



## ESTHER INITIATIVE

### Mentoring Esthers

#### Lesson 1: Mentoring – A Relationship

Our world is increasingly opening opportunities for women to exercise leadership in their nations, in their businesses, in their communities and in their homes, but the question for many Christian women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is what that should look like from a biblical perspective. We have looked at some basic biblical leadership principles, and have shared not only our personal experiences, but also what God has taught us along the way. The challenge now is to effectively communicate that information to other women in a way that brings transformation to their lives and prepares them in turn to “be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

I believe there is no better technique to do that than the one Jesus used with His disciples. He taught them godly principles in synagogues, on hillsides, in homes, and even in the Temple courts, but He also came alongside them as they journeyed, sharing experiences, insights, and life. He demonstrated for them what leadership looks like in action, allowed them to engage in ministry themselves, and helped them process what they learned, when they succeeded and when they failed. Whether the modern-day Esthers we mentor are business leaders, church leaders, or moms in their homes, they need the support, encouragement, accountability, and biblical wisdom of their peers and those who have gone before.

Being a Christian woman in leadership requires transformation of the heart, and I believe that is most effectively taught by seeing it in action through a mentoring relationship. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul bravely said, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (English Standard Version).

In the next 4 lessons we’ll look at what it means to be a mentor, how to choose those whom you will mentor, the challenges and the joys, the pitfalls and the blessings, the theological foundation and some practical tips for successful mentoring.

## **Mentoring: A Definition**

I have read a number of different definitions, but I have adapted the one that I believe most clearly and simply describes my experience. Mentoring is a relationship in which one person helps another reach her God-given potential (Biehl, 1996, p. 19).

It is that simple. It is a relationship. As women, we are relational beings; as daughters of a relational God, we are relational beings. We can do this!! Mentoring is not hard or complicated, but it does require wisdom, patience, and the willingness to listen.

One of my favorite analogies for mentoring is that of mountain climbers, roped together with those who go before, and those who come after (Biehl, 1996, p. 26). We can learn from both the successes and the failures of those who go before us, following in the steps of their successes and avoiding the pitfalls of their failures. By honestly sharing our stories, we can similarly help those who follow us. We don't have to be perfect, just humble enough to share honestly. We don't have to be great communicators, just good listeners, to the Holy Spirit within us, and the words and hearts of those whom we are mentoring. "Mentoring is primarily about discernment and learning to recognize where God is already present and active in the heart of the other" (Anderson & Reese, 1999, p. 28).

## **Types of Mentors**

Throughout life we will each have many different types of people who could be described as mentors. Some were teachers who communicated knowledge and facts. Some were counselors who gave advice during times of crisis. Some were coaches who taught us skills and encouraged us to keep trying. Some were historical people we never met, but whose lives we admired through reading. And some were "spiritual directors" who provided spiritual guidance and accountability.

For our purposes, as we mentor modern-day Esthers, I think we are most like coaches, teaching leadership skills and encouraging women to exercise those principles in their daily lives. We are not teachers standing before a class and lecturing, although there may be times when we are asked to speak before groups. We are not psychological counselors or advice-givers, although there may be times when God gives us the wisdom to ask an insightful question or share a personal experience that might help keep someone from falling into a pit. We are not career counselors, although we may have the opportunity to connect someone to our network of friends and associates. We are not priests who listen to confessions and offer forgiveness, although we may point someone to Scriptures that bring restoration and healing. We are not pastors who take spiritual responsibility and accountability for those in their flock, and we are not primarily Bible Study teachers who wrestle with deep theological truths, although biblical truths should be the foundation of all we teach. We are wise friends who listen, encourage, pray, and, as God leads, share our stories and our lives.

