

LIFE-CHANGING COMPANIONS



Book 1 The Art of Spiritual Mentoring

Rowland Forman

LIFE-CHANGING COMPANIONS (Book One)
Edition 1.0

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A Training Course on Spiritual Mentoring



ROWLAND FORMAN
M I N I S T R I E S

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Contents

Book One: THE ART OF SPIRITUAL MENTORING

Welcome to *Life-Changing Companions* p.2

Session 1 Free Up Your Choices p.3

Session 2 More Time with Fewer People p.18

Session 3 It's All About Life Transformationp.32

Session 4 Removing Our Masks p.45

Welcome

Welcome to *Life-Changing Companions*

This nine-lesson training course on spiritual mentoring is part of Barnabas School of Leadership's commitment to a life-on-life, relational approach to developing church leaders. To gain the most benefit, it needs to be completed, either with another person, or in a small group.

Each of the studies has four key sections:

- 1. Prepare** (What are the main questions?)
- 2. Study** (What does the Bible say?)
- 3. Read** (What do others say?)
- 4. Discuss & Apply** (What can we learn from each other and how can we apply this to life and ministry?)

Steps 1-3 need to be completed in your own time, and Step 4 is where you explore and apply what you have learned.

The first four lessons (Book One) in *Life-Changing Companions* look at the Art of Spiritual Mentoring. It is an “art”—involving heart issues and Spirit-led attitudes. The five lessons in Book Two are on the Craft of Spiritual Mentoring. You will develop some of the tools you need as you watch the Holy Spirit produce transformation in your relationships.

Keep Psalm 127:1 in mind as you work through this course: “Unless the LORD builds the house, the labourers labour in vain ...” Unless

God by his Spirit brings about the life-change, the course won't produce what he desires.

Session One:

FREE UP YOUR CHOICES



Step 1: Prepare

We are designed for companionship, not for doing life alone. Adam discovered that before the Fall. After the Fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, God-like companionships between humans were infected by sin. In Christ, relationships have been restored but not perfected.

Instinctively as believers in Christ, we know that we should be in meaningful spiritual relationships, but often find it difficult to know how to do this. Whom should we approach? Should we have one main spiritual companion or many?

This first lesson explores the importance of freeing up our choices—by modeling ourselves on Christ and his disciples, and exploring a number of possible options for companionship, in a spirit of prayer.

Case Study

Jason was blessed as a new Christian, to have a meeting with a mentor once a week for six months. Many years later he hasn't had anyone investing in him personally.

He's convinced that he needs input from other believers and has bought several books on the topic. The more he reads, the more confused he becomes. One book argued that the only way to do spiritual mentoring is to be in a group of twelve, as that's what Jesus did. Another said the best approach was to be in groups of four – a leader and three others, with the expectation that one of the three would start a new mentoring group after three months. However, most of the books suggested that individual-to-individual is the best way to accomplish real life-change.

Then one of his friends suggested that he needs a spiritual father. His own dad left the family when he was just eight years old, so the idea of having a father in the Lord really interested him. Just when he started to pray about finding a spiritual dad, one of his close friends pointed him to Jesus' words in Matthew 23:9: *And do not call anyone on earth 'father', for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.* This has made him wonder what Jesus meant by those words.

The person-to-person approach was certainly the period in Jason's life when he experienced the most spiritual growth. Should he try to find someone to invest in him spiritually and meet once a week? The idea of looking for a spiritual dad excites him the most, but he doesn't want to disobey the Lord either.

What is your advice to Jason?

Step 2: Study

Read Ecclesiastes 4:8-12

There was a man all alone;
he had neither son nor brother.
There was no end to his toil,
yet his eyes were not content with his wealth.
“For whom am I toiling,” he asked,
“and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?”
This too is meaningless—
a miserable business!
Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 & 11-12

Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well ... For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own

children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

What do you observe in these passages?

(Verbs, key words, repeated words, connecting words)

Ecclesiastes 4:8-12

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8; 11-12

What do these passages mean? *(Context, central truth)*

How do these passages apply to your situation?

