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# WHITE WING MESSENGER ARTICLE

## Mentoring is a Relational Journey

While serving in Fresno, California, as pastor of Sunnyside Community Church, I became friends with Sue Mallory of the Leadership Network, author of *The Equipping Church*, and Don Simmons, professor at Golden Gate Seminary. Don moved to Fresno to begin an equipping strategy for pastors within the city and brought Sue into a city pastors' gathering. That meeting launched a journey of relationships that transformed my approach to ministry. During that time, I also met Dr. David Ferguson, Founder and Executive Director of the Great Commandment Network. He gave language to what I was discerning, which was essential but could not describe. Each served out of their God-given design, something I had never experienced – ministry discipleship through a mentoring relationship. I know that may be challenging to understand – I was a pastor and had not been intentionally discipled, mentored, or equipped for ministry. Certainly, I had many unintentional role models or examples (that may have been more what I did not want to become than what I did want to become). I would not have called the unintentional models, mentors (as I understand them to be today), but they did help me in my journey of ministry.

However, as David, Sue, and Don began to impart not just the Gospel but their very lives, I realized what I had been missing in mentoring or shepherding my life through the context of relationships in shared life. Their life-sharing with me illustrated visually, not just verbally, what disciplining through a mentoring journey looked like.

Reflecting on these intentional mentors and unintentional examples, I realize both have significantly influenced my life. Pause for a moment and reflect upon people who have influenced your life. What qualities did they possess that helped you? How can you be to others what they were to you? You might even want to text them to say, *"You have really helped my faith walk, and I want you to know I appreciate all you have invested."*

In our Movement, the idea has been to get people to church (in the building), have an exuberant song service as it was called back in the day (today, it's called worship celebration), the preacher preaches a fiery sermon, and gives a compelling altar call. The premise was that if the preacher could get people to an altar, the altar would alter lives. To a very real extent, I am a product of what the altar can do regarding immediate transformation. But it was not until I began to have people intentionally come alongside me that my life was by my encounters with Jesus altered continually through the power of Holy Spirit, my encounters with God's Word, and God's people. And that intentional life-on-life, whole-life discipleship, my mentoring journey continues after 44 years of ministry. What I have had a few do for me has become my life's mission to duplicate in many – through whole-life discipleship that mentors through a relational approach.

Where would you be had you not had others (intentional and unintentional) who were wiser and more experienced come alongside to encourage and help you navigate the challenging waters of life, work, and leadership? A mentoring journey in ministry is essential. Solomon wrote, *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"* The wise man lays a pretty good foundation for not going it alone.

Robert Coleman writes, *"It is believed that the Christian community multiplied four-hundredfold in the first three decades after Pentecost. The growth rate continued remarkably high for three hundred years."*<sup>1</sup> This growth would have never continued if the church did not function with the intentional discipleship that requires the life-on-life mentoring Jesus practiced and instructed His disciples to engage in upon His departure. This kind of growth continued as they moved from people being *"added to the church"* (Acts 2:47) to people being *"multiplied"* (Acts 6:7) by broadening their leadership base by making disciples relationally to increase their capacity for ministry. In *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* by Burton Scott Easton about the early church fathers, he indicates they could be tied to an intentional mentoring journey. Hippolytus was a disciple of Ignatius & Irenaeus, Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, Polycarp, a disciple of John, and John of Jesus. Michael Wilkin states, *"Some of the early church fathers who had a direct connection to the apostles continued to practice a relational approach to discipleship just as their mentors had practiced. Two of these key people were Ignatius, who was a bishop at the church of Antioch in Syria from AD50 – 117, and Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Both men were discipled by the apostle John. Ignatius, for his part, used discipleship terminology more than any of the other apostolic fathers, revealing the most about the practice of discipleship after the death of the apostles."*<sup>2</sup> In the Complete Book of Discipleship, Hull writes, *"Demonstrating a practice of multiplication discipleship, Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, considered himself a disciple of Ignatius."*<sup>3</sup> Virginia Corwin states, *"The Ignatian letters have more references to imitation and discipleship than all the other Apostolic Fathers together."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman, Robert E., *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2001)

<sup>2</sup> Wilkins, Michael J., *Following the Master, A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 314.

<sup>3</sup> Hull, Bill, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 76–77.

<sup>4</sup> Corwin, Virginia, *Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch, Yale Publications in Religion 1* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 228.

Ignatius used the same terminology for discipleship, as found in the New Testament, fourteen times in the six letters he wrote. For example, according to Michael Wilkins, Ignatius wrote, *"I make a disciple, or I become a disciple (mathēteuō), which is the same verb used in Matthew 28:19 when Jesus gave the Great Commission. He also used the noun form of disciple (mathētēs), which means "a learner." Finally, Ignatius uses the term to designate a mentor relationship between a Christian leader and an immature believer."*<sup>5</sup> A study of the early church, the Apostles, and especially Paul shows that the discipleship we should practice in an equipping context is an interpersonal methodology that can only effectively occur in a life-on-life or whole-life discipleship relationship that mentors others for their entire life.

Mentoring is not tied to an information dump from one mind (mentor) to another (mentee), but rather an intentional, collaborative relationship where life is shared personally and individually, collectively in a faith community or in a leadership team context where what some call "mosaic mentoring" can occur. I say "can" because some want to be *"the sage on the stage"* instead of *"guide beside."* A mosaic is made with many differently shaped pieces of different colors, but each adds value to the overall scope of work. Hence, our lives are shaped by what we learn through a two-way collaborative relationship or the community platform of a team. Each person in the community has value to share, and the overall community benefits from the input of all in the community of mosaic mentoring. The bottom line is we learn from others - individually or collectively in a team concept.

Finally, I want to share a personal experience that might lead you to the next step. While I pastored, I was in a very low time and decided I needed to attend a particular conference. While

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<sup>5</sup> Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 318.

there, I saw a book entitled *"They Smell Like Sheep"* by Lynn Anderson. I thought that was the book I wanted. He knows just how stinky sheep are, and surely this book will comfort me. As I read, I quickly realized it was not about the sheep but rather the shepherd. He talks about the importance of personal relationships with the sheep and how spending time with them may be messy, smelly, and dirty, but being there makes all the difference. He reminds the reader that the world was turned upside down by 11 men Jesus had mentored. Jesus had twelve. He drew three closer, and they became *"pillars in the church"* (Galatians 2:9), as Paul recognized. It may be that we should take a closer look at the life of Jesus and lead as he led.

May our Movement move from an informational or transactional context to a transformational journey of becoming the visible expression of the invisible kingdom of God. Paul described this to the Corinthians, *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV). As Moses, let's cry, *"God, show me your glory!"* (Exodus 33:18). As it did, it will now flow from our Exodus 33:11 experience, *"So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."*

*Book suggestions for additional reading.*

*They Smell Like Sheep – Lynne Anderson*  
*Learning to Lead Like Jesus – Boyd Bailey*  
*Lead Like Jesus – Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges*  
*Growing Up – Robby Gallaty*