

Chapter One



MENTORING IN THE
FIRST CENTURY

Aurelius Augustinus (354–430) lived well, and his legacy lives on today. His thought—carefully preserved in books, sermons, and letters—has impacted theologians such as John Calvin (1509–1564), the Arab historian Ibn Khaldoun (1332–1406), and virtually every amateur and professional philosopher of the last 1,500 years. His contribution continues to stimulate scholarship today in those fields of study. He was a prolific writer who authored more than 100 books, most of which were composed after a long day at work as the bishop of the church of Hippo Regius (present-day Annaba, Algeria).¹ His genius is even more significant because he grew up in a family of modest resources in Tagaste (Souk Ahras, Algeria), a rather insignificant town in Roman Africa far from the cultivated learning centers of the Roman Empire.²

Although his thought and eloquence are well lauded, I find his person, character, and ministry even more remarkable. He had a sincere faith that remained consistent and passionate from the time of his conversion in Italy in 386 until his death in Hippo some 44

¹ Possidius, *Life of Augustine* 27; all English translations are from John E. Rotelle, ed., *Life of Saint Augustine* (Villanova, PA: Augustinian, 1988).

² *Sermon* 356.13.

years later.³ Yet, unlike the eremitic monks who fled the world for the solitude of the desert, this African pastor was always in the company of friends. He made his profession of faith, something regarded in the present day as highly personal, in the presence of a close friend.⁴ At the monastery in Hippo, where he and other clergy and laymen lived, he deliberately left his door open to visitors, and his table was set with extra places.⁵ In short, his life was characterized by friendship.

My particular interest relates to the impact Augustine had on other spiritual leaders of his day. Robert Clinton defines a spiritual leader as “a person with a God-given capacity and a God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God’s people toward His purposes for the group.”⁶ In Augustine’s day spiritual leaders included bishops, priests, and deacons as well as subdeacons, acolytes, and readers.⁷ As leaders they were men set apart to serve the people of God and carry out the responsibilities of the church. The present inquiry will consider how Augustine influenced these leaders in their training and preparation for ministry. My contention is that Augustine effectively mentored spiritual leaders and set them apart for needed ministries in the church and that many aspects of his mentoring will serve as instructive for the modern mentor. While he did not leave behind a particular manual for how to be a spiritual leader, his example and writings provide significant evidence toward understanding his principles of mentoring.

I am primarily writing for modern-day pastors and spiritual leaders who want to mentor and equip others. In evangelical Christian circles, where I tend most to frequent, mentoring and training has gained increased importance in recent years.⁸ The large number of books, seminars, stadium events, prayer breakfasts, and fishing

³ *Confessions* 1.1; *Soliloquies* 1.1.5; also George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 34–35.

⁴ *Confessions* 8.8.19; 11.27; 12.30.

⁵ *Sermon* 355.2; *Letter* 38.2; Possidius, *Life of Augustine* 22.2, 6; also Frederick van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. B. Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 239.

⁶ Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 245.

⁷ See Lee Bacchi, *The Theology of the Ordained Ministry in the Letters of Augustine of Hippo* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1998), 68.

⁸ See Robert Clinton and P. Stanley, *Connections: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 18.

trips testify to an increased emphasis on mentoring. The present generation of pastors seems to be more interested in matters of the heart like integrity, humility, faithfulness, personal holiness, spiritual hunger, and service than the skills normally associated with ministry—preaching, evangelizing, teaching, administrating, and visiting. As a vast store of wisdom and insight lies preserved in the story of the early Christian movement, I believe that Augustine has something to offer modern ministers pursuing authenticity and longing to practice what they preach. Through his thought, practice, success, and even failures, my hope is that today’s mentors will find hope, inspiration, and practical suggestions for how to mentor an emerging generation of spiritual leaders.

I should note what I will and will not address. First, I only intend to focus on Augustine’s spiritual formation of men who were spiritual leaders occupying a clerical office. This does not mean that he did not have an edifying impact on women, particularly the nuns and virgins. Though women who serve as spiritual leaders will find points of relevant application, the case studies will be limited to Augustine’s relationship with men.

A second limit is that this study will not address how Augustine disciplined the general congregation in Hippo—a ministry that is clear through his recorded sermons, catechisms, letters, legal judgments, and advice. Besides his congregation Augustine also influenced other laymen through his correspondence, including letters to “servants of God”—religious men and women who had abandoned the secular world to become servants of God.⁹

The evidence surrounding Augustine’s life reveals a deeply personal and passionate man who was committed to people and friendship. As a servant of the church, his thoughts, which were dictated into books and letters and formulated into sermons, served to edify the church in Hippo, Africa, and beyond. In light of what we already know about Augustine, a focused study on his approach to mentoring spiritual leaders is a valuable contribution to the study of mentoring, discipleship, and spiritual formation in the early church that has

⁹ See Daniel Doyle, *The Bishop as Disciplinarian in the Letters of St. Augustine* (New York: Lang, 2002), 368.

much relevance for today. So let us begin to consider the life of one we should “emulate and imitate in this world.”¹⁰

What Is Mentoring?

Though the term itself has only come into vogue in North America in recent years, the concept of mentoring is an ancient one. In certain African cultures, mentoring has referred to a boy becoming a man, a young man learning a skill like playing a drum, or a novice apprenticing under a master in a trade like carpentry. Milavec cites examples in Greek culture of novices being mentored in basket weaving, hunting with a bow, or pottery making.¹¹ Today in America mentoring has become synonymous with counseling, advising, training, coaching, and apprenticeship while some contexts include trades, sports, education, and the fine arts. Though the contexts and the cultures may vary, mentoring in essence means that a master, expert, or someone with significant experience is imparting knowledge and skill to a novice in an atmosphere of discipline, commitment, and accountability.