Step 3: Read

Options not Requirements by Rowland Forman

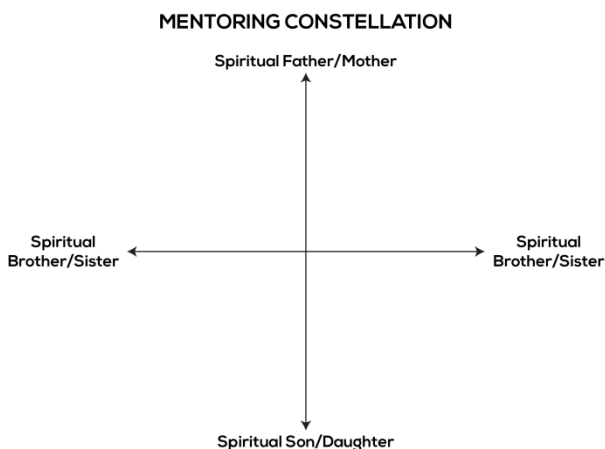
In my early days as a mentor-friend, one of the prominent speakers at a National Conference declared, “Every Christian leader must have a Paul, a Barnabas and a Timothy.” He was referring to the need for a spiritual parent (Paul), a spiritual peer (Barnabas) and spiritual understudy (Timothy). While that is a helpful idea, it fed the legalistic side of my nature.

I thought, “If I must, I must!” I wasn’t satisfied with one of the three options. I had to have all three. It was frustrating because even one of those relationships was difficult to find; even more so to locate all three.

Fast
many
later, I
these

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which

from



forward,
years
now see
as mere
options,
captured
diagram
I have
adapted
Stanley

and Clinton's "Constellation of Mentoring Relationships."¹

I like it because it captures the relationships Christ-followers have been brought into as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. We are family: members of an extended family, with spiritual fathers and mothers, and new brothers and sisters.

Option One: Spiritual Parenting

In his book *A Resilient Life*, Gordon MacDonald describes how he asked God to give him a fresh sense of calling at age 67. After his prayer Gordon spoke at two leadership conferences, one in Germany and one in the United States. The leaders who publicly thanked him at the conclusion on both occasions, said something like, "Gordon, you speak like a father and so many of us are spiritually fatherless."

In that moment he heard God's whisper, "You've got your fresh calling. Be a father to a younger generation. Speak like a father; talk to younger men and women like one; and write like one."

That story touches me deeply, because I recall how much, in my teens and twenties I yearned for, and prayed for, a spiritual father, but no one eventuated. It also challenges me because at this life-stage, many people call me a spiritual dad. I'm 77 and have been a Christian for 69 years. You would be forgiven for viewing the role of a spiritual mother or father as somehow age-

Open your heart and eyes to the possibility of becoming a spiritual parent.

¹ Paul Stanley & Robert Clinton, *Connecting: Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1992), p. 162.

related, or maturity-bound, and therefore assuming you are not suitable. The truth is that if you have been a Christ-follower for some time, there will be several people that view you as a spiritual parent. Please open your heart and eyes to the possibility of becoming one.

The Apostle Paul was a spiritual father to Timothy, firstly because he led him to faith in Christ. He describes that relationship in 1 Corinthians 4:15-17:

“Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord.”

To make a strong point, Paul uses exaggeration. The members of the church in Corinth had no end of people (10,000) who took a general interest in them, but very few that related to them like a true spiritual dad.

While Paul became a father to Timothy initially at his conversion, the spiritual father — spiritual son relationship was not just confined to Timothy’s early days in Christ. He calls him “my son whom I love,” and in Paul’s two letters to him, he describes Timothy as his “true son in the faith” and his “dear son” (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2).

What do Spiritual Parents Look Like?

What are some of the characteristics of spiritual mums and dads? Paul identifies some of these qualities in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, and 11-12:

“Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you.

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well ...

“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

Paul and Silas were like gentle and caring spiritual mothers to the church at Thessalonica

While the traveling teachers Paul refers to in that passage might have delivered their message and quickly moved on, Paul and Silas were like gentle and caring spiritual mothers to the church at Thessalonica. They also were like spiritual fathers to them *encouraging* (building them up and challenging them), *comforting* (coming alongside them to provide spiritual healing) and *urging* them to have lives that were

consistent with God’s character.

Timothy had spiritual mothers (his own mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice) and in Paul, a genuine spiritual dad. Here are some of the fathering and mothering qualities described in 2 Timothy:

- Writing a letter of encouragement. While these are the inspired words of God to us, it was also an intensely personal letter.
- Praying constantly (2 Timothy 1:2-3).
- Expressing emotions openly. Paul openly expresses his love for Timothy. He recalls his tears and expresses his desire to be full of joy when he saw him again (2 Timothy 1:4).

- Prioritizing devotion to God’s Word. Timothy’s mum and grandmother steeped him in the Scriptures from his youth, and Paul called him to study and preach God’s Word when he felt like it and when he didn’t (2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:15; 3:14-17; 4:2).
- Identifying the dangers of false teachers and their teachings (2 Timothy 3:1-9; 4:14-15).
- Being an open book. Paul says that Timothy knew everything about him (2 Timothy 3:10).

