

MENTORING
FOR SPIRITUAL
GROWTH

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Published by
The Bible Reading Fellowship
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Website: www.brf.org.uk

ISBN 978 1 84101 562 0
First published 2008
Reprinted 2009, 2014
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

MENTORING
FOR SPIRITUAL
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SHARING THE JOURNEY
OF FAITH

TONY HORSFALL

*To my Renovare friends—Jonathan, Andy, Dave,
Baz and Paul. How much I have appreciated your
companionship and our days together!*

Contents

Preface	7
Introduction.....	9
1 Point of departure: What exactly is spiritual mentoring?.....	13
2 Ready for adventure: The philosophy behind spiritual mentoring.....	20
3 Ancient paths: Spiritual mentoring in the Bible and Church history	27
4 Travelling companions: What it means to be a spiritual friend	35
5 Reliable guides: Qualities, skills and tools of a mentor	43
6 The scenic route: Developing spiritual awareness.....	55
7 A sense of direction: The gift of discernment.....	63
8 Road maps and guidebooks: Insights for busy mentors	72
9 Roadside assistance: Some of the key issues.....	80

10	Losing the way: Mentoring those with questions of faith	90
11	Travelling by night: When God seems absent	97
12	Group travel: Spiritual mentoring in small groups	106
13	Resting places: Mentoring through retreats and quiet days.....	114
14	Are we nearly there yet? The goals of spiritual mentoring.....	121
	Appendix A: Spiritual exercises	130
	Appendix B: Contemplative Bible reading or <i>lectio divina</i>	136
	Appendix C: Ethical guidelines for spiritual mentoring	138
	Bibliography	140
	Notes	141



Preface

I've just (at the time of writing) returned from the fifth Spiritual Mentoring Forum, an annual event here in the United Kingdom that came into being soon after this book was published in 2008. As I taught the contents of the book in various settings, I became aware of a number of isolated individuals scattered throughout the country who were beginning to mentor others. It seemed important to bring them together for mutual encouragement, further training, and the opportunity to network and share resources.

This year's Forum was as good as any we have had. It was thrilling to be made aware of the great variety of expressions of mentoring taking place, from those caring for mission partners via Skype to those developing younger leaders in schools and colleges. Some mentors are active in their local church, while others are working more formally with individuals in professional settings. All share a common purpose: to unlock the potential within individuals for spiritual growth and service, and to be there to encourage and resource them.

This, of course, is only one small snapshot of what is happening. There are other networks, other ways in which the growing number of mentors and spiritual directors is being resourced and equipped. The pattern is being repeated in many other countries too. One thing is for sure—mentoring is here to stay. It is a way of building up believers that fits the context of both church and society in the 21st century. No church, training institution or Christian organisation can afford to ignore its potential for encouraging spiritual growth, releasing individual potential and enabling personal transformation.

That is why I am delighted that BRF are reissuing this book. I know it has been used as a 'text book' in some places and as a study guide in others. I hope it will continue to provide a starting-off point for many who wish to equip themselves to mentor others and

Mentoring for Spiritual Growth

to accompany them on their spiritual journey. It is by no means a definitive work, but I hope it lays a foundation that will give people confidence to begin.

One of the greatest gifts we can give to another person is the gift of listening. Being a good listener is at the heart of the mentoring relationship. It is a ministry that is labour intensive, but for which there is an ever-increasing demand. We need a great army of people willing to prepare themselves for the work of strengthening others. If this book can play even a small part in the equipping of God's people for this vital task, then I shall be well satisfied.

Be blessed as you read.



Introduction

This is a book about spiritual direction. It is a humble attempt to make this ancient Christian practice accessible and relevant to a new generation. For this reason I have chosen to use the term spiritual mentoring, since ‘mentoring’ is a word more commonly in use nowadays, and does not carry the same ‘baggage’ as a term like ‘spiritual direction’ does for some people.

I am aware that even the word ‘mentoring’ can be confusing, since it is used by different people in different ways, but it slots more easily into contemporary thinking and vocabulary and I have therefore preferred it. I am also aware that it is impossible to avoid using the term ‘spiritual direction’ altogether, especially when referring to the work of other writers, so at times the two will be used interchangeably.

