

10 Qualities of Healthy Mentors

by J. Lee Grady

Learn to spot a healthy mentor who can help you grow spiritually.

Throughout my Christian journey, God sent special people to be my role models and mentors. One of those, a youth pastor named Barry, invited me to his home for a weekly Bible study when I was just 15. He taught me how to have a private prayer time with God—and now, many decades later, he's still a close mentor and an example of how to be a man of God.

Yet I meet many Christians today who never had a mentor—or they had a bad experience with someone who tried to disciple them the wrong way. If you want to begin a relationship like this, you can find God's pattern for discipleship in the Bible. Here are 10 qualities to look for in a healthy mentor:

1. **Healthy mentors have mentors.** The greatest leaders I know talk often about the people who helped them grow as Christians. No mature leader is "self-made." Even the apostle Paul had Ananias and Barnabas to disciple him when he first came to faith. If a mentor claims he or she "learned everything directly from God," you can be sure they have a spirit of pride. Never trust a loner.

2. **Healthy mentors are accessible.** Some mentors keep an arms-length distance from people, and they make you wait until the planets align to schedule an appointment. That is not the Jesus way. The apostle Paul told the Romans: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift (Rom. 1:11a). Don't be aloof or play hard-to-get. If you are called to help other disciples grow, give them your phone number, answer their texts and open your heart as well as your office door.

3. **Healthy mentors don't just talk—they listen.** Jesus is the source of all wisdom, yet when He was with His disciples, He didn't just lecture them. He often asked them questions (see Mark 8:27-30) and listened to their answers. God gave us one mouth and two ears—so we should listen twice as much as we talk. Good mentors know how to use their ears to comfort and care.

4. **Healthy mentors are patient and understanding.** If you are called to be a mentor, you must realize that people don't always take your advice the first time you offer it. Young Christians will make huge mistakes, ignore your counsel and frustrate you so much that you'll be tempted to get angry, pull out your hair (or theirs) and give up on them! Be there for them when they stumble. Cry with them when necessary.

5. **Healthy mentors have the courage to confront.** The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians that he cared for them "like a nurse caring for her own children" (1 Thess. 2:7b). But he also sternly warned his followers to avoid sin. Don't compromise biblical standards to show compassion. Love is kind, but it is never soft. Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is rebuke a person who is acting foolishly.

6. Healthy mentors are committed to confidentiality. When your disciple bares his soul to you, cover his sins with the blood of Jesus and never tell others what he said. 1 Peter 4:8b says: "Love covers a multitude of sins." You are betraying your disciple if you tell others about his private confession. Unless he confesses to child sexual abuse or murder (which you are required by law to report to the police) his confession is between you and him. Give your disciple a "safe place" to heal.

7. Healthy mentors live what they preach. Anybody can post their sermons on YouTube and attract a huge audience. But sermons alone don't make a man or woman of God. Don't be duped into following people just because of pulpit charm or online popularity. What you need in a mentor is tested character, not the wow factor. And true character is not formed in the spotlight but in the darkness of life's trials.

8. Healthy mentors focus on a few. We are all tempted to measure success by numbers. But Jesus turned this mentality upside down. He focused His time on a small, unimpressive group of followers. He taught us that quality comes before quantity. Good mentors, even if they preach to huge crowds, invest most of their time in helping a small number of disciples reach maturity.

9. Healthy mentors are always growing spiritually. Jesus said a good steward in His kingdom "brings out of his treasure new and old things" (Matt. 13:52). Good mentors aren't effective if they only teach what they learned 40 years ago. They must stay current. Good mentors are always reading books, learning new things and applying old truths to new challenges so they can train a new generation.

10. Healthy mentors know their limits. Jesus was the Son of God, but He got tired because He was also fully human. When the crowds drained His energy, He would often slip away to the wilderness to pray (see Luke 5:16). Good mentors know when their tanks are empty—and they withdraw from people to get refilled. Don't make the mistake of seeing yourself as a Messiah. You can only give people what God gives you.

If you need a mentor, look for a healthy one. And if you are a mature believer, make it your goal to impart what you've learned from Jesus to a whole new generation of Christians who need healthy role models.