More than Tutors

My early experience with a person who mentored me felt more like a series of appointments. The man I met with at 6 am every Monday for six years was more like a schoolteacher than a spiritual dad. I knew little about his family, and never interacted with him on a social basis. I still treasure his investment in me, but never viewed him as a father.

*Organic Mentoring*² by Sue Edwards and Barbara Neumann is based on doctoral research with ‘next generation’ young women. They found that most women in their survey were not looking for a woman with all the Biblical answers, but an honest approachable woman with whom they could process life. Deuteronomy 6:5-7 was their flagship text.

**They were
looking for
honest
approachabl
e women
with whom
they could
process life.**

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I

² Sue Edwards & Barbara Neumann, *Organic Mentoring* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014).

give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”

“Moses first wrote these words for parents to help them pass on their faith to their children, but they apply equally well to us as mentors, mandated to guide our spiritual children on these invisible highways. Moses instructs us to ‘impress’ ... our love for God on our mentees, but to do so in a natural kind of way. The Hebrew word for impress means to whet their appetites for God, to sharpen them spiritually. He tells us to mentor ‘when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.’ These verses ooze a casual, natural informality.”³

**These
verses ooze
a casual,
natural
informality.**

I would add that they also ooze informal spiritual parenting.

With my three adult children, I seldom make appointments. I just do life. Sometimes I text, other times we have meals together, sometimes as we drive to our destination, we don’t even talk.

They know that I am thinking of them all the time - well, most of the time!

On a more personal note, sometimes people describe me as their main mentor. At times I feel like asking “Are you kidding me?” All I have done is aim to be fully present when I meet them, and find out about their family, interests and passions. Then I pray for them and

³ Ibid pp. 15-16.

find ways of keeping in touch with them. Not that complicated. Although they might use the term “mentor,” what I think they are really saying is that I am one of their spiritual parents.

Spiritual parenting needs to be a relaxed, all-of-life companionship, not a rigid authoritarian approach to human relationships.

Option Two: Mutual Companionships

There is power and biblical warrant for a spiritual mother or father investing time and energy in a spiritual son or daughter. Yet the most accessible option could be called mutual spiritual companionships: when two or more Christ followers come to listen deeply to each other and to the Holy Spirit, regardless of their stage of maturity.

In these groups of two or three or more, each person understands they are a little further along the road in some things than the other person. In the above diagram it is captured by the notion of spiritual brothers or sisters. In the family of God, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ that are called to practice the biblical “one-anothers.”

Instead of anxiously searching for someone to mentor or for someone to mentor, just start practicing this sample of “one-anothers”:

- Meet with one another (Hebrews 10:25).
- Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9).
- Encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13).
- Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
- Pray for one another (James 5:16).

**In the
family of
God,
we are all
brothers
and sisters**

These are mutual commands: I meet with you and you meet with me. I show hospitality to you and you to me.

I encourage you and you encourage me. I bear your burdens and you bear mine. I pray for you and you pray for me.

When you spot someone that may be a God-given spiritual companion, don't ask, "Would you like to be in a mentoring relationship?" say "Would you like to meet together to encourage each other?" And when you do meet, maybe have a small gift that shows you are hospitable. Instead of making it too formal, show interest in each other's families and share any burdens you have. Then take some of those burdens to God in prayer.

That's what happened with Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas befriended Saul and encouraged him when other Christians were suspicious of him. The story about these two friends in Acts chapter nine doesn't read as if Barnabas was a spiritual father to Paul. He was just true to the person God had made him to be. He encouraged Saul by accepting him as a brother in Christ, then inviting him to come alongside him when there was a revival in Antioch (see Acts 9:26-31; 11:19-30).

**Barnabas
was just
true to the
person
God had
made him**

Instead of legalistically trying to find both a spiritual parent and spiritual understudy plus a spiritual brother or sister and feeling as if you have fallen short without achieving all of the above, I suggest you keep asking God to connect you with people of his choice.

- Pray about it then look around.
- Do you spot someone that might be looking to you as a spiritual parent?
- Is there someone that is more like a brother or sister alongside you? Someone you enjoy being with?

Step 4: Discuss & Apply

1. What advice would you give to Jason (from the Case Study)? Why?

2. Why are two better than one, according to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12?

3. Describe someone that has been a spiritual father to you. What were some of their best qualities (share your notes from 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8; 11-12)?

4. Share stories of times when you approached someone to be a spiritual companion. When did it go well, or not so well? Why?

5. What do you sense the Holy Spirit is saying to you from this first lesson?

6. What action steps do you plan to take?

Session Two: MORE TIME WITH FEWER PEOPLE



Step 1: Prepare

What measures do churches in your region use to estimate their effectiveness? In some parts of the world it is the number of people who attend the main church services. Their thought is — the bigger the crowd, the more influential the church.