Every book I have read in the last few years on the subject of spiritual direction has recognised in some way the startling growth of interest in this aspect of Christian ministry. It is a healthy and encouraging sign, for it shows a growing hunger to know God more deeply and a desire to take following Jesus seriously. It is happening all over the world, and among all types of church groupings. Everyone agrees that there is a need to understand the process of direction and to train others in its practice.

The rediscovery of this ministry is reflected in the increasing emphasis given to it by prominent Christian leaders. American writer and counsellor Larry Crabb, for example, has noted that in nearly 50 years of living as a Christian he has ‘never seen the soul’s thirst for God more talked about, more recognised as a vital motivation in the human personality or more strongly experienced as a consuming passion’. He goes on to say that ‘nothing is more needed in advancing this revolution than making the idea of spiritual

direction more biblically rooted and clearly understandable (insofar as mystery can be understood) and making the wise practice of spiritual direction more valued and common'.¹ Here in Britain, Selwyn Hughes began in the latter years of his life to introduce courses on spiritual direction into his training programmes. Two years before his death in 2006 he wrote this: 'I do not consider myself to be a prophet in the sense of foretelling events, but I believe that in the future spiritual direction is a practice that will be taken up by many in our evangelical churches.'²

Nor is it only the more reflective counsellors who are identifying and responding to this movement of God's Spirit. Some of the more active and outward-looking evangelists are responding to the same pull to inwardness. Leighton Ford, for many years an associate evangelist with Billy Graham, has described how, after a 30-year career preaching to large audiences all over the world, he took a sabbatical to find space and renewed vision. The time apart completely redirected his whole life, leading him to exchange the pulpit for the one-to-one ministry of spiritual direction.

British evangelist Rob Frost has also acknowledged the benefits of spiritual mentoring. Known for his dynamism and boundless enthusiasm, Frost has been behind many significant evangelistic efforts in Britain. Taking a retrospective look at his life and ministry, he recognises that many of his struggles as a Christian would have been lessened if he had been mentored himself at an earlier stage. 'I'm convinced,' he says, 'that all Christians should see themselves as apprentices in the spiritual life and should seek guidance from those who have travelled further along the journey than they have. We all need spiritual directors who can navigate our hungry souls towards the feast of good things which God has prepared for us.'³

I am writing primarily (though not exclusively) for those in the evangelical and charismatic sections of the church. It is here that there has been most suspicion of the ministry of spiritual direction. It has to be said that there is a certain mystique surrounding the subject, which seems to take place in isolated monasteries or

retreat houses, involve priests and nuns, and to employ language and practices that seem largely unfamiliar, if not a little suspicious. I hope this book will go some way to removing the mystery and the strangeness! Some, of course, fear that ‘direction’ may become authoritarian and are wary of any hint of sacerdotalism (the doctrine that ascribes special powers to ordained priests), given the close association it has with Roman Catholicism and ‘high’ Anglicanism. Others probably see no need for it, assuming that since we each have the Holy Spirit and the scriptures to guide us we can travel the Christian pathway without the need of external help.

As more and more evangelicals and charismatics are looking for a deeper experience of God, however, they are opening up to other traditions and finding the spiritual riches that are there; one example of these is the wisdom of having a ‘soul friend’ to help and advise. As they begin to experience contemporary examples of good practice in spiritual direction, they are realising that it is not at all authoritarian and in fact highly rewarding. Increasing numbers are now enjoying the benefits of retreats and quiet days, and finding spiritual companions (to use another common term) to guide them on their journey of faith. Slowly the walls are being dismantled.

It seems to me that spiritual mentoring is ideally suited to meet the needs of an emerging generation of Christian men and women and the new crop of younger leaders. Postmodern culture is relationally oriented and resists the ‘one size fits all’ mentality of the previous generation. Pre-programmed discipleship packages are less likely to be effective as we move further into the 21st century. Mentoring offers the freedom to recognise that each individual is unique and that their story and journey are unique as well. Wisely practised, and because of its care for the nurture of the individual, it will liberate many into a deeper experience of God and a more radical discipleship. It is ideally suited to a context where many fresh expressions of church are blossoming. At its heart, spiritual mentoring is simply a relationship between two people for the purpose of spiritual growth. That is why one chapter in the book

will be devoted to the more informal, and more common, ministry of what is often called spiritual friendship. Almost anyone can care for another as a 'soul friend', and part of my aim is to encourage members of local congregations to do just that for each other.