## **The Values of Our Mentors**

Our goal is to mentor women in leadership positions, to help them develop their leadership skills, and broaden their network of encouragement, wisdom, and support. We make the assumption that as mentors we are committed to prayer, to a personal relationship with God, to regular study of God's Word and to ably disciple believers. We choose to be servant leaders (teachable, humble, good listeners, willing to serve with joy, and passionate to help ourselves and others grow spiritually, mentally, and emotionally), and we are committed to wisdom, honesty, integrity, transparency, trustworthiness, accountability, and to building community.

Each of you has exemplified these values throughout your participation during the past weeks. Now it is time to raise up others who are like-minded!

## **The Biblical Role of Mentors**

There are many relationships in the Bible that could be described as mentoring relationships. Jesus mentored His disciples, preparing them for leadership in the task of reaching the world with the gospel. Moses mentored Joshua for many years in the desert, preparing him to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. Eli mentored Samuel not only in the priestly responsibilities of the tabernacle, but also in identifying the voice of God. Nathan was the one person who could hold David accountable. Naomi mentored Ruth in her faith as well as the customs of her new homeland. Mordecai mentored Esther, challenging her to save her people when she lacked courage. There are others: Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila with Apollos (Anderson & Reese, 1999). As you think about each mentoring pair, consider the role of the mentor in the life of their mentee. What other mentoring examples can you think of in Scripture? Who have the mentors been in your life and what role did they play in helping you grow?

## **Identifying Potential Mentees**

As we each think about recruiting five women to mentor during the upcoming year, the selection process is crucial. Unlike most church small groups where we are trying to encourage as many people as we can to participate, in this case, we are seeking to mentor five modern-day Esthers, women either currently in positions of leadership and influence or women whom God shows us have that potential.

In the introduction above I quoted a portion of 2 Timothy 2:2. The full verse states "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (ESV). The Greek word translated "men" is "*anthropois*" which, more literally, is "person" or "human being." That includes

women! And the word translated “faithful” is “*pistos*,” which can also be translated “reliable,” “believing” or “trustworthy.” That is the type of woman we are looking for -- women who are faithful, reliable, believing, and trustworthy.

They don’t have to be perfect. Saul of Tarsus wasn’t when God chose him, nor were Abraham, Moses, David and Esther. But each of them had a heart for God and a willingness to be courageously obedient. Over the next few weeks, prayerfully seek God for the women in your circle of influence who have a humble, teachable spirit and a passion to follow Jesus wherever He leads. They may not be a leader in the church. They may be leaders in their business or community or in their home. Do they have the time and the interest to participate? Ask God to point them out to you, to bring them to mind as you go about your day. Don’t neglect those whom you think are more experienced or wiser than you. That person may secretly have a willingness to mentor, but not be aware of the tools that make it possible for them to do so.

While it is always fun to meet with a group of friends and deepen your own relationships, ask God to broaden your horizons and diversify the group – women from other churches, other ethnicities, other communities or cultural backgrounds. It will broaden your horizons! Just make sure all of the women in the group have a common language for communication and that the lessons are available in that language. You are welcome to translate this material into a common language for your group, we just ask that you share that translation with Global Advance so they can make it available for others who also speak that language.

If the Lord seems to be speaking to you about someone you do not know well, ask God to confirm His voice through a mutual friend or a pastoral reference or some other trusted resource. The information/application/nomination form in the Appendix can also be used for that purpose.

One of the most important criteria for selection of mentees is whether the person is “trustworthy.” All of the members of your group will be sharing confidential information and it is important that you be able to share that information openly and honestly. Your group members will be depending on you to select only “safe” people for participation. How can you identify (and avoid) toxic people in your selection? Look for those who demonstrate the values listed above and avoid those who do not. For a more comprehensive list, read “Safe People” (Cloud & Townsend, 1995).

## **Finding Potential Mentees**

Women frequently have concerns about how to find and recruit five women who share the leadership values to which we are committed – knowledgeable in God’s Word, humble, teachable, faithful, trustworthy, committed to prayer, and passionate about following Jesus wherever He leads. Here are some suggestions:

1. Prayerfully consider the people in your circle of influence. Ask God to show you who to invite, and then ask Him to prepare their hearts for the invitation. In whom do you see leadership potential? It might be someone younger (or older) than you. Don’t worry

if your list seems to have women with a variety of backgrounds, cultures, ages, and personalities. God loves diversity!!

