

ARE YOU A MENTOR OR A PREDATOR?

Today's Text: Lk 10: 1-24

Extracts:

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest." ... Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "... [D]o not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" [Lk 10: 1-2, 17, 18a, 20].

Bishop Eddie Long is the senior pastor of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Georgia, USA, with a congregation of over 25,000 members.¹ Recently, four young men who were former members of the church have filed lawsuits alleging that he had preyed on them when they were teenagers. They have alleged that he seduced them with cars and other gifts and used them for sex. Bishop Long has vehemently denied the allegations and described the lawsuits as 'spiritual warfare' which he was determined to fight. He has hired a high profile private investigator to join his legal defence team.

Bishop Long joins a growing list of church leaders (in virtually every denomination) with a cloud of sex-related charges hovering over them. A great challenge that it poses is its impact on Christian mentoring programmes, aimed at preparing young men and women for marital, priestly or higher responsibilities. How can we differentiate those genuinely interested in preparing younger people for greater responsibilities in the church or in life (mentors) from those who use the wards under their control for their self-indulgence (predators)?

In this week's study, from how He prepared His disciples to take over the spread of the gospel from Him in due course, Jesus has given us important principles that we can copy to become successful mentors instead of predators.

¹ Story is based on the following sources: Esther Sherry, "Bishop Eddie Long Hires a Private Investigator," http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/5849028/bishop_eddie_long_hires_private_investigator.html Sept. 30, 2010; and "Jamal Parris Had Sex with Bishop Eddie Long in the Church," http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/5851236/jamal_parris_had_sex_with_bishop_eddie.html?cat=2 ; Oct. 01, 2010

1. Background: Jesus mentors His disciples

The word of God says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” [Prov. 22: 6]. That suggests a relationship between a trainer and a trainee, an older and more experienced person and a younger learner. Such training can be for good or for bad. For example, according to statistics from the Single Parent Success Foundation, 75% of (US) teenage pregnancies, 63% of suicides and more than 50% of all youths incarcerated for criminal acts are from single parent homes.² In a majority of such homes, the father is absent but his role cries to be filled by others that we can call mentors. They may be relatives of the mother or community elders or church leaders. In their absence, gangs may take over. That is why Christian mentoring has become an important issue.

A mentor is an experienced (usually older) person that advises or guides a younger/less experienced person (the mentee) to attain goal(s) that will be of use to him/her in due course. A mentor can bear several names, such as trainer, adviser, teacher or coach. In some inner-city churches, especially in the West, where children from broken homes are being wasted through gang warfare, some churches have developed mentoring programmes to encourage young men to play the role of husbands and fathers. Also, in parts of the world ravaged by civil wars or HIV/AIDS, there has been an urgent need to prepare boys for their future roles. Unfortunately, results from such programmes have been mixed. Satan has seen the scheme as a rare opportunity to scandalize the church of Christ. He has raised evil-minded predators to sexually abuse innocent mentees, or instigated wicked mentees to make false allegations against innocent mentors who have insisted on God’s standards instead of upholding politically correct contraptions. Should we give up the work of God through mentoring just because we do not want any scandal? God forbid! That is why we need to find out how to mentor in a way that is acceptable to God and His Christ. That is what this week’s study is all about.

The Christ came in human form as Jesus to take back the keys of the kingdom that the devil had seized from Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden [Rev. 1: 18]. After launching His ministry at the age of thirty, He set about appointing His disciples that He was going to use to establish the church and spread the Good News of salvation around the world. The mentoring techniques that He used to prepare labourers for the vineyard contain the very principles that will enable us to effectively mentor those under us. Let us note some of them as follows:

a) *He clearly defined His mentoring mission*

Jesus knew exactly what He wanted to do, namely, “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest” [Lk 10: 2]. Clearly, He was not looking for house helps to fan His ego as a powerful spiritual leader. He

² www.singleparentsucces.org/stats.html

was looking for workers that were willing and hardworking. For example, on one occasion, someone said to Jesus, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” He replied that, unlike foxes and birds that had their homes, “the Son of Man [had] nowhere to lay His head.” When another asked to be excused to go and bury his father, Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God” [Lk 9: 57-60]. Jesus was focussed.

