothy as his representative in Ephesus and to encourage him in the work.<sup>3</sup> The letter brims with insight for mentors seeking to learn how to develop the next generation of leaders.

***Conviction and Calling***

Paul begins his first letter to Timothy with a personal address and charge to Timothy, exhorting him to remember the ultimate aim in all his life and work: "Love that issues

from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). Reminding Timothy of his foundation for accomplishing this charge, Paul urges him to remember “the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith” (1:18–19). This is how Paul opens the letter. Before he gives directions about what Timothy is to do in his work, he begins with what is more urgent. He reminds Timothy of his vocational calling to his work and urges him to hold tightly to the convictions of his faith that provide his foundation to do so.

Paul believes that Timothy’s sound doctrine and calling to the work — a call validated by the gift of the Spirit and through the prophecies made about him<sup>4</sup> — will empower Timothy for the grueling job in front of him. Paul understands that, without steadfastness in doctrinal convictions and confidence in his calling, Timothy’s faith and ministry will be shipwrecked. This is how he opens this personal correspondence to his mentee.

Paul ends the letter in a similar way. Alluding to how Timothy’s convictions and calling should shape and characterize his lifestyle, Paul admonishes Timothy to flee the temptations and enticements of his flesh: “Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (6:12–14). A few sentences later, Paul ends the letter by pleading, “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you” (6:20). It is noteworthy that Paul ends the letter the same way he begins it, impressing upon Timothy that his conviction, made visible in his good confession, is paramount to his pastoral duties in Ephesus.<sup>5</sup>

The two bookends of Paul’s letter provide significant insight into two pillars of distinctively Christian mentoring. As he expresses to Timothy how he should carry out his ministry in Ephesus, Paul insists that it is of first importance that Timothy remember, keep, and guard the confession of his faith and assurance of his vocational calling. Paul’s angst and exhortation for Timothy to internalize this

is clear by the way he begins and concludes his letter. Yet, in his mentorship, Paul also makes plain to Timothy that he will need more than a constant remembrance of his Christian convictions or confidence in his calling to flourish. Timothy will need to build on these foundation stones by developing his character and competency.

#### *Character and Competency*

In one of the most memorable passages connected to mentoring in all Scripture, Paul sheds additional light on the aim of mentoring:

*If you put these things [the previous instructions] before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.*

*Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim. 4:6–16)*

In these verses, Paul reiterates the necessity for Timothy to train himself in the “words of faith and of the good doctrine” that he has followed (4:6). He also echoes his earlier warning to “not neglect the gift” (4:14) that God has given Timothy. This is further evidence of Paul’s concern for Timothy to nurture his convictions and calling. But there’s more in this passage.

The thrust of the text is an admonishment for Timothy’s conviction and vocational calling to shape his two primary ministries: his lifestyle and his teaching. Gordon Fee explains that this passage “makes it plain that Paul thereby wants Timothy to function as a model (vv. 12, 15), both for godly living (v. 12) and for ministry (vv. 13–14)—all for the sake of his hearers.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, anchored by his convictions and calling, Timothy was to be a man of impeccable character and notable competence as he taught and modeled the Christian life. The mixture of Timothy’s lifestyle (vv. 7, 8, 12, 15–16) and his teaching (vv. 6, 11, 13, 15–16), fueled and informed by his convictions and calling, are the actual work of pastoral ministry to which Timothy was to devote himself.

First Timothy shows us that the aim of mentoring is strengthening the mentee’s convictions and vocational calling. What a mentee believes about God and what God has gifted and called him to do vocationally in the world as a part of the Great Commission are foundational to their flourishing. Yet, this letter also shows us the centrality of developing a mentee’s character and competency. If we were to summarize Paul’s aims for mentoring in 1 Timothy, we would say that those aims are to develop one’s conviction, calling, character, and competency. We see this in 2 Timothy as well.