How does that line up with the method the Lord Jesus used: calling twelve men to come follow him, then investing deeply in them over an extended period of time? The call of this lesson is to focus on a few rather than the many.

Mark 3:14 says that Jesus chose his twelve that he might be with them and send them out into the world. To what extent are you really “with” the people God has given you to invest in? To be with the people we are training means the investment of time and to be fully present with them.

Let’s explore what it means to spend more time with fewer people rather than less time with crowds of people.

Case Study

Pastor Brian loves his church. It is large and things are running so well. He receives very few complaints from his congregation. Sometimes he worries if that is because they are so busy running the multiple programs in the church, that they don't have time to think. There's a youth program, children's program, women's program, and a community services program. However, the thing that involves the most people is planning and preparing for the weekend Worship Service.

Recently he was deeply impacted by Paul's words to Timothy: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2). It feels as if his church is so busy running programs that the people have very little time to invest in developing others – and that's true for him too. Church is like a well-oiled machine and he thanks God for that. But if someone asked him, "Who is your 'Timothy'?" he would have to answer, "I don't have one."

What he would love is to find a way to move his church from being program-oriented to something more like a discipleship or mentoring culture.

**If Brian asked for your help, what questions would you ask him?
If he asked for help, what might you say to him?**

Step 2: Study

Read John 17:6-9

“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”

Read John 17:20-24

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

Read Mark 3:13-15

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

What do you observe in these passages?

(Verbs, key words, repeated words, connecting words)

John 17:6-9

John 17:20-24

Mark 3:13-15

What do these passages mean? (*Context, central truth*)

How do these passages apply to your situation?

Step 3: Read

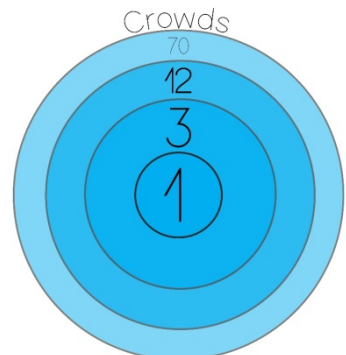
Fewer People; Greater Impact **by Rowland Forman**

In mentor-training seminars I'm sometimes asked, "How do I know who I should be in a mentoring relationship with?" My short answer is: "Just start where you are. Start with people that God has already connected you to. Don't aim to mentor many, just spend more time with fewer people."

At the heart of spiritual mentoring is an unselfish attitude. Both mentor-partners are more interested in the needs of the other person than their own. Writing to a church in Philippi, where people were concentrating on their own needs, Paul said,

"... in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:4).

That was the way of Jesus. Crowds of people thronged him everywhere he went. He thought of them more than himself. When they were hungry, he fed them. When they needed to recalibrate their thinking, he taught them. When they were sick, he healed them. When they had lost their way, he found them and restored them. Unselfish.



Jesus unselfishly served the needs of the crowds around him but also focused on a smaller group of 70 (Luke 10:1-24). Again, he was “with them.” He sent them out on a mission, two-by-two, gave them clear instructions, and debriefed after the mission was over.

Identifying People God has ‘Given’

Throughout the gospel narratives, it’s clear that Jesus spent the majority of his time and energy with “The Twelve” – twelve very ordinary men who followed him for three years. He cared for the Crowds, sent the 70 on mission, but invested himself largely in twelve people. John captures Jesus’ focus on these twelve in these words:

**Jesus
investe
d
himself
largely
in**

“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me...” (John 17:9).

He chose them, trained them for three years, and entrusted the task of taking his mission to the world to them.

Within that team of twelve though was another sub-group – Peter, James and John. Jesus was certainly unselfishly ‘there’ for them. He invited them to be with him on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13). And it was these three men that he asked to be his close companions in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37).

I would argue that within that group of three that he especially focused on was, from time to time, ‘the one.’ Peter is an example. He was invariably the spokesman for the Twelve, and his name

always appears first in the lists of the disciples. We see an example of this focus in Matthew 16:13-19.

When Jesus came to Caesarea Philippi, he asked the disciples who people said the Messiah was. They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

Jesus asked, “What about you?”

Peter blurted out, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

Jesus congratulated him, and said incredibly affirming words: “You are Peter and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Peter must have felt as if he was Jesus’ number one.

Yet there was also more than one occasion where Jesus had to admonish Peter. Within the Twelve, he received personal attention.

We see that even more clearly after Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus mentored Peter through a series of questions that no doubt related to Peter’s denial of him: “Do you love me more than these?” and affirmations that amounted to: “I have work for you to do. Your failure is not final.”