In light of the inherent need for mentoring or discipleship in Christianity, it seems best to work toward a model of mentoring by focusing on early texts, mostly from the New Testament, that largely show Jesus and Paul mentoring men at the outset of the Christian movement.¹² The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with offering an early Christian model for mentoring that will also provide a historical background for mentoring in the church prior to Augustine’s ministry.

Mentoring in Early Christian Writings

Although no exact equivalent for the term *mentoring* exists in the New Testament and early Christian texts, there are, however, some

¹⁰ Possidius, *Life of Augustine* 31.11.

¹¹ See Aaron Milavec, *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2003), 47; and Michael Wilkins, *The Concept of a Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel: As Reflected in the Use of the Term Mathētēs* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 34.

¹² Some reflection on early Christian mentoring will be gleaned from the *Didache*.

associated words that work together to express the concept. For example, we find verbs like “make disciples” (*mathēteuō*), “teach” (*didaskō*), “train” (*didaxō*), “be sound” (*hugiainō*), and “follow” (*akaloutheō*), as well as nouns like “disciple” (*mathētēs*), “teacher” (*didaskalos*), “imitator” (*mimētēs*), and “training” (*didachē*). With a primary emphasis on the notion of “disciple” (*mathētēs*), let us consider the key mentoring-related words that specifically tell us about a disciple’s belief and conduct.

Mathētēs

Though “make disciples” (*mathēteuō*) is found only a few times in the New Testament, the most significant occurrence seems to be in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ final commission to the Twelve: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”¹³ On the contrary, the noun *mathētēs* is found 264 times in the four Gospel accounts and Acts and occurs in its plural form (*mathētai*) in 239 of these instances.¹⁴ Hence, its significant repetition in only five books strongly suggests that “disciple” was an important concept for the early Christian writers as they accounted for the origins and spread of the Jesus movement.

The concept of a disciple was not limited to the ministry of Jesus. Mark and John recorded the Pharisees having disciples, and the Jews generally regarded themselves as disciples of Moses.¹⁵ Each Gospel account also showed John the Baptist with disciples, while John portrayed John the Baptist as essentially giving away his disciples and orienting them toward Jesus.¹⁶ When “disciples” was used in Acts, it referred once to Paul and Barnabas in their missionary efforts, but the rest of the time it was synonymous with Christians in general. Luke reinforced this by writing that the “disciples were first

¹³ Matt 28:19; also Acts 14:21; Matt 13:52; 27:57; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 160–62.

¹⁴ John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 3:41–45; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 11–125.

¹⁵ Mark 2:18; John 9:28; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 131.

¹⁶ Matt 9:14; 11:2; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 7:18–19; John 1:35–41; 3:25.

called Christians in Antioch,” rendering these believers disciples of Jesus in a general sense.¹⁷

The remaining references to “disciple” in its plural form (*mathētai*) in the Gospel accounts refer exclusively to those who were personally with Jesus. Three of the Gospel writers depicted a larger group of disciples, including some who parted company with Jesus after a while because they could no longer accept His teaching.¹⁸ Luke recounted Jesus’ interaction with a band of 70 followers whom He sent ahead of Him to cities where He would be preaching.¹⁹ Yet the greatest significance given in the Gospels to Jesus and His disciples pertains to His relationship with the Twelve.²⁰ John Meier writes: “We imagine the followers of Jesus in terms of concentric circles: the ‘crowds’ form the outer circle, the ‘disciples’ the intermediate or middle circle, and the ‘Twelve’ the inner circle.”²¹

In light of the significant and repeated usage of *mathētēs* in the passages cited, it seems best to approach an understanding of mentoring by observing what was going on around the disciple or group of disciples on the journey toward the “fullness of Christ.” What did a disciple receive from a mentor in this process?

A Disciple’s Belief

Marshall broadly defines a *disciple* as “the pupil of a teacher,” indicating that learning is a key occupation.²² In one sense this means that teaching of a cognitive nature was given for a disciple to apprehend and believe.²³ Jesus is called “teacher” (*didaskalos*),²⁴

¹⁷ Acts 13:52; 6:1,2,7; 9:1,19,25,27,38; 11:26,29; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 18:23,27; 19:1,9,30; 20:1; 21:4,6; Acts 11:26.

¹⁸ Matt 8:21; Luke 6:17; 19:37; John 6:60,66.

¹⁹ Luke 10:1–17.

²⁰ Matt 10:1,2,5; 11:1; 4:12,15,19,22,26; 20:17; 26:14,20,47; Mark 3:14,16; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10,17,20,43; Luke 6:13; 8:1; 9:1,12; 18:31; 22:33,47; John 6:67,70–71; 20:24; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 166–67.

²¹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.21.

²² I. Howard Marshall, “Disciple,” in *NBD*, 285; also Matt 10:24–25; Luke 6:40.

²³ “Learn” in a mere cognitive manner seems to be reflected in the rarely used term *manthanō* that occurs only seven times in the Gospels and Acts (Matt 9:13; 11:29; 24:32; Mark 13:28; John 6:45; 7:15; Acts 23:27); see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 158–60.