I also recognise that mentoring needs to be much more specialised than this as well, and I hope the text will help those who feel called to minister at a deeper level to prepare themselves for this much-needed and extremely worthwhile ministry. By definition mentoring is time-consuming and labour-intensive. We need to see many, many individuals called by God and equipped by the Spirit entering into this ministry if the hunger for God is to be satisfied and the church is to be strong enough to face the challenges of an increasingly hostile world.

I hope this book will be read by individuals who are already mentoring others or who are beginning to sense that God may be calling them in this way. I hope it will be read by church leaders to re-envision them about the real task of ministry. I hope it will be read in small groups, maybe by cell group leaders keen to see their members grow as much as they can in God, or by friends who meet together simply because they want to pursue God more intentionally. I hope it will be read by students preparing for ministry in local churches, helping them to see new possibilities for the shape of future ministry and by mission partners living and working in other cultures, needing to keep themselves spiritually fresh. Most importantly of all, I pray that it will be taken up in the hand of God and used by him to bring his people closer to him, thus making them more effective in their witness to the world.



Chapter One

Point of departure: What exactly is spiritual mentoring?

I was first introduced to the process of mentoring in 1999 by Rick Lewis, an Australian minister who came to Britain at the invitation of the Bible Society to introduce the idea to church leaders. I immediately responded with enthusiasm to what he shared, recognising that mentoring was something I had already been doing instinctively for most of my life but also sensing that it would become a significant factor in shaping my future ministry.

Rick's definition of mentoring is very simple. Mentoring is promoting the work of God in the life of another. This simple definition resonated with something deep in my own heart as what I most wanted to do. I suppose it is linked with how God has 'shaped' me for ministry, but helping others to experience more of God registers very high on my scale of priorities and aims in ministry. Those who find themselves involved in spiritual mentoring usually say something similar, for it normally involves a call of God, a sense that this is what the Father wants us to do. This is one reason why we speak of 'spiritual' mentoring. It is not a technique or set of skills learned mechanically and used dispassionately. Spiritual mentoring is motivated by a sense of vocation or calling and energised by God.

Defining clearly the terms we use is important in any subject, for it means we have the same starting-off point, and this helps the clarity of our communication. Rick's definition got me started in thinking more carefully about mentoring, and since then I have come across a number of other definitions that have expanded my

understanding of the term. It may be helpful to repeat here that I see mentoring as the basic skill of working in a one-to-one relationship with someone else so that the other person (let's call them the mentoree) can grow and develop in their faith. This means that mentoring is the 'hub' of many fairly similar activities. It can be used in a number of different directions—for pastoral care, for discipling, for coaching, for teaching, for counselling and for spiritual direction. I have used the term 'spiritual mentoring' to indicate that the skills of mentoring are being used in the process of spiritual direction. You may or may not agree with my use of the term in this way, but at least you will know what I mean by it!

As we look at each definition in turn we will see that they grow in complexity, and each adds something new to our overall appreciation of what is involved. As we ponder we will also try to ask three key questions about spiritual mentoring:

- Who is involved (people)?
- What actually happens (process)?
- What is it for (purpose)?

The first definition comes from the pen of Eugene Peterson, a much-respected writer and thinker based for many years at Regent's College in Vancouver. His writings have done much to open up evangelicals to the wider realm of Christian spirituality. He says, 'Spiritual direction takes place when two people agree to give their full attention to what God is doing in one (or both) of their lives and seek to respond in faith.'¹

Here we see that normally spiritual mentoring involves *people* in a one-to-one relationship that is intentional and purposeful. This lifts it out of the informal, where a relationship might or might not develop, and puts it firmly into the formal category, where those involved are committed to the relationship. It has a definite *purpose* or goal in mind—understanding what God is doing in someone's life, and encouraging them to respond in some way to what is

discovered through the sharing. In some cases, we note, this may be mutually beneficial. Further, the *process* requires some concentrated effort and is something we need to focus upon if it is to work. It demands our full attention.