***The Letter of 2 Timothy***

Paul’s second letter to Timothy is more personal than his first. Although Paul remains concerned about many of the same problems among the church in Ephesus, this letter takes on a completely different tone. Much of this is explained by the fact that Paul’s personal situation has drastically changed since his first letter. By the time Paul pens his second letter to Timothy, he is in prison awaiting execution, and his imminent death overshadows his last correspondence with the man he’s mentored. Fee expounds,

In a sense it is a kind of last will and testament, a “passing of the mantle.” In contrast to 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy is intensely personal, recalling their earliest days together (3:10–11; cf. 1:3–5) and, above all, appealing to Timothy’s

abiding loyalty—to the gospel, to Paul himself, to his own calling (1:6–14; 2:1–13; 3:10–4:5).<sup>7</sup>

Paul shows his heart in this letter. Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin summarize it this way: “Paul focused his interest on Timothy. This is a personal word to a beloved follower.”<sup>8</sup> His words provide a picture of his dying hopes for his son in the faith. The letter is a vulnerable summary of how Paul hopes Timothy will persevere in the work of ministry and commend his faith to the next generation. It provides one of the clearest glimpses of the heart and hope of Christian mentoring.

*Conviction and Calling*

Although different in tone, Paul’s words of exhortation in this second letter are similar to what we’ve already summarized from the first. Paul reminds Timothy that his convictions and calling are the basis for his flourishing: “I am reminded of your sincere faith. . . . For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (1:5, 6–7).

Timothy’s “sincere faith” (1:5) and “the gift of God” (1:6) were the starting point for his life and ministry. Timothy was to hold to the sincere convictions of his faith and “fan into flame” the gifts of his vocational calling. Paul holds up to himself as the model for Timothy. He exhorts, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (1:13–14).

*The most important mentoring happens not just, or even primarily, through what we say, but through our very lives.*

Paul hopes and expects for Timothy to learn the most important thing about life and ministry from his own example: sound doctrine leads to sound faith and love. This is the pattern he wants Timothy to follow. Just as he did in his first letter, Paul follows these foundational words by reminding and warning Timothy of what happens to those who neglect to build their lives and ministry around their convictions and calling: They abandon the faith and turn away from their co-workers (1:15). Paul does not want this for Timothy.

Later in the letter, Paul reiterates his hope that Timothy will follow his example and build his ministry upon his convictions and calling:

*You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me . . . continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (3:10–11, 14–15)*

With his death near, Paul’s primary angst for his beloved mentee is the same: that he perseveres in his faith and ministry by holding fast to his convictions and remembering his calling. It seems that Paul cannot repeat these fundamentals enough.

*Character and Competency*

Yet, as with the first letter, Paul makes clear his desire for Timothy to do more than simply hold to his belief and calling. Timothy has been called and gifted in order to teach and model his convictions to others. Paul says, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2:2). It is here that one begins to see Paul’s strategy for maturing the church.<sup>9</sup> Paul has poured his life into Timothy. He now expects Timothy to make the same deposit into others. The work of mentoring is about imbedding convictions and character into the lives of others so that they might turn and do the same. This work of multiplication is what Timothy

was called to do. As he neared death, Paul hoped that his own ministry would advance through Timothy’s faithful and intentional deposits into others.

And, as in the first letter, Paul conveys that Timothy is to do this work by modeling godly character and competently teaching the word of truth. Two passages in the letter make this clear. The first is found in 2 Timothy 2:

*Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. . . . So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2:14–17, 22–26)*

Timothy is to model (2:15–16, 22–25) and teach (2:14–15, 24–25) the Christian life to those inside (2:14) and outside of the church (2:25).<sup>10</sup> In order for Timothy to do this, he must be growing in godly character and developing competency in proclamation. The hope is that God, through Timothy’s lifestyle and teaching, would grant and lead people, especially those opposing his life and message, to repentance (2:25–26).