²⁴ Matt 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16,24,36; 26:18; Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:17,38; 10:17,20,35; 12:14,19,32; 13:1; 14:14; Luke 3:12; 7:40; 8:39; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13;

rabbi,²⁵ or “master” (*kyrios*)²⁶ 151 times in the Gospels and is depicted in the act of teaching (*didaskō*)²⁷ another 42 times.

Jesus is the Christ. What did His followers believe that made them disciples? Though the Gospel accounts portrayed Him teaching on subjects such as ethics and prayer, it seems that a conviction about Jesus’ identity as the Christ—one who would atone for sins through His death, burial, and resurrection—was the most important qualifying attribute of a disciple.²⁸ This conviction was most succinctly communicated in Peter’s famous confession that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”²⁹ Though some of the Twelve were slow to grasp this point and many from the larger group rejected it completely, ultimately the identity of Jesus was the focal point of the good news preached by Jesus in the Gospels and what was proclaimed by the apostles in Acts.³⁰

The Scriptures. Besides Jesus’ identity, what other teaching contributed to a disciple’s belief? Matthew recorded Jesus saying, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.”³¹ As His discourse unfolded, He made

18:18; 19:39; 20:21,28,39; 21:7; 22:11; John 1:38; 3:2; 8:4; 11:28; 13:13–14; 20:16; see Milavec, *Didache*, 73.

²⁵ Matt 26:25,49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:29,38; 3:2; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8. Luke also used “master” (*epistata*) in the same sense another six times (Luke 5:5; 8:24,45; 9:33,49; 17:13).

²⁶ *Kyrios* is essentially the Greek rendering of “rabbi.” Matt 7:21–22; 8:2,6,8,21,25; 9:28; 12:8; 14:28,30; 15:22,25,27; 16:22; 17:4,15; 18:21; 20:30–31,33; 21:3,30; 24:42; 26:22; Mark 2:28; 5:19; 7:28; 11:3; 16:19; Luke 2:11; 5:8,12; 6:5,46; 7:6,13; 9:54,59,61; 10:1,17,40–41; 11:1,39; 12:41; 13:15,23; 17:6,37; 18:6,41; 19:8,31,34; 22:33,38,49,61; 24:3; John 4:11,15,19,49; 5:7; 6:34,68, 8:11; 9:36,38; 11:3,12,21,27,32,34,39; 13:6,9,13–14,25,36–37; 14:5,8,22; 15:15; 20:28; 21:7,12,15–17,20–21; see Aaron Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did: Acquiring Spiritual Power Through Apprenticeship* (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1982), 98.

²⁷ Matt 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:11; 13:54; 21:23; 22:16; 26:55; Mark 1:21–22; 2:13; 4:1,2; 6:2,6,34; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:1,7; 12:14,35; 14:49; Luke 4:15,31; 5:3,17; 6:6; 13:10,22; 19:47; 20:1,21; 21:37; John 6:59; 7:14,28; 8:2,20; 18:20.

²⁸ Matt 5–7; Luke 11:1–13; John 13–17; see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3.2.

²⁹ Matt 16:16; “the Christ” (*ho christos*) literally means “anointed one” and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *mashiah*. That the Messiah would suffer and die is recounted in Dan 9:25; Matt 16:13–21; Mark 8:27–33; 9:31; Luke 9:18; John 3:16; 4:39,41; 6:69; 7:31; 8:24,30; 11:25,27; 13:17; 16:30; 20:31.

³⁰ Matt 16:22–23; Mark 8:32–33; John 6:60–66; Matt 16:21; 17:12; Mark 1:1; 8:31; 9:21; 14:9; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 24:26–46; Acts 2:38; 3:12–26; 4:2; 5:42.

³¹ Matt 5:17.

AUGUSTINE AS MENTOR



Entry to the ancient city of Hippo Regis where Augustine served as a presbyter (391–395) and then bishop (395–430).

several references to the Mosaic Law followed by commentary and updated teaching on each subject.³² The fact that Jesus would fulfill the law or prophets implies that His teaching stemmed from the Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout the Gospels Jesus is regularly observed teaching in the temple or synagogues where, as an unofficial rabbi, He would have read and taught from these Scriptures.³³ So, in addition to believing that Jesus was the Christ, a disciple would also have accepted the moral and ethical teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as His updated teaching like that contained in the Sermon on the Mount.

³² Matt 5:21,27,31,33,35,38,43.

³³ Matt 4:23; 9:35; 13:54; 21:23; 26:55; Mark 1:21; 6:2; 11:7; 12:35; 14:49; Luke 4:15; 6:6; 13:10; 19:47; 20:1; 21:37; John 6:59; 7:14,28; 8:2,20; 18:20; see Marshall, “Disciple,” 285; most of Jesus’ references to Scripture (*graphē*) also make some connection to His identity as the Christ; see Matt 21:42; 22:29; 26:54,56; Mark 12:10,24; 14:49; Luke 4:21; 24:27,32,45; John 2:22; 5:39; 7:38,42; 10:35; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24,28,36–37; 20:9.

