

Biblical Reflection on Mentoring

Jethro and Moses

Scripture: Exodus 18: 1, 6-27

Reflection Questions

1. What can be said about Jethro's role as mentor to Moses? In what ways is it unexpected? In what ways does it make sense? What does this text say about the qualifications of a mentor?
2. Consider the nature of the communication between Moses and Jethro. How would you characterize their exchanges? What can be said about the nature of their conversations? What does it tell us about mentoring?
3. Jethro provides very practical advice to Moses on how to delegate responsibility. Why do you think Moses needed someone else to help him think of this strategy? How can mentors help people see possibilities they might otherwise overlook?
4. How is God present in the relationship between Moses and Jethro? How does God use each of them in this situation? How does Jethro demonstrate leadership?
5. At the time of this encounter between Moses and Jethro, Moses was already well established as leader of his community. What does this story tell us about the need of leaders to be open to advice, counsel, and ongoing mentoring? What can stand in the way of this kind of relationship? What factors account for Jethro's success in this situation?

Moses and Joshua

Although the references are relatively brief and scattered, the books of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and Judges give testimony to the ways that Moses prepared Joshua to be his successor. They reveal that Joshua was an ever-present aide to Moses who had been with him since his youth (Numbers 11:28).

Moses sends Joshua into battle

Exodus 17:8-10

Moses takes Joshua to the mountaintop

Exodus 24:12-16

Moses invites Joshua along as he speaks to God

Exodus 33:8-11

Moses sends Joshua as a spy

Numbers 13:16-17

Moses prepares to pass the mantle of leadership to Joshua

Numbers 27:18-20

The Lord appoints Joshua

Joshua 1:1-9

Reflection Questions

1. Consider how Moses helped Joshua learn about God. What do these texts suggest about the role mentors can play in modeling how to relate to God?
2. Moses gave Joshua a number of strategic assignments. What do these tell us about how mentors can provide learning opportunities? What do you imagine happened before and after these assignments?
3. What do you imagine the relationship between Joshua and Moses was like? How was God present in Joshua's preparation for leadership?
4. Considering the example of Moses, reflect on the role of mentor as teacher.

Naomi and Ruth

The Book of Ruth recalls the familiar story of Naomi, a Judean woman who lost her husband and two sons while living in Moab, and her devoted daughter-in-law Ruth, a Moabite. Out of loyalty to her mother-in-law, Ruth decides to return to Bethlehem with Naomi, rather than remaining with her own family in Moab. As these two destitute widows return to Bethlehem, Naomi counsels Ruth on how to make her way and find acceptance in a new community.

Ruth 1:7-18

Ruth 2:17-3:6

Ruth 4:13-17

Reflection Questions

1. Naomi's mentoring of Ruth occurs in the context of a deeply felt personal relationship. Discuss how this affected Naomi's advice to Ruth. How is friendship and affection a part of mentoring? When can it get in the way?
2. Consider the dynamic that existed between Naomi, Ruth, and the customs of the community. How are leadership and initiative shared between Ruth and Naomi? Consider how mentors should balance giving advice with encouraging initiative on the part of those being mentored.
3. Consider the "everydayness" of Ruth and Naomi's plight. How does God work in the midst of the details of people's lives to form leaders? In what ways were Naomi and Ruth leaders and servants of God?
4. How was God's spirit present in this relationship? How do we create space for God's presence in mentoring relationships?

Eli and Samuel

Scripture: 1 Samuel 3

Reflection Questions

1. Although Eli is a flawed character, God uses him to train Samuel and help him understand his call. Does mentoring require perfection? How can someone with personal shortcomings be an effective mentor?
2. How does Eli nurture Samuel's faith? How do mentors help those mentored hear and respond to God's call?
3. Eli tells Samuel to hide nothing from him. What does this text say about the risks and rewards of honesty in a mentoring relationship? What are some risks and rewards of honesty in mentoring that you have experienced?
4. Consider how trust and patience are at work in this story and how they relate to mentoring.
5. God uses Samuel to pronounce a judgment against Eli's family. In this sense, Eli and Samuel learn from each other, despite Eli's senior status. How can a mentoring relationship be a "two-way street" where both partners grow in faith and service? How can mentors be attuned to how God is speaking to them through those they mentor?

Elijah and Elisha

Scripture: 1 and 2 Kings

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

2 Kings 2: 1-2, 6-14

Reflection Questions

1. In these texts, how readily does Elisha accept Elijah's authority? What stands in the way? How are the obstacles overcome?
2. Elijah is the instrument that God uses to call Elisha. How do we communicate to others that God may be calling them? How do we invite them to take up the mantle?
3. What do you observe about the nature of the relationship between Elisha and Elijah? What are the mentoring lessons that can be learned from this example?
4. It seems at a number of points in these stories that Elisha's resolve is being tested. Is putting someone to the test part of mentoring? If so, how can it be done faithfully?
5. Discuss how "loyalty" and "presence" are key elements of the mentoring relationship in these stories.

Elizabeth and Mary

Scripture: Luke 1: 39–56

Reflection Questions

1. What do we learn from this story about how God uses mentors to prepare leaders? Why are these women important?
2. How does Elizabeth confirm Mary's faith and call? How do the two women witness to each other in this text? What role do mentors play in confirming faith and refining one's call? What does this look like in our context?
3. The text lets us imagine how Elizabeth and Mary used the three months that they spent together. What do you think transpired during this time? How might God have used Elizabeth to prepare Mary for her role?
4. Consider the similarities and differences between Elizabeth and Mary. What are the similarities and differences in the situations they face and the ways that God used them? What do you think are the most important points that people should have in common in order to have a profitable mentoring relationship? What sort of differences should they have?

Barnabas and Paul

Scripture: Acts 9, 11

[Barnabas was the mentor and sponsor who introduced Paul to the church in Jerusalem, which would play such an important role in his life. Later, he was Paul's partner in several missionary ventures. Barnabas is looked to as a model of encouragement in ministry.]

Acts 9: 26-31

Acts 11:19-26

Acts 14:1-3

Reflection Questions

1. Barnabas believed in Paul and his faith when the other disciples were still afraid of him. Why do you think Barnabas was willing to go out on a limb for Paul? What does it mean to believe in someone who is yet unproven? How can mentors be radically "for" the persons they are mentoring?
2. Paul is often looked to as a model of Christian leadership. In what ways do you think Barnabas may have shaped Paul's understanding of Christian leadership?
3. Barnabas seems to have been the real leader of what we now call "Paul's first missionary journey." In several of the early episodes Barnabas is mentioned before Paul. Later as they continued their work Paul came increasingly to the foreground. What issues are involved in a mentoring situation when the person being mentored eventually surpasses his or her mentor?
4. Barnabas's name is almost always listed in Scripture along with the names of other disciples. He is considered the consummate team player. How can mentors teach and model team work and inclusive leadership?