Undoubtedly the Apostle John, one of the Twelve, thought he was Jesus’ favorite. In John 21 he calls himself, “... the disciple whom Jesus loved...” – or “I was Jesus’ number one!” (John 21:20).

His comment reminds me of a funeral I attended a while ago. My friend Don’s four children (three sons and a daughter) gave eulogies

about their dad and presented the case that they were their father's favorite. It was highly entertaining when the daughter said, "My brothers can kid themselves all they like, but I know I was my father's favorite and here are the convincing reasons!"

My guess is that each of the disciples (maybe apart from Judas), when they read John's words about being the disciple that Jesus really loved thought were shocked, thinking they were Jesus' favorite!

Throughout his three years of public ministry Jesus was constantly surrounded by crowds, but he primarily invested in twelve ordinary men. And his primary investment was to pray for them. Listen to his prayer recorded in John 17:

"I have revealed you to those whom you **gave me** out of the world. They were yours; you **gave them** to me, and they have obeyed your word" (verse 6).

**His
primary
investment
was to**

"I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have **given me**, for they are yours" (verse 9).

"My prayer is not that you would take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (verse 15).

“Father, I want those you have **given me** to be with me where I am,
and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world”
(verse 24).

**Who has
God “given”
you at
present so
that you
can invest
in them?**

Who has God “given” you at present so that you can invest in them with a view to life-transformation? At the beginning of most months I write this prayer in my journal: “Father, who are you ‘giving’ me at the moment?”

Then, on the basis of the way Jesus focused his attention on a few rather than the many, I try to write down my “Three” (my Peter, James and John), my “Twelve” (including the Three), and once a quarter I write down the names of my wider group (Jesus had 70 key followers that he sent out two by two according to Luke 10:1). If you are of a more private disposition (like my grandmother Bella-Jane) you may just have the names of your children or grandchildren, and if my life story is anything to go by, that will be eternally significant.

Lingering with those God has Given

If we are going to mentor like Jesus, we need to do more than merely identify people that God has ‘given’ us. We will make time to invest in them. We will do life with them. We will linger with them.

This involves relational slowing. It is a call to eliminate what John Ortberg calls “hurry sickness” from our lives.

The Master Mentor, our Lord Jesus Christ, was incredibly busy according to Mark's gospel, yet he lingered with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35):

- He came alongside them.
- He asked them questions.
- He invited them to linger over the Scriptures.
- He had table fellowship with them.
- He revealed himself to them.

When you have identified someone (or a group) that God has given you, follow this Emmaus Road sequence:

- Meet with them. Maybe, like Jesus, go on a walk?
- Slow yourself down by asking questions and listening deeply with a view to understanding each other.
- Share together what God is teaching you through his Word.
- Have a meal together or enjoy a good cup of tea or coffee.
- Make it your goal to experience the presence of the risen Lord Jesus as you meet.

Step 4: Discuss & Apply

Introduction: Share steps you have taken as you have prayerfully applied Session One.

1. What questions or advice (from the Case Study) would you give to Pastor Brian?

2. What are the main lessons you learned from studying John 17:6-9, 20-24 and Mark 3:13-15?

3. How would you know for sure that God has really 'given' you a person (or group) to invest in?

4. Why is it so difficult to slow down and really make time to build a mentoring relationship with other people?

5. What do you sense the Holy Spirit is saying to you from this second lesson?

6. What action steps do you plan to take?

Session Three: IT'S ALL ABOUT LIFE TRANSFORMATION



Step 1: Prepare

The Apostle Peter's last recorded words in Scripture are an appeal to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

To what extent have you been growing in those two areas Peter mentions: gracious character, and developing a more intimate knowledge of Christ?

Session Three examines key areas of growth for Christ followers, and explores how God-given spiritual companionships can accelerate spiritual growth. It also looks at the possibility of growing in one aspect and neglecting others.

Case Study

Hank was a cranky man. He would always find the negative side of everything. He complained about the music in the church. It was too loud, or church services didn't have enough of his favorite songs. He would often talk about joy being a deep inner quality, but he hardly ever smiled. He was a cranky young man and became a cranky older man.

The church leaders wanted to say something about the fact that Hank was so negative and critical. He was one of the most regular attenders of church meetings. He was one of the wealthiest men in the church, and his contribution made a huge difference to the budget. The leaders' hope was that over the years, as he read his Bible, supported the church, listened to sermons, and that as God worked in his heart, he would change.

He never did.⁴

⁴ Adapted from John Ortberg, *The Life You Always Wanted* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), pp. 30-32.

Step 2: Study

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Read Colossians 1:28 – 2:3

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

What do you observe in these passages?

