



Editor's Note

The Christian never tires of tracing the Lord's leading in ordinary life situations. True, it usually happens by hindsight, but it brings joy and gladness to one's heart.

As an editor, I try to be sensitive to what's going on in God's vineyard; what are the needs of His people, and how can the Scriptures be brought to bear on them? In recent months, the need for older believers to train younger believers has become more apparent than ever. So I began working on an article to address

this need. When brother Warren Henderson submitted his article, it too addressed this need by outlining principles for a mentoring relationship.

At the same time, sister Maria Forcucci was working on the story of Ruth, which is a beautiful illustration of all of this, for Wives' Corner. No one collaborated; the same Spirit was quietly at work in each heart so that the result seems to bear the divine finger print. Praise His Name!



Leadership Principles

Mentoring Principles from the Elijah-Elisha Relationship, Part 1: Embracing the Mantle *by Warren Henderson*

Elijah was discouraged because his expectations had not been met: there would be no revival in Israel despite all of his efforts. The Lord graciously dealt with His disheartened servant at Mount Horeb, and after receiving new marching orders Elijah departed for Able-meholah to find his replacement, Elisha.

Elijah rather liked the idea of passing on the prophet's mantle (i.e. his ministry) to someone else, as he did not anoint Hazael or Jehu, but rather immediately searched out his own successor. When he found Elisha plowing in the field, he did not say anything to him, but literally threw the mantle on Elisha and quickly departed. Elisha actually had to run after Elijah in order to speak with him. Elisha, as a mentee, demonstrates several admirable qualities which we would do well to ponder if we want to develop profitable mentor/mentee relationships with others. The following seven principles are drawn from this biblical narrative relating to Elisha's calling, training, and commissioning as God's prophet.

1. God calls working people into His work

Elisha was plowing in a field with twelve yoke of oxen—he was a working man. There is no example in the Bible of God calling a lazy or irresponsible person into ministry. Rather, He uses those who have first been proven faithful in what they have been given to do. David was attending his father's sheep when he was anointed king over Israel. Gideon was threshing wheat when called to be the judge of God's people. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishing or cleaning their nets when the Lord summoned them to be His disciples. Whether chores at home, classes at

school, or tasks in the workplace, all that we do is a proving ground for what God wants to accomplish next in our lives. Those who are faithful to do what they are supposed to do are being prepared for greater responsibilities, challenges, and honor (Luke 16:10-11).

2. Elisha was in a right relationship with authority

Elisha requests that he be allowed to first go home and inform his parents of God's calling for his life and to kiss them goodbye. Apparently, he was a young and unmarried man still living under his father's authority. It is good to remain under authority in whatever station God has put us until God clearly repositions us under new authority. It is a mark of a false teacher to despise authority and to speak evil of dignitaries (2 Pet. 2:10). The Lord approved of the centurion's statement (Luke 7:8): one must be under authority to have authority. Until God called Elisha into the ministry, he remained under the authority structure in which God had placed him. Elisha returns home, not to delay service, but to sever a tie that bound him from serving under Elijah's authority. It is a good principle for us all to follow while we wait on the Lord for new marching orders.

3. The mantle is to be handed over with care

The mantle represented the work of the Lord and is thus precious to God. The Hebrew word *shalak* is translated "threw" in verse 19 and literally means "to throw" or "to hurl." Elijah was in such a poor emotional state when he found Elisha that he just threw his cloak on Elisha and departed. Elisha, however, understood that having the mantle itself did not

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Practical Ministry

Start Early with Your Young Men *by Jack Spender*

Occasionally we encounter assemblies where the elders are still functioning in their later years for two reasons: a faithful commitment to the Lord and His people, but also because there is no one coming along to replace them. Generations have come and gone, and so have the younger men. Why is this?

Before we go further, let's mention the obvious. For one, there are many legitimate reasons why people leave an assembly or move out of the area. For another, not all men will have the desire or qualities needed for leadership. Also, it's important to work with all of our youth, both boys and girls. But this particular article will focus on young men because we're thinking about replacing the eldership of the assembly. Finally, good planning in any area of life is not a denial of our dependence upon the Holy Spirit's work. It is the Lord Who "makes" overseers (Acts 20:28), but does He do this in concert with our obedience to His instructions about training the next generation, or do elders simply "emerge" as a surprise to all? Most will agree it's the former.

The Place and Time to Begin

Much has been written to prove that the home is the primary training ground for children, and this is correct. Fathers are to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4). The church and the school have a supportive training role, but they do have a role. Godly fathers must see that these other two institutions are not asleep as to this responsibility, much less working against the training given at home.

In any case, one crucial responsibility of assembly elders is to teach biblical truth about how children are to be trained at home, and then make sure that the local church is reinforcing that training when the saints gather. This must begin when children are very young, and some would say in infancy. Children are never too young to learn the simple principles of honesty, respect for others, obedience to those in authority, helpfulness, etc.