The last charge from Paul to Timothy conveys the same hope. It is found at the end of the letter. Paul writes,

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke,*



*and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (4:1–6)*

Again, one sees Paul’s vision for Timothy to fulfill his vocation of ministry through a mixture of his patient, sober-minded, and steadfast character and his steady, diligent, competent preaching and teaching. In addition to guarding and nurturing his mentee’s convictions and calling, Paul was aiming to foster his character and competency until the very end.

Paul’s relationship with Timothy provides invaluable insights into the nature of mentoring. One learns from Paul’s letters to Timothy that his mentoring was focused on four particular areas of Timothy’s life: his convictions, calling, character, and competencies. Christian mentoring is aimed at the very same things. Although the assignment and context of our mentoring relationships are different from Paul and Timothy’s, their relationship helps us understand the fundamental nature and aims of mentoring. Any younger person seeking to be mentored and any older person hoping to mentor will be served well by Paul’s instructions and order our mentoring relationships in light of them. The rest of this field guide aims to provide practical considerations about how to do just that.

**Discussion & Reflection:**

1. What aspects of Paul's mentorship of Timothy are illuminating for what our own mentoring relationships should look like?
2. Of the four areas listed (convictions, calling character, competencies), which does you think you most need growth?
3. Do you view your vocation the way described above? What would need to change in order to view it this way?



## PART II: FINDING A MENTOR

There’s a sense in which finding a mentor is easy — just ask! Find someone whose life — whose convictions, calling, character, and competencies — are worth imitating and ask them to be your mentor. But finding a mentor is typically a bit more involved than that. If it were that simple, it wouldn’t be one of the most frequently asked questions I’ve received over the years, and this field guide would be much shorter. But keep in mind, that’s eventually where finding a mentor ends up: you asking someone to mentor you. Along the way, here are a few things to keep in mind that might help you find the right mentor.

**1. Be Mentor-able**

This is easily overlooked in the search for a mentor. And certainly, it’s easy to miss in Timothy’s example. By the time Paul showed up in Lystra, Timothy already had a good reputation among the church. Though we can’t be sure why, Paul saw certain qualities in Timothy that made him a prime candidate for mentorship. That is, Timothy was mentor-able.

As I mentioned earlier, I've encountered many young people through the years who assumed that having a mentor was a sort of birthright of the Christian life. The assumption, often unconscious, was something like, "Everyone gets a Paul." What I've often had to explain is that "No, everyone doesn't get a Paul." And not just because Paul was an apostle! In many contexts, like my local church, the demand for mentors simply outpaces supply. And thus, those whose lives are worth imitating are already mentoring people. Which means there are simply fewer mentors available, and those who are have to be selective who they choose to mentor.

As you look for a mentor, you need to ask yourself, "Am I the type of person who is prepared to imitate a life worthy of the gospel?" Not everyone gets a Paul. And one reason for that is because not everyone is a Timothy. For all that we don't know about Timothy, we do know he was mentor-able. He was eager and ready to have someone shape and strengthen his convictions, his calling, his character, and his competencies. He was already living a Godward life when Paul came through town.

## **2. Know Where to Look**

Another practical consideration in finding a mentor is knowing where to find them. You can find a mentor anywhere. But the ideal place to find a mentor is your local church. That way, your lives are more intertwined — and your mentorship deeper — because your spiritual lives are being shaped by the same congregation. You are worshiping and receiving the same teaching each week. Your doctrinal convictions are generally aligned, as well as your weekly rhythms of worship. Finding a mentor in your congregation provides more opportunity for the mentorship to be life-on-life and not compartmentalized into one area of life. Finding a mentor in your local church goes a long way to assure that the most important and foundational area of the mentoring relationship — your Christian convictions — are shared.

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For many people, the number one hindrance to finding a mentor is that they are simply not in contexts with people who are older or in a different stage of life. Sadly, this is often true even in churches. For many in my church over the years, getting serious about finding a mentor meant they got up earlier and went to the earlier worship service. For others, it meant they began attending the church's monthly prayer meetings looking for a mentor there. For still others, it meant they transitioned out of their community group that was filled with peers their age and into a multi-generational group. Or they joined a men's or women's Bible study specifically to be with older men or women. Whatever the case, for many, getting serious about finding a mentor required them to rearrange their schedules in order to be in places where mentors could be found.

