

No One is an Island

As I think back on all the people who made a contribution to my Christian growth, it makes me appreciate how the Body of Christ works. Studying the Word to know what God wants us to believe and obey is absolutely necessary. However, believers mature most quickly when they're mentored by other Christians.

I want to share with you some of the significant people in my life who've taught me, spent time with me, encouraged me, and counseled me. This is only a partial list of those who've had an impact on my life. And even though their names are not as important as what they've done, I'll note who they are because it's personal to me and, I believe, it will be more real to you.

Shortly after I was saved around age 16, Marty Villa, the Campus Life missionary at Silverton High School, spent personal time with me. He took me through the Book of Romans, and I felt cared for, saw a good Christian example and was encouraged by him to study the Word.

During and after my junior year, I spent numerous hours a week with Bill Brown who'd been saved about a year before me. We spent our time discussing the Bible, praying about concerns, reading inspirational books and memorizing Scripture. His commitment to the Lord, the fellowship we had together, and his encouragement had a positive effect on many areas of my Christian life. He really helped propel me toward memorizing Scripture as we committed the Sermon on the Mount to memory in the following summer.

Gordon McNeilly, a medical doctor, was my first Christian fatherly figure – and what a great one he was. We called him “Doc”, and he taught my high school class at the Baptist Church. He also chaperoned the College & Career group for years, in which I was later involved. In addition, he and his wife, Lois, had me over to their home for dinner many times after Sunday church and spent quality time with me. Doc was a most gentle and gracious man, but in an effective and wonderful way had a tremendous influence on the lives of us young people. Because of their example, solidly based on the Word and seen in their lives, this couple encouraged many to become good Christians, successful husbands and wives, effective ministers and committed missionaries. I consider the influence Doc and Lois had on my life as the second greatest of all my mentors.

Immediately after graduating high school, I attended Canyonview Bible College. There I learned a great deal from the president, Ernie Campbell. The foundation of literal Bible study I've continued to build upon over the years was established at that time. In addition, the untold hours he spent with me, mostly one on one, discussing theology and life yielded much fruit toward my Christian growth.

During this time, I was attending Salem Bible Church. Arvid Johanson was a teacher there. He wasn't trained in Bible school, but developed a well-balanced understanding of the Word through exposure to good teaching, diligent study and a clear desire to obey the Lord in his life. Everyone could see that he was real. Progressively, his theology became practically displayed in his convictions, love for people, emphasis on living pleasing to God and character as I saw Christ living through him. The longer I knew Arvid, the more I respected him – this is how it's supposed to be.

At this same church, Rose Besaw had a big influence on me. Her dedication as a Christian wife and mother was evident. She always had joy in the Lord while endeavoring to direct conversations and life's experiences toward what was glorifying to Him. She was all about evangelizing and edifying everyone who came into her path. Her son, Dave, was one of my closest friends with whom I spent a lot of time. Her godly influence on his life was striking as he respected her highly. This same positive model had a significant effect on me.

During these same years, I came to know the man who had the greatest impact on my life, Ruel Glover. He was the first individual who had the spiritual fortitude to challenge my *pride*, yet he did so in such a loving and wise manner, his efforts gently led me in a positive direction. Ruel was an "open book". He would share his vast knowledge of the Word while openly admitting his failures. I could see the kind of humility in him that I saw spoken about in the Word. Another thing I learned from his behavior was the living connection between biblical teaching and Christian practice. We'd discuss the Bible and not always agree. Often, after we had differed, while I was leaving Ruel would express his acceptance and love for me despite these differences. I couldn't love him back but went away angry. Over time, his example helped me learn to love those who disagree with me, which has become one of the most valuable and foundational things in all my relationships.

There're so many essential lessons I learned from him, they could fill this entire article. Let me illustrate this by sharing about when Ruel went to be with the Lord 10 years ago. At his memorial, people had an open opportunity to share how he had impacted their lives. Dozens of individuals spoke unprepared and unprompted for a solid hour about how his life had influenced them. It would've continued, but the rented time on the auditorium expired. When I die, I'd love to have a similar legacy in the Lord which I knew Ruel to have had and which I observed that he'd obtained with many others at his commemoration. In my lifetime, I've spent far more time with a number of other believers, but the time I had with Ruel became the most significant compass directing my Christian life.