The apostles and evangelists who came after Jesus also seemed to follow this pattern of teaching. Luke wrote that Philip, Paul, and Apollos used the Hebrew Scriptures to present Jesus as the Christ.³⁴ The teaching apostles of the Jerusalem church in Acts—particularly those who had been with Jesus—probably also passed on what they had learned from the Lord in the three previous years.³⁵ This teaching seems to have been quickly handed down to disciples beyond the Jerusalem community; this explains how Barnabas, a native of Cyprus who was apparently living in Jerusalem around the time of Pentecost, and Priscilla and Aquila, who were from Rome, were educated enough in the faith to teach emerging leaders like Paul and Apollos.³⁶

Sound teaching. As the community of faith grew, one challenge that Luke and Paul highlighted was the battle against heresy infiltrating the young churches.³⁷ Two young pastors, Timothy and Titus, received letters from Paul in which they were exhorted to maintain “sound teaching” (*hugainousē didaskalia*) in the face of certain ascetic and Jewish teachings.³⁸

What was sound teaching? The clearest response comes in 1 Timothy, where unsound teaching was described as “a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁹ So it was the teachings of Jesus, “the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses” and apparently familiar to all church leaders and teachers, that were the standard for sound teaching.⁴⁰

In 2 Tim 3:14–17, Paul added that sound teaching was essentially what was taught in the Scriptures:

You, however, continue in the things you have learned
and become convinced of, knowing from whom you

³⁴ Acts 8:35; 17:22; 18:28.

³⁵ Acts 2:42; 6:2; 11:26; 15:22; 18:11; 20:20; 28:31; Matt 5–7; 9:37; 11:11; 16:5,13,20–21,24; 17:19; 19:23; 20:17; 26:1,26; Mark 4:34; 8:27,33–34; 9:28,31; 10:23–24; 12:43; Luke 6:20; 9:18,40,43; 10:23; 11:1; 12:22; 16:1; 17:1,22; 20:45; 22:11; John 6:61; 13:5,35; 15:18; 16:29; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 144.

³⁶ Acts 4:36; 18:2; 11:25–26; 18:26.

³⁷ Acts 15:1ff; Rom 16:17–18; Gal 1:6–7; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 4:1ff; 2 Tim 4:3–4.

³⁸ 1 Tim 1:10; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1.

³⁹ 1 Tim 6:3.

⁴⁰ 2 Tim 2:2; also *Didache* 11:2.

have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.⁴¹

The “sacred writings” (*hiera grammata*), familiar to Timothy since his early education in a Jewish home, and “all Scripture” (*pasa graphē*) both refer to the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴² Yet, in 1 Tim 5:18, Paul had written: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’” Here Paul quoted Deut 25:4 and Luke 10:7 and referred to them both as “the Scripture” (*he graphē*). Hence, sound teaching for the early Christians meant teaching that conformed to the Hebrew Scriptures, the teachings of Jesus that were transmitted by the apostles, and the eventual New Testament writings, of which Luke is included.

Why was the notion of the Scriptures important in promoting sound doctrine and ultimately a key for mentoring and discipleship in early Christianity? The message of Christianity as well as Judaism was conveyed through revelation. The Jews believed that God spoke to them through their prophets and leaders like Moses who received the law. Though this revelation was initiated by an intimate divine-human encounter, the message was ultimately written down and preserved for members of the covenant community to learn and even memorize. While accepting the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures, the early church believed that ongoing revelation in the form of Scripture accompanied the rise and expansion of the Christian movement. John wrote that Jesus was not merely a means of revelation but that He was the Word of God incarnate (*ho logos*).⁴³ As noted, Paul considered Luke’s writings to be Scripture, while Peter communicated the same about Paul’s writings.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 2 Tim 3:14–17.

⁴² 2 Tim 1:5.

⁴³ John 1:1–14.

⁴⁴ 2 Pet 3:16.

Written Scriptures brought unity and continuity to the Jews and the early church as they served as a reference point for teaching and preserving the faith. At the same time they provided a means of discerning counterfeit teaching. As noted, Paul held up the Scriptures as well as the teachings of Jesus as the test for sound teaching, which safeguarded a disciple's doctrinal belief.

A Disciple's Conduct

According to the Gospel writers, one became a disciple by believing that Jesus was the Christ and through accepting His teachings—the moral and ethical teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures and His teachings that fulfilled the law. But was being Jesus' disciple limited to belief? On the contrary the Gospel writers showed that it was quite impossible to separate belief about Jesus' person and teachings from obeying those teachings.⁴⁵ In light of this inseparable link, Milavec argues that *didaskolos* ought to be rendered "master" instead of "teacher" and *didaskō* should be translated "to apprentice" instead of "to teach." He comments on *didaskō*, "it could only refer to that apprenticing which consumed the whole life and purpose of every Jew—that of assimilating the way of *YHWH*."⁴⁶ In his commentary on the *Didache*, Milavec adds that the word *didachē*, most often translated as "teaching" should be rendered "training" because of the practical nature of the teaching.⁴⁷

The practical manner of obeying Jesus' teachings was clearly expressed by the active way in which Jesus called His disciples—"follow me" (*akolouthei moi*).⁴⁸ Meier writes, "In the case of people specifically called disciples, especially the particular group called the Twelve, the physical act of following usually expresses an inner adherence to the person and message of Jesus."⁴⁹ Matthew emphasized practical obedience in his account of Jesus' Sermon on the

⁴⁵ The idea of "hearing" (*akouō*) is used nearly synonymously with obeying in texts like Matt 7:24,26; Luke 6:47; John 12:47.

⁴⁶ See Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 85.

⁴⁷ See Milavec, *Didache*, 44; *Didache*, 2:1; 6:1.

⁴⁸ Matt 8:22; 9:19; 10:38; 16:24; 19:21,28; Mark 2:14; 8:34; 10:21; Luke 5:27; 9:23,59; 18:22; John 1:43; 8:12; 10:27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19,22.

⁴⁹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:20.

