

SACRIFICE:
SACER + FACERE;
TO MAKE SACRED.
THIS IS THE
DAZZLING
DARKNESS AT THE
HEART OF LOVE.

On my desk are the photographs from our trip just weeks ago to the Marble Mountain Wilderness in the Klamaths. I glance through them again, remembering in particular the long, hot climb we made one afternoon on Marble Rim, 7,000 feet up, resting briefly at the sheer edge of things. We watched as a red-tailed hawk soared far below. Down the valley, a tiny ribbon of water etched itself through the forest. Sun and sky and stillness, just for a moment. It was as far as we could go.

I do not know how this seemed to Katie, nor how she will remember it in years to come. To me it was one of those moments, like the crying of the wolves, when wild called out to wild. It is a place that always beckons—a true place, a jutting rim where I momentarily perched on the edge of the possible.

On our way back down Katie began to teach me one of the songs she'd learned in choir, a simple hymn called "Joseph's Lullaby": "Dream your dreams of angels and light, / I'll be there throughout the long night / A man needs deep silence to feel such deep joy. . . ."

Beneath the brilliant sun she sang, and then I sang, haltingly following behind.



THE THREE LANGUAGES OF MENTORING

Saul, Jonathan, and David—Which Will I Be?

By Don Hudson

Honi Ha-Magel once saw an old man planting a carob tree. He asked when he thought the tree would bear fruit. "After seventy years," was his reply. "Do you expect to live seventy years and eat the fruit of your labor?" "I found carob trees in the world when I entered it," said the old man, "and as my fathers planted for me before I was born, so do I plant for those who will come after me."

—Talmud: Ta'anit, 23a

We are beginning to hear much about mentoring. Fads come and go, and whether this new thing called mentoring is a fad or not is not as important as understanding that this current "whim" of culture addresses a legitimate absence felt by many people. It is obvious even to the casual reader or observer of American culture that we live in a fatherless society. The statistics are astonishing: more than sixty percent of our children will grow up without their biological fathers or mothers in the home. Increasingly, many of us are hungrily groping to "name" ourselves—discover who we are—by finding the fathers or mothers we have never had. For this reason, I believe our generation is turning to mentoring as an instrument of God to repair the ruin of our personal losses. As such, mentoring becomes a powerful means of revealing the fatherhood and motherhood of God to a generation of orphans. This is good; as the familiar adage goes, what God gives, he takes away. But I have found that what God takes away, he also gives back—sometimes in the strangest ways and to the strangest people.

There is more. Most importantly, I am writing on mentoring because it strikes a chord deep in my own heart. Many of the sacred notions I believed in my youth are waning and fading in importance, but a few thoughts are flourishing. What began years ago as intuition and desire has flowered, full bloom, striking deeper roots and extending strengthening limbs. It is telling that one of my favorite phrases of late is the often-heard "I would not be here today if it were not for —." I have many names to fill in the blank. They are my roots that daily name me and help me discover more of who I

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am because of who I have been—my father, my grandmother, my great-grandfather, my friends, my counselors, my professors, Norman MacLean, Gabriel Marquez, Miguel de Unamuno, Calvin, St. Theresa, Bonaventure, Jonathan, David, and on and on—my personal pantheon of mentors.

Mentoring appears to me to be a celebration of identity that is true and biblical. Bruno Bettelheim, in his book *The Uses of Enchantment*, says that “the child (who listens to fairy tales) identifies with the good hero not because of his goodness, but because the hero’s condition makes a deep positive appeal to him. The question for the child is not ‘Do I want to be good?’ but ‘Who do I want to be like?’”

What Bettelheim does not say, but which I suspect he would agree with, is that every adult asks the same question: “Who do I want to be like?” Have you noticed that when we face the trials of life, we immediately look around to find someone who has faced a similar trial successfully? This is where the mentor enters the very real drama of our lives. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we are constantly on the lookout for mentors who will teach us to live beautifully.

However, mentoring is much more than self-identity. It is self-identity that lives and breathes self-sacrifice. Mentoring is a paradox—one that cuts against the grain of what comes naturally to us as human beings. For that reason, mentoring lies close to the very center of the gospel. It is not authoritarian, hierarchical, or even egalitarian, as many would want it to be. Mentoring is a reversal; when we think of mentoring we should recall the revolutionary credo of our Lord: “The Gentiles lord it over one another. . . .”

