

Mentoring: Mission Possible
By Stephanie Wolfe

*If you're planting for a year, plant grain;
If you're planting for a decade, plant trees;
If you're planting for a century, plant people.*

Jess Gibson

My role as a mentor began more than 30 years ago with our sons, Jeremy and Chad. Spending time with our boys - training them, living life with them, and watching them live life - was my first assignment as a mentor. As their mother, I am proud to have been their coach, counselor, example, and teacher.

Jeremy and Chad are successful in their Christian walk today because their father and I accepted this assignment and took our responsibility as parents seriously. They are grateful for our investment, and I believe they recognize the significance of their walk because of it.

Sowing seeds from the Word of God into their young lives and watching those seeds grow has been the most profound accomplishment of my life. No amount of worldly success will ever top it, and I must say that the more I saw these seeds grow in their lives, the more excited I got about sowing more seed. That is why, now that they are grown, married and in ministry themselves, I continue to sow seed as a mentor, not only in their lives, but in the lives of others.

You might find it interesting that the term *mentor* goes back to Greek mythology. A mentor was "someone assigned as tutor of another." Our dictionary defines it this way: *A wise and trusted teacher, guide, and friend; an elderly monitor or adviser.* Titus 2:1-8 has been my guide as a mentor for years. Study it well. That special passage of scripture has shaped my thinking as a mentor, so let me share some of my thoughts and experiences with you.

First of all, mentoring takes courage. I say that because I believe mentoring is revealing what you have learned through your own life experience and your understanding of the Word to another person. As leaders, most of us find no greater joy than revealing how much we know about any given subject! However, many of us would rather have a root canal than to share how we have learned these valuable truths, especially if it includes revealing the mistakes we have made, our own poor decision-making, lack of judgment, or, God forbid, some weakness on our part!

But wouldn't you agree that these are some of the greatest lessons we have ever learned and probably some of the most valuable instruction we can offer others? If we come off as always perfect, our followers simply cannot relate. I am quite aware of the fact that I do not have it all together all the time and to pretend that I do is absurd and would make me of little or no value to those I am called to be an example.

A quote that resonates in my heart from the earliest days of mentoring is this one:

"It takes one who has gone deep in his or her own heart to know how to draw out that which is deep within the heart of another."

One month after the debut of the *Mentoring Women* resource material I wrote for John Maxwell/INJOY, I was faced with a major health crisis. I had just begun my second year as a mentor with a brand new group of selected women from my church. We had just returned from our kickoff retreat in January and the year looked to be a promising one with many more seed-sowing opportunities!

However, much to my disappointment, after a routine mammogram and many complicated tests, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The prognosis was good, but only after a mastectomy to rid my body of the invading cells that were putting my life in danger. Believe me, this was not a part of my plan for the year! Now what? Should I continue, knowing what lay ahead for me? I had faced cancer once before in my life, and surgery was the means of healing at that time too, so I was well aware of the kind of year that I would face. Well, I did what any godly leader would do...I cried like a baby, then went running to my Father! He gave me this awesome scripture and challenged me to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Romans 8:18

God had a plan to reveal His glory through me somehow. I submitted to His plan and trusted Him as I went through a year of complicated surgeries, treatments and procedures. I still managed to mentor the eight women that God had entrusted to me. It was a tough year, but I learned as much or more than they did. I have grown so much through my life's experiences and I don't believe God intended for me to keep it to myself. I hope that by sharing these, others can learn from them as well. Richard Edler said, *"A mentor has been defined as someone whose hindsight can become your foresight."*

I have a new motto that I live by now: *"Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger!"* But the truth of the matter is, it not only makes me stronger, but it makes those around me stronger as well.

