

mentoring matters



Christian mentoring an introduction for mentees



discipleship

leadership

growing churches

'Mentoring was a real encouragement, giving me the opportunity to meet with somebody older and more experienced to reflect, discuss and plan for the future.'

Paul, mentee

Introduction

You've probably been given this introduction because you're considering whether to meet with a mentor. Someone may have suggested having a mentor would be a good thing, yet you don't really know what that involves.

This brief guide explains what mentoring is, what you can expect from a mentoring relationship, and how you can best prepare for meeting with a mentor. It won't answer all your questions, but I hope it gives you enough of a flavour of Christian mentoring for you to want to give it a go. When you've read it through, why not meet the person who gave it to you to talk through any questions you might have?

What is mentoring?

Christian mentoring is an intentional relationship of trust in which one person (the mentor) enables another person (the mentee) to maximise the grace of God within their lives and develop their potential in the service of God's kingdom purposes.

The keys to understanding such a relationship are:

- **Intentional** It has a clear purpose and direction, normally a range of agreed expectations. This is more than a 'chat' between friends. You as the mentee are looking to get something from this relationship.
- **Relationship of trust** Mutual trust is a vital component of the mentoring relationship. It develops over time, especially if there has been no previous connection between mentor and mentee. From the outset it helps if there is a mutual respect, an element of connection.
- **The mentor** As a general rule the mentor is older and more experienced than the mentee, farther along the same path, able to offer perspective and wisdom for the journey. The mentor is warm and willing to share personal stories, to be vulnerable and admit mistakes, struggles and failure. The relationship maintains a clear focus on the mentee. It is for their benefit, not the mentor's.
- **Enables** The mentor seeks to enable the mentee to grow and develop.
- **To maximise the grace of God** Both the Bible and personal experience make clear that God's grace is foundational for all growth. Deep, lasting and ongoing change occurs as people receive God's amazing grace and out of gratitude respond to its transformative work in their lives.
- **Develop their potential** Mentoring doesn't try to steer people in a direction that is unsuited to who God has made them to be. Indeed, it is poor practice for a mentor to try to shape the mentee in his or her likeness. Good mentoring helps the mentee discern more clearly how God has 'wired them up' (talents, spiritual gifts, temperament and passions). It will increase their awareness of the gaps in skills and knowledge that might need filling, and the character issues that might need addressing (truthfulness, faithfulness, honesty, patience, and so on).
- **In the service of God's kingdom purposes** This phrase reminds us of an inherent danger in mentoring: the mentee becomes self-absorbed, rather than self-aware. Self-awareness enables an individual to see things that need addressing in order for them to become more fully the human being God wants them to be, more able to relate to people in a mature and selfless way, more competent in fulfilling the role God has given them in life. Self-absorbed people are self-oriented rather than kingdom-oriented, self-centred rather than other-centred.

So, it is more than friendship, but not counselling or therapy. It is relaxed and yet intentional. It is about the mentee, but involves the mentor sharing from their experience.

'As a new Christian I didn't know what was involved in being mentored. I suppose I was looking for an older hand to offer guidance, encouragement and support, someone to talk things over with. Once it got started I loved it!

'It was great to have another pair of eyes to keep me on track and keep me realistic. With so many possibilities of what I could be doing, I found it helpful to have someone who asked sensible questions about how I was going to fit things in with my family. My mentor also pushed and challenged me on a variety of issues.

'I'd encourage anyone considering a mentoring relationship to give it a go.'
Hazel, mentee





Many people have benefited from a mentoring relationship over the years. You could be one of them.

Why do people look for a mentor?

People seek mentors for a wide variety of reasons:

- Sam wanted to explore the Christian faith. He wasn't from a Christian background and wanted to make sense of what Christians believe and why they believed it. He had lots of questions.
- Miriam was new in her faith and wanted to get to know how to read the Bible and pray. There were also a range of other practical issues she now faced as a Christian in her workplace, relationships and moral decisions.
- John was a new parent. Enough said!
- Winston was taking on a new leadership role and felt out of his depth.
- Sarah faced tough issues at work. She was also unsure about her long-term career. What did God want her to do with her life?
- Nigel had been a Christian for 15 years, but felt as though he was 'drifting'.
- Sangita was struggling to balance work, being a mum and wife, church commitments and involvement in the local school.
- Norm was finding mid-life difficult. So many questions, unresolved issues from the past, unfulfilled hopes for the future.
- Terry didn't know if he would cope with retirement.
- Malik longed to share his faith with his friends but found his own doubts undermined his confidence.

You may relate to one of these, or actually have a completely different reason for thinking about a mentor. Common to them all is a desire to grow, to explore issues where the perspective of someone else might be helpful.

What can I expect?