The mentor, then, looks two ways—backward and forward—asking, “Who am I?” and “Where am I going?” This essay will address the questions in the context of answering other questions: What is mentoring? What is the purpose for mentoring? How do we define mentoring? And what does the process of mentoring move toward?

Who Am I?

Any mentor worth his or her salt must look back. And he must begin with this question: “Who am I?”

“We have been repeatedly warned that we cannot know where we wish to go if we do not know where we have been,” says Wendell Berry in *Another Turn of the Crank*. But where do we go to answer this question: “Who am I?” We look to the story of our lives and to the story of the Bible.

I want to examine mentoring in the context of stories—our stories and Bible stories, new stories and ancient tales. I also want to examine this subject by viewing the Bible through the lens of culture at large, and in turn to look at culture through the lens of the Bible. Perhaps if we listen to the conversation between the stories of the Bible, the stories of culture, and our personal stories, we may overhear something that will change our lives; and if we change, we inevitably will change the people we love.

What is this conversation to which we are to listen? First, the stories of the Bible echo the themes that draw our hearts into an intimate, impassioned exchange. Karl Barth says this is where God “encounters” us, seizes us, and we dare not let go. These same themes touch us, nudge us, jump out at us, and sometimes ambush us. But most of the time they whisper to us so subtly that we recognize them without ever recognizing them.

The ancient stories of the Bible are vibrant threads of truth that interweave with our lives today. The Bible is more than inspired; it is relevant. This is a very important point: I return to the Bible not only because it is inspired, but because the Bible speaks to me.

As evangelicals, many of us have come to a very unfortunate position. In our pursuit of “truth” we have lost our quest for meaning. We believe that the Bible is true but not meaningful. For this reason, we read the Bible by dissecting it rather than by discovering it. Many of us read the Bible to prove it or rationalize it rather than to engage it with wild imaginings and yearning hearts. We are to practice our Bible reading as Annie Dillard practices her faith: “Sometimes I ride a bucking faith while one hand grips and the other flails the air, and like any daredevil I gouge with my heels for blood, for a wilder ride, for more.”

I murder with Cain; I whimper with Abraham; I cower in a hazy oblivion with Gideon; like Samson, my desire is unhinged; and I hurl a jealous spear like Saul. But there is more to the Bible, and there is more to me. I agonize with Abel the good man’s loss; I wander in the wasteland with Hagar and grope for the angel who will spare my boy; through the eyes of Gideon, I watch God do the impossible; like Samson, even though I forget my God, he remembers me with a vengeance untamed; and at times in my journey to find the donkeys, I happen upon the prophets and begin to tremble with ecstasy. Since I have been a boy, I have come back to the beguiling stories of the Bible; I may get lost, but those stories have never disappointed me.

The story of yesterday is always a story for today and safe passage into tomorrow. One such story is the story of Saul, Jonathan, and David. There are many facets and meanings to great stories. To think that the story of David and Saul has been told to teach

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mentoring would be a mistake; but, on the other hand, to think that this story cannot speak to us about mentoring would be a much greater mistake. Here are three men, three leaders, two older than the other. One seeks to destroy the young man; one gives his life for the young man; both mentor the young man; and the young man learns to be mentored and to mentor.

The Language of Jealousy: Hiding Behind the Baggage

Saul's story begins in the strangest way. Israel has endured over three hundred years of incompetent, ambiguous judges. The people are tired of the judges and their defeats. They require a king now who will raise them up out of the cycle of despair and defeat. But there is a pressing question: will the king be like the past judges, or a man with a different heart who leads the people to safety and success? If you know the story of Saul only casually, you know that King Saul will carry on the legacy of the judges. Read again the passage about the anointing of Saul: in this account we get a glimpse of Saul's character and begin to capture a picture of what kind of mentor he will be.

And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the baggage. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. (1 Samuel 10:20-25)

The man who was head-and-shoulders taller than everyone else was hiding behind the baggage. This image of Saul becomes a subtle harbinger of a recurring theme that will eventually lead to his downfall. Normally, many of the heroes of the Bible stories are underdogs: Jacob is second-born and deceitful from birth; Moses stutters; David is the baby of the family and ruddy in complexion. Saul, however, is unique as a potential Bible hero. He is the most likely candidate for kingship. He is the people's choice. Then why is this warrior hiding from his shining moment? As we read the story, we discover later that Saul's lack of confidence intrudes into almost every significant scene in his life.