Here is what Jesus said to Paul about being strong:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

So here's how I see it: If you had a map, and at least knew the direction in which to travel, wouldn't you feel inclined to help your fellow traveling companions find their way also? Even if you didn't know all the turns or all the roads that you must travel, you still may know more than others, and wouldn't you feel compelled to share what you did know, and not focus on what you did not know? In my writing and speaking on the topic of mentoring, I teach that mentoring is simply sharing a piece of my "map" with another. Maps provide us with four important things:

- The Big Picture
- Your current location
- Your final destination
- Various possible routes

Also, as a mentor, who has traveled some of the roads and discovered some paths not to take, I can provide the above information by sharing my map, but I can also offer some life experience as well by offering my knowledge of roads to avoid. (Not that everyone takes this advice, but it won't be because I didn't warn them!)

Some of you are already intentionally and successfully mentoring. Well done! Mentoring is time well spent and you should consider it an honor that qualities found in you are of value to a fellow laborer. Most mentors do not see themselves as God's gift to the Body of Christ. They believe if there is anything within them worthy of reproduction it is only because of the tough roads they have walked or the valuable lessons they have learned. They feel a deep desire to make a difference in the life of others and simply make themselves available.

That's my story. If I have anything of value to offer others, it is only because of the investment made in me by God, God's people, and the tough roads I've walked (some, a result of my own poor decisions). I'm nothing special in and of myself. Ask any one of the 33 women who have been personally mentored by me, or the others mentored by those I have mentored over the past 5 years! I am quite sure they will tell you that it wasn't my great knowledge or my incredible communication skills that was life-changing for them. They will tell you that it was the time I gave them, my belief in them, my vulnerability and honesty, and my allowing them to learn not only from my strengths and successes, but from my weaknesses and my failures as well!

Remember, some of us learn from the mistakes of others, and some of us must be the others! I am constantly growing and changing to become more like Jesus and my goal is to point them in the right direction, while I walk towards Him, to the best of my ability.

Everyone who aspires to leadership is looking for a mentor; someone to believe in them enough to teach them, train them, and even correct them so that they can grow as a leader. The mission of a mentor is to lead the student - this demonstrates courage & builds trust; to love the student - this increases faith & builds confidence; to serve the student - this increases reproduction & creates duplication; and to confront the student - this addresses weaknesses & produces repentance; but it is much more about our ability to affirm the student - this recognizes their giftedness & strengthens their leadership potential. Peter F. Drucker said, *"Find the strengths of the student and put them to work, rather than to look at the student as somebody whose deficiencies have to be repaired."* I couldn't agree more.

I don't want to talk you into mentoring and not tell you the whole truth because before you begin, you should know that everyone wants to be mentored until you try to mentor them.

Mentoring is risky business, but the greater the risk, the greater the victory. You may give, and serve, and love, and believe, then something happens and you watch your work fall like a house of cards. Winston Churchill said, *"To build may have to be the slow and laborious task of years. To destroy can be the thoughtless*

act of a single day." I have experienced this, and it is always difficult but in leadership we all know the saying, "If everything's coming your way, you must be in the wrong lane."

Mentoring will increase your vulnerability. This means you may make mistakes and you may even fail (in your eyes), but failure is just an opportunity to begin again...more intelligently. Resist the urge to be perfect. A perfectionist is someone who takes infinite pains, and gives them to others. Don't be a pain!

Mentoring often reveals more about yourself and what you have yet to learn, but I've heard that life is a grindstone. Whether it grinds you down or polishes you up depends upon what you're made of. To quote Lord Kelvin, "*When you are face to face with a difficulty, you are up against a discovery.*" So prepare for some great discoveries!

Mentoring is guaranteed to change your life. Like Heraclitus said, "*It is in changing that things find purpose.*" I believe that nobody learns more than the teacher and you can't help someone to the top, without getting closer to the top yourself.

Here is your mission, "should you choose to accept it." Share your piece of the map. Give what you've got to give. Don't just talk the talk, walk the walk. Sow seeds into the lives of others. Reveal who you are, what you've learned, and how you've learned it because in our weakness - HE is made strong.

Contact Stephanie Wolfe Ministries by calling 678.714.7008 or
www.innerbeauties.com