(Verbs, key words, repeated words, connecting words)

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

Colossians 1:28 – 2:3

What do these passages mean? *(Context, central truth)*

How do these passages apply to your situation?

Step 3: Read

Mentoring for Life-Change by Rowland Forman

Are you concerned about your spiritual development? How would you know if you are growing in grace? How would others tell if you had ceased to grow spiritually? How would you go about measuring spiritual growth? What would you measure if it were possible to determine whether you are developing spiritually? And who would be responsible for measuring your growth in Christlikeness?

**How
would you
know
if you are
growing in**

While spiritual growth is not always obvious, and it is certainly not uniform or automatic, I believe that it is measurable up to a certain point. For example, in his book, *Rediscovering Holiness*, J.I. Packer lists five signs of growth in Christian character and intimacy with God:

- Sign One:** An increasing delight in praising God, and a dislike for being praised oneself.
- Sign Two:** A growing desire to give to others and to care for them and a move away from self-absorption.
- Sign Three:** An increasing passion for personal holiness and an avoidance of behavior that displeases God.
- Sign Four:** A growing commitment to God's kingdom even if that means taking unpopular actions to fulfil that commitment.

Sign Five: A growing willingness to submit to God's sovereignty and an avoidance of impatient attitudes.⁵

How did you measure up to those signs? While I agree with Packer that there are signs of spiritual growth, the ones he lists could be taken as rather abstract and subjective.

Unhealthy Signs

It may help to uncover signs of unhealthy spiritual development before we look at ways of assessing our growth in grace. Consider these three distorted pictures of church leaders:

Oversized Heads

Imagine a body with an inordinately big head. It would be grotesque. Some Christian leaders are like that. They know so much. They use their theological and biblical knowledge like a club to beat other believers into submission. In Paul's words to the Corinthian church, they are "puffed up" with pride in their ability to process and package spiritual truth. Leaders like this are often underdeveloped in Christian service. They want to hide behind their books. They may also be low on the experiential side of Christianity. When they teach or counsel, you almost feel that they have no soul.

Oversized Hearts

⁵ J.I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992), pp. 188-190.

Other church leaders have large hearts, but skinny legs and a pea-sized head. For these people, Christianity is all about experience. They are warm individuals that relate well to others in need. They may care very little about doctrine and often specialize in religious feelings to the exclusion of practical Christian service.

Oversized Limbs

These individuals have massive legs and arms. They are forever doing good deeds for others, but they may have pinheads and a matchstick body.⁶ They serve themselves into the ground, but often neglect doctrinal truth and the devotional disciplines of the Christian life that might enable their heart to grow.

How about you? Have you paid attention to your knowledge base to the exclusion of your character and ministry skills? Have you focused on the development of your ‘heart,’ in a spiritual sense, yet neglected a sound knowledge of God and his Word and involvement in the ministry of your local church? Are you serving Christ frantically, yet thin on Bible knowledge and fragile in aspects of your character?

Both Life and Doctrine

When Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he expected his young protégé to be growing, and he called on him to attend to every facet of his life and ministry. He said:

⁶ Ibid, pp. 167-170.

“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, **so that everyone may see your progress**. Watch your **life** and your **doctrine** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Timothy 4:15-16).

Is there evidence of progress, or are you

When Paul referred to *these matters* he was talking about every part of Timothy’s life and ministry – his character (he was to set an example to other believers in his speech, life, love, faith and purity), his ministry (he was to devote himself to preaching and teaching) and his gifting. The reason Timothy needed to pay attention to these things was so that his progress would be obvious to everyone around him.

Stop and consider your life and ministry. Is there evidence of progress, or are you stagnating? Do other people notice that you are developing in your character, knowledge and ministry skills, or do they see real weaknesses in all three?

Spiritual Companions and Growth

Paul’s relationship to his spiritual son Timothy demonstrates the impact of one spiritual companion on another. Like a spiritual father, Paul had opened up his whole life to Timothy. They travelled together. Paul cared about Timothy’s progress in life and doctrine.

Try to emulate the Paul-Timothy relationship

Timothy saw Paul's reactions to difficult people and impossible circumstances firsthand. He listened to Paul's teaching, and received letters of encouragement from him.

As you identify and begin to be in a mentoring relationship with your spiritual companion, try to emulate the Paul-Timothy relationship. Aim to take your companion with you when you go on a ministry assignment. Ask questions of each other that press into possible areas for growth. From time to time, review ways you are growing. Discuss the J.I. Packer's five signs of spiritual growth. Be open with each other about whether you have "oversized heads, hearts, or hands."

