

A Life That Leads

The Five Excellent

By Valerie Bell **HERE WE GO AGAIN.**

Peering over my cup of Starbucks' nonfat latte at the woman sitting across from me, I wonder: Why has this woman sought me out? What does she expect from me? My questions prompt a quick prayer, "Oh God, Whatever it is this woman wants from me, help me not to disappoint her."

My business card says I am an author and speaker (which means I end up publicly "telling" on myself a lot.) But still, I harbor some insecurity that up close I will be disappointing; not as articulate in real life as I am in my books; not as engaging in private conversation as I am when I'm "up front." Honestly, the "Will you mentor me?" question spooks me.

On that Starbucks morning, looking across the table at my new friend's face, a familiar inner Voice reminds me, "Forget trying to be more than you are. Just be yourself and don't worry about her expectations."

The Voice reminds me of what I have learned about mentoring over the years. Other women see "something," even if I don't see it in myself. God's light shines through my humanity — piled up laundry, imperfections, every-day-is-a-bad-hair-day life. I can be a woman of influence if I let my imperfections be awesomely overshadowed by God's light.

The good news is that people seeking to be mentored don't really want me. I won't be consumed in tiny little painful sips at the corner Starbucks. What they do want is God.

Phew! Getting over the fear of being a disappointment is the first obstacle I need to overcome to be a mentor.

Along the way, I've learned something else: Mentors are created by God to offer safe, grace-filled, accepting places.

In other words, no one goes to a shark to be comforted.

Do you have what it takes to be a mentor? Examine your life to see if you practice the Five Excellent Gifts of Mentoring that I have adapted from David Benner's book, *Sacred Companions*.

Gift #1 — Hospitality

A mentor makes welcoming space in her life for others.

Did you ever have a friend, but she was always busy, always overscheduled, always unavailable; she never had time for your friendship? How long was it before you stopped attempting to be her friend?

A mentor must know how to share her life through time, access, and space. Because other women are a priority to her, she welcomes them into her home, into her calendar, into her future plans. Whether the relationship is formal — scheduled meetings marked on the calendar, or informal — come over and help me try this new recipe this week — space and time show other women how much they matter. "Welcome to my life!" is the attitude of women who mentor.





Note from the Editor:

Regardless of your leadership title, you can be a mentor! Coordinators can mentor Assistant Coordinators, Discussion Group Team Leaders can mentor Discussion Group Leaders, moms with five-year-olds can mentor moms with one-year-olds. And of course, MOPS Mentors can mentor the leaders and moms in their groups.

Gifts of Mentoring

Gift #2 – Safety & Love

A mentor is a soul friend who offers relationship without the fear of criticism or ridicule.

If your trust has ever been violated, you know how sacred it is. Mentors carry the secrets and burdens of others with extreme care, hoping God will use that trust to encourage them to become all God has in mind for them to be. A mentor is a conduit for the unconditional, lavish love of God. In an unsafe world, a loving mentor may be the closest many women come to experiencing the love of God.

Gift #3 – Modeling

A mentor shares the “hows” of life so others can emulate her and find their own way.

This can be a real ride! I have two Ukrainian friends, a mother and a daughter, who are brand new to the United States. They are insatiably curious about the “hows” and “wheres” and “how muches” of my American life. They don’t want to be me, but they do want to be American. One day, sitting on my deck, one of them reached over and rubbed my bare leg — something most American woman would rarely do. I was a little taken back, but then she asked, “Do you shave your legs every day?” (The answer is no!) Their

“... be the safe place where others can share their deepest secrets, darkest fears, and most acute sources of shame. To be the place of grace where the most disturbing questions and anxieties can be shared, where another woman can find acceptance for who she is for the sake of who she may become.”

David Benner

childlike curiosity delights me. Obviously, the facts about leg shaving are very important if you are on your way to becoming an American woman!

As you mentor, be prepared to share personal information; like how you fight with your husband; how you discipline your children; in other words; everything about what it is like to be you. No one really wants to be you, but your modeling and

openness about your Christian way of life can help someone become herself. Sometimes we just need to know how another woman manages the intimate details of her life with God in the picture.

Gift #4 – Coaching & Guiding

A mentor gives information on how life works.

At the core of her being, a mentor is wise. The primary requirement of a spiritual mentor is that she is growing in the knowledge of God. A mentor knows that God’s wisdom is her source and she taps into God’s heart and mind regularly.

Gift #5 – God Awareness

A mentor helps others see God’s activity in their lives.

In *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction*, David Benner writes, “A spiritual companion helps a friend to see herself as God sees her.” He encourages mentors to enter a process that asks, “What is God saying to this life?”

One of the greatest gifts a mentor can share with someone else is her intuition for God. “Ah! God!” The mentor says over and over to her friends. “I suspect his hand, his ways, his methods in your life right now. Let’s wait and see what he does.”

What better gift can we give each other than the reassurance that God is present, active, and caring? If you give these Five Excellent Gifts to other women, you will be a woman of influence — a woman who mentors with excellence.

Note: A helpful book on mentoring is Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction, by David Benner.

Valerie Bell is an author and speaker. Several of her books address family issues, including Faith-Shaped Kids and Getting Out of Your Kids Faces and Into Their Hearts. Valerie serves on the MOPS International Board, and presented a seminar on mentoring at the MOPS International Convention. CDs are available at www.MOPShop.org.