

# Decoding the Dilemma of a Discipling Candidate

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The following paper is presented with the perspective that those of us who are "professional disciplers" can become exceptional at training and poor at discipling. It is easy to mistake the "lights coming on" in a seminar with life change. While I appreciate the opportunity to train and to train trainers-I know that Jesus made disciples through relationships. To ask the question, "Who do I disciple?" becomes a question almost like "Who do I become friends with?" There are many factors that forge a friendship and there are many factors that both develop and disintegrate a discipling relationship. As national leaders we must seek God for who we disciple and never get sidetracked from the Great Commission as it applies to our own lives.

The mentoring process has produced many, if not most of the people who have profoundly influenced the ages. Over half of all Nobel Prize winners were once apprenticed to other Nobel laureates. From the age of thirteen until his early manhood, the painter and sculptor Michelangelo was mentored by the painter Ghirlandaio. The Russian writer Boris Pasternak, author of Doctor Zhivago, was mentored early in life by the novelist Leo Tolstoy and the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Ludwig van Beethoven spent three years under the mentorship of the Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn.

What did Beethoven learn from Haydn? Techniques of composition and counterpoint, certainly. But more importantly, he learned the kind of character one needs to create music amid tremendous obstacles. In Haydn, Beethoven found a man who had overcome the childhood pain of repeated physical and psychological abuse from his parents. Beethoven also saw Haydn endure the opposition of a wife who was bitter, quarrelsome, and contemptuous of his music-a wife who often stole Haydn's original manuscripts and used them to line her baking pans! Despite these hardships Haydn remained cheerful and contented.

In later years, as Beethoven struggled to produce his own art despite his handicap of total deafness, it was not only the technical artistry but also the courageous heart and optimistic spirit of his mentor that inspired him to persevere. (Davis 19-20)

Robert Greenleaf, in his book *The Servant as Religious Leader*, gives the following illustration. As an AT&T officer involved in career training and development of leadership he frequently did research on upper-level leaders. Once he studied the twelve executives who made up the top leadership of the organization. He found them able but not exceptional people, so he sought to find out what it was that had moved them upward in their careers. He discovered that each reported there was one early boss who greatly accelerated their progress as managers. But most surprising was the fact that four of the twelve had their early formative years under a mid-level manager. His level of management included nine hundred managers. He had no more access to up and coming leaders than anyone else at his level. Yet during his career with the company he not only accounted for one-third of the top-level management, he had people all over the business in middle and upper-level positions who had their early formative experience under him. Greenleaf says that he was probably the most influential manager of his generation. (Clinton, Stanley 115-116) In the arena of sports every athlete needs a coach. Three primary functions of a coach are: perspective, motivation and strategy. Often the best athlete is not the best coach because it is not the same skill set required of a stellar athlete. I would like to suggest there is a parallel to the world of ministry. The best mentors may not be the

best speakers, writers or presenters—for these are the skills closer to that of the athlete than coach. The mentor or discipler must indeed track the role of coach—more than that of the all-star athlete.

## **The Biblical Priority of Mentoring**

**Examples:** Jesus and his disciples

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. — John 13:34*

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. - John 15:9*

*My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. - John 15:12*

**Principle:** A Christlike Mentor loves their disciples

**Example:** Barnabas, Paul, Timothy

*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. - Acts 11:25-26*

*I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. -*

*Philippians 2:19-22*

**Principle:** Ministry is context for mentoring

**Example:** Elijah and Elisha

*...And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.' The LORD said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.' . . . So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. 'Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, he said, 'and then I will come with you. ' -1 Kings 19:12-20*

**Principle:** The relationship of mentor/mentoree should be prompted by God.

**Example:** Moses and Joshua

*The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. -Exodus 33:11*

*Moses came with Joshua son of Nun and spoke all the words of this song in the hearing of the people. - Deuteronomy 32:44*

*Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdoms because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses. -Deuteronomy 34:9*

**Principle:** The mentor must teach by model to effect life change.

**Example:** Eli and Samuel

*The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. - 1 Samuel 3:1*

**Principle:** One's life path is a primary venue for mentoring

### **A Mentoring Analogy**

Imagine having this agenda: Mobilizing a nation of computer users. To launch such a task would require a strategy. Such a strategy would require two different but related tactics. The first would deal with hardware - IBM or MAC, RAM size, floppies, zips and hard drives, screens, printers, scanners and modems, just to name a few. The second would deal with software-word processors, databases, graphic publishing programs...