As you think about finding a mentor, are you in the right contexts? What do you need to rearrange in your schedule, and particularly your life in your local church, to be more likely to find someone whose life is worth imitating?

## **3. Know Who You're Looking For**

As you think about where to look for a mentor, it's also important to have clarity about who you're looking for. When you think about women and men whose lives are worth imitating, do you know what that means? Beyond

being Christian, what else are you looking for in a mentor? This is where the categories we gleaned from Paul's letters to Timothy can be useful to you as a mentee. In looking for a woman or a man to mentor you, you are looking for someone who can shape your convictions, calling, character, and competencies.

- **Convictions:** In looking for a mentor, you're looking for someone who is clear and convictional in their beliefs about God and the gospel. They don't need to be a seminary professor or carry around a systematic theology book in their cars, but you need to be confident that this person is rooted and grounded in the truth of God's Word. And more than just knowing and articulating the right doctrine, they should be living their lives in light of it. Remember, Paul encouraged Timothy not only to imitate what he believed but how he lived in light of what he believed. When you're looking for a mentor, you're looking for someone whose life is worth imitating in this regard. And thus, someone who is able to mentor — to shape and direct and strengthen — you in your own Christian convictions.
- **Calling:** In addition to Christian convictions, you're also looking for someone who is able to help you grow in your vocational calling. Whether we are pastors or homemakers or teachers or barbers, our vocations matter in the kingdom of God. We'll steward more time in our lives toward our vocation than anything else, save sleep. This is why integrating our worship and work is so important. Timothy's vocation was pastoral ministry, and the Apostle Paul was uniquely equipped to help him live that calling faithfully. What about you? Do you have a sense of your vocational calling? Perhaps you do and you want to find a mentor who has been serving in a similar vocation. Perhaps you desire more clarity about that and that's why you're seeking out a mentor to begin with. Whatever the case, an important consideration in finding a mentor is finding someone whose vocation and work ethic you respect. Believe it or not, much of your conversation throughout the mentoring will be centered on your

work. As you keep your eyes open for a potential mentor, your own sense of vocational calling, or lack thereof, might be helpful in your considerations.

- **Character:** As one of my own friends and mentors likes to say, "Character is king." In a healthy mentoring relationship, this will be true. We see this in Paul's letters to Timothy. Again and again and again, Paul counsels and reminds and exhorts Timothy about his character. And when it comes to mentoring, you cannot give what you don't have. As you look for a mentor, you are looking for a woman or a man whose character, rooted in and flowering up out of their convictions, is lived in a manner worthy of the gospel. It's a cliché in mentoring and discipling that "more is caught than taught," and this is certainly true with character. For better or worse, your character will be shaped by the character of your mentor. It's perhaps the most shaping aspect of the relationship. As you seek a mentor, keep this in mind. Look past the secondary aspects that might initially incline you toward someone and find a mentor whose character is the most attractive thing about them.
- **Competencies:** Lastly, there will be a variety of life competencies — at work, at home, in relationships, etc. — that you will need to grow in over the coming days and years. A big part of mentorship is having someone to encourage you and spur you along in the areas where you are competent and to give you counsel, comfort, and correction about the areas where you are not-yet-competent. Obviously, this is not to say you need to find a mentor who is omni-competent in every area of life. That person doesn't exist. And there will most likely be areas of life, and perhaps particularly vocationally, where you have more competency and skill than your mentor. What I'm intending to acknowledge here is that in a mentoring relationship where you are seeking godly guidance for all of life, it's important that you respect your mentor's ability to speak to your competencies. In many ways, this will be the area of some of the most practical conversations you'll have. A good mentor will be able to spot and nurture your strongest competencies and

the areas of your most glaring incompetencies. Both are important.

