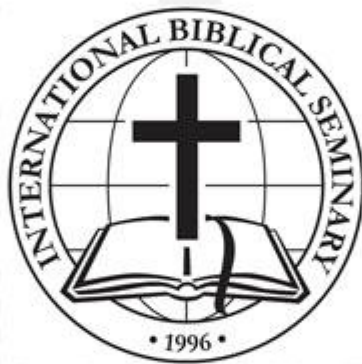


# **Mentor**

**One on One**



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**International Biblical Seminary--Bivocational Ministry.**

**Chapter 4:**

## **Mentoring happens in real life**

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## **Contents**

Chapter One: You can be a mentor

Chapter Two: Everybody needs a mentor

Chapter Three: Qualities of a mentor

Chapter Four: Mentoring happens in real life

Chapter Five: Mentoring Spiritual life

Chapter Six: Mentoring in conversation

Chapter Seven: Mentoring in action

Chapter Eight: Relational developments in mentorship

Chapter Nine: Mentoring a ministry (team)

Chapter Ten: Mentoring in suffering

Chapter Eleven: From mentee to mentor

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## Chapter Four: Mentoring happens in real life

Life is education; education is life.

Who said that? I don't know, so I searched the internet. There are so many entries surrounding this subject, if not the statement itself. I suppose it is so well said, and so often said that nobody can claim the originality. I do, however, find a website that says what I was about to say, with the title "Life is the education, not college"; so here I cut and paste, from <http://alfin2100.blogspot.com/2011/05/life-is-education-not-college.html>

Humans begin learning as soon as the central nervous system begins to develop in the womb. Learning during infancy and early childhood is more intensive than any other learning in a person's life. Over historical and pre-historical time, most humans learned about life from observation, imitation, apprenticeship, and experimentation -- and just doing it. Only recently has it been thought necessary for every child to receive a formal, government-approved education before being released into the real world.

And still it is life that is the real education, not schools, not colleges. Schools can only prepare a student for a few of the things he will confront in real life, the rest is up to the lifelong student's capacity to adapt and grow in the real world.

Before there was formal education, there was mentoring. No, the author in this article did not use the word, mentoring; but what is mentoring? Mentoring is 'observation, imitation, apprenticeship, and experimentation' which happens at home of a healthy family relation more often than any other places. What is education? If you check the etymological root, education comes from Latin, meaning rearing up (children). Then, we advanced; the more advanced in 'education', so we thought, the more compartmentalized it became, and perhaps the more detached from real life. The educational system, especially the higher education, keeps pushing people into specialized fields. High school students, if they don't want to keep flipping hamburgers, go to colleges for wherever better incomes may result; incidentally, it is better if one finds a field that fits one's interest and ability. If colleges do not do the trick of landing satisfactory jobs, then one goes to graduate school. It seems now the purpose of education is only to teach the students a way to make a living, or a trade to earn the daily breads for a family, if they have families.

Don't get me wrong, I am not against education. I spent over 30 years in formal educational system and earned the highest degree, and I consider myself an educator. I don't know if you watch The Big Bang theory, a TV Comedy series. The main character Sheldon is a genius, a physicist by training, but his social skill is comical—that's where the fun starts. Believe me; I met many Sheldon's replicas in real life, intelligent, with highest academic achievements but socially clumsy, which may be rooted in arrogance. They all have the best education. Really!

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That was not what supposed to be with education. Have we really divorced real life and education? For that matter, a more serious problem also exists in our spiritual counterpart; our seminary education too, going into the direction of academism, may have been separated from real church life and Christian lives. But I do not want to get into serious theoretical discussions with this chapter; I want to tell you about my maternal grandma. That's right! You already met her in Chapter Two.

Grandma was an intelligent person; she went to a parochial high school, a rarity and a privileged woman in her days. She married my grandpa at 16 and 'practiced' home economics for nearly 80 years through thick and thin. Grandpa graduated from Peking University, majoring in Economics. In his time, an education of this level was something really to be proud of. Too bad, he was not given an opportunity to do anything significant. When the Communist took over in 1949, he was labeled a 'Capitalist' because among other reasons he once held a mid-management position in Farmers' Bank. According to their definition and logic: Bankers are all capitalists, if you work for a bank, you are a capitalist; and if you work for a bank with a descriptive 'Farmers' in front, then you are definitely some capitalist who takes advantage of the farmers. So, grandpa's career was over; now he worked for the people: it was lean time.