Our second definition comes from John Mallison, a respected leader with Scripture Union in Australia. He is writing primarily about discipleship, which in my understanding is the process of helping believers become more established in the basics of the faith so that they can then live effectively for Christ and serve him fruitfully. His definition is sufficiently broad, however, to add to our appreciation of what is involved in spiritual mentoring: 'Christian mentoring is a dynamic, intentional relationship of trust in which one person enables another person to maximise the grace of God in their life and service.'²

Here we are reminded that we are using mentoring in a specifically Christian way. Again, it involves two people in a structured setting, but a new factor is introduced—the relationship is built upon trust. Mentoring depends upon friendship and the creation of a safe environment where it is easy to be open and vulnerable. A little more is disclosed to us about the *process*. It is an enabling relationship which results in empowerment for the mentoree, specifically helping the person to access the multi-faceted grace of God for themselves. The focus therefore is on God and the mentoree, not the mentor. The *purpose* is then to apply this to every aspect of life, and no aspect is considered to be outside the parameters of the mentoring relationship.

Bruce Demarest has worked among students in Europe and as a missionary in Africa and is presently a professor at Denver Seminary in the United States. He has written passionately about the need for evangelicals to engage more deeply with Christian spirituality and gives us this definition. Spiritual direction 'refers to the structured ministry in which a gifted and experienced Christian, called a spiritual director, helps another believer to grow in relationship and obedience to Christ.'³

Now we see something more about the *person* who offers direction. They are to be both experienced (in the ways of God) and gifted (by the Holy Spirit and through appropriate training). We will have more to say about the qualities of such people later in the book. The *process* is again said to need structure (agreement about when to meet, where, for how long and so on). A little more is said about the *purpose*, too. It is to bring about not only growth but obedience. This liberates the relationship from a cosy chat into a challenging exercise of discovering and doing the will of God.

Perhaps the writer who has most influenced my own thinking is Dr David Benner, a professor of psychology and spirituality based in Atlanta, Georgia. His own discovery of the importance of soul care and the value of a broader Christian spirituality has fired his passion for what he calls spiritual friendship. He writes:

Spiritual direction is a prayer process in which a person seeking help in cultivating a deeper personal relationship with God meets with another person for prayer and conversation that is focussed on increasing aware-ness of God in the midst of life's experiences and facilitating surrender to God's will.⁴

Now we are beginning to see why this is *spiritual* mentoring! When it comes to the *people* involved, the mentoree is passionately seeking a deeper relationship with God and comes to the relationship with a spiritual hunger, not looking for a quick fix but for help in finding ways to cultivate that relationship over a period of time. This means the relationship is growth-centred, not problem-oriented. This distinguishes it from counselling. The *process*, too, reflects a deeply spiritual approach that is soaked in prayer and that includes prayer as well as meaningful dialogue as key components. It involves seeking to identify the working of God in the events of everyday life, both the good and the bad, a process that requires discernment. Here the *purpose* is also spelt out in no un-certain terms: it is that the mentoree might give themselves fully

Point of departure: What exactly is spiritual mentoring?

to God's will for their life, whatever that might mean for them.

Our final definition is perhaps the most all-inclusive and comes from Keith Anderson and Randy Reese, two authors and spiritual mentors from the States. Here is their summary:

Spiritual mentoring is a triadic relationship between mentor, mentoree and the Holy Spirit, where the mentoree can discover, through the already present action of God, intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a child of God and a unique voice for kingdom responsibility.⁵

Now don't be afraid of the word 'triadic'—it has nothing to do with secret Chinese societies! It means that when it comes to the *people* involved, there are not just two but three—and the really important person is the Holy Spirit, who is the true spiritual director and the one on whom the whole relationship depends. This dependency on the work of the Holy Spirit is characteristic of most contemporary explanations of spiritual mentoring. When this is acknowledged and welcomed we need not be afraid of authoritarianism. The *process* is again seen as one of discernment, recognising where God is already at work, but here the *purpose* is fleshed out in even greater detail.