Mount, an ethical discourse characterized by practical commands for living summarized by the command to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”⁵⁰ As noted, John portrayed Jesus in the role of a master not only commanding obedience but also demonstrating it by washing the feet of His disciples before teaching them in the upper room.⁵¹

While Jesus presented a model for the Twelve, Paul called the Corinthian believers to be “imitators” (*mimētēs*) of him, emulating his “ways which are in Christ.”⁵² Paul’s “ways” (*hodos*) referred to his own morally upright conduct that conformed to the conduct and teachings of Jesus, whom John referred to as “the way” (*hē hodos*).⁵³ With no separation in His conduct and teachings, Jesus was the embodiment of moral perfection and all that pleased the Father. So the Corinthian believers were challenged to a higher level of conduct by imitating Paul, who imitated Christ. In the early epistles Christians were also encouraged to imitate the good example of hardworking and honest people, the faith of the saints of the Hebrew Scriptures, the example of teachers who have taught the Word of God and demonstrated a holy life, as well as God and Christ.⁵⁴

Summary

An early Christian disciple believed in the identity of Jesus as the Christ and cognitively accepted and sought to obey the moral and ethical teachings of Jesus, which stem from the Scriptures. In addition, the disciple imitated the conduct of Christ and others in the community of faith whose conduct conformed to that of Christ.

Mentoring or discipleship, as observed in the New Testament and early Christian writings, was the work of one Christian helping another disciple or group of disciples grow in their knowledge and application of the teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures. Put another way, the mentor coached his disciples toward realizing the fullness

⁵⁰ Matt 5:48.

⁵¹ John 13:3–17.

⁵² 1 Cor 4:16–17; 11:1.

⁵³ John 4:16.

⁵⁴ 1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 3:7,9; Heb 6:12; 13:7; *Didache* 4:1–2; Eph 5:1–4.

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of their salvation.⁵⁵ A mentoring relationship was a personal and caring relationship between disciples committed to this common goal.⁵⁶ The mentor probably had been a disciple longer than his disciples and had a more profound understanding of the teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures. With that he was a winsome model whose conduct was continually being conformed to the way of Christ. His teaching and conduct were coherent with each other, meaning that he practiced what he preached. Finally, the atmosphere of the mentoring relationship was both gracious and rigorous and characterized by encouragement and exhortation.

Mentoring Spiritual Leaders

On one level mentoring or discipleship was possible for all Christians. The word *disciples*, as we have noted, could refer to the broader group of those who followed Jesus or even members of the early Christian movement as recorded in Acts. Yet because our inquiry is concerned with the mentoring of spiritual leaders, it seems most helpful to concentrate on how Jesus mentored the Twelve and how Paul mentored his coworkers in mission. Meier makes the important point that Jesus called disciples not merely for their own salvation and benefit but to join Him in His purpose—promoting the kingdom of God.⁵⁷ Also, Paul clearly selected men and mentored them in the context of the missionary enterprise. To complete our model of early Christian mentoring of spiritual leaders, I propose the following eight characteristics of mentoring drawn from the evidence already presented.

1. The Group

The first apparent reality of mentoring spiritual leaders in early Christianity is that mentoring happened in the context of a group. As noted, *mathētēs* is repeated 239 times in the plural form in the Gospels and Acts compared to only 25 times in the singular form. Twenty of the 25 occurrences referred to the “disciple that Jesus

⁵⁵ Eph 2:8; 4:13; Col 1:28.

⁵⁶ See Milavec, *Didache*, 88.

⁵⁷ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:157.

loved” in John’s Gospel or to the hypothetical notion of a disciple.⁵⁸ In fact, the only individual disciple named in the Gospels was Joseph of Arimathea.⁵⁹ Hence, disciple was almost exclusively a group concept in the Gospels and Acts. The Lord is simply never observed mentoring any of the Twelve or members of the broader group on an individual basis.⁶⁰ Meier correctly asserts, “As presented in the Gospels, discipleship involves not just an individualistic relation of a single pupil to his teacher but the formation of a group around the teacher who has called the group into existence.”⁶¹

Though Paul was not initiated into the community as the other apostles were, he also mentored spiritual leaders in a group context. His key mentoring contexts were the missionary journeys recorded in Acts, where emerging leaders like John Mark, Titus, Timothy, Silas, Judas, and Luke accompanied him as disciples and coworkers.⁶²

Why did early Christian mentoring happen in a group context more than on an individual basis? Some may reasonably make the cultural argument that first-century Palestine was more communal than modern Europe or North America, where individualism is more highly valued; but I suggest that the more compelling reason, which is above culture, is that Jesus and Paul and other early Christian mentors were mentoring leaders in the context of their goal—the establishment of the church.⁶³ As the church was to be a body of believers living together in faith, hope, and love, its leaders needed to be trained in the context of a community. Wilkins rightly adds, “The church as a whole can identify with the group of disciples.”⁶⁴

Ultimately, mentoring in a group context seems to be more effective because it takes into account the relational makeup and needs

⁵⁸ John 18:15–16; 19:26–27; 20:2–4,8; 21:7,20,23–24; Matt 10:24–25,42; Luke 6:10; 14:26–27,33.

⁵⁹ John 19:38; the remaining singular usages of disciple are in Acts 9:10,26,36; 16:1.

⁶⁰ There are a few instances where only Peter, James, and John accompany Jesus, though this does not diminish the group context of His teaching; see Matt 17:1; Mark 5:37; 9:2; Luke 8:51; 9:28.

⁶¹ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:51–52; also Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 169.

