

The Power of Mentoring

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Leaders naturally take initiative. Perhaps that is why it is so frustrating to stand on the outside looking in. But almost every young leader can relate to the feeling of having something important to contribute without a window of opportunity or a platform for influence. One of the most powerful bridges for young leaders facing a challenge of this nature is the right kind of mentor. No biblical character understood this better than the apostle Paul.

The relationship between Paul and Timothy has been referred to so often by church leaders that their names have been co-opted to represent the interaction between a mentor and a mentee. When speaking to a Christian leader, it would not be uncommon or misunderstood to ask, "Who is your Timothy?" In his final epistle, Paul reaffirmed his value for developing others in an exhortation to Timothy: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will be able to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2) We are accustomed to thinking of Paul the mentor; but rarely has he been viewed as the one benefiting from a mentoring relationship.

Early in his ministry Paul found himself run out of Damascus by Jews who had conspired to kill him. He went to Jerusalem hoping to connect with the disciples. Paul was filled with a sense of destiny flowing from the message given to him by Ananias. (Acts 9:15-16) He had become "more and more powerful" in Damascus, baffling the Jews and proving that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 9:22) But in spite of his radical about-face, zealous ministry and personal giftedness, upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was on the outside looking in. He "tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing he really was a disciple." (Acts 9:26)

Almost every young leader can relate to this stage of the apostle Paul's journey. Overflowing with zeal, passion and a growing sense of confidence in terms of leadership skills, no one was willing to give him a chance to make his mark. He sensed God's call and wanted very much to make a difference. He probably asked himself, "Why can't other leaders see what I have to offer?" Sound familiar?

Thankfully for Paul and the early church, Barnabas was willing to listen to this leader-on-the-fringe, believe in him and take a personal risk to connect him with the apostles. (Acts 9:27) Do you understand how God wants you to respond to this kind of challenge? Are you proactively seeking a Barnabas-like mentoring relationship that can shape your heart and help bridge this important leadership gap?

Mentoring: A Definition

The simplest definition of mentoring is relational empowerment. In sentence form, mentoring has been defined as a relational experience where one person is empowered by another through the sharing of God-given resources¹. The interdependency between

the two key words in this definition, “relational” and “empowerment,” can be described as follows:

The level of empowerment that results from mentoring is directly proportional to the depth of the relationship.

A deep relationship between mentor and mentee opens the door for greater levels of empowerment. Yet it is important to clarify the relational component of mentoring as something that should not be confused with disproportionate amounts of time or social contact. Your mentor does not have to be your “best friend” in order to empower at deep levels. But he or she does need to be someone you trust, can be vulnerable with and respect. This line of mutual trust is critical if the relationship is to generate more than superficial results. One of the often-misunderstood and unintended consequences of mentoring is the limit placed on empowerment based on a superficial (in terms of trust and honesty) relationship.

Mentor Functions & Network

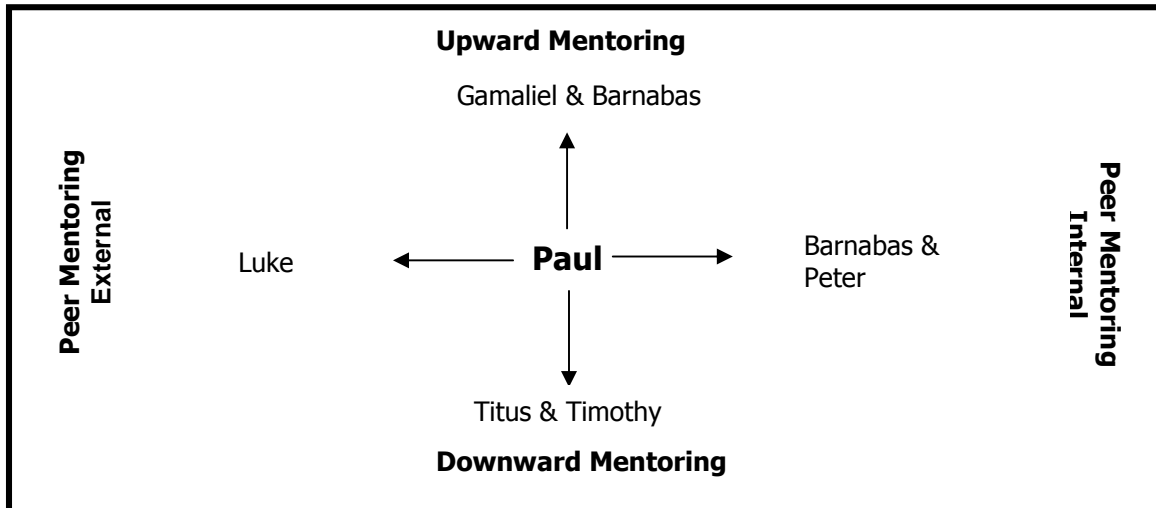
One of the common myths of mentoring is that of the ideal mentor. The fact is, there is no one person that will be able to provide all the input you need. It is much more practical to think about mentoring in terms of the functions mentors performⁱⁱ. The following chart outlines one view of the different ways mentors interact with mentees.

