

Mentor

One on One



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International Biblical Seminary--Bivocational Ministry.

Chapter 2:

Everybody needs a mentor

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Chapter Two: Everybody needs a mentor

Born in 1900, my maternal grandparents came to the United States from China in 1979, after 40 years of separation from us. It was very hard to get grandpa to church, for one reason of two bad memories: the format of meeting reminded him too much of the copycat in the days of Cultural Revolution in China when everybody had to read the Precious Red Book and everybody must sing tributary songs to Chairman Mao, sometimes in front of his portrait. We prayed for my grandpa of course, but it took my dad's wisdom to change his stance of resistance.

According to my mom's family, and they gave him a plaque stating to the fact that my dad was the best son-in-law of the Shen Family. (My grandparents gave birth to seven daughters and a son.) Being old himself, my dad understood and would cater to my grandparent's needs even before they mentioned it. One day he drove his father-in-law around for a chore and they reminisced. The elder said, "We often talked about you of your younger days and we felt sorry that you didn't have a mentor to lead your way, or you could do even more than what you had achieved." Well, my dad lost his dad at age 13, but aspired to be the top student in his classes all his life. You understand the Chinese mentality; a mentoring relationship with an important one goes far. They did not use the word a "mentor" that day but did say, a "one who leads the way." My dad immediately said, "Yes, we all need someone to lead the way, for this is the way we have never treaded before." (I think he was inspired by the hymn *All The Way My Savior Leads Me*, and perhaps pulling parallel thoughts from Israelites' exodus experience.) Grandpa paused, thinking about all the uncertainties with this newly arrived country where he might as very well spend the rest of his life. While he was still thinking my dad added, "Jesus lives forever to be our guide." I believe this was the defining moment for his attitude towards the gospel and eventual coming to faith with Jesus.

In fact, he was also influenced by his brother-in-law's decision to become a Christian in his death bed. Grandpa witnessed how this Yi Jing scholar in terminal pancreatic cancer received Christ and found peace with God. My granduncle was so ill and uncomfortable, not much I could help by preaching or any other ways; I remember two things I did, one was to read *Psalms 23*, and the other was singing *All The Way My Savior Leads Me*. Instantly he calmed down, visibly relaxed, then not afraid anymore; several days later the Lord took him in his sleep. But that is another story, I should not elaborate here.

When grandpa finally decided to be baptized in his 90's, he would not accept it from a boy—me; alas, where would I find an active 90-year-old pastor? We finally settled with an old pastor friend of mine, who was in his late 70's—an old enough young man to him. As of my grandma, people asked her why she would not be baptized, together with grandpa; do you want to know her answer? "I want to see his testimony, if he has a changed life or not!" Now, how do you like that! As it turned out, she requested to be baptized on my grandpa's funeral by several pastor friends of mine; this time, at least

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this time the combined age was older than hers. She must have been pleased with his testimony of new life, and now gave her life to Jesus in his “sight,” and in front of all the children, grandchildren and friends! God blessed my grandparents, they both lived to be 95, thoroughly enjoyed their final years. Now they are together in a better place with Jesus.

Everybody needs a mentor.

Now, how does it go in that hymn, *All The Way My Savior Leads Me*?

All the way my savior leads me; what have I to ask beside? Can I
doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my guide?
Heav’nly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know whate’er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

All the way my savior leads me; cheers each winding path I tread,
Gives me grace for every trial, feeds me with the living bread;
Though my weary steps may falter, and my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo, a spring of joy I see.

All the way my savior leads me, oh, the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father’s home above:
When my spirit clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song through endless ages; Jesus led me all the way.