2. Reflect on the people you have met at conferences, community events, or in business -- people whose heart for God has drawn you to them. Don't neglect people from your past with whom you may have recently lost contact.

3. Briefly explain the program to your pastor and ask if he has suggestions of people you could contact for biblical leadership training.

4. Don't hesitate to engage with someone, if not local, who can participate in either online or in-person sessions.

**Memorize:**

2 Timothy 2:2 Take the teachings that you heard me proclaim in the presence of many witnesses, and entrust them to reliable people, who will be able to teach others also.

**Key Truth:**

Mentoring is a relationship in which one person helps another reach her God-given potential.

**Your Response:**

1. Make a list of 15 women you know who share the values of our mentors. Remember, they do not have to be perfect!!
2. Pray over your list daily for two weeks, asking God to speak to your heart about them and any others He might bring to your mind.
3. Prayerfully prioritize your list of people in the order in which you plan to contact them. Begin praying for them, for God to prepare their hearts and give you the right timing to invite them.

**For Further Study:**

*Mentor for Life: Finding Purpose through Intentional Discipleship* by Natasha Robinson (Robinson, 2016)

*Mentoring Paradigms* by Edmund Chan (Chan, 2008)

*Mentoring: Confidence in Finding a Mentor and Being One* by Bob Biehl (Biehl, 1996)

*Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* by Keith R. Anderson & Randy D. Reese (Anderson & Reese, 1999)



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#### Lesson 2: Getting Started, Building Community

For many women the next step is definitely the hardest – asking women if they are interested in participating. Most mentoring books suggest that in a mentoring relationship the mentee should ask the mentor, but in this case we do not have the luxury of waiting for them to ask! If someone unexpectedly does ask you if she can participate, try to determine whether God has spoken to her heart, or she has other motives.

#### The Invitation to Participate

I suggest you begin by thinking (and praying) through what you will say. The order of the content will vary depending on your personality and the person to whom you are speaking, but at some point in the conversation you will need to include:

1. Purpose of the program – to raise up godly mentors for women in leadership
2. Your personal experience – how you benefited from the program
3. Course content – a brief overview of topics
4. Course format – 12 sessions of 1.5 hours each in a small group setting
5. Time commitment – reading, discussion and the commitment to mentor others
6. Starting date and place for discussions or their available days & times
7. Why you chose to invite them -- it is by invitation only
8. Ask them if they have questions
9. Ask them to prayerfully consider it and give them a “respond by” date.
10. Consider giving them a copy of the Information/Application form as a review of your conversation. It is not essential that they complete the form, but might be helpful in cases where you do not know the person well.
11. You can also offer to email them a copy of “Raising Up Modern Day Esthers” or let them know it can be downloaded from [www.2tim2.org](http://www.2tim2.org).

12. Pray for them to hear God!! Since one of the values of our mentors is their personal relationship with God and their ability to hear and recognize the voice of God, no human persuasion or manipulation is required on our part. That takes the pressure off of us and leaves the outcome to God. Meanwhile, our responsibility is to pray that they hear God clearly and obey, and that the enemy has no foothold or influence in their decision.

## **Prior to the First Session**

When one of the women you have contacted makes the commitment to participate, I suggest you immediately meet with her either online or in person and make sure she understands the purpose and content of the program as well as the expectations.

I also suggest that you give her a "Getting to Know You" form that she can complete in order to "meet" the others in her group prior to your first meeting. There is one in Appendix 2 that you can tailor for your own use. If you have already decided on a day, time, and place for the discussion sessions there is no need to use the "Setting Up a Time to Meet" page. Feel free to design your own form if you prefer. I have found that is a good way for women to feel more comfortable with one another prior to the first meeting.