Though this may be a lot to think about, and even feel a bit overwhelming, it's important to know who you're looking for when you're trying to find a mentor. In general, you're looking for someone whose life you've determined to be worth imitating. More specifically, you're looking for someone who you believe is capable of nurturing your convictions, calling, character, and competencies.

**4. Know What to Ask**

Actually making the “big ask” is where the rubber meets the road in finding a mentor. Though finding one is not as easy as asking, the way you approach a potential mentor is an important part of establishing the relationship you're wanting. Over the years, one of the most common responses I've observed to the question, “Will you be my mentor?” is the answer, “What do you mean by that?” So, once you've discerned who you'd like to ask to mentor you, you would do well to consider what you're requesting.

More particularly, it would be beneficial for you to consider how you'd like the “formal” times of mentoring to be structured. Though the structure will ultimately depend on the mentor's availability and preferences, it's helpful to know what you'd like to ask for on the front end. Do you want to meet with your mentor twice a month? Once a week? Do you want the time to be oriented around open-ended conversation, a book study, or some sort of mixture? When and where would you like to meet? Over lunch? At the office? These are the kinds of questions that you might want to think through when you're preparing to ask someone to mentor you. Again, the mentor will eventually determine much of the structure, but thinking through these things on the front end will only serve to convey the sincerity and thoughtfulness of your request. It might also serve you to use the categories above — convictions, calling, character, and competencies — to develop a more specific list of ways you're hoping to grow and develop through the relationship you're seeking.

So when you're looking for a mentor, know what you're

asking. That way, when you ask the question, “Will you mentor me?” and they respond, “What do you have in mind?” you will be ready. In addition to helping you clarify what you're wanting out of the relationship, such thoughtfulness will help the potential mentor begin to imagine with you what the mentorship can look like.

**5. Know Who to Ask**

Another often overlooked resource in finding a mentor is other people! Let other people know that you're looking for a mentor and see if they have any recommendations. If you've decided to find a mentor in your church, ask your pastors or ministers who they'd recommend. Oftentimes, they're able to take their knowledge of your life and the specifics of what you're hoping for in a mentorship, and they can help you identify who might be a good fit for mentoring you. On more than one occasion, I've seen people do this kind of asking for recommendations and get the same name from multiple people. Such confirmation is always an encouragement. Though it can be humbling, it's helpful to let other people know that you're looking for a mentor and to be open to their insight.

**6. Pray**

Last but certainly not least, pray for the mentor you seek. There's a sense in which finding a good mentor is like finding a good friend. You can prepare and pursue one, you can ask around for recommendations, but you can't contrive or make one come about by your own efforts. Ultimately, a formative mentorship, like a deep friendship, is something you'll need to receive as God graciously brings it about. Which will require you to be on the lookout for an answer to your prayers!

If you've read this far, it means you're hungry to find a mentor, to have someone shape and direct you into the fullness of your convictions, calling, character, and competencies. Truly, the most practical action you can take in response to this desire is to pray. Ask God to provide you the mentor you need. And keep your eyes and hands open, ready to acknowledge and receive the mentor he provides. It is our Father's delight to conform us into the image of his Son, so we should not be surprised

if he brings us someone whom he will use to that end. So as you consider who to ask and what to ask them, don't neglect to ask God. He knows exactly who and what you need.

***Discussion & Reflection:***

1. What action steps do you need to take from the above section?
2. Do you think you're ready to be mentored? If so, great! If not, which areas need to be addressed in your life?
3. Who are some people who might be good mentors?



## PART III: BEING A MENTOR

As with finding a mentor, there's a sense in which being a mentor is easy — just say yes! Or better yet, don't wait for someone to ask. Initiate. Find someone whose life — whose convictions, calling, character, and competencies — you want to shape and ask them if you can mentor them. Again, that sounds easy enough, but we know that being a good mentor is more nuanced than that. If it were that simple, there'd be a lot fewer people looking for mentors. But at the heart of mentoring, there is a simple desire to entrust and pass along whatever good God has done for us along to others. In addition to a willingness to do so, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind that might serve your efforts to mentor.