We need to look at ourselves in certain situations in life. Some situations will say more about us than others. What is our response when we are honored? What is our response when we are shamed?

Saul failed in both situations. His humility was actually arrogance in disguise. His shame did not change him, but it increasingly calcified his heart with every incident of failure. Could it be that Saul believed he was nothing so he had to live as if he were something? Perhaps this is why Saul attempted to destroy David with such a vengeance. Everything that David possessed was a reminder of what Saul did not have. Initially, Saul refused to be honored—but eventually he demanded to be more honored than David.

Saul was a bad mentor because he sought out of his insecurity both to use David and to destroy him. He lived with great ambivalence toward David. Saul asked him to do those things he could not do for himself: he asked David to pull him out of his depression and fight his battles. But selfishness always backfired, because it reversed the paradox of mentoring: "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (1 Samuel 18:9). "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (16:7).

There is a good jealousy and a bad jealousy. The good jealousy is really quite simple: it is being jealous for someone, not of someone. Bad jealousy has two forms: we can be jealous of something that someone has, to the point that we want to take that away from the person. The idea of this jealousy is, "You cannot have what I do not have." This was the case with Saul. His mad jealousy eventually wanted to strip from David the very thing he could not possess. The second type of jealousy wants to use what someone else has. One is narcissism and the other is codependency. In both cases, the jealousy is focused inward rather than toward the other.

The anti-mentor—the jealous one—does not end well:

Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; that all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? . . ." (22:7-8)

With the Sauls of this world we are left gasping for air—living as refugees remembering the promises of old, trying desperately to fight for our identities and what we believe in.

Then comes the mentor—a "thrust of grace" who blunts the incisive edge of Saul's sword. Saul wields his sword against the promising, brave young David; Jonathan gives his sword away to the same young David.

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The Language of Sacrifice: Three Arrows from Jonathan, One Sword for David

And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle. (1 Samuel 18:1-4)

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul. Then Jonathan said to David, To-morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. And when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly . . . and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to thee, and no hurt; as the LORD liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way; for the LORD hath sent thee away. (20:16-22)

These two passages from 1 Samuel comprise one of my favorite parts of the Hebrew Bible. It is one of the most beautiful and moving, and it speaks of what a mentor does.

The Language of Humility: I Will Not Touch God's Anointed

Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD. (24:2-6)

Again the stories of Saul and David weave in and out furtively as David must have weaved in and out of mountain, cave, and city with Saul always one step behind. Saul seeks to destroy David; David spares Saul's life. Even when the Philistines are attacking Israel, Saul is hell-bent on finding David. David twice has the opportunity to strike the fatal blow to his pursuer, but each time he refuses to take matters into his own hands. Indeed, his cutting of Saul's skirt becomes another reminder of Saul's seizing Samuel's garment and tearing it. King Saul was grasping for what he could not have—what God tragically had willed was not his—and thus he turned his energies toward seizing the future king, David. Yet David—the shepherd, the fugitive, the refugee—would not grasp what was rightly his.

No, David's hands would be a sign of remembrance rather than instruments of violence. Saul would choose violence—the hurling of a spear, the ambush in the night, the dogged pursuit of an innocent man; but David would choose forgiveness, cunning. Many times when I read this story, I wonder if David understood something very subtle: A madman may hurt many people, but he cannot destroy them. The madman can really destroy only one person—himself. Inevitably, he will fall on his own sword.

David did not live out the Oedipus myth; he lived out the story of God. This young man learned what every wounded son must learn if he himself is going to be a father: "I will not destroy another man for my own benefit." Maybe that is why God blessed David: he would not grasp what was not his.

Remembering Another World

I must always remember: there is another world other than my own. Mentoring calls us to invite other people to worlds unknown, and invites the mentored to come out of a one-dimensional world.

This is in distinction to Saul, who in later years sought to seize and grasp the kingdom. (In this sense, David's actions in the cave are strangely familiar—and perhaps are the reminder that smote his heart: "And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou" (15:27-28).