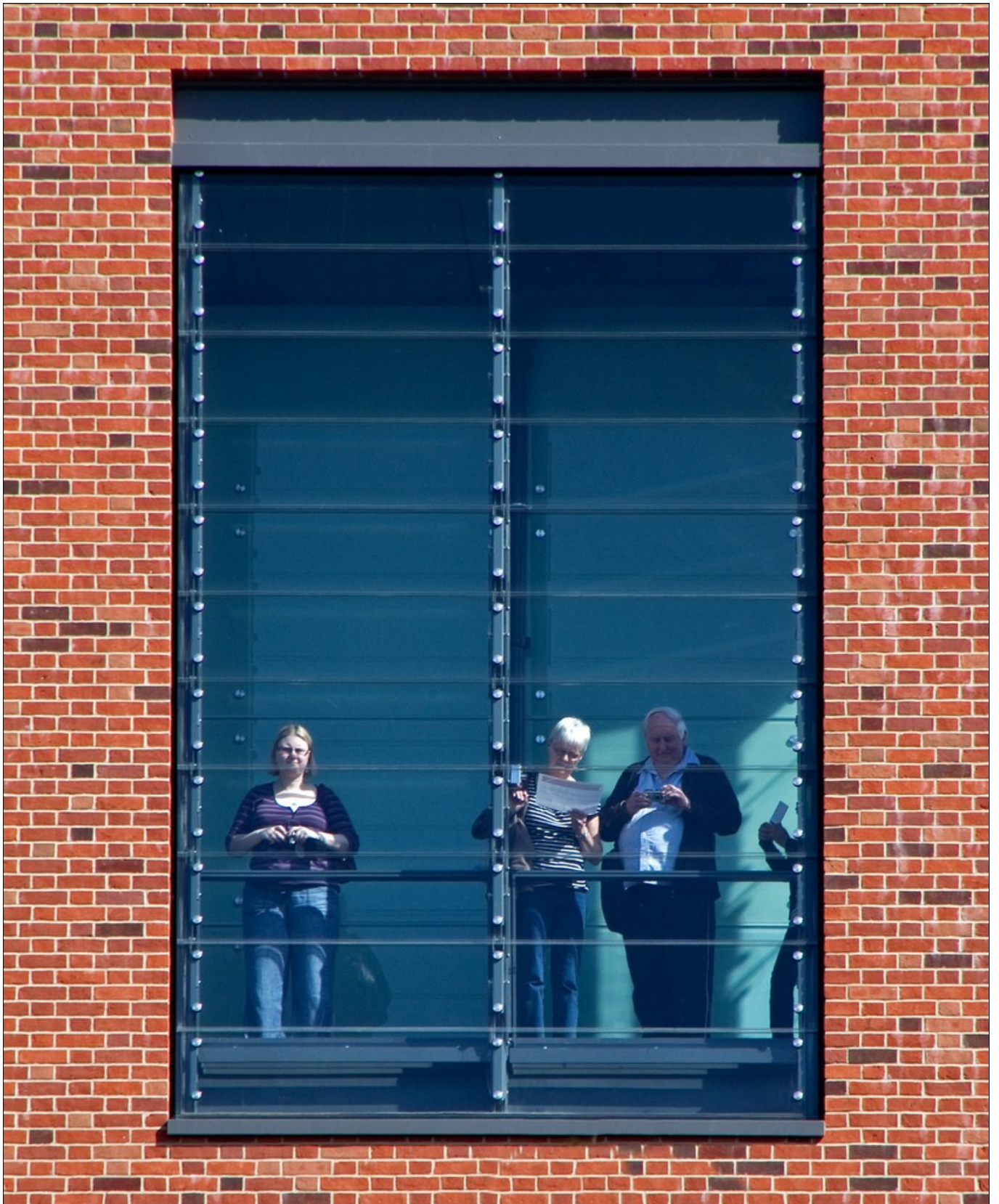
The first meeting with a potential mentor will be an informal chat where you can get to know one another, share something of why you are looking for a mentor, and work out whether to proceed. If you both think it might work, then you will chat through your expectations:

- How often to meet and for how long. Normally people meet once a month for anything between 60-120 minutes.
- Where to meet. Normally in a place where others are around but you can't be overheard.
- What to talk about. It helps to agree where the focus of the conversation lies, and where are the boundaries (things you don't want to talk about).
- Whether there will be any contact between meetings.
- How you will review the relationship.

At each meeting the mentor will guide the conversation, but the content is decided by you. Mentoring relationships often last between six to eighteen months.

'It gave me a confidence boost, a push, to have someone saying "Come on, you can do it." It was a good time, I really looked forward to meeting up and enjoyed getting to know my mentor better.

Lorraine, mentee



'Many people are looking for direction, an idea of which way to go in the complexities of 21st-century life. Mentoring offers space to reflect, to reconnect with God's priorities, and find a way through.'

'It was great to have someone to help me put my experiences into perspective. As a young mum I had a lot going on in my life which could be very overwhelming. It was really helpful to have an outsider looking in who had done lots of the same things and had similar experiences in the past.'

Naomi, mentee

What do you need to bring to the relationship?

The great thing about mentoring is that the primary thing you need to bring is yourself! It isn't a training course with lots of reading. It isn't a sermon where you sit and listen. It is a relationship focused on your development. So bring humility, openness, a commitment to make it work (for example thinking about what you want to talk through ahead of the meeting, acting on steps agreed with your mentor after the meeting), and a desire to change.

And finally

It may be that mentoring isn't for you at this time. There may be another more helpful way of moving on in your discipleship or leadership. That's great.

But if you are interested in being mentored and have further questions, talk with the person who co-ordinates the mentoring network in your church. Ask them how you could be linked with a potential mentor. The first meeting would simply be an opportunity to explore whether mentoring would be a good way forward for you, and to see if you 'connect' with the mentor.

Here's how Kate summed up her experience of being mentored.

'Mentoring has been really important to me. I find saying things out loud to another person makes them real. I would make a decision to do something, and I knew my mentor would follow it up. I felt very motivated by being accountable to someone.'

'It's so valuable having another person's perspective on your life, and to see things more from God's perspective. There are lots of decisions I just wouldn't have made if I hadn't been mentored. I've got nothing but good things to say about it. My mentor is moving away soon, and I am thinking about who might be around to mentor me next.'

