

Some Thoughts About Mentorship

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[0 : 00] Welcome to the Providence Podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church. Contrary to some of the chuckles I got a few weeks ago on Sunday mentioning this extremely important and popular podcast. I want you to know that we are in the top five most popular podcasts produced in the 66215 zip code. So take that and consider how lucky you are to be part of this highly selective audience. Well, we are overdue for a discussion on mentorship. It was on my docket for last week, but last week was quite full, full of wonderful things. What a wonderful week to spend extra time with the church family and to celebrate the gospel as it plays out over a week. The triumphant entry of Jesus arriving into Jerusalem, headed to die, offering himself up in obedience to the Father on the cross and in three days raising to glory and ascending to the right hand of the Father. So a wonderful week, one of my favorite handful of weeks that there are in a year. And so lots going on and didn't get to the discussion I wanted to regarding mentorship. Now, just so you know, just so you know, I would not consider myself to be an expert on this subject. But it's something that I know that many people are interested in. And I do have some thoughts and some experiences and some scriptures to share and so on and so forth. So let's go ahead and let's go ahead and get into it. The one thing I will say is that

I have been incredibly blessed to have a significant number of mentors in my life at various times. What I have found is that there's a Chinese proverb that says that when the student is ready, the teacher arrives. And so the first thing I want to do before I talk about some practicalities is I just want to praise God for his faithfulness to me in this area, because it just seems like every time I would reach a point where I really couldn't go any further with the information that I had or the skills that I had or the perspective that I had, the Lord would bring somebody into my life and allow me to learn from them, usually older men, and allow me to learn from them. So actually a couple times older women too. So this is probably where I should start is I just want to say thank you to the Lord for his faithfulness and care in that area. Now I want to move from there into sort of what maybe was going on in those moments when the Lord provided some mentors to me. So first thing would be a practical observation. I would say that one of the most important things you can understand as a younger person in particular is that hustle invites help. I'm sorry, hustle attracts help. When you are evidently, you know, going hard and doing your best. I think very often people notice that people that are in a position to help you to encourage you to support you, they notice the effort. And they, there's something very attractive. Now that I'm older, I see this, there's something very attractive about seeing someone really just giving it their all and working really hard. And looking at that situation saying, okay, they're doing the best they can. But I could help them in some way to reach another level. There's just something very attractive and compelling about that. And so I think, you know, in a practical way, one of the reasons why I have had a number of mentors kind of arrive on the scene in just the nick of time is I think that looking back, they were looking at me and saying, well, here's a young man who's trying and he's doing his best, but he's also young and inexperienced or, or here's a guy with, with kids. And you can tell that he wants to lead them well, let me help them. Let me help him figure that out. So hustle attracts help. So a big piece of advice to you would be in pursuing mentorships would be to just make, do the best you can with what you have, make the most of your own resources, your own time, and so on and so forth. I think, I think busy people tend to attract mentors for a particular reason. I think that it's as, as you get older and your energy is less and, and maybe you're really getting to do a lot of the things that you feel most called to do or, or the kinds of things that you feel the best at doing, you do have to become a little bit more selective in who you invest in and so on and so forth. But I think that in addition to hustle kind of, uh, you know, attracting help, um, busy people tend to attract help because the back of your mind is sort of this question of if this person's not respecting their time, will they respect my time? So, uh, that's another piece of this that I think was important

was, and it's, you know, it's more or less an extension of this idea of hustle attracting help. But I think when people look at you and they say, here's a person who is making serious efforts, they're doing the best that they can with what they have. And, um, and, and they're really like showing up, you know, they're really investing themselves. I just think that makes it, you an easier target to, uh, to be noticed and to receive mentorship.

