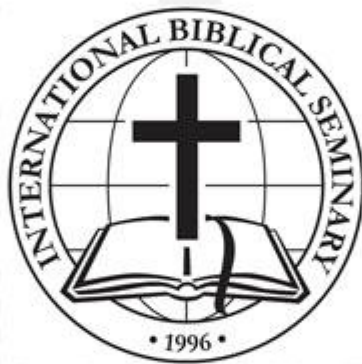


# **Mentor**

**One on One**



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

**Chapter 5:**

## **Mentoring Spiritual life**

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## Chapter Five: Mentoring Spiritual life

After I was clear on God's calling into full-time ministry we joined Home of Disciples (HOD) and eventually settled down in California, for Newman promised us that trainings in HOD would emphasize the development of spiritual life and the ministry apprenticeship, a hand-on experience of learning style, and living by faith, among other attractions.

Strictly speaking, 'living by faith' is not a biblical term, but the concept is everywhere; everyone has a different capacity of faith and God is directly responsible for the provision of His children, especially for His workers as a lifestyle. When I left my Research Assistant position, the Lord gave me the word from Isa. 30:20-24; my understanding was throwing away the gold and silver idol of PhD in Applied Physics, in exchange for 'bread of adversity and water of affliction'—these are all in financial aspect, aren't they? So I prayed in Agur's style (Prov. 30:8-9), that I would see "neither poverty nor riches" but just enough so that I would depend on Him. Of course, I had no idea of what was enough; after all, the student life was pretty simple. I prayed specifically, that I would never worry about money, never beg for money, even money for ministry. Surely, this was a reasonable prayer for Jesus Himself taught his disciples to ask for "our Daily bread." Besides, the reason it took me a year to make sure God's will for me, was exactly not to worry where the livelihood would come from; wasn't it? Since I am a servant of God and He is my Boss; why should a servant worry about his Master's resources? Living by faith? Of course! The tuff part, however, was how Newman taught us, "not to ask any man but God Himself." For that, we needed faith. By faith, and in faith, we experienced God's faithfulness.

HOD had no salary system; not only the trainees had no incomes (they don't pay a tuition either,) the trainers did not receive enumerations as well. If there were no meals, the more reason we could spend time on prayers. No, HOD has never had meals with utensils displayed only. Praise God. But, yes, we were told of George Muller's stories, and Margaret Barber's, Hudson Taylor's, AB Simpson's, Watchman Nee's; these were great examples of spiritual giants. Well, one day it happened, though in a very small way; I received an envelope with \$100 in it. It was not a big amount, but God answered prayers. There was no name, no sender's address, no explanation of any kind. In fact, I received these gifts twice, but they were sent from different zip codes. I guess the sender made sure that I would not be able to guess who, moved by the Spirit, did it. These gifts came in a good time for I was in my last 5 dollars. In those days, the minimum amount to open a checking account was \$10; that means if I took the last \$5 out I would not be able to cash an out-of-state check. That was the way for several month; we lived from mouth to mouth. Rather, from gas tank to gas tank.

In Los Angeles, you can't get around without a car. I spent the last \$400 and bought a Station Wagon for all of us in HOD. (Hey, I was the rich guy, then.) We did not practice communal life as in Book of Acts, but we did encourage sharing; we kept whatever we wanted to keep and did not worry about

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similar things recorded in Acts 5 happen to any of us. A car shared could do a lot of good things, provided there was gas in the tank. One Sunday morning, as usual, I sent a couple of old ladies home after church, but realized that there was not enough gas for a round trip. I was taught not to let anybody know my needs but God; what should I do? I made a short prayer and went on our way. I figured, now, God had to perform a miracle by letting me make home on an empty tank; or, worst to worst I would walk the rest of way home, so what! Miracle did happen, but not as I thought. When we came off the Freeway one of the old ladies suddenly requested to stop at a gas station. I thought she might have a full bladder and could not wait till we got to her home. No, she said, "I am moved to pay for gas today." "What? Oh, ok." As far as I knew, she had very poor vision or was legally blind, and she could not have seen my gas tank on empty from the second row. I could only say, this was the Lord's doing and she was sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

She had never done it again.

Living by faith builds spiritual life and characters. First, you pray, and you pray a lot, in private and in a small group. The group prayer was something to remember. The living space in HOD was very crowded and we pray loud. What did we do? Eventually we found the 'attic', a crawl space of about 5 feet high. We prayed for revivals. We were loud; as if each one was trying to out loud others. We fed on each other's energy. I learned a lot of praying together.