The Primary Growth Agent

2 Corinthians 3:18 outlines three essential elements in your quest to be more like Christ:

"And **we all**, with unveiled faces **contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed** into his image with ever increasing glory, which comes **from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**"

1. Transformation is a Process Expected of Every Believer. "We all..." says Paul. All of us. No exceptions. Remember he is writing to the less than perfect church in Corinth. It is to that church he says, "This is for all of you—every individual who is being handcrafted by God himself."

2. Transformation Calls for Action on Our Part. "We all contemplate the Lord's glory..." We need to keep looking at Christ,

not other Christians. Become enthralled with Christ and in the process, be transformed.

3. Transformation is Accomplished by the Holy Spirit. “Which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Like Moses with Joshua, Naomi with Ruth, and Paul with Timothy, we have a crucial part in helping each other grow in character and skills. We may do the listening, encouraging and praying, but it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who does the changing.

In my life and ministry there have been significant mentor-friends that have facilitated spiritual growth:

- My grandmother — Bella Miller, who taught me the Scriptures from my youth.
- My uncle — Dr. Will Miller, who was more like a spiritual father to me, and took me with him on preaching assignments.
- My wife Elaine, who for 51 years has called me to a life of trustful prayer.
- My lifelong friends, Bruce Miller, Jeff Jones, Don Overton and Dan Debenport.
- Numerous spiritual sons (too many to mention).

But however influential they have been, they are not the ones that have changed me. If there has been any transformation, it has come from the Lord who is the Spirit!

Step 4: Discuss & Apply

Introduction: Share steps you have taken as you have prayerfully applied Session Two.

1. What was your reaction to the case study about Hank? Why?
2. What were some of the key things you learned from your study in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 and Colossians 1:28-2:3?
3. Why is it so difficult to evaluate whether you are really growing in Christlikeness?

4. Share stories of one person that God has used to help you grow in your character or ministry skills. Why were they so influential?

5. What do you sense the Holy Spirit is saying to you from this third lesson?

6. What action steps do you plan to take?

Session Four:

REMOVING OUR MASKS



Step 1: Prepare

On the “Guarded Leader”—“Vulnerable Leader” continuum, where would you place yourself? Are you mostly a very reserved, guarded person in your relationships with spiritual companions, or are you mostly open and transparent, unafraid to let people know who you really are?

This lesson explores the importance of openness in trust-based spiritual companionships. It is a call to unmask because of the grace of God.

Case Study

“Hi Sam. How are you doing?”

“Doing fine Philip. Yourself?”

“Fine, Sam. Fine. Couldn’t be finer.”

“How is your wife, Sam?”

“Fine, considering the circumstances. Just fine.”

“What about your wife, Philip?”

“She’s fine too. The whole family is doing just fine. Can’t complain. I just spoke with Mrs. Sanderson and she told me she was doing fine, but she had is on reliable information that several other families were not doing fine. She asked me not to share that publicly, but just to tell you, only so you might pray more effectively.”

“Well that’s fine with me. At least we’re all fine, just fine.”⁷

⁷ Adapted from *TrueFaced*, by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol & John Lynch (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), p. 20.

Step 2: Study

Read Galatians 6:1-5

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.

Read Philippians 3:10-14

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

What do you observe in these passages?

(Verbs, key words, repeated words, connecting words)

Galatians 6:1-5

Philippians 3:10-14

What do these passages mean? *(Context, central truth)*

How do these passages apply to your situation?

Step 3: Read

Guarded or Vulnerable?
by Rowland Forman

One of my hobbies is to collect memorable quotes. Here's one of my favourites, by Alan Jones:

“God has so ordained things that we grow in the Spirit only through the frail instrumentality of one another.”

I like that, although it is an overstatement to make a point. It does however capture what the biblical one-anothers are all about. Two or more imperfect people meeting together (Hebrews 10:24-25), encouraging one another (Hebrews 3:13), confessing our sins to one another (James 5:16), and carrying one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). How would you be able to carry someone else's burden if you didn't know what it was?

What gets in the way of us growing in the Spirit through interaction with each other? Often it is because we have masks on. We are more guarded than vulnerable. We are hiding behind masks of competency or perfection. People ask us how we are doing, and we say, “Just fine thanks,” even though internally we may be falling apart.

**We are hiding
behind
masks of
competency**

Mask wearing started in the Garden of Eden. After the Fall, God asked, “Where are you?” even though he knew exactly where Adam and Eve were. Adam responded, “I heard the sound of you in the

garden and *I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.*” (Genesis 3:9-10). In one way or other, we have been hiding ever since.

As Alan Jones said, God has orchestrated life-changing spiritual companionships with fellow failing human beings to help us to stop hiding and become real with each other.