⁶² John Mark (Acts 13:13; Col 4:10; Phlm 1:24); Titus (Gal 2:1; 2 Cor 8:23); see Luke’s “we” statements (Acts 16:10–13,16; 20:6–8,13–15; 21:1–8,10,12,14–17; 27:1–8,15–16,18,27,29; 28:1,10–14,16).

⁶³ Matt 16:18; Acts 11:26; 14:23–27.

⁶⁴ Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 170.

of human beings. Milavec highlights the vital role of the family, particularly parents, in forming children in their basic belief system and serving as an ideal nurturing community.⁶⁵ Aside from the family, the expression “no man is an island” signifies that humans do not flourish or develop well in isolation. Theologians explain the relational makeup of humans by pointing to their creation in the image of a triune God, One who by necessity is in relationship with the Godhead.⁶⁶ Humans who already demonstrate a need for others are in even greater need of relationships as they pursue relationship with God. Hence, we begin to understand a bit of the theological speculation between the mystery of the Trinity and the doctrine of the body of Christ. In summary, mentoring in the context of a group, as demonstrated by Jesus and Paul, is most effective because it meets the inherent relational needs of the disciple.

2. The Mentor as Disciple

Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.”⁶⁷ Though far from having “arrived” spiritually, the mentor was still growing, his conduct becoming more and more Christlike. The mentor was still a disciple.

The New Testament also depicted Jesus in human form living by faith and dependence on God, though his divine nature was never compromised. Such dependence, characterized by prayer, demonstrated that he also took the posture of a disciple. The writer of Hebrews described it this way: “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 8,11.

⁶⁶ Gen 1:26–27.

⁶⁷ Phil 3:12.

⁶⁸ Heb 5:7–8.

This attitude and way of life qualified a mentor to be imitated by his disciples. The mentor's continual posture of learning demonstrated authenticity and humility for his disciples, making his mentoring more attractive and effective. Augustine aptly communicated this point in *Sermon 340*: "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian."⁶⁹

Practically speaking, the mentor continued to meditate on the teachings of Jesus as transmitted by the apostles as well as the Scriptures. Milavec, describing Jesus' commitment to knowing the Scriptures, writes, "Employing the time-honored methods of his day, Jesus was the master who sensitively immersed himself in God's Torah with his disciples."⁷⁰ With this teaching in mind, the mentor continually pursued behavioral change essentially working out his salvation with "fear and trembling."⁷¹ Also, he probably had been or continued to be mentored by another spiritual leader. In the case of Paul, Barnabas initially served as his mentor, though later they seem to have more of a peer-mentoring relationship.⁷²

3. Selection

In each mentoring context surveyed, there was a definite point of selection in which the mentor called a disciple or group of disciples to join him in spiritual growth and serving the community. Although Jesus invited disciples to follow Him, at some distinct point He specifically set apart the Twelve to be with Him, learn from Him, and minister with Him.⁷³ Meier summarizes, "Jesus' initiative in summoning a person to discipleship is a necessary condition for becoming his disciple."⁷⁴ Similarly, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus in search of Paul to recruit him for the important work of teaching the recently converted Greeks in Antioch.⁷⁵ Later Paul, upon receiving

⁶⁹ Augustine *Sermon 340.1*; all English translations of Augustine's sermons are from John E. Rotelle, ed., *Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. III, vol. 1–11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2001).

⁷⁰ Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 134, 317.

⁷¹ Phil 2:12.

⁷² Acts 9:27; 11:25–26.

⁷³ Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:13–16.

⁷⁴ Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3:54; see 3:21,45,50–54.

⁷⁵ Acts 11:19–26.

the good recommendation of the church at Lystra, chose Timothy to travel and minister with him.⁷⁶

Milavec writes that “Jesus’ choice of collaborators was one of the most critical of his career,” meaning that this stage of selection involved risk.⁷⁷ First, there was risk that the disciple would not hold up over time, causing potential damage to the ministry or friction within the mentoring community. Though having received good references from the Lystra church about Timothy, Paul surely had not forgotten the incident of another disciple, John Mark, who had abandoned him and Barnabas after their preaching campaign in Cyprus. John Mark’s departure had resulted in conflict and a parting of ways between Paul and Barnabas.⁷⁸ Second, the mentor potentially risked his own reputation as a spiritual leader if the disciple did not hold up. Barnabas modeled this when he vouched for the recently converted Paul before the apostles at Jerusalem.⁷⁹ Though the element of risk in selecting disciples was unavoidable, a mitigating factor was the mentor’s ability to identify potential in a person.⁸⁰ The mentor was aided in making this decision if he had already observed faithfulness in a disciple, as in the case of Jesus and the Twelve, or if he had a good report from a reliable source as Paul had with Timothy.

4. The Mentor-Disciple Relationship

The mentor invited a disciple or group of disciples into a caring personal relationship characterized by both discipline and grace. Because the mentor wanted to see the potential of the disciple fulfilled, the training program was rigorous. When the Twelve wanted to send the crowds away because the hour was getting late, Jesus challenged His men to feed them.⁸¹ Coleman suggests that it was the objective of the Twelve’s training, to be prepared to lead the church when Jesus was gone, that caused Him to demand total

⁷⁶ Acts 16:1–3.

⁷⁷ Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 110.

⁷⁸ Acts 12:25–13:13; 15:36–40.

⁷⁹ Acts 9:27.

⁸⁰ See Clinton and Stanley, *Connections*, 38; Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 110.

⁸¹ Mark 8:35–37.

obedience and to train them in such an atmosphere of discipline.⁸² Perhaps it was a similar conviction that led Paul to reject John Mark as a companion on the next missionary journey.