***1. Know You Have Something to Offer***

One of the first and highest hurdles that women and men are confronted with on the way to mentoring is the feeling that they don't have anything to offer. People will ask, "Why would anyone want me to mentor them?" or "What do I have to contribute?" Sadly, these feelings have kept many people on the sidelines who have much to offer.

One way to battle these insecurities is to simply acknowledge that they are normal and to be expected on the mentoring journey. Yes, there are those blessed few among us who seem to know they have something to offer the world. But most, even those who unquestionably have lives worth imitating, don't often feel that way. We simply don't feel like mentors, in part because we're so very aware of the areas in our lives that need mentoring! And that's important to remember: becoming a mentor doesn't mean we've outgrown the need for mentoring in our own lives. But we will never be finished products, so we need not wait until then before we offer to help others. Foundational to being a mentor is the willingness to humbly acknowledge that we have something to offer.

## *Foundational to being a mentor is the willingness to humbly acknowledge that we have something to offer.*

If you think you have nothing to offer as a mentor, ask the person who has requested you to mentor them what they think you have to offer them. And remember that mentoring is not, ultimately, about you. It's about the person you're mentoring. For the mentor, mentoring is more fundamentally about discerning what the mentee needs, and how we can serve them toward that end, not what we have to give. We can all serve others in love. And if it helps you to think about it that way, that's the heart of what you're being asked to offer in mentoring: serving your mentee in love.

### **2. Know What You're Mentoring**

As you seek to steward the privilege and imagine the potential of your mentorship, knowing what you're actually mentoring — what you're aiming to shape, develop, and nurture — in your mentee is important. What are you

hoping to see come about through your mentorship? What's your aim? Again, this is where the categories we observed from Paul's letters to Timothy can be useful to you as a mentor. You're not the Apostle Paul, and you're not mentoring Timothy, but the aim of your mentoring, like Paul's, is to shape the convictions, calling, character, and competencies of the one you are mentoring.

- **Convictions:** The most foundational thing we are seeking to mentor in our mentees is their Christian convictions. Distinctively Christian mentoring is grounded upon distinctively Christian convictions. This doesn't mean you need a seminary degree or carry around a systematic theology in your car, but it does mean that the underlying aim of your mentorship is Godward. To be a distinctively Christian mentor is to understand that your fundamental aim in your mentoring is not to dispense wisdom, although hopefully that it will happen. It's to devote yourself to your mentee being rooted and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- **Calling:** Of course, in addition to helping further ground them in their Christian convictions, you're also going to be helping them remember, and perhaps discern, their vocational calling. Much of your mentorship, as we see in Paul's letters to Timothy, will be centered around your mentee's vocation. You will get to help them think through the highs and lows, the wins and losses, the desire or lack of desire they experience in their God-given vocation. Oftentimes, this will be the most important and pressing issue your mentee faces. They may have even sought you out as a mentor in order to sift through and gain clarity or confidence about their vocation.

This doesn't mean you need to have the same vocation as those you are mentoring, though that might be useful. And some may prefer that. But a firefighter can mentor an accountant and a homemaker can mentor a lawyer. In mentoring, the particular vocation matters less than the Godward way one goes about their vocation. One of the primary opportunities you have as a mentor is to help your

mentee integrate faith and work, to view work as a true calling and vocation in life, and not just a job. You will be mentoring them toward confidence and joy in this calling.