Lloyd McIrvine is another man who commanded immediate respect. His humble actions and kind, deliberate words moved me. I never heard anyone ever have

any criticism of Lloyd. When his health and abilities were declining because of muscular and nerve degeneration, I never saw his Christian example wane. Now he's experiencing comfort with our Lord.

Sybil Renberg is another "angel" in my life. When I was in need, she rose from her cancer induced death bed and spent three hours counseling and comforting me. She had also baked bread from scratch for us before we arrived. We had no idea how ill she was until, before we left, her daughter told us that Sybil hadn't done these kind of things for anyone else. And for me, the wise words she shared that day enabled me to move forward in my life.

Perry Cramblit is another brother who is dear to me. He was appreciative for his fellowship with me, and I benefited greatly from his Christian experience and practical application of the Word to real-life situations. His appropriate and targeted counsel helped me navigate numerous challenges I've faced.

Gary Schubert has long been a solid friend in Christ to me. He's been supportive, encouraging, and gracious in our relationship. He has a unique way of talking about the Word of God and demonstrating it in his actions which others can clearly see. Gary has been a good Christian example to both me and my wife, to the point of counseling us in our marriage.

Mark Stearns is a brother I've known since Bible school days. I began as one of his teachers, and I've also become one of his students. When I have a question in the Bible, Mark is usually the person I go to. Having known him for some 30 years, I've seen him progressively grow in knowledge of the Word. This has consistently been followed by change in his character, motives and attitudes – a true picture for me of Christian maturity.

Another brother with whom I seek fellowship and counsel is Jeff McCleary. I've found his insights into the Word to be invaluable and have profited from the practical applications of truth he has learned from years of living for Christ. After speaking with Jeff, I'm always encouraged. He has helped me significantly improve my interpersonal relationships with others. With confidence and humility, acknowledging he's not perfect, Jeff impresses me as one of the most well-rounded believers I know.

Dale Price is a brother with whom I have not always gotten along. A few years ago, after he contracted cancer, we got together and Dale was "big enough" to ask for forgiveness regarding how he had wronged me in the past. I was also able to forgive him along with asking that he forgive me my wrongs toward him. Following this, we shared in many deep and real things regarding life and God's Word. One thing we discussed for about an hour was how glorious it'll be when we stand in

the presence of our Lord. This was one of the best hours of my life. Those who knew Dale heard him express he wanted to reconcile with everyone whom he felt any kind of tension before entering the presence of Jesus Christ. Now he's with the Lord, and he went out on a high note. What an example for us all.

Cody Leary is a brother who has become dear to me. Our paths crossed in his early 20's and I took him under my wing to mentor. Little did I know at that time what an impact he would have on my life. For seven years our relationship blossomed. He taught me many things by both word and deed. I profited by seeing him demonstrate gentleness, patience, positivity, conviction and love. Now, Cody is working as a Physics professor in another state, he's a husband and father, and we continue to encourage one another to please the Lord.

Finally, my wife, Debi, is my best friend. After more than 30 years of marriage, we've grown a lot together and in the Lord. She's been my strongest and best critic whose counsel I've come to respect. We've spent a great deal of time together discussing the Word and how it applies to everyday life. I get the benefit of not only a woman's view on things, but also wisdom from a dedicated Christian. I feel like I'm married to a "Pricilla" and fortunate to have more than a spouse.

Hopefully you've been blessed by hearing about the ministry these brothers and sisters in Christ have had toward me. We're often commanded to be thankful for what God has done for us and many times this is accomplished through other members in the Body of Christ. Most of those mentioned weren't paid for their service, but each one will be richly rewarded by the Lord for what they've done. So, we should persistently seek to be built up by the ministries of God's children who endeavor to live their lives by His power. And may each of us join this group of believers so we too will participate in the joyful reality of accomplishing something eternal in the lives of others.

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