Examine your motives for surrounding yourself with young people that you claim to be mentoring or having a special relationship with. Have you articulated for them what you are after? Do they understand them? Otherwise, you could be a predator in the making!

b) *He selected His disciples by divine guidance*

In order to select the twelve apostles, Jesus went alone into the mountain to pray, “and continued all night in prayer to God.” When it was day, He called together all His disciples and from them chose twelve [Lk 6: 12-16]. We can infer from that that He had done the same thing before appointing “seventy others also” [Lk 10: 1]. Therefore, Christian mentoring is a spiritual decision, not a fad.

God does not look at physical or outward appearance but the heart [1 Sam. 16:7]. Therefore, you have to obtain spiritual clearance from God before embarking on that dangerous mentoring programme for former prostitutes or ex-prisoners or children from broken homes. If you are a priest, you must be sure that God has authorized you to conduct rehearsals for Mass servers in your home instead of in the church. If you are a pastor, you must be clear that God has told you it is okay for you to travel with a group of impressionable kids or other people’s spouses or singles who have no visible functions to perform in your religious events. Otherwise, you are on your own and you cannot blame your enemies if or when you are led into temptation. You could be setting yourself up to be accused of being a predator.

c) *He applied effective mentoring and managerial techniques*

Jesus knew that He had barely three years on earth to prepare disciples that would carry the mantle of His ministry forward. For the seventy disciples in our Bible text, Jesus applied the following techniques in mentoring them:

He put them in small teams [Lk 10: 1]

He sent them out two by two to places that He Himself was about to go. The word of God says, “Two are better than one ... for if they fall, one

will lift up his companion” [Ecc. 4: 9, 10]. By sending them out in small teams of two and to places that He Himself was coming to visit, He gave the young people the opportunity to learn and build their self-confidence. Even if they made mistakes, He could make amends when He would come later. That was what He did when He returned from the Transfiguration experience. The disciples that He had left behind could not cast out a mute spirit from a boy that his father had brought to Jesus. The Lord performed the miracle. When His disciples asked Him later in private why they could not do it, He told them that that type required prayer and fasting [Lk 9: 14-29].

He laid down specific rules of conduct

Having empowered them to heal and to preach [Lk 10: 1, 9], He enjoined them to conduct themselves “as lambs among wolves,” and to render selfless service [vv. 4-8] because freely they had received, freely they should give [Matt. 10: 8]. If they should be under attack (persecuted) on account of their assignment, they should not worry how to defend themselves because the Holy Spirit would give them what to say in that hour [vv. 19-20]. Clearly, they were being sent on a journey of righteousness- where faith in Jesus (by obeying His commandments) would produce the desirable results.

He evaluated and appreciated their results

The disciples returned with joy, saying to Him, “Lord, even the demons [were] subject to us in Your name.” Jesus added more powers to them by giving them authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy (Satan) and nothing could by “any means” hurt them. Nevertheless, their joy should not be so much because the demonic spirits were subject to them but much more because their names were written in heaven [Lk 10: 17-21]. His evaluation was closely tied to His mentoring mission. That way, neither He nor His disciples could get carried away by their overwhelming results.

Jesus gave the glory to God

We are told that in that same hour, Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and thanked His Father, the “Lord of heaven and earth,” for revealing to His disciples (mentees) what had been hidden from the wise and prudent. Then, turning to His disciples in private, He told them, “Many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it” [vv. 21-24]. If anything, that should underline for His mentees the privileged position they occupied and why they should never trash it. That was the spirit that guided their work after Jesus had returned to heaven.