- **Character:** Character formation is the heart of distinctively Christian mentoring. In being a mentor, you are inviting a mentee to follow Jesus and to seek to be conformed more and more to his character alongside you. This is, ultimately, the bullseye of mentoring. So, as you prepare to mentor, make this your primary aim. Whatever your mentee thinks he's asking you to be or do in being his mentor, keep the priority of character formation clear in your mind. You don't have to state it as baldly to them as it's written in this paragraph (though you might choose to), but it needs to remain at the forefront of your vision as a mentor. Again, your primary function is not to dispense secret wisdom and knowledge to your mentee, it's to guide them toward being conformed to the character of Christ, in whom wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

And as you keep character formation at the forefront of your mind in your mentoring, also remember that your mentee will most likely learn more from observing your character than listening to you talk about it. Knowing this, be intentional in the example you set. And be intentional about creative ways you can invite your mentee to witness your life. Invite them into your home or to observe you at work in your own vocation or other settings, if applicable. Whether they know it or not, the most beneficial part of your mentorship will be the effect you will inevitably have on the character of your mentee. And much of it simply through observing your life. Don't lose focus on this. Amidst all the wisdom and experience that the mentee will hope to glean from conversations with you, remember that what your mentee needs most is for his character to be transformed. And a primary way that God will bring that about is through your own example.

- **Competencies:** Lastly, there will be a variety of life competencies — at work, at home, in relationships, etc. — that your mentee will want and need to grow in over the coming days and years. Relax, this doesn't

mean you have to teach them to do everything. And it certainly doesn't mean you have to be competent in all the areas of their incompetence. Indeed, one of the primary ways you'll be able to help your mentee is by letting them see how you too, even though years ahead, are still identifying areas in your life where you need to grow and learn and become more competent. So take heart, your own incompetence is part of what will make you a good mentor!

When it comes to competencies in mentorship, we're primarily thinking about awareness. Part of being a mentor is spotting, communicating, and nurturing the areas of both strongest competencies and most glaring incompetencies. Both are important. And a big part of your role is simply to help them spot these areas of strength and weakness, acknowledge them, and courageously respond to them as faithfully as possible.

### **3. Know Who You're Mentoring**

In addition to knowing what we're mentoring in others, it's important to know who we're mentoring. Though the categorical aims for mentoring are always the same, every mentee is different. And provides you with one of the greatest privileges of any mentorship: the opportunity to get to know the person you're mentoring.

Though uniqueness can and has been overplayed in our culture, the more you know about your mentee, the more specifically and pointedly you'll be able to mentor them. In that sense, it can be like raising multiple children. It's one thing to know how to raise your children generally; it's another to know how to raise each child specifically. You raise them all the same, generally. But you simultaneously raise them all distinctively as well. It's the same in mentoring.

In light of this, enjoy getting to know your mentee. As in parenting, the relational connection you forge with your mentee will open up a world of enjoyment and trust. And this world will never come about if you simply "plug and play" the mentorship. Part of the reason Paul could write the specific and personal things he did to Timothy is because his relationship with Timothy was not merely

transactional. It was more than transferring information or knowledge. Much more.

The more time you take to get to know and love your mentee, the more transformational the mentorship will be. For both of you. Truly, one of the greatest gifts a mentor offers to a mentee is relationship. If character formation is the heart of mentoring, relationship is the soul. Get to know who you're mentoring.

#### **4. Know How You're Mentoring**

In addition to knowing what and who you're mentoring, know how you're mentoring. By this I mean the form and structure your mentorship will take.

There's a seemingly endless variety of forms mentorship can take. What do you want yours to be? Do you want to meet with your mentee twice a month? Once a week? Do you want the time to be oriented around open-ended conversation, a book study, or some sort of mixture? When and where would you like to meet? Over lunch? At the office? At your home? All of the above? What kind of structure would allow you to best press into developing the mentee's convictions, calling, character, and competencies? These are the kinds of questions you might think through when you're preparing to mentor someone. It might take you some time to determine what you prefer or what works best for you. That's okay. The important thing here is to have some kind of structure and consistency, even if that structure and consistency changes over time.

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To begin, you might consider meeting with your mentee once a week. Perhaps you have the same day and time each week but a different setting. This would allow you to begin the process of getting to know your mentee and what the most pressing needs of the mentorship seem to be initially while you two develop a longer-term form and structure to it. Ultimately, your preferences and inclinations should drive what the structure ends up being. Don't be ashamed of this. You're the mentor. And though you never want to be selfish in the mentoring relationship, forming and structuring the mentorship in a way that allows you to serve will ultimately be best for your mentee.