We are introduced to three significant outcomes of the mentoring relationship. Firstly, the enjoyment of a closer relationship with God, based on his love for us, which matches the hunger that many people are feeling for a deeper connection with God. Secondly, and flowing out of the first point, the discovery of our true identity as God's beloved children based on who we are and not on what we do. This is liberating to busy Christians worn out by years of living on the treadmill of church activism. Thirdly, and flowing out of the first two, the recognition of what it is that God is calling us to do, and for what he has specifically gifted us.

The discovery of our unique 'shape' is then a natural outworking of his unconditional love for us and our secure identity as his children. This lifts Christian service out of the realm of drudgery and makes it an exciting and fulfilling adventure.

Can we now put this all together and form an overview of what we mean by spiritual mentoring?

The people: the mentor, probably a little further on in the Christian journey, seeks to establish a friendly relationship with the mentoree that encourages trust and provides a safe space for them to share their deepest desires, longings and fears. The mentoree comes to the relationship with a desire to grow spiritually, a hunger to know God more deeply, and a willingness to be open and vulnerable so that they may benefit from time with the mentor. The relationship may be informal but has normally a definite structure to it with clear boundaries and clear expectations on both sides. Crucially a third person is present throughout and is the true mentor—the Holy Spirit.

The process: it involves talking and sharing and assumes a listening attitude on the part of the mentor. No part of life is off limits as they explore together what is happening in the life of the mentoree and seek together to become more aware of what God is presently doing and saying in the circumstances of life. Both come in dependency on the Holy Spirit, seeking to attune themselves to his voice and discern together where he is leading.

The purpose: the mentoring relationship is an intentional one, for it has a clear aim in mind—to help the mentoree discover the all-sufficient grace of God and to apply this to their unique life situation and calling. It will inevitably involve at some stage the exploration of God's unconditional and personal love for them, the discovery of their unique gifts and calling, and the discerning of God's will for their future life and service. This does not happen overnight, of course, and so assumes an ongoing mentoring relationship over a period of time (although not necessarily an exclusive one).

Having grasped a little more clearly what we mean by spiritual mentoring, we can perhaps now see how it is different from some other aspects of soul care. Clearly there will be areas of overlap, and the different approaches blend together, but it is important to understand what is unique and distinctive about spiritual mentoring.

Point of departure: What exactly is spiritual mentoring?

Spiritual mentoring is different from pastoral care for it goes beyond the needs of the present moment and deals with the bigger picture of life direction and purpose. It is different from discipling because it is concerned about the growth of the soul once a person is established in their faith. It is different from coaching in that it is not about teaching particular skills, but encourages the individual in the totality of their relationship with God. It is different from teaching because it is not so much about the impartation of knowledge as about the experience of God and the application of what we already know. It is different from counselling because it does not focus on problems but on potential.

David Benner describes spiritual mentoring as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of soul care,⁶ and I wholeheartedly agree with his perspective. For me there is no greater joy or privilege than to promote the work of God in the life of another.



———— Chapter Two ————

Ready for adventure: The philosophy behind spiritual mentoring

Spiritual mentoring assumes a certain distinctive approach to the Christian life which may be new for some people. It involves a different way of looking at things, and in some cases will involve the adoption of a new mindset altogether. Rather than seeing spiritual formation as a static thing (which can be accomplished through set programmes and a rigid curriculum suited to all), it sees the way we become like Christ as a dynamic process that is never-ending. In some ways this process is both unpredictable and somewhat mysterious, since it is personal and unique to the individual. It is based on certain underlying assumptions which we will now begin to unpack.

The journey

The first assumption is that *the spiritual life is like a journey*. When we become believers we are only just starting out on what is a lifelong adventure. This contrasts sharply with some models of discipleship which give the impression that we have somehow ‘arrived’ when we come to faith. It contrasts, too, with those approaches that leave people high and dry after a heavy initial input in the first phases of discipleship, with nothing new to aim for, only more of the same. Spiritual mentoring assumes that there is always something more

to learn, always something new to discover and always some new growth and development to take place.