	Mentoring Functions	Central Thrust of Empowerment
Intensive	Discipler	Instruction in the basics of following Christ
	Spiritual Guide	Accountability, direction and insight for questions, commitments, and decisions affecting spirituality and maturity
	Coach	Motivation, skills and application needed to meet a task or challenge
Occasional	Counselor	Timely advice and correct perspectives on viewing self, others, circumstances and ministry
	Teacher	Knowledge and understanding of a particular subject
	Sponsor	Connects mentees with people, resources and opportunities
	Contemporary Model	A living, personal model for life or ministry, who is not only an example but also inspires emulation
	Historical Model	A model character from history, either biblical or historical, who has positively impacted your life

When seeking a mentor it is important to consider the specific mentoring functions you need most and to enlist a mentor that can serve in that role. Pursuing a focused mentoring relationship that springs off a particular mentoring function will help your mentor cut through the fog and confusion associated with a more general approach.

Over a lifetime, a balanced network of mentoring relationships would include upward mentors, who speak into your life, downward mentees, who are receiving input from you, and peer mentoring relationships, in which there is a mutual give-and-take sharing.

An example of this kind of mentoring networkⁱⁱⁱ can be seen in the life of the apostle Paul as follows^{iv}:



Back to Barnabas

Paul's journey into the inner circle of early church leadership clearly hinged upon his relationship with Barnabas. But after putting his personal credibility on the line to introduce Paul to the apostles, Barnabas was most likely among the "brothers" who felt it was better for Paul to leave Jerusalem and "sent him off to Tarsus." (Acts 9:30)

This is an important point we dare not miss. The fact that Barnabas listened to Paul, believed in him and took a personal risk on his behalf, did not immediately transfer to a formal ministry role for Paul. In fact, it culminated in Paul being sent to Tarsus where he would move out of the biblical narrative for at least a decade. Too often young leaders want a mentor as long as he or she will say what the young leader wants to hear or provide an immediate connection with a more highly visible leadership role. While it is clear Paul was seeking a place where he could use his gifts and live out his calling, he did not rebel against the advice he was given or interpret it to be a desire to hold him back^v.

Perhaps the manner in which Paul responded in this crucible moment was what brought him to Barnabas' mind while serving as the leader of the primarily Gentile church in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-30) Clearly Barnabas would have remembered what Paul shared with him in Jerusalem about Ananias' explanation that Paul was to be God's chosen instrument for the Gentiles. What better training ground could Paul have to prepare for this life purpose than in Antioch? It was in Antioch along side Barnabas that Paul refined his understanding of Gentile evangelism and gained valuable experience in the methods he would use for making disciples outside a Jewish context.

What might Paul have learned from his time with Barnabas?

1. *The value of people development.* Barnabas was intentional about engaging Paul and drawing him into a place of service that matched his destiny. The time they spent together in Antioch was marked by a teaching/equipping ministry. This value shaped Paul's leadership.
2. *The importance of generosity.* Barnabas entered the New Testament narrative when he sold a field and laid the money at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37) It was a natural extension of Barnabas' leadership to respond to Agabus' prophecy about a famine by collecting funds and bringing the offering to Jerusalem. (Acts 11:28-29) Paul's values about money and generosity were shaped by his mentor, Barnabas.
3. *Integrity with finances.* Barnabas not only influenced Paul with regard to giving money but also with regard to how to handle it with integrity. Paul's desire to be careful with funds was, I believe, an outgrowth of his time with Barnabas. Paul enlisted Titus' help with future collections, perhaps in part, because Titus had been converted in Antioch and would have been familiar with how Barnabas handled things.
4. *The ministry of encouragement.* Barnabas was the 'Son of Encouragement.' Paul's value for encouraging others was no doubt influenced by Barnabas who had encouraged him at a time when no one else would listen to him.

Making the Most of a Mentoring Relationship

It is clear from Paul's journey that the mentoring relationship with Barnabas played a critical role in preparing him for all that God had intended. There is no evidence Paul took the initiative with regard to his connection with Barnabas. But that should not stop young leaders from actively seeking out wise and experienced mentors to help them along in the journey. Here are a few practical pointers to consider as you seek to make the most of a mentoring relationship.