In private prayers I was taught the inner way, conscientiously paying attention to the still small voice. Prayer is not speaking to God only; it is a two way communication. The same scripture I mentioned above (Isa. 30:20-24) promised me that I would hear the voice of my teachers. Newman took me to Summer Camps in Taiwan for several years and I met Sister Pearl, a Canadian missionary. Although I could not claim that she was my mentor I knew she intentionally gave me opportunities to learn from her in her ministry and ask questions concerning the inner way. She was an old school Pentecostal; her strength, and what I learn from her, was not speaking in tongues, healing, laying on hands, etc., but the inner way of keeping the presence of God through constant submission and walking with Jesus.

Yes, she also practiced living by faith, but her way was not only trusting God in financial matters but the whole life. You cannot say you are living by faith only for His provisions; if you live by faith, then *in everything* you live by faith. Living by faith is constant abiding in Christ, the two cannot be separated. She listened to that inner voice all the time and acted accordingly. To many Christians, especially the rational ones, Romans 8:4 posts a problem: How do you live 'according to Holy Spirit'? To Pearl, there was no problem, 'according to the Holy Spirit' was her life.

One of Sister Pearl's favorite scripture was 2 Cor. 3:18, "(We) are changed into His image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." By inner way, our life will be changed, that's what she taught. I cannot say I learned well from her; far from it! But I can say that I have seen a great example of

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Christ's image in her.

To discern the voice of the Holy Spirit you need the Word of God, for the two never contradict each other. Mentoring is not random experiences passed on from one to the other; we must check the validity. In the days of HOD I learned to read the Bible in many ways. Many people ask me, what is the best way to read the Bible? I would say, the best way to read the Bible is . . . "Read". (I am referring to foundational reading; you read to increase the familiarity with the Bible; that's the first step. Before you really know how to interpret the Bible you must know what it says.) I say this from my experience; the secret of reading the Bible is the love to read it. You don't get to love to read by thinking about how I love to read; just do it. One thing leads to another, one method inspires another; by and by, you build your own ways to read the Bible. For instance: one day I decided to read all the prayers in the Bible, (I don't think anybody taught me that.) so I just started it and finished it from cover to cover. That was before I found Lockyer's book of *All the Prayers of the Bible*. Then I thought, if he did it, and I did it with relative ease, it must be a pretty good method, in dealing with a particular spiritual subject. And if I can do it, you can do it, too. There is no trick. Bible reading is a daily exercise; once you do it, keep doing it for your spiritual health. If you don't do it, you are going to lose your health, sooner, rather than later.

Later on, when I went back to seminary and received formal education, my biblical foundation afforded me to finish two 2-year programs (MA and ThM) in two and a half years. The benefits of knowing your Bible does not stop at academic advantages. God shapes us and endows us by His Word, together with the works of the Holy Spirit. A lot of people associates the works of the Holy Spirit only with Pentecostal or charismatic manifestations, but they forget that the experience with a believer starts with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Many of the 'charismatic' manifestations start with 'non-charismatic' experiences. How do you get the gifts of utterance? By listening to the still small voices first! Many young Christians are too eager to work for the Lord, to find power in some magnificent way. So they "prophesize," or practice prophecy; but what they say immediately can be discerned by the matured Christians as speaking from their own minds. (Jer.14:14, 23:16, 26; Eze.13:2) Listen to God! The more we do, the more we are familiar with His voice. (John 10:2-5) How do you think the sheep recognize the voice of the Great Shepherd? By listening, just as we can recognize the voices of the ones we are familiar with. Theologically, you can go a long distance to explain why this is so, but experientially, just do it. Listen! And you know. Every time when you listen again, remember His voice. By reinforcing the impression, you can run away from strange voices.

Early on I played a game of "Name that Book!" I tried to figure out, when I listened to a sermon, how the preacher quoted the Bible. Whenever I heard him quoting a portion of the scripture with reference I would quickly search my Bible. And then, gradually, if someone did not give reference I would check it out on my own anyway. I learned to differentiate the moods, the voices, the

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grammatical patterns and vocabularies with each author, although the whole Bible after translation was already somewhat muddled of all these original characteristics. Later on, and now, I understand this is what the scholars of Higher Criticism built its theoretical foundation upon for its own validity; and they were very good at it. Playing this game of “Name that Book” quietly alone in the pews was fun; I was good at it too after a while.