Principles for Action

Specifics for involving young people

in the assembly are a matter for the liberty and autonomy of each assembly, but there are underlying principles to guide elders and parents in these endeavors. Here are a few:

- Parents must understand that the assembly is there to support their training efforts in a practical way; not just with prayer and well wishes. Their own involvement in the life of the assembly lays the foundation for this.
- Begin early, at least by school age. There are many simple tasks that can be shared with children as they work alongside an adult. -
- Adults should appreciate ministry (serving) from children! One elder made the following announcement to the assembly about young men learning to preach: "If you have a compliment, tell them; if you have a criticism, tell one of us." Wise words!
- Make sure the tasks given are suited to the age and ability of the child. Avoid discouragement by requesting work too advanced or complex.
- Provide down-to-earth guidelines ("equipping"; Eph. 4:12) for carrying out requested tasks.
- Remember, one goal is to develop ownership in the assembly at an early age. It is not just "where my parents go to church," but "my" or "our spiritual family."
- Accountability is always an important part of discipleship but should be kept simple and positive whenever possible. Both respect and admiration for those in spiritual authority must be cultivated because of a loving relationship.
- Praise and recognition for work well done is important for any age, but especially for young people.

Some Real-Life Examples

Not all of the following examples taken from the author's experience with nearby assemblies over the years will be acceptable to everyone, and that is fine. But at least these enable the reader to see that a genuine effort was being made by those in leadership to involve young

people in a quality way. Such things rarely just "happen." They are the result of prayerful design. And they are not always successful initially; sometimes mid-course correction is necessary.

At the Lord's Supper in our assembly, the elements are passed by 4 men and a boy. The 4 men cover the main meeting room, and the boy carries the bread or cup to the nursery for moms with babies. It is not unusual to see a young man passing the elements in the main room guided by his father or an elder.

Vacation Bible School held for a week in the summer began with adults leading the Bible studies, crafts, games, refreshments etc. But in just a few years, these activities were transferred to young people who had been assistants in prior years and were now able to lead. The goal (which has been successfully reached) was to have the entire week run by the young people with adults observing in the background.

The small groups meeting in homes have provided an excellent opportunity for young men to share a brief meditation from Scripture. One elder has been taking some young men to a nearby smaller assembly and giving them opportunities to share the Word in the Sunday Bible hour.

Keeping Things in Perspective

As with any worthwhile effort, overseers must be "watching over" progress and being vigilant for inroads by the enemy. To that end, here are several related questions for discussion among the elders:

- Are the relationships among elders (and deacons) characterized by genuine friendship and a spirit of team effort? To put it another way, would young men be looking forward to the day when they might join such a group? The frequently heard comment, "I'm glad to do the work, but I don't want the title," can be a red flag.
- Is the team a true team or is there one man that must have his way while the others are too timid to confront him? This can discourage those

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coming along from having a desire to participate.

- Is there a reasonable path to greater responsibility? Few men will go from being a spectator to leading as an elder. The Lord promotes men according to His will, but providing reasonable “stepping stones” is sim-

ply wise stewardship. Think of what blessing has come from men growing up in an assembly where they have opportunity to share a brief word at the Lord’s Supper. No wonder some go on to become good teachers and speakers! In the same way, encouraging leadership of a few people in a

home group, or as part of a team in deacon work, can become a stepping stone to greater involvement.

Yes, time flies! And before we know it, those little kids running around on Sunday grow up and become involved in meaningful work. Make sure the church is part of that!



Elijah-Elisha (continued from page 1)

equip him to be a prophet; he needed instruction. It takes time to mentor others in righteous living and practical ministry—the mantle cannot be thrown, the work of the Lord must be carefully committed to the next generation. Elisha would eventually receive Elijah’s mantle (a cloak of fur or fine material) and continue the work of being God’s spokesman. Though it was a great privilege to wear this cloak, it was also a constant reminder of the prophet’s accountability to God to speak only His word.

4. Elisha wanted the mantle

Elisha ran after Elijah; he appreciated the opportunity to serve with and learn from Elijah. It is especially important for young people to understand that it is a privilege to be mentored by others; it is not a right. Nor should the mentoring relationship be viewed as some program one finishes to achieve some church position or spiritual status. Close interaction with a mature believer, someone who genuinely cares about the mentee, is a wonderful provision from the Lord to promote spiritual growth (i.e., development of righteous character while learning to do ministry). Count it a great blessing if someone is willing to invest their time and resources to enhance your life. If you desire to be mentored for Christ, but no one has approached you, why not ask a mature believer (of the same gender) to spend some regular time with you in Bible study and answering questions. Take the initiative and see what happens.