But I also think that more important than that idea is just, I think just a consistent, a consistent pleading and seeking, praying, uh, to the Lord for wisdom. I think that if you could take anything away from the book of Proverbs, even beneath the idea, cause you know, we would, we all understand that Proverbs just wholeheartedly commends, you know, seeking counsel, but, but, but, but that's, that's a subordinate kind of action. The action that is actually more important than that is seeking wisdom. Seeking counsel is just one part of seeking wisdom. So if I were to tell you how to pursue mentors, I would say the first thing is, is that this is something the Lord needs to do for you. Um, being overly formal and asking people to mentor you typically doesn't go as well as people might think it does. Um, I'll talk more about that in a moment. What, what ideally will happen is, is that you'll, the Lord will bring people into your life and, um, you may never have a conversation that sort of formally seals a mentor mentee relationship. Uh, but, but that'll start happening. And I really want to commend you to like, don't, don't seek a mentor because you think you should, and definitely don't seek a mentor just because you're looking for additional career opportunities or so on and so forth. Be a seeker of wisdom, seek wisdom, ask the Lord to give you wisdom. And one of the things that he will do in, in answering that prayer, so bring people into your life. Okay. Does that make sense? So, um, you know, James, James one, it's funny because we don't think about it in terms of the practicality, but James one verse five, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach and it will be given him. So if you lack wisdom and you, you should see that you probably do. You should be seeking the Lord and saying, God, help me to be wise, help me to have wisdom. And I love, and I can't remember the text reference right now. I apologize, but I love the Lord visiting Solomon at night. He had just become King and said, ask me what you want. Ask me for what you want. And Solomon's request for wisdom is actually rooted in his humility.

[9 : 12] He says, I'm a young man. How am I possibly going to take care of these people? It's rooted in humility. It's rooted in a sense of, um, obligation and faithfulness. Like he wants to do the job he's been given. Well, um, you know, his motives are so sweet in that moment. He knows that he doesn't have the resources. He knows that the people need him to do a good job. He wants to do a good job for them. And he just says, you know, who am I to lead these people in and out? And so just so on and so forth. And that's why he asked for wisdom. So I would tell you, ask God for wisdom and understand that one of the ways he will give you wisdom is through, uh, bringing advisors, uh, counselors, mentors in, into your life. And, uh, that, that actually, I believe is going to do another thing for you is if you, if you could just train your heart to really crave wisdom and to really, and we, we train our hearts friends by, by praying, we train our hearts by asking God for things. So, um, it may start out, uh, you know, even for quite a while on your prayer list is just a thing you're supposed to pray for, you know, you're supposed to pray for, but eventually your heart will be trained to see that it's important. And so one of the added benefits to just developing a desire for wisdom is it's going to make you a much better person to mentor.

Um, there's a bunch of reasons for that, but like one of the things that's evident to me in someone that loves wisdom is that they're willing to pay for it. Um, and, and they're willing to pay for it. They're willing to dig a little bit for it. Proverbs 25, 20 verse five says as deep water.

So counsel is in the heart of a man, but a wise man shall draw it out. There's, there's work to be done on the part of the person that's seeking wisdom. Let me give you an example that I kind of came to mind as I was thinking about this. There's a guy that, uh, I think is, is really, really brilliant and has a ton of insights. And he's probably in his eighties now. His name is George Gilder and a futurist, uh, written a number of books, uh, thinking philosophically about the nature of commerce and the nature of energy. Um, I talked to some of you about a book I read from him a few years ago called knowledge and power. Anyway, George Gilder, I think is a, is a brilliant guy and he was converted to Christ. Not that long ago. Um, he was always kind of on the conservative side of the ball of, of the field, but, um, he, he converted to Christ. Not that long ago, uh, in, in his later life, certainly I don't know the date, but, uh, he was giving a talk at a conference I attended a few years back and now, you know, he's in his, I think he's in his eighties and, uh, due to his age, you know, he's somewhat idiosyncratic. His mind wanders a lot of, a little bit, um, like a lot of older people, uh, at that age, he will sometimes get sidetracked trying to remember like details that don't matter. Have you ever, have you ever had the conversation with someone?

I think it's because they don't want to let go of, you know, like their mental acuity, right? So they're, they're trying to say, you know, they're trying to tell you about a time that they had some important experience and then they'll get kind of hung up on like, what year was that? Was that 1972?

Was that 73? Or was I at, was I at this, this restaurant or that restaurant? And they, so as people get older, they get more idiosyncratic. Um, maybe in some respects, their mind begins to wander a little bit and that's what was going on with Gilder at this conference. And I would say that I was one of the older people at this conference. It was a lot of younger people and, uh, you know, young families, young men. And I could sense, I was sitting in a place where I could see like squirminess and sort of people losing attention and so forth because people have come to expect, uh, information and learning to be so neatly and concisely packaged. You know, everybody wants bullet points and Ted talks and three second videos and so on and so forth.

