

Mentoring Matters

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The Student's Voice: [The MQ retreat experience] confirmed the fact that ministry is a hard road to travel on. If anything, I now have a deeper respect for people in ministry, and I have a lot of growing to do. And I am willing to do that.

Did you know that since our MQ students were born:

- Affluent troubled teens in Southern California have always been the subjects of television series.
- Being techno-savvy has always been inversely proportional to age.
- Email is no longer a preferred method of communication; texting and facebook have taken over.
- Young women's fashions have never been concerned with where the waist is.
- They have always known that "In the criminal justice system the people have been represented by two separate yet equally important groups."
- Mr. Rogers, not Walter Cronkite, has always been the most trusted man in America.
- Some churches are embracing texting as a communication tool between the preacher and the congregation during the service.

Finding time to meet for mentoring – This is by far the biggest challenge identified by mentors and students in MQ. Ideally, one would like to suggest that mentoring occur at the same time every week. The rhythm of a weekly event makes it a habit and easier to maintain than haphazard meetings. We recognize that this is not always possible. Mentoring is the heart of MQ and so it is important that the mentoring meetings be a priority for both the student and the mentor. This is where the most significant spiritual growth happens for the student. When the mentoring relationship works, the student and mentor grow in leaps and bounds. When the mentoring relationship is weak, student and mentor lose interest and focus. If you have any concerns about your mentoring relationship, talk to your student and pastor sooner than later. There is no glory in struggling through a relationship that is not connecting. There is no shame in saying, "this isn't working, can you find someone else?"

Here are some great suggestions for effectively ministering to students today. I quote these ideas from **Engaging the soul of youth culture**, by Walt Mueller (IVP Books, 2006) p.185ff.

- Approach youth ministry as a cross-cultural missions venture. Regardless of your age or relationship with young people, when you engage the emerging generations you must remember that there is a cultural gap you are responsible to span.
- Be in but not of the world.

- Always evaluate (and where necessary abandon) methods. (Your mentoring curriculum uses a particular approach to a topic and scripture. If this approach is not connecting with your student, find different ways. We are not interested in methods but in transformed, growing students.)
- Answer all the groans. To be concerned with a young person involves being concerned with the social systems that shape his or her life.
- Use popular culture as a communication tool. Today's popular culture is filled with stories, video clips, lyrics and so forth that can help us communicate in a relevant manner. (Find out what your student listens to and views.)
- Understand your own cultural biases. (We all have them.) Cross-cultural missions efforts across generational lines are prone to try our patience for the simple fact that we've been living in the same geographical world with our audience all our lives. The differences are related more to values, attitudes and allegiances. The collision between worldviews that coexist in one place can be messy, loud and severely damaging to our ministry effectiveness.
- Love without condition or limits!
- Be a learning listener
- Be a storyteller – your student will place a higher value on your stories than your teaching.

MQ Program

All MQ students have now attended **the fall retreat** in Fresno, CA. They've received a mind boggling amount of information (9 sessions), been thrown out of their comfort zone numerous ways, and have made life changing friendships in four short days. It is always amazing to see what happens when you invite about a dozen young leaders to join in this adventure called MQ. One of the first things they realize is that there is someone else in this world that thinks like they do. Students who are nominated to MQ are often more mature than their peers and sometimes find it hard to connect significantly with others in their youth groups. Here they meet other leaders who have similar experiences. It's amazing how deep these relationships grow in a very short time. The goal of the retreat is to provide the student with questions and a vocabulary surrounding the call of God on their life. A key activity during the retreat is writing and telling our call stories. Ask your student to share his or her call story with you. Then share yours with them. Students are asked to write a reflection on their retreat experience. Ask them to share a highlight or two with you. For some guidelines on how to shape a call story, check out this resource on our website: www.mbseminary.edu/ministryquest/pm/shaping-your-call-story.

A **spiritual practice** we exercise at the fall retreat is **solitude**. Most of our lives are busy; students' lives are typically very busy. Hurry is the enemy of the Spirit. It prevents us from hearing the voice of God. At the fall retreat we take time to drive up to Kings Canyon (about 6,000 feet up), walk among the huge, ancient sequoia trees and spend an hour in silence in a quiet valley. For many students this is a first time experience, and for some it is very difficult and frustrating. As you talk to each other about quiet time with God, think about how you develop the spiritual practice of solitude. Maybe you and your student could take one of your mentoring sessions and expand it to

include a time of solitude in a quiet place; then share what it was like. Listening to God is a difficult thing to learn. Working at it together brings encouragement.

Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster have some great insights into the value of spiritual practices. I quote from The Godbearing Life (Upper Room Books, 1998). p. 109

“Christian practices are means of grace that God uses to strengthen us for the otherwise impossible task of living faithfully. While most practices are not “sacraments” of the church, all practices are sacramental in the sense that they invite us to take on Christ’s life as our own. They are the community’s way of enabling every generation to “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27, KJV) and to participate in God’s saving work in the world. Congregations as well as individuals take on new identities when immersed in Christian practices. The grace God leaves with us in these practices is sacred mortar that strengthens people and communities to risk reaching beyond themselves.

Because Christian practices shape our identity in Jesus Christ, they are basic to ministry with adolescents. When our curriculum for young people focuses on the practices of faith, these practices shape their souls so they can bear Christ into the world. But soul shaping takes a lifetime – not an adolescence – to complete. It is essential that the community of faith, and not adolescents alone, participate in the practices that compose the Godbearing life.”

MQW – Where do you find God in your life? What you are listening for is how aware the student is of God’s presence in every aspect of his or her life. We all have places we meet God more readily than others and we need help to see God in all aspects of our lives. At the same time we need to cultivate good places for intentionally waiting on God.

More good questions that can’t be answered yes or no:

How is this relevant to your situation? (application Q)

How can I find out? How can I do this? (methodological Q)

How can this be improved? How can it be changed? (creative Q).