How successful was Christ's mentoring programme? We know that He had a running battle with the Jewish leaders on account of His close association with sinners, the poor and the needy. Yes, they called Him a blasphemer (for calling Himself the Son of God that He really is) or a Sabbath-breaker (for healing on the Sabbath day) but He was NEVER associated with immoral conduct. Yes, one of His disciples (Judas Iscariot) betrayed Him; another (Peter) denied Him and the rest ran away during His trial. However, after His resurrection and more especially after the Holy Spirit had descended on them on Pentecost Sunday, all that they had learnt from Jesus came flooding back to them. With that boldness, as led by the Holy Spirit, they spread the Good News beyond the shores of the Sea of Galilee to the utmost ends of the earth. Therefore, Christ's mentoring was a huge success.

2. Can we go and do likewise?

From the forgoing, we learn the following principles:

a) *Be Spirit-led*

Successful Christian mentoring cannot come by might or own zeal but only by the Spirit of God [cf: **Zech. 4: 6**]. Do not expect commendation from man for trying to make others better. That is because those who benefit from trampling others will resist your attempt to set them free. Therefore, you must put on the whole armour of God [**Eph. 6: 10**]. With spiritual guidance, you will know what mentoring to focus on, who to benefit and how to do it.

Recall how Elijah selected and mentored Elisha to succeed him. God specifically told Elijah to anoint "Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah as "prophet in [his] place." You cannot miss such a clear description of his successor! Elijah went there and met Elisha plowing the field with twelve oxen. He passed by him and threw his mantle on him. Elisha left the oxen and "followed Elijah and became his *servant*," that is, his assistant or apprentice or mentee [**1 Kgs 19: 16-21**]. In due course, the faithful servant obtained a double portion of his master's power after Elijah had been taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot [**2 Kgs 2: 1-13**]. Therefore, do not select mentees to please family or members of your congregation or out of mere sympathy. You could be setting traps for your own downfall!

b) *Be transparent*

There was nothing that Jesus did without witnesses to vouch for Him- even when He did not need it. For example, Mary Magdalene was not the only woman that ministered to Him. She was always in the company of other women, such as Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Susanna, and many others [**Lk. 8: 2-3**], including "women who followed Him from Galilee"

[Lk 23: 49]. When He went up to the mountain for His Transfiguration, He went with three disciples, not one (Peter, James and John) [Lk 9: 28], the same disciples that witnessed His passion in the garden of Gethsemane [Matt. 26: 37].

The best place to hide is in the open. In other words, be transparent, especially when dealing with matters that can easily lead to scandals. They include your personal life style, how you handle money and what you do with vulnerable people (such as minors, women and the needy) under your influence. It follows that you must never be alone with such people except in the presence of your spouse or other associates (who are not cover-up artists!). If you think you are alone, you are deceiving yourself because God is forever watching [Prov. 15: 3]!

c) *Be prepared for slander!*

Always remember that Satan will not hesitate to steal, kill or destroy. His ambition is to occupy the highest seats in churches where God is worshipped in truth and in Spirit. He tries to do so by tempting leaders and key associates with what they love most (or preach against). That was why Paul warned his mentee, Timothy, against certain threats. For example, on money, he reminded him that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil that can make people stray from their faith and so pierce themselves through with many sorrows [1 Tim. 6: 10]. On women, he should insist on young widows remarrying and raising new homes so as not to give “opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully, for some have already turned aside after Satan” [1 Tim. 5: 14-15].

3. Conclusion: Every mentor should see Christ as his/her mentor!

Holding a mentorship position as parent, guardian, teacher, boss or pastor is a privilege as well as a challenge. For example, when Jesus was conversing alone *in the open* with a woman by the well at Sychar in Samaria, He told her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” Immediately, the woman realized that she was not dealing with a potential seventh husband but the Prophet! Even so, when His disciples came back, “they marvelled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, ‘What do You seek?’ or ‘Why are You talking with her?’” [Jn 4: 15, 27]. That should tell you how much mentees also scrutinize what their mentors are doing. Happily, it was the woman herself who introduced Jesus to her people as the Christ [v. 29]. The Lord thus demonstrated integrity to His disciples both in words and deeds.

So, let *Jesus mentor you so that you can successfully mentor others.*