[13 : 36] Well, I don't, I don't think that that, I don't think that that really communicates a desire for wisdom. A desire for wisdom involves digging. It involves listening carefully. It involves even kind of sorting through the weeds, uh, of someone's life. So I don't, I don't agree with George Gilder about, about everything. I rarely agree with anybody about everything, but boy, I sure enjoy learning from people. Uh, not because of, you know, I think they're amazing, but because I really do, I really do want to learn. I want, I want to understand more. I want to know how to serve in, in the, the roles that God has given me. So, you know, it's not beneath me to sit still while an 80 year old man tries to remember, you know, what year it was when he had this idea initially.

It's just part of the payment. That's just, it's not necessarily, I'm not arguing that it's fun. I'm just saying it's just part of the deal. And, you know, this is a big part of, of wisdom giving is just patience. Um, reading when you don't want to read, talking to people who maybe don't even know how to articulate some of their thoughts very well, but, but you know, they're wise. That's another thing to think about. A lot of wise people aren't necessarily well-spoken, you know, and a lot of well-spoken people aren't necessarily wise. And so you've got to realize that there's a ton of wisdom out there, but not all of it is very neatly packaged. You know, much, most, most of the wisdom out there is not very neatly packaged. And so you, as you pray for wisdom and you understand that, you know, this is important to me, you'll begin to be willing to kind of pay for it. There's an old saying that hunger is the ultimate sauce. What does that mean? Hunger is the ultimate sauce. Well, if a man is hungry enough, he won't be a picky eater. His only concern is whether, you know, the food will fill his belly in normal circumstances, that same man might have, you know, various kinds of culinary preferences like we all do. But when he's hungry enough, his stomach will override his taste buds and he will happily eat things he normally wouldn't choose, you know, to eat. And that's really how it is with wisdom. Hunger is the ultimate sauce. If you, if you, if you want it, you know, you'll, you'll wait, you'll wade through the stuff that maybe is unpleasant or not super palatable to get it. You know, there's another proverb that says that the hunger of a worker works for him. That's, that's how we need to approach wisdom. There's a proverb that says, Proverbs 27, seven, one who is full loathes honey. And I've, I've read it where it says one who is full loathes even, loathes even honey. Meaning, you know, when you're full of yourself, like counsel and words and wisdom, you, you may not even have any time for it. You know, I think we all kind of remember being a teenager. I don't think I'm, I know I'm weird in a number of ways. I don't think that was, that's one of them where you're just, you're just so dumb. You don't know what you don't know. And you're, you're full. And so you're full of yourself. And so you, you don't even necessarily want wisdom, but the proverb goes on, but to one who is hungry, everything bitter is sweet.

And that has been such a good proverb for me as I've sorted through kind of, well, all sorts of things in my life. But understanding that, you know, a lot of times when I'm complaining about my circumstances or like the comfort level of a situation, I need to ask like, well, am I hungry for God or not? Because this situation may be bitter, but it's feeding me God. And, and also understanding that that applies to like spending time with people and, and reading books and, you know, making good choices with, you know, my leisure time to digest podcasts and, you know, all that kind of stuff. So that's a little bit of an introductory, some introductory thoughts on mentoring that have been, you know, a part of my life to some degree or another. Now let's talk about Paul and Timothy, because there's another concept I want to introduce.

First concept would be hustle, hustle attracts help. The second concept is be hungry for wisdom. And the third concept is something I'll call mission compatibility, or to keep the H alliteration, we could say helping one another. So this idea of mission accountability is just that ideally the mentor and the mentee will have a lot in common in terms of what they're trying to get out of life.

So let me read Acts 16, which is the first appearance of Timothy in the New Testament. Acts 16, verse one, Paul came to Derbe and Lystra. Paul went to Timothy to accompany him and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew his father was a Greek.

[19:11] So Paul and Timothy both wanted the same thing. This is key. This is what I mean by mission compatibility.

You want mentor-mentee relationships built on mission compatibility. They both had the same mission. They both wanted the same thing of their life.

And that really is the ideal expression of mentorship. So Paul loved the glory of God and he wanted that glory to be made manifest in the church.

And Timothy did. And when we see them meeting, they're both already doing that. They're just doing it at different stages and scales. And that would be another big key of what mentoring and mentorship, you know, what it is.

It's actually, ideally, most of the time, two people doing the same thing just at different stages and different scales. Paul was at a more advanced stage and a more expansive scale.