I wish I could say everything good about HOD but that would not be true; HOD had a lot of problems later, but the main reason was Newman’s strong view on a biased Ecclesiology and his personality. If I can describe it fairly: he intended to correct a twisted theology handed to him. He rejected the theology of Church Ground and left (or was kicked out of) the Local Church but instead he preached another kind of self-centered church view by coining the word “Testimony.” A departure from Local Church doctrine that all churches are not church until they stand on the one-locality-one-church church ground, Newman says, all churches are church but do not have the testimony of the church. And who are the church with testimony? (You don’t say!) He is not a heresy but I call him a frustrated ideologist with a self-indulged, plausible goal for ministry.

His personality is another story. I suspect it also has something to do with the ideology. It is very hard to be his co-workers for he is opinionated, and critical of others; none seems to measure up to his standard. He treated everyone as inferior to him. Someone said quaintly, that he had no peers but disciples! This is the problem with a dominant leader; a dominant leader may not be a good mentor.

The thing that made it difficult was his skills of motivation, if there was any. He would compare the students with a younger, former himself. He gave us the impression that he was head and shoulder above all his peers; just as Paul was. And I rarely hear his compliments to the students for he said, “It is not good to eat too much honey.” (Pr. 25:27) Honey!?! We didn’t even receive syrup! Perhaps he was under the guidance of another Chinese adage: “Strict teacher brings out excellent students.” 嚴師出高徒. Sure, he would point out that Peter was often chastised by Jesus. Why not! All for his good!

A mentor is not supposed to mold his/her mentees into his own image; look at Paul’s wise advice: Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Jesus. The word *also* is strategically inserted in the right place; for it could mean Paul’s Imitators were *also* followers of Jesus—just as Paul was. The logical order is: Jesus, Paul, and then imitators; but Paul did not put them in this order. Only the wrong exegesis will make some Jesus’ disciples, and some Paul’s followers. There is only one group of imitators—Jesus’. But this is where the problems begin. In men’s vanity we try to make others to follow “me”, not Christ.

All mentors beware!

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**From my early development there are several things, I think, very important:**

- Ministry mentoring can be an alternative to seminary training.
- Development of spiritual life is a mentoring focus
- “Living by faith” can carry multiple meaning but the basic idea is by life experience one gains faith
- Everyone has his/her capacity of faith; and it will grow with experiences
- A servant of God must have the simple faith that God is responsible of all his/her material needs
- Living by faith means trusting in God in everything
- An opportunity of experiencing God first hand is more than book/head knowledge
- Our expectation of miracles may not be the way God does them; miracles come in different shapes and sizes
- People who are sensitive to God may become vessels that God can use to change a situation
- Prayer is a means of grace in spiritual growth; prayers can be mentored, even peer-mentored
- Prayer is a two way communication; we must listen to God
- The path to spiritual growth is listen and act according to the inner voice of the Holy Spirit
- The most important thing in studying Bible is to develop, and keep developing a love of His Word
- Spiritual gifts, even some charismatic gifts may come from a foundational non-charismatic experience
- The Word of God and the Holy Spirit work hand in hand to mold our lives and characters
- There are dangers in a mentoring type of education: too much influences and control from a dominant mentor
- We are mentored into Jesus followers, not the mentor’s disciples

**Suggestions for group discussion:**

1. “The just shall live by faith.” In application, what is your extent of living by faith? Do you worry where your livelihood would come from?
2. Have you heard of George Muller? Do you know stories of his orphanages? What about other

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people mentioned with him in the same breath in this chapter?

3. What is your experience of going to prayer meetings? Do you experience that we feed on each other's energy and passion? Describe the best prayer meeting(s) you have gone to.
4. Why is the Word of God important in the works of the Holy Spirit?
5. Describe your personal Bible study. Is it fun or rewarding? How do you keep the momentum?
6. Does playing the game of "Name that Book" interest you? Why? What can you do about it?
7. In this chapter what do you see in a true mentor's heart? Why do you say so?
8. What are the disadvantages of mentors with dominant characters? Was Paul a dominant leader? Was he a dominant mentor? If you are one of them, in what areas will you improve yourself? How?
9. Do you agree that "strict teacher brings out excellent students"? Does Bible support this idea to some extent?
10. Compare to the Western idea of teaching by encouragement, which do you think is more effective? Is there a more balanced way? Where is the balance?
11. Compare mentoring and formal education: what are the strengths and weaknesses? How can we have the benefits of both systems?
12. Are seminary professors necessarily good mentors? Can they be abusive too? Can they be trained?

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