1. *Be specific in outlining what mentoring function you are asking your mentor to provide and what specific goals you have in mind.* A vague and general request for a mentor will rarely produce the same kind of response as a specific and well thought out proposition.
2. *Emphasize your respect for your mentor's time and define your expectations for the relationship.* Your mentor may misunderstand your request as a desire for a time-intensive socially driven relationship. Don't allow that to create a barrier from the start. Acknowledge your awareness of your prospective mentor's busy schedule and explain you are only asking for a limited amount of time focused specifically around the goals you have articulated.
3. *Affirm your commitment to follow through on any projects or assignments your mentor may give you, to the best of your ability.* Some mentors are understandably skeptical because they have tried to help people before only to discover the commitment level was not sufficient to bring about the desired growth. Going public with your

intention to apply yourself to this learning relationship will both encourage your mentor and deepen the resolve in your own heart.

4. *Offer to compensate your mentor in some way, as appropriate.* If you are approaching a high-level leader that is routinely asked to mentor others, it may be necessary to demonstrate how serious you are about personal development. One way to do so is to offer to pay for his or her input, even if it is by doing volunteer work to help compensate for the time you are taking.

A Word to Mentors

Mentoring is one of the most powerful skills in your leadership toolbox when it comes to developing others. Here are a few things to consider that may help you be even more effective as a mentor.

1. *Identify your "mentor mix" and use it as a boundary for mentoring relationships.* Start by reviewing the mentor functions above and refining your understanding of how you can best help those God brings into your path. Keep in mind that everyone can be a mentor sponsor and that is one of the most critical functions young leaders need. Barnabas served as a mentor sponsor for Paul by connecting him with people and opportunities that would not otherwise have been within his reach.

2. *Use discernment in selecting mentees by screening them in via ministry tasks or "faithfulness tests."* You only have so much time and energy to invest in people and therefore will want to insure you are giving yourself to the mentees who really want your time. One possible faithfulness test could be to give this article to people who want your help as a mentor, asking them to identify which mentoring functions they really need. If what they need in a mentor fits your "mentor mix" then work on calendar related issues to see if you have the time available. If not, seek to become a mentor sponsor.

3. *Involve your mentees in the administration of mentoring relationships by way of a follow-up email or next steps letter.* When you meet with your mentee various additional resources or next steps may come to your mind. Make it a habit of requiring your mentee to note these items and send you a follow-up letter or email that outlines their next steps and any additional action items to which you have agreed.

4. *Utilize group mentoring when common interests and needs overlap.* It only stands to reason that you would want to maximize your time when multiple mentees are seeking similar input. Be careful to manage the dynamics of the relationships as the numbers grow since leading a small group can be quite different than a one-on-one mentoring context.

Working it out...Ideas for application and reflection

1. Make a list of the most important areas in which you desire to grow right now. Then review the chart of mentor functions and try to determine which kind of mentor would

best fit each item on your growth list. Who do you know that may be able to mentor you in your most important growth goals?

2. Think about a past mentoring relationship you have had with an upward mentor. Now review the tips in this article for making the most of a mentoring relationship. How could following these have enabled you to get even more out of that relationship?

3. Review the mentoring network diagram and write down the names of key people who fit in each quadrant for your life. On which quadrants should you be focusing now? Are there noticeable holes in your network?

4. Which mentoring functions do you do best? What should you do now to help prepare yourself to be an effective mentor?

ⁱ This definition of mentoring is taken from the NavPress book *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, authored by Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton.

ⁱⁱ The idea of mentor functions is also outlined in *Connecting*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Clinton and Stanley refer to this as a mentoring constellation. In using Paul's life as an example it is worth noting that Paul had scores of other lesser-known mentees beyond Timothy and Titus. Acts 20:4 lists six, in addition to Timothy. It is also worth pointing out that Barnabas functioned both as an upward mentor and later as a peer. Luke, was on the inner circle of Paul's relationships, but as a Gentile physician was able to speak into Paul's life from a non-Jewish perspective as an external peer mentor.

^{iv} Paul testified to "being thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers" by Gamaliel. (Acts 22:3) Luke was a close companion of Paul's, but as a Gentile physician, he brought an "outsiders" perspective that is associated with external peer mentoring. Peter visited the church in Antioch where Paul served with Barnabas and referred to Paul as a "dear brother." He read Paul's epistles, acknowledging their inspiration as well as the profound truths they contained. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

^v Paul later testified to the fact that Jesus himself confirmed that he should leave Jerusalem and reaffirmed his call to the Gentiles. (Acts 22:17-21)