Make sure she has a copy of "Raising Up Modern Day Esthers," either a hardcopy or a digital version.

If you are going to meet on Skype or Zoom, make sure you each have the Skype or Zoom contact/invitation set up prior to your first session.

Send out reminder emails or call each person prior to the session.

## **Preparing for Your Sessions**

To maximize the value of the time that you spend together, all of you should commit to prepare mentally, spiritually, and emotionally for your sessions. What does that mean?

Mentors:

1. Read the chapter for discussion and listen for the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart about points to emphasize or share. Is there an illustration from your experience that would highlight a point being made? Are there any statements with which you disagree or do not understand?
2. Review the questions for discussion and be prepared to share your answers if the opportunity arises.



3. Prepare to "listen wholly," with energy, care and concentration to what your mentees are saying, and what they are not saying, by what their body language and facial expressions are communicating.
4. Pray for your mentees. Listen to the Holy Spirit prior to your session and prepare to listen to the Holy Spirit throughout your session. Is there something He wants you to say, an insight or personal experience He wants you to share, a word of warning or correction that He wants you to give, or an assignment He wants you to suggest?
5. Prepare to be attentive to your own heart and motives, not dominating the conversation with your interests or personal issues, but vulnerable to share what you have learned. "If you remember that this is God's business, you will remember to attend to God's agenda for the other" (Anderson & Reese, 1999, pp. 96, 97, 99).
6. Pray against hindrances and distractions that could interfere with open, honest, and God-led communication.
7. Pray for a heart that is humble and ready to learn and grow from the wisdom and experiences being shared by mentees.

Mentees:

You can also suggest that your mentees prepare for each session as follows:

1. Read the material for the chapter; answer the questions, preferably in writing, in "Your Response."
2. Ask God to help them come with an open receptive heart, ready to listen, learn, receive wisdom and correction gratefully, and discern God's will.
3. Pray for the mentor to clearly hear the Holy Spirit and faithfully share only what He is speaking (Anderson & Reese, 1999, p. 99).

## **Building a Safe and Nurturing Environment**

1. Be trusting.  
Share openly and honestly the successes and failures of your life, not dominating the conversation with your personal stories, but using your experiences to illustrate principles as the Holy Spirit leads. In so doing, you demonstrate to the other members of the group that this is a safe place to share.
2. Be trustworthy.  
Keep what all participants in the group share confidential. Do not disclose it without permission. In so doing, you demonstrate respect and love for others, and preserve their dignity. Refuse to gossip and judge (Robinson, 2016, p. 177).

3. Listen attentively.

In an age in which we often feel like we have to multi-task to get everything done, turn off cell phones and other distractions and give your full attention to what is being said within the group, and what the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart. In so doing, you demonstrate respect for those who are sharing.

4. Cultivate an atmosphere for learning and growth.

Give your mentees permission to fail, to try new things in their leadership role and accept failure as part of learning. Help them to "fail forward," by analyzing the results and determining what they might do differently in the future.

Encourage them to ask questions and commend them when they do. Consider starting each session with "QC Time," asking each participant two questions. What is your question? What is your contribution (Chan, 2008, p. 19)?

5. Be humble.

Pride is a great destroyer of relationships. You are never in competition with those you serve. Never hesitate to say "I don't know" if you are uncertain about how to respond to questions, and if someone in the group corrects you on a point, let them know you appreciate it.

If that is an area where you struggle, ask God to reveal the roots of that pride. For me, that was an eye-opening experience! "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

6. Serve others.

One way to serve others is to give them opportunities to practice leading – praying aloud, answering a question, sharing an experience or leading a discussion. It amazes me that Jesus trusted seventy-two of His disciples enough to go ahead of Him (Luke 10:1). They clearly did not fully understand the kingdom message He was preaching, but what an exciting opportunity it was for them. And in a more traditional sense, He served them by washing their feet (John 13:5). Jesus Himself said that He came "not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45), and we are called to "follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Ask God for creative ways He wants you to serve the members of your group in a way that it is meaningful for them individually.

