

Here's a quick question: what do the prophet Elisha, Queen Esther, the first century pastor Timothy, Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci, fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent, and business mogul Bill Gates have in common? Well, they all have selected their mentors very well!

How about the prophet Elisha in the Old Testament? Elisha was the protégé of the prophet Elijah in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, what we might generally call a “mentor” today. And Elijah performed many a service for the God of Israel—no easy task when kings like Ahab and queens like Jezebel were very hostile to the tasks that Elijah was assigned by God. But perform those tasks Elijah did, with distinction, yet often with healthy doses of deep personal frustration and chagrin.

God actually selected Elijah's successor to his mantle...and that was Elisha! The older prophet was to anoint Elisha, the son of Shaphat, to succeed Elijah as God's prophet. When asked what one thing he wanted from Elijah, Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit that was upon Elijah. This alone indicated that Elijah was the ideal in-person mentor for Elisha to follow for years. Observing the crucial but lonely experiences of Elijah, Elisha went to the root of the matter and asked for the one sure thing that was completely reliable and always renewable—the spirit that was upon Elijah. And that's exactly why Elisha was so remarkably effective in his ministry that followed!

It helped, of course, that God actually selected Elijah to be a long-term mentor for Elisha. But Elisha stepped up to the task and discerningly asked for the one true dimension that ultimately made Elisha very effective in his role. The real test for the mentee is always that of taking up the mantle and performing!

Likewise, Queen Esther had the strongest of mentors, her uncle, Mordecai. Selected providentially to be queen, ostentatiously because of her great beauty, Esther relied on Mordecai for his sage advice at one of the turning points in all Jewish history. Mordecai's advice? To proceed with the right thing to do with courage and aplomb, for people of God are appointed in their journeys “for such a time as this.” In response to Mordecai and acting with great courage, Esther approached the king at the risk of her very life...and all the Jews were ultimately spared. To this very day, faithful Jews celebrate this event as the annual feast of Purim. Did Esther select Mordecai as her mentor or did God do the selecting? Regardless of the answer, Esther was the careful mentee of the wise Jew Mordecai!

And how about Timothy, that first century pastor mentored by the Apostle Paul? Remember, Paul picked up Timothy in Lystra during Paul's second great missionary journey. And Paul related to Timothy, the son of a Greek, in multiple ways in his epistles: his “true son in the faith” and “a fellow worker” and most revealingly in 2 Timothy 3:10-11 in the ESV, where Paul says, “You...[Timothy] know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings...” Now, that's real mentoring and discipling, up close and personal! And this type of astute, specific mentoring was captured twice in Scripture itself, in Paul's two letters to Timothy.

And our studies of mentoring are not limited to Scripture. Take Leonardo Da Vinci, easily one of the most breathtakingly impressive people of all time. Sure, his enduring painting of *The Last Supper* is likely our most familiar impression of his greatness. But his depth in so many areas is simply beyond the pale, for example in geology, science, anatomy, architecture, and engineering. His unceasing curiosity that led to breakthrough conceptualizations was simply astounding.

Early conceptual design of a helicopter? Yes, four hundred years or more before the reality. And think of his art—his sculptures, his drawings, his paintings—indeed, that very familiar *Mona Lisa*! No wonder da Vinci is widely considered the very definition of what we now call a Renaissance Man! But da Vinci, too, selected a very important mentor. Andrea del Verrocchio was himself a very highly gifted painter and sculptor of Renaissance Florence. While most don't readily know this man, we find that da Vinci was

indeed a mere mortal: he stood on the shoulders of his mentor. By the way, at the time of this podcast recording, the National Gallery of Art is presenting a curated event called “Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence.” Like da Vinci, *all* of us owe those before us a huge debt of gratitude!

And now we consider a specialized form of business: high fashion. The recently departed Yves Saint-Laurent was hired as a personal assistant by the towering Christian Dior, who taught Saint-Laurent the art and the science and the business of top-end fashion. Today, Yves Saint-Laurent rivals Dior as a top fashion-success brand worldwide. Indeed, both brands have such recognition that their websites have shortened names—YSL.com and Dior.com. Hard to imagine that YSL could have chosen a better mentor than Dior!

And how about the pioneering technologist-businessman prodigy Bill Gates? Well after he was and remains astoundingly successful in his particular technology realm, he identified Warren Buffet as a mentor in teaching Gates how to deal with tough situations and how to think long-term. Now that is interesting. As the famous saying goes, Gates has forgotten more than Buffet will ever know about technology. But Gates selected Buffet as a mentor for entirely different reasons. That’s powerful! Gates, who’s consistently ranked among the world’s wealthiest, still chooses a mentor to help fill his gaps!

So, from an ever-focused, continuous-development viewpoint, we all should be selecting mentors wisely. And it’s clear that sometimes God selects mentors for His people. Regardless, we have to have enough sense to recognize greatness when we find it and stick with that mentor for just the right duration.

That reminds me of a favorite Mark Twain quote: “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.” Yes, sometimes we are too ignorant or unaware or stubborn or spiritually insensitive to recognize strong mentors even when they are right in front of us. But, all the same, we should note that, in all our examples here, these amazing mentors were not the actual natural parents of the mentee...they were more like adopted parents in each of their respective storylines. This is special and important: the true in-person mentor-mentee relationship requires mutual adoption!

But sometimes the most vital mentoring happens when the two persons involved never meet face-to-face! That’s because, over time, mentoring has been radically enabled, even transformed, and several of those enablements have been earthshaking! That’s right, over time, mentoring has been radically enabled, even transformed. How? First, the writing of the Scriptures. Next, the dramatic leverage of those Scriptures through Gutenberg’s printing press and the likes of the giant reformer Luther, together helping to break Rome’s stranglehold on access to the Bible. Then, all the way until now, vitally important knowledge—spiritual, scientific, you name it—has moved into the incredible digital world.

The result? Now, each person with connectivity and a notepad has access to many of the greatest mentors who ever lived. The Bible, classic books, cutting-edge research building on other greatness, top websites—the available knowledge and wisdom is well beyond what we should have ever had the right to imagine!

So, the end game is that there is absolutely no excuse for us not selecting great mentors. If we are wise, among our greatest mentors will be persons we will never see face-to-face this side of heaven. Jesus, Paul, C.S. Lewis, Oswald Chambers, key business leaders, great thinkers. Next, of course, we should always be seeking after and selecting mentors in our specific nearby realms. Then, we should revel in those mentee opportunities. Immerse. Glean. Absorb. Process. Integrate. Apply. Adjust. Ask again. Listen even more.

This is the golden age of available knowledge and wisdom. But pretenders are exponentially more numerous too. Pray and discern that you are reading and listening to exactly the right mentors. Eliminate the pretenders. Go for the gold standard. Start with Jesus. Then on to Paul and John and Peter. You’re on your way already! You can do this, because you already know the foundational resource. Godspeed!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Name your top five face-to-face mentors from your past. Then list two specifics you learned and routinely apply effectively.

2. Name your top five mentors you will never meet face-to-face this side of heaven. Then rank them in order of impact on your life. Name the specific attributes you have due to each of these mentorships.

3. In terms of your impact, name your top five mentees so far in your life. Identify what should have been the key takeaways for each of these mentees.