The first call of Jesus to his disciples was ‘Come, follow me’ (Mark 1:17), an invitation at once simple in its content, yet far-reaching and challenging in its demands and implications. This Christ-following is a continual calling to follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21), to walk as he walked (1 John 2:6), to respond to his leading (John 10:27) and to be where he is (John 12:26). We are called to follow Christ through the different stages of our lives. This journey through life has many phases to it: from birth through infancy to childhood; from childhood through the teenage years to adulthood; from adulthood through midlife to old age. Each stage is unique in its challenges and opportunities and demands its own response to following Christ. Jesus is relevant at every moment and at every turn on the road through life, and we need to develop a spirituality that is appropriate for where we are on life’s journey. Spiritual mentors can help us navigate our way through the various transitions of the years, enjoy and appreciate the different ‘seasons’ and negotiate safely both the mountain tops and the deepest valleys that will inevitably form part of our journey.

We are called to follow Christ in becoming like him in our thoughts, words, character and actions. This has been called the transformational or inner journey, and it reminds us that as we travel through life we are meant to change. The goal is that Christ be formed in us, so that we become imitators of him, not in some external sense of copying a detached standard, but in the sense of allowing the Christ who dwells within us to express himself through us (Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:27). Spiritual mentoring provides a safe place where we can explore how God is at work to make this transformation a reality in our lives. It presents us with enough encouragement to keep pressing on and sufficient challenge to avoid complacency or inertia. We are called to follow Christ, too, in living for him day by day and in serving his cause in the world. This may mean following in a geographical sense wherever he may

lead us, either in our own country or elsewhere. Like Abraham, we may well find we are called to leave our own country and go to a place that God will show us (Hebrews 11:8). Implicit in the call to 'follow' is for some a command to 'go' as well (John 15:16).

It may involve finding a place of service within our church or local community, discovering our spiritual gifts and then selflessly using them for the benefit of others. However the call to serve Christ works itself out, it will require obedience, and an ongoing obedience at that. Just as Israel were led by the movement of the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, so we will find that when we settle down God will again stir our hearts to lead us into some new expression of following (Exodus 13:20–22). Sometimes guidance will be clear and simple; at other times it may be difficult to discern the right thing to do. Spiritual mentors can offer us help at such moments of decision.

One thing I admire about the apostle Paul is that he was always reaching out after God, never stagnant in his pursuit of the One who had called him. No complacency entered his soul, causing him to adopt a 'cruise control' mode. Rather, the path still stretched ahead of him, and with undiminished enthusiasm he set himself to follow his Master. 'Not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect,' he said, 'but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining forward towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 3:12–14).

The inner life

The second assumption that lies behind spiritual mentoring is the belief that *the inner life sustains the outer life*. In a fast-paced culture, alive with high-speed technology and bursting with opportunities

for involvement, it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that the external world of activity is all that there is. Spiritually minded people, however, know that the real action takes place in the unseen realm in which prayer is offered, faith is exercised and God is at work. The process of spiritual mentoring gently calls us back to the truth that the inner life needs to be acknowledged, strengthened and cared for.

A tree cannot grow upwards and produce fruit unless it first grows downwards and is nourished and supported by a healthy root system, which is hidden from view. Taller trees need deeper roots; without them they will be blown over when the storms come. Likewise, the more we are involved in the busyness of daily life, even if it is in service to others, the more we need to care for our own inner selves. This is why spiritual mentoring often takes place in the context of retreats or quiet days. This gives us permission to slow down and provides a setting of stillness and an opportunity to reflect and think more deeply about what is happening to us, where we are going, and whether we are living in accordance with our true values. It says in Proverbs 4:23, 'Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life'.

Spiritual mentors will therefore challenge us to develop a balance in our lives between work and rest, activity and intimacy. They will remind us that our true identity does not lie in our performance or our productivity, but in the fact that we are God's beloved children and that we do not need to earn or maintain his favour by what we do. They will help us to let our being become the ground of our doing, and to work from a place of spiritual rest, where we know our acceptance with God is secure and not dependent on what we do or don't do, and where we minister out of a true awareness of who we are, not from an image we project. For me personally, the discovery of my own belovedness has been one of the great blessings of my Christian life, transforming my relationship with God and the way I serve him.

In no way do spiritual mentors wish to take the place of God in

our lives. Indeed, their objective is to encourage us to hear God for ourselves. They minister under the terms of a new covenant, with the knowledge that every child of God can hear the voice of God for themselves (Hebrews 8:11). By calling us back to the nurture of the inner life, they provide a setting that makes it easier for us to hear the still small voice of God and to notice the subtle movements within our souls. They help us to train our hearts to recognise the whisper of divine love, and they challenge us continually with the question, 'And what is God saying to you?' In the rush of each day and the hurly-burly of our response to need we may miss out on hearing the life-giving voice of God unless we truly listen.