7. Lovingly correct discussion comments that are not biblically accurate.

This is difficult but necessary, keeping in mind the quote attributed to St. Augustine, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Which category is this? If it is an essential theological issue, you can say, "How do you think that fits with ... referring to a particular Scripture verse?" If you cannot quote the verse accurately, admit it, and let the group know you will follow up in the next session, or by email. If it's a non-essential, you can say, "That is an interesting perspective. I wonder if others agree." The main point is to correct with gentleness and kindness (2 Timothy 2:24, 25).

8. Deal with major disagreements in private conversations later.

In a later session we will talk about conflict resolution in groups, but for now, in the rare situation where this might occur in a group situation, it is advisable to suggest that the two of them discuss the issue privately after the meeting and tell the group their conclusion in the next session.

9. Be patient.

Give the Holy Spirit time to work on the hearts and minds of those you mentor. If you do not see immediate dramatic changes, do not assume you are not making a difference. "Growth usually happens not with great speed, but with great depth" (Anderson & Reese, 1999, p. 30).

10. Love unconditionally.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35)

"And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us." (1 John 3:23)

"If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (1 John 4:12)

Loving others becomes easier when we recognize how much God loves us in spite of who we are.

### **Memorize:**

John 13:35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

### **Key Truth:**

A spiritually healthy, safe and nurturing community is the result of loving relationships with one another and individual personal relationships with God.

### **Your Response:**

1. What actions of others put you on guard against trusting them?

2. Is it easy or difficult for you to trust other people? Why?

3. Begin this week to contact the first five people on your list of potential mentees.



## ESTHER INITIATIVE

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#### Lesson 3: Facilitating a Small Group

##### Why Groups?

Why do I suggest going through these lessons with a small group rather than individually or one-on-one? The simple answer is that over the past fifteen years of ministry, I have become a strong advocate for small group learning, especially among women. We are born to be nurturers and that requires communication skills, conflict management skills (as any mom knows), and emotional sensitivity, in addition to a myriad of other talents. I freely admit that some men are also strong in these areas, but for most women it seems to come naturally. I also believe that women learn best in relational settings, interacting with one another rather than listening to a lecture or even reading a book. It only makes sense to teach leadership principles in a setting where people are in relationships with one another. What better laboratory for learning? Leadership is all about building relationships, not just acquiring information!

##### Facilitation and Gardening

In their book "Making Small Groups Work," Cloud and Townsend suggest that facilitation is like gardening (2003). For me, that analogy works on many levels. The word "facilitate" comes from the Latin word for "easy." Your job as a facilitator is to make it easier for the women in your group to grow, in the same way that a gardener's job is to make growth easier for the crops in her garden. She cannot make them grow, or even guarantee the sunshine and the rain that bring the growth, but she can provide a safe, nutritious atmosphere where growth can take place. She can facilitate the plant's growth!

In the last lesson we talked about your role in building a safe and nurturing environment within your group, but it will be a relief to you to know that it is not all up to you, just as the production of crops is not solely dependent on the gardener. Within the group there must be “rules of engagement” that all group members agree to follow prior to taking this journey together. Without them the group-learning environment can be a hurtful place where confidences are broken, the vulnerable are exposed, and emotional lives are shattered.

### **1. Establish Boundaries – Set Expectations and Ground Rules**

You are the one whose responsibility it is to set the rules that make your group sessions a safe place of growth for all. As mentioned in the last lesson, I encourage you to make expectations about time, place, length of meetings, homework and attendance commitments clear during your initial invitation, so the individual can prayerfully consider whether their schedule will allow them to participate. I advise you to repeat that information when a person agrees to join the group. When everyone reads the assigned lesson, reflects on the response questions, and faithfully attends the sessions on time, respect is communicated to the group members. It says, “I value you and this time we spend together.” Naturally there will be occasional emergencies or unexpected schedule conflicts, and apologies for these should be lovingly accepted.