#### **5. Be Present**

Finally, a big part of being a mentor is just being there with and for the mentee. It would be misleading to say that showing up and actively listening is all there is to mentoring. But it's a big part of it. When you commit to being a mentor, you're committing to more than a consistent meeting. You're committing to being present in your mentee's life. For however long the mentorship lasts, and perhaps beyond, you're pledging to be among those who will be there for them. You're committing to being eyes, ears, and a voice to turn to in a unique season of life. Fundamentally, this is expressed within the structured times of the mentorship. But in the healthiest mentorships, it spills over those boundaries.

Whatever the form and structure of the mentorship, show up and be present when you're meeting. Remind yourself that being a mentor is not just about giving time to a mentee: it's about giving quality time. We all know you can be in a meeting or a conversation without really being there. Resist this in your mentoring! Be present. Strive to listen and, in the Spirit of Christ, to love your mentee. When you're with them, be with them. As much as anything, what mentees need from a mentor is a person who is ahead of them on the road who is willing to be with them. To love them by actively listening.

Not disconnected from listening, the greatest gift the mentor can give to the mentee is to pray for them. Sadly, this is an often-neglected part of mentorship, even among



Christians. Despite confessing otherwise, many Christians see prayer as passive and impractical. Which might explain why it is virtually nonexistent in so many mentorships. Why pray about it when you can discuss it with a mentor? The answer: because more transformation can take place in the life of a mentee in an hour of a mentor praying than a lifetime of them discussing.

After all is said and done, the essence of mentorship is presence. In your mentoring, be present. Be present when you're meeting with your mentee. And be present in prayer for them. There will be lots of moments in your mentorship where you will not know what to say, when you feel as if you don't know how to strengthen your mentee's convictions, calling, character, or competencies. At all times, but especially those times, fulfill your mentorship by being present. Show up, listen, and pray.

**Discussion & Reflection:**

1. Are you ready to be a mentor? Who's someone in whom you can invest?
2. Of the above features of a good mentor, which areas are strengths or weaknesses for you?
3. Have you seen examples of good mentors? What can you learn from them?



# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there's one last word of encouragement I would offer to those seeking to find or to be mentors. Mentorships don't last forever. At least many don't. Many, if not most, mentorships are seasonal. God brings mentors and mentees into our lives for specific periods of time and for specific areas of godly guidance.

So as you prepare to find or to be a mentor, relax. This mentorship most likely won't last forever. And it's most likely not the end-all, be-all mentoring relationship in your life or the person's life you are mentoring. Letting go of unhealthy expectations will take the pressure off and, hopefully, allow you to enjoy the mentorship God brings your way.

Yes, Timothy had Paul and their relationship was unique and long-term. But not everyone gets a Paul. Most of us don't. But in God's grace, he is good to lead us to others within his church where we can both give and receive the godly guidance we need to deepen our convictions, strengthen our sense of calling, nurture our character, and encourage us in our competencies. All to the glory and honor of God.

## END NOTES

1. Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 2.
2. John Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 37.
3. Hayne P. Griffin and Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 43.
4. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 58.
5. Platt, Akin, and Merida assert, “Paul returns to the exhortation he began with, and the theme he had touched on throughout the letter—hold fast to the truth of the gospel.” David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 129.
6. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 102.
7. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 13.
8. Griffin and Lea, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 44.
9. Fee suggests that part of Paul’s desire for Timothy to entrust the message to others was so that Timothy could more quickly leave Ephesus to come to Paul’s side. If this is the case, what Paul is encouraging here is more than a simple ministry model. It is also the way the church is brought to maturity more quickly. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 13.

10. As Fee notes, “Paul wants Timothy to model a kind of teaching that will not simply refute error and save his hearers but that will also be used by God to rescue those who have already been entangled in the false teaching.” Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 266.





THE  
**MENTORING**  
PROJECT

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