God's presence

The third underlying assumption is that God is *always present and acting in our lives*. The God of grace is always the first mover, taking the initiative and reaching out towards us. Our responsibility is to recognise what he is doing and to respond with faith and obedience. We all realise how difficult this can be. We become so wrapped up in our own affairs, so caught up with the present moment and so absorbed in ourselves that we often fail to recognise when God is around us. It has always surprised me that despite the noise of angelic choirs and the appearance of supernatural stars in the night sky, most people in Bethlehem were oblivious to the birth of the Messiah. The most important event in history simply passed them by. How much of God's activity do we miss by our preoccupation with our busy little concerns?

Spiritual mentors invite us to recognise that God is always present in the world, and they work with us to help us discern his footprints. They agree with the ancient poet, quoted by the apostle Paul, who said, 'For in him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). We live in a God-filled world and our job is to awaken to his presence, notice what he is doing, and go with the flow of divine activity. Consequently,

the work of the mentor, as Anderson and Reese point out, is ‘not to create but to notice, not to invent but to discern’.¹

This process of co-discernment is integral to the mentoring process. God is present in the circumstances of our lives, and his word is already written in our personal stories. By providing an objective presence, spiritual mentors enable us to recognise how God has been at work in the past, is currently at work in the present, and where this might lead us in the future. By encouraging us to look for God in everything, and opening our eyes to his presence all around us, they awaken us to the joyful possibility of living more consciously in the awareness of his closeness. There is no place where he is not. Every place can be a sacred place if we have eyes to see.

According to David Benner, this attentiveness to God’s presence, and our experience of that presence, is at the heart of spiritual direction. He quite rightly states that ‘the master goal of spiritual direction can therefore be described as *the facilitation of this attunement to God’s presence*’ (his italics).² In the light of this, it is easy to see why spiritual mentoring can be described as a prayer process or, as someone has put it, ‘holy listening’. Both mentor and mentoree are seeking to tune in to God, to have ‘ears to hear’ what the Spirit is saying.

Here then is the background to spiritual mentoring. It sees the Christian life as an adventure, an exciting journey with God. It invites us to value and appreciate the inner life and to learn to live from within, from our hearts. It recognises the presence of God in every part of life and trains us to come alive to his voice and respond to his activity.

Considering the benefits that spiritual mentoring can offer, it is not surprising that increasing numbers of people are looking to find their own companion on the journey. Some are drawn through the longing of their own hearts to know God more deeply. Some come because they feel confused and bewildered and want to make sense of what is happening to them. Others recognise the danger of burnout, are aware they need help to live in a more balanced way

and want to learn how to serve God more efficiently and effectively in the rhythm of his grace.

Howard Baker was actively involved in youth ministry, energetically throwing himself into his work and committed to it one hundred per cent. Then one day, out of the blue, he woke up to the cold reality of his inner life. He realised he felt frustrated and angry at the meagre results he was seeing for all his hard work. He began to admit that he was afraid of close relationships and that much of his motivation for service was his need to be successful and appreciated. The painful awareness dawned on him that he had lost his spiritual fire, and that he had lost his soul to the chief rival of true devotion to Jesus—Christian activity. Worse still, he felt he did not know how to change things or to develop a strong inner life. ‘So here I was,’ he wrote, ‘a Christian man, a guy working in Christian service, faced with a growing deadness inside.’³

Baker’s willingness to be honest with himself and face the numbness he felt inside led him to explore spiritual direction. It opened him up to some of the ancient paths of soul care, and eventually restored his passion for living and for God: ‘I discovered the benefits of allowing a spiritual director to take an honest look at my soul with me and direct me into the presence of God. I felt as if I might really be rejoining God on the path he had laid out for my life.’

Baker’s story and testimony have been echoed by many others. Perhaps you feel now as he did then. So why not do as he did and consider finding a spiritual mentor? Why journey alone, when there are others to guide you and to travel with you? Or, if you have been helped yourself, why not consider using your experience to help others?