5. Elisha assisted Elijah in the Lord’s work

Mentoring relationships are often thought to be unidirectional service of the mentor to the mentee, but that is not a correct understanding. Elisha minis-

tered to Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:21). A few years later, it would be Elisha, on behalf of Elijah, who would anoint Jehu and Hazael, the tasks given Elijah at Mount Horeb. Long after Elijah departed, Elisha was still known as “Elisha...who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah” (2 Kgs. 3:11). Certainly, Elijah taught Elisha much, but Elisha showed his appreciation for his mentor by selflessly serving him also. Paul instructed the believers in Galatia of the same principle: “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (Gal. 6:6). If someone blesses you in the name of Christ, consider how you might bless them in return.

6. Elisha encouraged Elijah

Elijah’s name means “God is my God.” His name aligns with his ministry of calling an apostate nation back to the Lord. It was a hard and discouraging calling. Elijah needed a friend, and who better than Elisha, whose name means “God is Salvation,” to strengthen Elijah’s fortitude? Elisha was a companion of Elijah for about ten years and assisted him to regain his courage and tenacity to speak for the Lord. God would again send Elijah to confront Ahab and Jezebel and pronounce judgment on them (1 Kgs. 21:17-26). Elijah and Elisha’s relationship was mutually beneficial; they both needed each other. Mentors need encouragement also, and Elisha is a good example of a supportive mentee.

7. Elisha made a sacrifice to be mentored

After informing his parents that he would be departing with Elijah, Elisha slaughtered a yoke of oxen and burnt his implements in order to cook the meat for the people. More than being gracious to others, he was effectively closing the door on his former life. By removing the possibility of returning to farming, he was showing his dedication to Elijah and his commitment to learn from him. Likewise, mentees should understand that some activities will have to go by the wayside in order to have the time to be

mentored properly. Mary had to say “no” to some legitimate activities in order to have time to sit at the Lord’s feet and learn from Him (Luke 10:38-42). Although she was misunderstood by her sister Martha, the Lord complimented her in front of everyone for making the best choice. It is not just the mentor that sacrifices himself or herself, the mentee must also be committed to the mentoring process.

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Conclusion

The development of mentoring relationships requires that both the mentor and the mentee maintain a proper perspective of their ministries to each other. Elijah had a rough start in effectively passing the work of the Lord on to Elisha, but apparently he did well in the end. Elisha demonstrated many good attitudes in the mentoring relationship, which we would do well to pattern in our own lives.



Wives' Corner

Ruth, the Familiar Foreigner by Maria Forcucci

As we study the women in the Lord's genealogy, there seems to be a subtle love and acceptance for Ruth that is not afforded to the former ladies, Tamar and Rahab. Ruth, who had no stigma of being a prostitute as did the others, has a whole book dedicated to her and is pictured in situations that endear her to us. However, if we remember the Moabite culture of idolatry, it is likely that before Ruth married Mahlon, the son of Naomi and Elimelech, she was exposed to such pagan rituals.

The Moabites were descended from Lot's incestuous union with his eldest daughter. Eventually, the worship of their idol, Chemosh, involved prostitution, incest and child sacrifice. To what extent Ruth might have participated, or at the very least witnessed these rituals, we cannot guess, but marriage to Mahlon must have played a role in her abandoning them.

The Book of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges of Israel which was a time of backsliding and wandering from God and His tenets. It is not so ironic then that Jehovah

would use a gentile to bring a vestige of faith and joy back to the heart of Naomi. After all, Elimelech and Naomi's departure from Israel and migration to Moab gave some indication of their own lack of confidence in Jehovah. However, as a familiar adage makes clear, even a dim light in a dark place brightens it, and God can use us even during our valley experiences to bring light to a dark place.

I believe this may have contributed to Ruth's attraction to Mahlon and after his death, to her mother-in-law, Naomi. I envision Ruth as being more hungry for truth than concerned over the condition of the truth bearer. When my husband and I did the story of Ruth for VBS, we wrote a song titled, "I Want to Know Your God," sung by Ruth to Naomi as her reason for accompanying her back to Israel from Moab. It may well have been this that drove Ruth to embark on a long journey and to become a caretaker for Naomi.

Never underestimate the power of your testimony, even when going through a dry period

There are more than a few lessons in Ruth's story for us. One is never underestimate the power of your testimony, even when going through a dry period. Naomi was discouraged when she told her friends upon her return to Bethlehem, "Call me Mara, for the Lord has dealt bitterly with

me." Yet Ruth saw in her the hope of salvation and righteousness.

Secondly, never underestimate the Lord's love for even the most undesirable of the

lost. We do not know Ruth's history, but her culture was evil and she was part of it. God had a plan for her as He might any culturally evil person in our time. No one is discounted from God's plans and purposes.

Third, even when God seems silent, as I am sure Naomi felt during her stay in Moab, He is working. He is bringing His plans to fruition. We cannot control when, how, what, where or who He will use, so be watchful for His leading even when it doesn't appear to make sense. 

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