If I may, I'd like to use this image to focus attention toward an agenda of mobilizing a nation of Christ followers. Two tactics would be required: "hardware" and "software" distribution.

### **Hardware issues would include:**

\* **Personal gift mix** - the mentoring role would include helping the mentoree to identify and develop their giftedness, and fit within the body of Christ.

\* **Information/Knowledge** - the instruction offered to the mentoree could include such needed dimensions as a philosophy of ministry, a theological framework, a focused understanding of Biblical studies, or specialized area like family.

\* **Skills** - A mentor could offer the following disciplines to be employed by the mentoree: planning-calendar and event, training evangelism, etc., coaching developing lay workers within a local ministry as well as coaching leaders in other ministries, speaking or other skills required to implement their ministry.

\* **Vision** - The mentoree will need a mentor to help through the entire process of crafting a vision, communicating, implementing, and evaluating effectiveness at pursuing it.

These have been the stock and trade of leadership development, perhaps contributing unwittingly to the leadership vacuum now facing western Christianity.

Countless numbers of people have been and continue to be thrust into leadership positions having never been mentored. The evaluation of competency is hardware-Does the person have the gift mix for the job? What is their philosophy of ministry? Can they handle a multiple staff? Does their vision fit that of this ministry?

These are the questions of search committees, head hunters and candidates as they discern where they will serve. Do we compound the problem by training with a premium on information, skills and vision? The answer is yes and no. The training is a "hardware" issue and can only highlight hardware issues. The trainer, however, is a "software" issue and must be the difference maker in creating a movement that has effective as well as efficient ministers because they have been mentored as well as trained.

### **Software issues would include:**

\* **Personal weaknesses and "baggage"** - When a mentoree enters the arena of ministry he/she brings a set of troubles. These range from counseling needs that are family related to communication limitations which affect ministry and marriage.

\* **Spirituality** - Every Christ follower longs for intimacy, yet few pay the price to develop the disciplines of a deeper life. A spiritual director or guide is often needed to help direct and interpret the mentorees activities. Such a director or guide can not merely pull out #37 from a manual-they

must know the mentoree and know the Lord, melding together practice, longing and spirit to allow the mentoree a personal and profound spiritual discovery.

\* **Character** - How many people in ministry must fall before we admit that a frequent meeting of men asking stock questions is not accountability? Accountability is when someone matters enough to you that it impacts your behavior. Their welfare is considered and preferred over ones personal pleasure. A disciple will never be accountable to a mentor that does not love them, for they do not matter enough to impact behavior.

\* **Relationships** - A mentor must model as well as monitor relationships that develop or debilitate ministry. A mentoree should be in a mentor's home, see how he interacts with his/her children, wife or parents. The mentor in turn should be able to watch and discern/respect, intimacy and/or warning signals.

Again, this cannot be done from a lectern or even an office.

Hardware qualities can be cultivated through equipping seminars, training events and produced study materials either hard copy or Internet accessible. Software qualities, however, require relational intensive mentoring.

As potential mentors, we must evaluate: what is the need this mentoree has and how can I meet it? Hardware needs can be met in mass quantity, but with software needs we must find ourselves as Jesus did spending more time with a few. Further, as a potential mentor I must ask the question-who do I look for if I am able to mentor only a few?

Drawing on the principles in the Biblical data I would like to suggest three main ponds from which to fish in finding a person in which to reproduce Jesus.