The mentoring relationship was also marked by grace. That is, the mentor was patient and forbearing with his disciples in the growth process. In John's Gospel, Jesus was depicted as a shepherd: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."⁸³ Paul repeatedly referred to Timothy as "my child."⁸⁴ One way that grace was demonstrated was through the mentor's patient manner in dealing with his disciples in their immaturity. The Twelve argued among themselves over who would be the greatest in the kingdom, they offered to call down fire from heaven against those who disagreed with them, and they were irritated with parents who brought their children to Jesus.⁸⁵ Yet, as Coleman writes, "Jesus patiently endured these human failings of His chosen disciples because in spite of all their shortcomings they were willing to follow him."⁸⁶ Similarly, a mentor demonstrated grace in how he responded to a disciple's failure. According to John, Jesus tenderly restored Peter, who had denied Jesus and then returned to the comfortable confines of fishing. As the text records, Jesus renewed the call for Peter to follow Him and continue in the ministry.⁸⁷

Because of the mentor's stature of spiritual maturity and ministry experience, there was clearly a spiritual hierarchy that existed in the relationship.⁸⁸ While the mentor's spiritual authority over his disciples was clear, it was an authority realized through caring influence more than by title or rank. Mentoring required servant leadership. As noted, before beginning His upper room discourse, Jesus dem-

⁸² Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1987), 58–59.

⁸³ John 10:27.

⁸⁴ 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 2:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; also *Didache* 3:1–8; 4:1; Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope & Love*, 147–48.

⁸⁵ Matt 18:1–5; Mark 9:33–37; 10:13; Luke 9:46–48, 51–54.

⁸⁶ Coleman, *Master Plan*, 55; also Clinton and Stanley, *Connections*, 38.

⁸⁷ John 21:3, 15–19.

⁸⁸ See *Didache* 4:1; and Milavec, *Didache*, 13, 49.

onstrated the humble servitude of a mentor by washing the feet of His disciples.⁸⁹

Despite being their rabbi and master, Jesus also referred to the Twelve as His friends.⁹⁰ The fraternal and friendly nature of their relationship was evidenced by the significant time and the various contexts that they were together. Apart from spending time together in teaching and ministry, they ate and rested together, even attending a wedding together.⁹¹ More than a group of students studying under a teacher, the Twelve were more like a family or group of friends living together.

Paul also seemed to have a fraternal mind-set with His disciples. In a letter to the Corinthians, he called Titus “my partner and fellow worker among you.”⁹² In the salutations of eight of Paul’s epistles, the recipients were greeted not only by Paul but also by disciples like Silas and Timothy who were referred to as “brothers.”⁹³ That Paul would include the names of these friends in what was generally regarded as his writings also reflected his humility and fraternal mind-set.

5. Sound Teaching

As teaching that conformed to the words of Jesus, a mentor drew from the Hebrew Scriptures, the teachings of Jesus, and the early writings that circulated throughout the churches that were later confirmed as Scripture. As noted, written Scriptures, a hallmark of the Christian movement, provided a point of reference not only for teaching sound doctrine but also for guarding against unsound teaching. (See 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14.)

⁸⁹ John 13:4–5; also Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; and Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350–1250, Cistercian Studies* 95 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1988), xxvii.

⁹⁰ John 15:15.

⁹¹ Matt 5:1; 8:23; 9:10,19,37; 11:1; 14:22; 16:5; 17:19; Mark 3:7; 4:34; 6:45; 8:34; 10:13,46; 13:1; 2:15–16; Luke 5:30; 6:20; 7:11; 9:40; 10:23; 12:22; 16:1; 17:1,22; John 2:2,11–12; 3:22; 11:7–12.

⁹² 2 Cor 8:23.

⁹³ 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1,19; Gal 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1:1; see Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 99.

Jesus insisted that the apostles uphold sound teaching. The final command given to the Twelve, to make disciples of all nations, was to be accomplished through teaching what Jesus had taught them.⁹⁴ Timothy was commanded to teach “the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses” (2 Tim 2:2) and to “retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:13).⁹⁵ The follower of the resurrected Jesus, and even more an emerging spiritual leader in the church, was one who believed in the person of Jesus as the Christ as well as what Jesus taught.

A clear necessity for the spiritual leader committed to maintaining sound doctrine was the ability to read the Scriptures. Although first-century Palestine could be characterized as an oral culture, and although it was possible for a Jew to hear Torah in the synagogue, the spiritual leader entrusted with teaching had to be literate. Milavec writes, “The Pharasaic masters customarily required that their disciples be able to read the text of the Scriptures before undertaking to train them in its proper interpretation.”⁹⁶ It would be unlikely that Jesus, who emerged from the rabbinic tradition, would have required any less of His disciples.

6. *Modeling and Involving in Ministry*

A mentor was not only a growing disciple and a winsome model for imitation; he also demonstrated faithfulness and skill in the work of ministry. The Twelve watched Jesus confound the Jewish leaders, attempting to trap Him by their questions. They observed how He drew in the crowds and amazed them with His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. They also learned how to rest and pray after a long day of ministering to the crowds.⁹⁷ Paul surely learned much about teaching new believers from Barnabas during the year they spent together in Antioch before the missionary journeys to the Gentiles.⁹⁸ Clinton writes that emerging leaders learn through “imi-

⁹⁴ Matt 28:19; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 144.

⁹⁵ See *Didache* 11:2.

⁹⁶ See Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 109.

⁹⁷ Matt 7:29; 14:22; 21:23–27; Mark 3:7; 6:45; Luke 20:1–8.