Grandma's generation was caught in an East-meets-West time in China. Though exposed to western education she retained a lot of the traditional values for a good woman—no matter how rich you are, you must be good in managing your household. This is somewhat like the Jewish and early Christian values, as described in Prov. 31 and 1 Tim. 5:1-14. I like verse 10, "bringing up children," and verse 14, "managing homes," in 2 Tim., for in compactness the scripture linked the family value and meaning of education. You say, "This is old fashion; are you senile?" Alright, then, if women all joined women's lib, then men had to do it. Somebody has to do 'the woman's job', or we don't have homes anymore and mentoring will not happen at home. Maybe this is precisely the problem of American families today.

If you think my grandma had a weak personality; well, you are wrong. I hope you understand that my grandparents had their daily debates all their married life. And she seldom lost one; the worst ones were ended in draws. Actually, according to one of my cousins-once-removed, that was the secret of their mental health; they were both very sharp until the end of their lives. Put them on each corner, and you talked to them separately, they were both quite logical and reasonable; the difference was grandma had a better memory than grandpa, so he lost the debates more than often on technical details of who, and what, and how things were. She even out-drunk him. They enjoyed a glass of Whisky every meal; another reason for longevity. That's right, not red wine; that's sissy stuff, they didn't care. Well, my grandpa drank it on the rock but my grandma liked it straight. So you see: she actually drank about twice as much. They were never drunk; they had good self-control.

Grandma was a wonderful conversationalist. It was fun to talk to her. Oh, her linguistic ability: both

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my grandparents spoke three languages, mandarin and two dialects before they came to US. She did not speak English at first, but she learned through daily contacts with people in senior apartments, markets, TV, chit-chats with great grandchildren, and what not; of course I suspect my parents also taught her a little bit here and there occasionally. Guess what! They went for interviews on Citizenship, and the immigration officer who sent them out on their way, said, “Mrs. Shen, you speak better English than your husband!” I am very sure her pronunciation was better.

She was a good cook. I suppose a century ago her family must be very rich and afforded many maids and servants. The delicacies she could make gave away her family high standards. Whether or not she had been mentored by her mother of all the home economics skills, I now have no way to verify. But I know my aunts are all good cooks and they cook the food all to their mom’s specifications and standards. In a family reunion potluck, they had to take pains in figuring out what new stuff one could out-cook other siblings—It is fun if you are invited to such occasions. One thing I still cannot comprehend: they all wrap zong-zi (粽子) in the same shape and size, better than a cookie cutter can do to dough. The size part is easy, you should see the strings they use—same length. Of course, the same length is not the problem, you cut it first; but the difficulty is in the tying of knots; one simple flat knot, as you would secure any gift wraps. That’s not hard either. The amazing part is what is left off the strings; the loose ends are all but a half centimeter long! I can’t even make one such knot, but Shen ladies can do hundreds of them uniformly, and quickly. You want to pick a bigger one? Forget it; they are to the same precision. But they didn’t go to culinary schools to learn that; they didn’t have to. They learned it from their mom, and she learned it from her mom. Mentoring! Through this they build a Shen family legacy.

Her hands were so skillful: I have never seen anything like it. Once I went to her apartment and found a small model of a flying crane, hanging down from kitchen light, dangling. That’s nothing, you say; but I did not tell you it was made with the bones in a fish head. What? Yes, from a special kind of fish we call ‘yellow fish’, abundant in Shanghai coast. They disassemble the cooked fish head (It would be a good question to ask the students of anatomy: how many bones are there in this fish head?), and reassemble the bones in a different way, and “Walla!” A crane is born! The Shen sisters all know it too.

Why do I tell you all these silly stories? And what redeeming values does a fish-turned crane have? Let me agree with you, “None whatsoever!” But it is fun, isn’t it? And I think it also builds character. I don’t know who ‘discovered’ a crane in a fish; my grandma more likely also learned from somebody else. The deeper truth is, that someone very smart, and very painstakingly patient, and through many trials, created this craftsmanship to turn fish bones into a crane! And someone cared to teach the next one.