**1. Those within our life paths** - Jesus did this by inviting his mentorees to make their life path his. Elisha left his plowing to follow Elijah, Joshua seems to have lived his apprenticeship in the presence of Moses... there very well may be those who are willing to reconfigure their life to spend the time it takes to be marked by us. This means that we must welcome them into our lives and live in such a way that they can traffic in the software of our life. We must be willing to spend the time to tailor a pattern for the software to be developed, implemented and refined in our presence. Take for example the quarrels Jesus refereed with his competing followers, his asking Philip how to feed the multitude...these were software issues surfaced in the proximity of life. Thus we must either look within the life path we now have, or look for those who would alter theirs to join ours.

**2. Shared Ministry** - We may find a ministry venue that allows us to shape, challenge and launch workers into leader roles. Events like SEMP have served to craft the heart of regional impact players. They start as trainers, move to coaching roles and several have now moved to multiplying other sites. They have learned the process by sharing it with someone who empowered them. There may people on your staff who need a mentoring role from you. This is both a life path and shared ministry venue. The good news about this is that you are available. The bad news is that your own leadership may be crowded in order to let the emerging leader have enough challenge or room to expand a vision.

**3. Intentionality** - There are some younger or less experienced people with whom you enjoy a "chemistry." It is an attraction between both parties-it really doesn't seem fair-but you know that more mileage will happen with one weekend together in this type of relating than a month of formal one-on-one settings with goals, assignments, etc. The challenge to this type of men to ring

relationship is to have something valuable happen. The relationship in and of itself may be the value, but opportunities to sharpen one another slide because of the camaraderie. Sometimes the righteous edge can even dull because of the comfort and ease that is felt between the two.

This is a tragedy, for even though Jesus has personal time in the houses of his disciples, even though John is described as the one whom he loved, even though he loved Lazarus and his sisters-the familiarity never overwhelmed righteousness as center stage. Pursuing Christlikeness, imparting the character and priorities of Jesus must always be intentionalized.

### **Land Mines to an Emerging Leader**

Because of the many "bombs" waiting to dismember, would-be soldiers who advance the kingdom of God - it is a prudent strategy to mentor more than one person at a time. This does not mean they have to be mentored together or in the same way. It just means that there is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between those invested in and those yielding a harvest. We are developing a list of land mines both to warn and to arm mentors as they accept the challenge to reproduce Jesus in the lives of others.

- \* Immorality - there are many factors besides sex that drive this behavior
- \* Failure to develop a proven ministry - talking the game without playing it
- \* Lack of focus - too many good options keep one from excelling at any
- \* Lack of follow-through - details kill many a visionary
- \* Leadership transitions - when a person is not the senior they are in the mercy seat
- \* Not multiplying a leadership team - A one-man show can't spare the one man
- \* Medical crisis - we are not indestructible
- \* Not adjusting for seasons of life - "how" of ministry changes more than "what"
- \* Limited freedom - a controlling board or pastor, four kids under four, needy wife
- \* New opportunities - moves to "better" position before developed
- \* Debt - the fewer discretionary dollars the fewer discretionary anything
- \* Marginless living - without a healthy rhythm burnout is coming
- \* Marriage breakdown - there is more to health than no problems
- \* Lack of desire - security driven people encounter a fear of risk

Just for fun, go through this list and put an "H" beside each you see as a hardware issue and an "S" by each you see as a software issue.

### **So who do look for?**

Hardware:

- \* Available people - those with a ministry that can share them
- \* Skilled people - those with the capacity to impact others
- \* Articulate people - those who can identify the need for which they seek our help

Software:

- \* Available people - those who will rearrange their lives to be mentored
- \* Attractive people - those who refuel you when you spend time with them
- \* Responsive people - those who complete assignments, make corrections and seek to profit from your experience.

While much of the discipleship responsibility falls on the mentor-the mentor must also be wise in his/her investing time and effort in the lives of others. The following verses are prudent to evaluate whether one is working with a wise person.

*Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult,' whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still,' teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning - Proverbs 9:7*

As we seek God for those we would mentor one final "fun" question that pops up in my mind is: Why did anyone invest in me? I praise God for those who have, but I really so no optional answer than to say, "God had grace on me." May God dispense his grace on his emerging leaders through us.

### **Works Cited**

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Davis, Ron Lee. *Mentoring: The Strategy of the Master.* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1991.