Though we are not Jesus, we are nevertheless mentors and guides to the ones we lead. So, whatever Jesus has promised to do and we at least know how He has done for us, in principle we ought to pass it on to the ones following us in this spiritual journey. There are several basic experiences which I think the mentee will appreciate our sharing: first of all, this hymn brings across a joy and satisfaction with the full assurance of salvation, doesn’t it? I really appreciate Fanny Crosby (1820-1915). According to reliable sources, when she wrote this song (in 1875) she was 55 year old, not a young Christian, (She was saved at age 3 in her grandmother’s bosom.) but despite that she started with the very foundation, of the assurance of salvation, where we all start our spiritual journey. We ought to start our mentoring the same way. Don’t overlook every word Crosby penned in there; “can I doubt?” she said. Doubt may be the first thing we need to deal with, together with the younger Christians. Here Crosby based on her long Christian years—through life, said in a rhetoric way; but no doubt, many of us, perhaps the poet, herself too, went through the struggle. As a mentor, we can really help by sharing our own struggles to the mentee. Did you have doubts, after you became Christian? “I have already taken my baptism, with all my friends attending, and some of them I know were skeptical, and now here I am, doubts crepe in; what do I do with it?” You ought to know that your experience is not unique. If you

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put several Christians together, you can easily form a discussion group on this subject, very involving.

Crosby then told us, “by faith in Him to dwell,” we are to receive heavenly peace and divine comforts. Have you experienced the same? Although “dwelling in Christ” is a mystery which we may never be able to figure out, we can tell stories. What can we tell them? We can tell others of our experience of peace, joy, comforts . . . , when we trust Him—in everything big or small. By the way, for more matured ones, “indwell by faith” may be a good subject to engage yourself and the mentee with for meaningful Bible study and discussion. (Well, time out! I suppose mentoring does not mean feeding someone 5 hamburgers all at once.) Then, Crosby took a turn to say, “Whatever befall me;” so, peace, comforts, joy . . . , these spiritual blessings may not always come with outward “smooth sailing”. We must brace ourselves with rough time as well, yet, assured with inner peace and calm in Him.

This leads naturally to grace, another important subject for all Christians. “Grace for every trial,” said Crosby, extending Paul’s teaching. Do we know where she trained her mind? Right! 2 Cor. 12: 9. It is always interesting for me to find out how some of the great exemplary people were shaped by the word of God. In fact, Crosby’s hymn was richly imbedded in biblical teaching, a hymn book gave me the following references of quotation: Deut 32:12, Ps 48:14, Jn 17:4 and Rev 7:17—on theme “God leads” alone.

Surely, Crosby then shared with us how important the word of God was, that He “feeds me with the living bread.” Christians ought to know and practice Bible reading—not to teach others but first to feed ourselves for the God’s word is spiritual food to us. Too many Christians rely on the weekly feeding from the pulpit and never were taught to self-feed. How well is your cooking skill? “I can cook eggs.” That ought to be encouraged if you are a seven year old. If your skills stop there when you are more matured, then I feel sorry for your lack of variety in your menu. A young Christian is to be commended if he starts to grab a Bible and read it; as a mentor we can help by encouraging him (her) to do it regularly, asking him (her) to share what he (she) has discovered. This is like enthusiastically tasting the soft boiled egg your child has just cooked. You are telling the child, “Good, I like what you are doing, now go do more.” But if you don’t want to taste eggs forever or let your child eat eggs the same way the whole life, you better teach him (her) the art of cooking, albeit, the art of studying the Bible—step by step.

Have you been taught? How do you read your Bible? Why is it important that everybody ought to read it personally? Why is it that everybody must have the same foundational understanding before going into personal applications? If you don’t know these answers, form a discussion group and find out. Or if you think you know the answers, go form a group anyway; you may be in for a surprise.

From the living bread to living water (spring), moved Crosby. Jesus spoke of living spring in John, the Fourth Gospel. Do they know the difference of Four Gospels? Can you explain if someone asks you?

