WOW: Word Of the Week

Mentoring

June 24, 2026

When I accepted my first ministry position 60 years ago, mentor was not a well-known word. Daniel Levinson's work on adult development was still a dozen years away. We were still a third of a century away from mentoring as a tool toward career acceleration and the development of social capital (the value of social networks and relationships, who you know). Over the past two decades, mentoring has become a formalized practice. The number of coaching and training programs has exploded.

I would like to claim that I was wise enough to seek the wisdom of others when I began preaching, but it would be more accurate to say that God put people in my path – Maurice, Wayne, Hershel, Wilburn. They shepherded me through the first decade of my preaching ministry. These older, wiser preachers taught me ministry and helped me grow. Through the years there were others – professors who shaped me; elders who were genuine shepherds to me; coworkers who sharpened me; missionaries who stretched me. With little thought, I could mention another dozen and more people who made have a difference in my life.

We need those who walk beside us – those who have already walked the path, those who are working alongside us, those who are coming after us. Allow me to reflect on what I have gained from the presence of those with more experience, how I am helped by those who share the spiritual journey in ministry, and what I hope to pass on to those who will continue the ministry and missions task after me. In the list I share, I am thinking about mentoring in general: the collective influence and value of numerous people across the years. Here are seven things I have received, things I try to share with others I work with in the Kingdom, things I am trying to pass on to future workers.

Inspiration. I found inspiration in my earliest mentors—a dream, hope, a path forward to make a difference in God's work. Mutual inspiration came as Jerry and I, each month at the area church leaders' luncheon, challenged one another forward evangelism. I seek to inspire those who continue the work.

Example. Examples give us experience without having to make all of the mistakes ourselves.

Instruction and insights. What I learned was priceless. The insights share even better. We are made better and can make other better.

Balance. Staying between the ditches is not always easy. I appreciate those who gently corrected and steered me. I seek to help others find balance in God's kingdom work.

Perspective. No one person can have enough experiences to understand everything. All who have touched my life have provided perspective. Today every encounter raises two questions. What am I to learn? What am I to share?

Encouragement. The relationships shared – with mentors, coworkers, and those who will follow us -- are invaluable. I love those who have been my biggest fans in God's ministry and mission. I want to push every good work that comes along.

Growth. We are encouraged and we encourage one another to continue to grow and develop.

I have caused myself plenty of heartaches, but the mentoring of others has made the journey easier, helping me avoid multiple mistakes and problems. I pray for the same impact in the lives of those who will continue the work of the Kingdom!