[20 : 27] Timothy was at an earlier stage and a smaller scale. But they were both, they both wanted the same things. They were both trying to accomplish the same things. That's really what mentorship is.

Mentorship should be as much as possible reciprocal. Both people should be getting something out of it. And that's what we see here.

You know, Timothy was beneficial to Paul to one degree. And Paul was beneficial to Timothy to a larger degree. And we see what I think is pretty common in long-term mentorship relationships.

Over time, their benefit to one another kind of becomes the same amount. It becomes truly reciprocal. I can think of a few relationships where, you know, I'm starting to experience that.

Long-term mentoring relationships where now as I get older, I'm starting to experience that kind of reciprocity where we're not, you know, we're not. We're not, I'm not so much the mentee anymore.

[21 : 38] But the relationship will always be marked to some degree with that because that's how it started. It's like father and son. But at the same time, you know, there's a growing reciprocity.

So you want your mentoring relationships really to be reciprocal as much as possible. That's not to say that there will be an even amount of benefit, you know, running in both directions to begin with.

That's probably not going to be true. But there should be some reciprocity. The best way to do that is to make sure that you're aligning yourself with people who want the same things out of life as you do.

And I said aligning, but let's say more broadly that you're spending the majority of your time with people who want the same things out of life that you do. And, of course, you know, generationally, like spending time with older people who are at a different scale and a different stage, but they want the same thing you want and so forth.

That's where mentorships happen most naturally. And so that's a key to this. Now, you know, one of the things I would say is that the more specific you try to get, the harder it's going to be to find a mentor.

[22 : 58] That makes sense, right? Like, for instance, say you want, you know, say you're at a church like Providence and your only requirement is that someone else wants to glorify God, you know, with their love, their church, raise a family and so forth.

Well, that's broad enough where you'll probably find some people to help you. But if you need highly specific advice, and sometimes you do, related to your particular career, related to particular issues, I have another piece of advice for you.

So generally, spend as much time as you can with people who are just aligned with your general life mission. And you'll find someone that you can walk with who can contribute to you and you can contribute to them.

But I have some advice also for kind of how to how to get even more specific kind of help in specific areas. And this I'm just going to say it this way to to like to speak directly to those who would potentially be mentors.

In general. God just wants you to love others with the things you love that in general. God wants to want you to love others with the things you love.

[24 : 18] Now, that's a general statement. I'm sure there are always exceptions. I'm sure there are exceptions in my life. But for the most part, I can tell you that now, 48 years into this thing, mostly what God has asked me to do is to just include others in doing the things I love to do and to think of others as I do the things I love to do.

For instance, I have always loved to learn. And I just have always really enjoyed it. And it never felt like work to me to figure something out.

And, you know, early on, we had a great public library. I was surrounded by libraries. My church had a big library. We had a great public library. My school always had a really big library when I went to public school.

And, you know, I just realized and this is way before the Internet, but I just realized like it's just all here. Like all the information is here. And I just really never minded figuring out how to find what I needed to know and then, you know, doing the work.

It never felt like work to solve the problem. And back then it was quite a bit of work, I suppose. You know, if I wanted to know, you know, for instance, like how hydraulics work.

[25 : 40] Well, you know, now I could get a video on YouTube about that. But back then I would have to find a book about hydraulics that I could understand and so on and so forth. And so, yeah, it was it was kind of a special love for me.

I would say that most people didn't love it like I did. And that wasn't it had nothing to do with other people. That was just me being selfish. That was just something I enjoyed. And then eventually, though, I realized like that not everybody loved that and that not everybody was.

It wasn't as easy for everybody, you know, as it was for me. And so then I began to realize, you know. So I can do this thing and help others, too.

And that's it. I think that's part of why God called me to be a pastor. And and it was just it's just a part of my life. So I have this thing I love and I've learned over time not only to include others in it, but also to think of others as I'm doing it.

So as I'm reading something, it may not be of much interest to me, but I I can think, OK, this would be helpful to so and so or so. So and so would be interested in this or so on and so forth. So most of the time as you get to be, you know, older, my age, whatever, you know, younger than me, a little bit older than me, whatever.

[26 : 57] What mentorship is going to be is you're going to God's going to call you to do life with somebody else with a compatible mission. And then like there's some unique things about you that you love.

Like another one for me is I do actually enjoy cooking. And so it's it's not it doesn't feel like work to me to make people meals or to have people over for dinner and so on.