David was submissive, but he was also cunning—cunning beyond belief: "And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him" (1 Samuel 18:14).

Mentoring asks a very difficult question: Will I die for the other? I know that one day younger men and women, more talented men and women, will come along and take my place. Will I be a Saul

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who fights for my very life to the bitter end, and in doing so destroy myself? Or will I be a Jonathan who gives his life for the other, the "elsewhere"? Will I die with a dream in my heart, or will I kill the dreams in others? I have had mentors who have fought against me and mentors who have believed in me and loved me. Strangely, both have been necessary for my growth. And I am beginning to learn something that Saul never learned: only God can destroy me. The mentor who is against me, or the other who is more talented than I, cannot destroy me. As a mentor, my primary duty consists of making sure my students surpass me.

The Bible is resplendent with paradox. There are times I have stumbled upon a mentoring moment as I might happen upon an errant penny lying on the sidewalk. Mentoring is a process of growing people up. But, most importantly, mentoring is relationship, and it is a costly relationship.

Mentoring is more puzzling than we dare to think. Simply put, the model of mentoring presented in the Bible critiques the mentoring process itself. When most people think of mentoring, they think of an elder ministering to a younger. Once again, in Christianity we have taken on a cultural view more than a biblical one. The Bible is radically different in that it does not speak of mentoring as a one-sided relationship with the greater (elder) ministering downward to the lesser (younger); no, good mentoring is always a deconstructive process, in which the one who ministers is dying so that the one being ministered to is living.

Ours is not to be victorious, but to be mature; not to conquer, but to overcome. This is both living in the story of God and living the story of God. Maturity is the patient loving while waiting in the limbo of the *already . . . not yet . . .* Every great story really gets interesting when the hero or heroine must go on a journey. On the surface, it is almost always a journey to find something or someone; but in reality, it is always a quest for character, a search for identity. Deep down, every person asks, "Do I have what it takes to face the trials of life with my own resources?"

Being a mentor means we understand the unfolding drama of God. My story is a significant part of the story of God, but it is only that—one part of the whole. Often I want my own personal story to be the end of all stories, or perhaps the beginning; I want to participate literally in every story. But I obviously cannot. I must remember and hope as a mentor.

The true mentor must be jealous for the other's success, never jealous *of* the other's success. And this is the rub; it is why, in my opinion, very little mentoring is ever accomplished. Mentoring, according to the Bible, is radical other-centeredness. The mentor lives by one simple motto: "He must increase, and I must

decrease." It is not that the elder sees deficiencies in the younger primarily, but instead sees opportunities in him and is jealous to call those out. Good mentoring comprehends the secret to good parenting: I give my life so that my children can live abundantly. This means I do not want my son to be like me; I want him to be better than I. I am passing on my experience so that he has the potential to be more successful than I. This is what Emmanuel Levinas calls living with the "elsewhere" in mind. My story is not the only story, and the present story is not the only story.

If mentoring resembles anything, it verges on the insane. In its essence, mentoring is death that leads to life—my death that leads to the life of another, the other for whom I am responsible. It is living now, in the present, with the future in focus. My death teaches me that above all else, I belong to the story of the ages, and not just to the present. Suffering is our best mentor, and within this comes the surprise—"thrusts of grace." Saul became God's instrument in David's life to put him to this death; Saul would become the crucible, the furnace of maturity.

So it was then, so it is now, and so shall it be for every generation: Will I be Saul, or Jonathan, or David? I will be all three. At times I will be Saul, who rages against the loss of this world and the will of God that always includes loss. At times I will be Jonathan, who battles for another human being by giving away my sword—my right to justice and ownership. And at times I will be David, who will not seize God's kingdom by violence, and in so doing will learn that the suffering of life leads to the sweetest poetry of life.

(This essay is a memorial to Charlie Patton Roberts, 1888-1957.)

*Though I never knew you,
in my darkest hours, I miss you the most.
Though you never knew me,
you taught me the sweet poetry of life.*

*Y no hay olvido, no hay invierno
que te borre, hermano fulgurante, de
los labios del pueblo.*

*(There is no forgetting, there is no winter
that will wipe your name, shining brother,
from the lips of the people.)*

—Pablo Neruda

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