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These seemingly minor questions may be unimportant to us, but they may bother the young Christians majorly. Someone will explain to them. The Fourth Gospel is a unique book, John wrote it to demonstrate Jesus' divine nature but manifested in humanity. When He made the claim of living water in Ch 7, after the living bread in Ch 6, John the Apostle carefully wrote down, "this He spoke of the (Holy) Spirit." How soon are we going to talk about the Holy Spirit? The living bread and the living water are two essentials to the sustenance of life; we might as well explain it to the young believers. "Never thirst" said Jesus, and echoed Cosby, "gushing from the Rock, a spring." The reference of Rock is nothing else but drawing from Exodus stories of the Israelis. Here again, there is an opportunity to teach the Old Testament. The whole Bible: the Two Testaments, both are words of God, so we believe and so we tell the students.

Wow, and then she talked about "the fullness of His love", *a la* Eph 3:18-19. Need I to say more on how important it is? And Paul told us, that even we try to comprehend it with all saints, it is still beyond our understanding. Share. God's love can be shared, not analyzed; the more we share the more we are in awe of the fullness. Christians are taught to be build up in love—by each other. Share God's love with one another whenever you have an opportunity. That's mentoring.

And then, there is hope, Christian hope. We shall not see corruption; we shall be clothed in immortality with His glory. This is The Great Hope, Hope of all hopes: again, common to all Christians. There is an eternal Rest, not death but perfect rest for all the works are done, no more toils and labors; we are now to rejoice and enjoy the presence of God. In fact, Jesus promised that our Father has prepared "many houses" for us, each one his own to dwell. There are plenty theologies in the last stanza of this hymn, but suffice it for us to know that Crosby had chopped down the difficult and fiberry stuff and made it palatable for anybody to enjoy—and easy to digest. I believe this is the job of a mentor—to make spiritual things palatable, digestible and enjoyable.

Why do I take time to go through this hymn? There are many reasons, but the most important was that I could demonstrate how to mentor, even with a hymn. Of course you can do it without it. Hymn is an important wealth of the church. Use them well and we can help many.

Let us review some of the highlights we have just said:

- Everybody needs a mentor for this (spiritual) life journey we have never treaded before
- The security of this journey is in the assurance of salvation; Jesus our Savior promises us that he will send the Holy Spirit to lead us all the way
- A mentor is a friend, a person, who can call us aside for encouragement—just like what the

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Holy Spirit will do

- Christians have occasional doubts and trials; but that is the more we need a mentor to guide us
- God has given us sufficient grace in every trial; by faith we will receive it
- A mentor's own experiences of peace, comforts, struggles, etc. can encourage the mentee
- A mentor can also help the mentee in studying the Bible and prayers, etc. step by step
- The word of God and prayers will shape our spiritual life
- God intends us to learn His fullness of love by sharing with all saints
- Hymns can be a handy tool to communicate spiritual experiences; they are palatable, digestible and enjoyable
- A mentor will share his own experiences also in a palatable, digestible and enjoyable way

Here are some suggestions for group discussions:

1. How do you mentor someone much older than you? In Asian culture, this is extremely difficult.
2. Hymns as mentoring material: how many hymns with spiritual insights are you familiar with? Share.
3. Why is "Jesus forever lives to guide" important? (With reference to my dad's comments to grandpa)
4. How about Ps 23? Can you use it as mentoring material?
5. Is baptism (by grandson) a humiliating experience? If not by a grandson, still a humiliating experience? (Think baptism in terms of Jesus' cross)
6. How meaningful is my grandma's request to be baptized in front of all those people in grandpa's funeral service?
7. How realistic is to "demand" the aged to demonstrate a changed life? Why?
8. How do you describe "heavenly peace and divine comfort"?
9. Exchange your experiences on devotional Bible study. Were you taught/mentored? What do you

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do? What do you benefit from it? Have you since improved? And kept improving?

10. What should you tell the mentee: why and how Bible will change your life?
11. How do you introduce new believers to understand OT? Why is OT also very relevant for mentoring?
12. Discussion: what is “fullness of love”? Share stories, if possible.
13. Why, and how, Christian hope is not an excuse for Escapism?

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