You know, it just it just doesn't feel hard to me to do that. And and so what I what I'm saying is, is that you have some things like that, too.

And the one thing I will say is like there's this tendency that we have. To kind of want to keep some of those things we love to ourselves, because we almost find it annoying to include others in them.

And we find that it's less refreshing when we engage in these activities when we're including others. Well, I would just say, you know, that, you know, that's life. We need to love others and be inconvenienced to some extent.

[28 : 01] And also, I still do plenty of reading for myself. I, you know, I think God just works that out. I wouldn't worry about that. But point is, is that, you know, you might love finances and budgets or you might love going to the lake or you might love cooking.

Or you might love home decoration. You might love parenting or love education or so on and so forth. And you might be just kind of like better at it than a lot of people.

Well, that's another level of mentoring that's more specific. And what we need to do as a church is we need to have like people identified of like if you have a question about, you know, cooking for a thousand people, go to Chris.

If you have a question for, you know, about curriculum selection and, you know, something like that, go to Dottie. If you have a question about finances, go to these guys and so on and so forth.

And what you wind up with is you wind up with sort of this constant stable of mentors that are always available to you to help you solve a particular problem.

[29 : 05] And that can be just tremendous. I've told homeless people before, you know, like your whole life could change in a year if you just went to my church.

Like if you would just go to my church and do the things you're told to do, your whole life could change in a year. And, you know, I don't think anyone's ever taken me up on that, but I do believe that's absolutely true.

So what a tremendous gift from the Lord that he would surround us with people who have all of these unique things where in some respects, like you're not even hassling them if you ask them to help because they're that into that thing.

That's really sweet. That's a really good gift from God. So generally, you know, 90% of the time, you don't need that level of specificity. What you really need is just someone to kind of give you general wisdom and help you develop your own wisdom.

And the church is great for that because, you know, you just are surrounded by people who share your life mission. They want to glorify God. They believe a centrality of local church. They believe families are very, very, very important, so on and so forth.

[30 : 13] So you're good there. And then when you need something highly specific, you need to go look for someone that has like a love for the thing that you're wondering about. That's the ideal.

If you can get away with it, usually you'll be able to figure that out. And to you older folks listening to this, that's how I would recommend you think about being a mentor.

Most of the time, God really just has given you loves for things, and he just wants you to love people with those loves. That's about all I've got.

Oh, and, you know, one of the things about this whole wisdom thing is you need to listen to what James says. Not only does he say, ask God for wisdom, but then he says, don't, you know, ask in faith.

Don't ask with doubting. The one who doubts is like a wave at sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

[31 : 09] He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Here's what I would tell you. When you ask God for wisdom, you need to know that that's a thing for him.

That's a thing that he loves to give. So if you went to me and said, you know, Chris, would you investigate like the statistical correlation of, you know, denominations and murder sentences or something?

I'd be like, oh, yeah, let me do that. That sounds kind of fun. And I wouldn't think of it as you tasking me. I would just be like, yeah, that sounds kind of cool. You're asking me to love you with something I love to do.

Guess what? When you ask God for wisdom, you're asking him to love you with something he loves to do. He loves to give wisdom. Go back through Proverbs and see, you know, wisdom crying out on the streets.

So ask God for wisdom. He will provide it when you need it. Start to love wisdom. Start to realize that you've got to work for wisdom. Do the best with what you have now.

[32 : 12] Hard work or hustle invites help, attracts help. And surround yourself with people who have the same mission and where you can enter into increasingly reciprocal relationships with them over time.

So those are some thoughts about mentorship. I hope some of that blessed you. Probably the other thing that's a really good example in this podcast is, you know, I have a lot of things to share about this, but it didn't all come out very clean, did it?

It was a little idiosyncratic. I, you know, and I think this is a good example of what I'm talking about. Like, if you forced me to make this polished and, you know, TED talky, I probably just wouldn't share it.

Because it's like, I mean, how much of that can I really do? But if you're willing to dig through my idiosyncratic speaking and my repetition and structure problems and so on and so forth, if you're willing to do the work, there's probably some pretty helpful stuff in here.

So, all right. Well, that's all I've got for you tonight. May God richly bless you as you seek wisdom. Remember, he loves to give wisdom. Just ask and ask without doubting.

[33 : 24] God bless.