A Real Friend

The story of the prophet Nathan’s relationship with King David captures elements of the “guarded and vulnerable” continuum. After his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, David went to extreme measures to cover everything up.

He even orchestrated the death of Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband.

Psalm 32 describes what those months of cover-up felt like for the King:

“When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night
your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer” (verses 3-4).

He failed to confess his sins to God and did everything he could to give people the impression he was still a godly king. The effects were horrific—physically, emotionally and spiritually.

**Sometime
s a close
friendship
can get in
the way of
honesty**

Enter his mentor—Nathan. Over the years, Nathan had developed a strong friendship with King David. He was the man who first encouraged David when he wanted to build a temple for the Lord (2 Samuel 7:1-3). Sometimes a close friendship can get in the way of honesty. Not Nathan. He was a true and courageous friend.

2 Samuel 12:1 starts, “Then the LORD sent Nathan to David.” The timing was right, and Nathan was the right person to admonish this powerful man.

Nathan’s courage came from obedience. He knew God had sent him. He could have lost David’s friendship, he might in those days even lost his life, but he responded to the Spirit’s prompting. Instead of bold confrontation, Nathan told the story of a small ewe lamb and at the right moment, confronted David with the words, “You are the man” (verse 7).

Notice those key elements as they relate to the importance of removing our masks:

- Since the Fall, in the Garden of Eden, it is human to attempt to cover up our sin.
- Covering up our sin has disastrous consequences.
- We should cultivate high-trust spiritual friendships, so that when the time is right, we can practice grace-filled accountability with each other.

Not Perfect but Progressing

In Philippians chapter three, Paul sets out his life-goal: “I want to know Christ — yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings ...” Then, just in case his readers put him on a pedestal, he continues “... Not that I have already obtained all this, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it” (verses 10, 12-13).

What spiritual companions need is a large dose of the humility that the Apostle Paul demonstrates in this passage. The admission that, “I’m not there yet. I’m not perfect, but by God’s grace alone I am progressing.”

**What
spiritual
companions
need is
a large
dose of**

A turning point in my mentoring journey was when I met weekly with Rick Murphy while we were both students at Dallas Seminary. I was ten years Rick’s senior. Prior to meeting with Rick, I had assumed that if I was to be an effective mentor, I had to project godliness and be a closed book when it came to anything that would reveal my brokenness. The times with Rick changed me. Early on in our lunch meetings, he opened up about struggles he was having. That flicked a switch in me. It was a call to remove my mask. Most of my life I’d been a leader, and wrongly believed I needed to hide my inner conflict between my flesh and the Spirit.

Those lunch meetings with Rick simply unmasked me. Interestingly by then we had established a high-trust relationship so that we could be transparent with each other.

Which Room Are You In?

In their insightful book, *TrueFaced: Trust God And Others With Who You Really Are*, Thrall, McNicol and Lynch describe two rooms: “The Room of Good Intentions,” and “The Room of Grace.” Which room are you in?

In the “Room of Good Intentions” you are trying really hard to keep up appearances. You camouflage or hide unresolved sin from others. As you enter this room, you notice everyone looks so holy, so correct, and a little fearful. When you ask them how they are, they are quick to let you know that they are just fine.

When you enter “The Room of Grace” someone says, “Welcome to this room,” and you feel accepted. Later you discover that,

**The call of
this
lesson is
to stop**

“In the Room of Grace the almost unthinkable has happened. God has shown all his cards. In essence he says, ‘What if I tell them who they are? ... What if I tell them I love them and will always love them? That I love them right now, no matter what they’ve done, as much as I love my Son? That there’s nothing they can do to make my love go away? ... What if I tell them they are righteous, with my righteousness, right now? What if I tell them that I actually live in them now? ... What if I tell them they don’t have to put on a mask?’”⁸

The call of this lesson is to stop pretending. Stop trying to keep up appearances. And to find a Nathan, or in the story of Ruth in the days of the Judges, to find a Naomi, with whom you can share life and be transparent.

⁸ Ibid., p. 51-52.

One of the primary ways, (maybe not the only way) God has ordained things, for us to grow into Christlikeness is through the frail instrumentality of one another.

Step 4: Discuss & Apply

Introduction: Share steps you have taken as you have prayerfully applied Session Three.

1. In your culture, how common is the Case Study about being “just fine”? Why?

2. How does Philippians 3 speak to the topic of being transparent in our relationships with fellow believers?

3. Do you agree with Alan Jones that we grow in the Spirit *only* through the frail instrumentality of one another? Why?

4. What are some of the elements that make it possible for us to take off our masks when we are in a God-given spiritual companionship?

5. What do you sense the Holy Spirit is saying to you from this fourth lesson?

6. What action steps do you plan to take?

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