Let’s repeat the last sentence: “And someone cared to teach the next one.” Isn’t that the principle of

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mentoring? When does mentoring happen? It happens when someone is interested to learn. We have a modern term and wonderful time for children in classrooms: Show and Tell. Mentoring is show and tell. My grandma cared to show and tell her children, all seven daughters and one son; and they are willing to be mentored! That's life! (By the way, my uncle is a good cook, too.)

I can't say the same for some of my seminary students on 'Spiritual Formation'. When I started to teach in a seminary, Joseph, the President told me, "Our seminary education is out of touch with church; we are not producing pastors and missionaries that match the needs of churches and missions. We need to make changes." Actually, Joseph had his ideas; he told me "in Spiritual Formation we hope to imprint our lives on the students". But there were only a few problems: First, the students did not take seriously or show efforts in a P/F class—especially we had never given anybody an "F". In all the busy schedules and programs to turn out graduates in minimum time, the students just did not want to 'waste' time to listen to what seemed irrelevant. Grading systems were invented to make sure that education happens; it has to happen with fairness and efficiency. But in this case, P/F is not efficient and letter grades may not be fair.

Second, the teachers did not give enough time to the students and measure their progress; they too, were too busy under 'academism first' illusions. One of the illusions is, 'a student who makes good grades is a good student.' Plagiarism happens under this pressure. I caught a student cheating, and of all the subjects, he cheated in Christian Ethics! It was really sad. Thanks to school policy, I understand that he never graduated. They let him out on voluntary withdrawal instead of being expelled.

Third, 'spiritual imprint' best happens in real life ministry situations, not in a classroom. How can you teach students in a classroom to deal with death, with drug addicts, with a divorce case? How do you demonstrate personal evangelism to a seeker, or an unbeliever? How do you discern which is which? In what level has this person been? They can never be taught effectively except by mentoring in the field works of ministry. Having a class teaching Spiritual Formation is still not forming spirituality.

Learning is never out of touch with life.

**What have we covered? Let's see:**

- Life is education, education is life; etymologically, education is a rearing up
- Mentoring is 'observation, imitation, apprenticeship, and experimentation'
- Mentoring happens in real world

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- Mentoring is not information, or internet would be the best mentor
- Mentoring is the basic human experience of living
- Mentoring is the most down-to-earth way of teaching
- The concept of mentoring as education is eroded by the modern school system and academism
- Modern day education teaches students to make a living but gives no real meaning of living
- Schooling attends to the subjects of teaching but does not address the development of a person
- Mentoring happens in a show and tell
- Mentoring happens when the mentee shows interests and shows efforts to learn
- Mentoring and its process build characters
- Mentoring happens in real life ministry, not in a classroom
- Mentoring is a passing on of a legacy
- Mentoring is a lifestyle: learning and teaching, keep on doing both
- Mentoring concept and practices ought to be re-introduced back into school, seminary, church as well as family

**Here are a few suggestions to group discussion:**

1. How do you understand the opening statement “Life is education, education is life”?
2. What are the ‘a few things’ formal educations provide? (Ref to quoted article)
3. What is ‘real world’ to that internet author? For Christians, is it different?
4. What happens when a family does not mentor the children? Why do you think there are so many brats today? Is this just an American problem or a world phenomenon?
5. What does formal education do? What does mentoring do? How do they complement each other?

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6. House mom and house dad, which is better?
7. Describe the family-spousal relation in your parent's family where you grew up.
8. Describe your own family in your spousal relation and division of house works, in terms of mentoring your children.
9. Is there a relation between these two descriptions?
10. How does mentoring build characters?
11. Have you helped your children in school projects of show and tell? What did you learn? What did they learn?
12. Has anybody mentored you in your spiritual formation? How was it like? Are you willing and ready to help others?
13. Are you involved in church ministry? Are you in Evangelism, Caring or Teaching? How do you learn the ministry skills?
14. Are you good at 'observation, imitation, apprenticeship, and experimentation'? How can these basic abilities help you in your ministry? What else can you do to help your ministry?

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