⁹⁸ Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 83 (see Acts 11:25–26).

tation modeling” and that ministry skills are acquired in large part through observation.⁹⁹ Milavec similarly suggests that skill begins to be grasped intuitively by disciples over time.¹⁰⁰

The mentor not only modeled ministry, but he deliberately involved his disciples in the work as well. Clinton adds that ministry skills are developed through “informal apprenticeships” and “experience.”¹⁰¹ Though the initial tasks may not have been overly spiritual, responsibility was increased with time and faithfulness on the part of the disciples.¹⁰² As noted, the Twelve were involved in distributing food and cleaning up after Jesus’ miraculous feedings as well as in securing the colt for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. They were also entrusted with tasks like baptizing, preaching, and casting out demons.¹⁰³ Finally, after a few years of traveling and serving with Jesus, they were promoted to the greater assignment of making disciples of all nations.

Timothy began traveling with Paul and his team on the second missionary journey. Later he was sent on a few occasions to minister in place of Paul. Paul’s letters to Timothy indicate that Timothy was entrusted with a greater responsibility of serving as pastor of the church in Ephesus.¹⁰⁴

An important quality of mentoring at this stage was debriefing. A group of disciples was entrusted with a task, executed it successfully or unsuccessfully, then returned to discuss the experience with their mentor. Luke recorded that Jesus assigned the 70 to go and preach in towns and cities where He would later preach.¹⁰⁵ In this case they returned elated at their success. Jesus responded by encouraging them to be humble, and He openly praised the Father for their success.¹⁰⁶ Matthew recorded an instance when some of the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 31, 89.

¹⁰⁰ See Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Clinton, *Making of a Leader*, 31, 89.

¹⁰² Ibid., 35, 81; Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 133.

¹⁰³ Matt 14:19; 15:36; 21:1,6; Mark 6:7–12,41; 8:6; 11:1; Luke 9:14,16; 19:29; John 4:1–2; 6:3,12; see Wilkins, *Concept of a Disciple*, 166.

¹⁰⁴ Acts 16:1–3; 17:14–15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:24; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; Phil 2:19; 1 Thess 3:2,6; 1 Tim 1:3; 2 Tim 4:19; see Donald Guthrie, “Timothy,” *NBD*, 1201.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 10:1–24; also Mark 6:7–13.

¹⁰⁶ Luke 10:20–24.

Twelve unsuccessfully attempted to cast out a demon. Jesus arrived, cast out the demon, and later used it as an object lesson to teach them about faith.¹⁰⁷ In summary, the Mentor effectively mentored His disciples at this stage through modeling ministry, involving the disciples in ministry, and debriefing successes and failures in preparation for future ministry.

7. Releasing to Ministry

Releasing a leader logically flowed from the previous stage of increased involvement and responsibility in ministry. Jesus had taught and trained the Twelve, entrusted them with the commission to make disciples, and then purposefully departed, leaving them on their own to succeed or fail in the task. Paul used this same method with Timothy. After years of observing Paul and receiving assignments of increasing responsibility, Timothy was entrusted with the authority and responsibility to pastor the church at Ephesus, where some of his tasks included teaching sound doctrine, leading the church, raising up other leaders, and caring for widows.¹⁰⁸ These tasks could not be delegated back to Paul when they became difficult. This stage was a veritable weaning for the disciples and was probably painful for both mentor and disciples alike. Yet given the proper training and timing, this stage was crucial and necessary to keep the disciples from developing an unhealthy dependency on the mentor and ultimately depriving the church of needed ministers.

8. Resourcing Leaders

Though the disciples were released with authority and responsibility, a mentor could still be available as a resource or consultant, providing encouragement and perhaps practical advice. Because distance could make personal contact or visits difficult, the forms of mentoring probably needed to change. Paul resourced both Timothy and Titus with letters, affirming their ministries while addressing specific issues they were facing. Though the role of the mentor

¹⁰⁷ Matt 17:19–20.

¹⁰⁸ 1 Tim 1:10; 3:1–13; 4:6; 5:3–22; 6:3,20; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:24–26; 4:3.

changed at this point, the caring relationship between mentor and disciples remained the same.

Outcomes of Mentoring

The impact of the mentor continued through his disciples as they mentored other groups of disciples. This influence continued in a multiplying fashion. Timothy was to take the teachings he had learned and “entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”¹⁰⁹ In short, the mentor left a legacy.

The testimony of early Christianity was that the disciples of Jesus and Paul did become mature disciples and leaders in the church in most of the known world.¹¹⁰ That the Jesus movement, born among Galilean fishermen, has continued to the present and taken root worldwide is as remarkable as it is undeniable. And although mentoring and discipling leaders has played an important role in the church’s ongoing mission, the mentor’s legacy is largely out of his control. Nothing functions automatically. What would have happened, for instance, if the Twelve had changed their minds after Jesus left and gone back to fishing? We should also note that the legacy or influence of a person will differ according to the gifting and contribution of the mentor. Some mentors write and have their books preserved; others preach and have their sermons recorded, while others simply serve and their nameless example lives on. Each mentor’s legacy will look different, but it is difficult if not wrong to judge or rate a person’s legacy. A mentor’s legacy may lie dormant for a while, only to resurface in a later generation. (Van Gogh never sold a painting in his lifetime!) We can at least say that a spiritual leader, ministering in the community of faith, generally has left some lasting influence to the next generation of spiritual leaders.

¹⁰⁹ 2 Tim 2:2.

¹¹⁰ See Milavec, *To Empower as Jesus Did*, 149.