

The Blessing Of Mentorship

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It was 2001; I was ten years in at a good job that offered a great retirement plan that would allow me to retire early. The evening I planned to spend working on a Harley-Davidson was an evening that would set me on a new path. Don Walker called and the conversation we had changed, not just my career, but the course of my life. He called me that evening and said “dude, you need to go to preaching school.”

I had doubts, concerns and objections, but for each one, Don had an answer. “I’ll go in ten years after I retire.” Don’s reply, “the Lord needs you now.” “I’ve got commitments: a job, a motorcycle shop, a new wife, a baby on the way.” Don’s reply, “the Lord’s work is too precious and He needs workers.” After our discussion I went in to work the next day and gave my two weeks’ notice. My boss asked me to reconsider. He reminded me that I had ten years with the Co-Op and that I was next up for promotion to supervisor. It all made sense, but I was already gone! It seems that from that point on doors opened. In a six month market, our house sold in a few weeks. We needed a place to live in Austin and one of the elders had a house to rent. We needed financial support to live on for the two-year study program, and Don stepped in and wrote a letter of recommendation encouraging brethren to support me. The good name and recommendation of my mentor helped me raise the support I needed.

Don encourage me to quit my job for a higher calling, he helped me enroll and he helped me get the financial support to go Southwest School of Bible Studies, but he didn’t stop at that. He also made sure I finished! One week was all it took for me to realize I was in way over my head. I didn’t know how to type, I was an extremely slow reader, and I had a very long list of requirements for the first quarter classes and no idea how or where to begin. I had a formal dress code and I didn’t even know how to tie a tie! I was so stressed that my eye lids were twitching and I couldn’t read. I talked to Don and told him I made a mistake. He encouraged me by directing me to Philippians 4:13 and 2:12, and then he reassured me some more. Every step of the way, Don kept encouraging me to press forward and not give up.

The two years of study passed quickly and then the real work began. It was at the point of beginning my first full-time work with a congregation that I began to rely heavily on my mentor. I would face many challenges, but almost always, he had been there before. I was discouraged, he had been too. We worked together on side jobs trying to make ends meet and while we worked, we also discussed lessons. He would ask me questions about passages and I would wonder why. I understand now that he was helping me learn to think and reason through the Scriptures. His desire was to help me grow as a spiritual man and a gospel preacher. He gave me opportunities to speak, sermon ideas, feedback, and some constructive criticism. He invested in me with an aim toward helping me develop into a useful vessel (2 Tim. 2:20-22).

Don and I shared many things in common. We both loved to hunt, to fish, to argue, and pull pranks on each other. Even more so we loved to share our challenges and struggles. We loved to pray and talk Bible. This was the core of our friendship. This was the core of Don’s mentorship. For years we had worked for the Lord separately and talked about how great it would be to work together. An opportunity came when he returned to Southwest School of Bible Studies as Director. The opportunity we so looked forward to was full of its own unique challenges. Don’s health was the biggest. The months of his illness provided many opportunities for us to talk, pray, and encourage each other.

Without Don's mentorship I would probably be retired from my good Co-Op job. Maybe I would still be thinking about going to preaching school – maybe. Instead, I am looking back on a decade and a half of service in the Kingdom. Don was a great mentor and a blessing to me because he pushed me and set a goal to develop me into something useful to the Master. He was to me the “friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”