You are also the one who has the primary responsibility for enforcing the ground rules. Obviously the fewer the rules, the easier they will be to enforce, but there must be enough rules to allow the group members to participate freely and honestly, and grow spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. I encourage you to review the rules with the group at the beginning of your first meeting. Here are my recommendations:

- Speak openly and honestly about your thoughts and feelings.
  - Be honest about yourself. Because of previous experiences and expectations in ‘church’ settings, many women have learned to ‘put on a happy face,’ a mask that covers the emotional wounds of the soul. For healing and growth to occur, this group should be a safe place to share true feelings, doubts, and fears and to receive unconditional love.
  - Be honest with others. Provide honest and loving feedback if correction is required. Initially you as facilitator can model what honest and loving feedback looks like. With time, other group members will hopefully follow your lead. As facilitator you may need to step into the conversation if you believe the feedback becomes either unloving or inconsistent with Scripture.
- Feel free to ask for clarification if you do not understand the words or ideas being discussed. There is no such thing as a dumb question.
- Keep what is shared confidential within the group.
- Speak slowly enough that those who are not speaking in their native language can understand.

## 2. Seek Balance – Add Nutrients

Just as a gardener must learn to balance the nutrients in the soil, as a facilitator, you will need to prayerfully discern the needs of your group members and respond accordingly.

What I have discovered in conducting these group sessions is that some women have had a significant amount of leadership training already, and the content in the lessons is less important to them than the relationships being established. One participant remarked, “We are continually pouring into the lives of others, but who is pouring into us? We also need encouragement and support.” But those who have not been exposed to leadership training for women find the information itself to be beneficial in their leadership journey. Balancing the time spent discussing content and the time spent in relationship building is your responsibility as a facilitator. Both are good, but getting the right balance is challenging.

Equally challenging can be achieving balance in how much you say during the conversation and the input of other members of the group. There is no right answer except the leading of the Holy Spirit. It can be tempting to fill the silence with your own experiences or thoughts, when the Holy Spirit is speaking in the silence to the hearts of group members.

The most essential “fertilizers” for your group are faith, hope, and love. As you meet together, make sure that these elements permeate every conversation. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), but hearing how God has worked in the lives of others also strengthens faith. When a group member is discouraged, take time to minister faith and compassion to the one who is hurting, encouraging them to hold tightly to Jesus. Offer hope, the “anchor of the soul,” (Hebrews 6:19), and most importantly a genuine unconditional love that can only come from a loving Father.

## 3. Have a Flexible Agenda – Timing

Just as a gardener needs to know the times and seasons for each crop and respond accordingly, as a facilitator it is your responsibility to know and set the timing for your group sessions, what to include in each session and how to divide the time to meet the current needs of the members of the group.

The following is a sample agenda for group sessions. It is one that has worked for me, but you are welcome to add or omit elements as God leads. Be sure to divide the time prayerfully for each element; it may change from week to week depending on the needs of the group members.

- **Opening Prayer** (either by you or a group member) - If some members are uncomfortable praying out loud, this may be a growth step for them.

- **Praise Reports** – Spend a few minutes catching up on what God has been doing in lives since the last meeting. This can quickly be time-consuming and may require monitoring on your part as you try to balance content and relationships.
- **Lesson observations** – Ask if anyone has any questions or comments about the lesson material, things that spoke to them and things with which they disagreed. Some may choose not to participate in this part of the agenda if the content was already familiar and was not challenging for them.
- **Your Response** – Group members are expected to have read the lesson and be prepared to share a personal response to the questions. Encourage each person to participate in this part of the agenda. Typically this is the commitment to apply what they have learned.
- **Prayer Requests** – Encourage each person to share one personal prayer request, for themselves, their family, their church, or their community. Either the facilitator or a designated group member should record those requests, and if possible distribute them by email to the group members after the session.
- **Closing prayer** – One person can volunteer to pray briefly for each of the requests or, if time is short, offer a more general prayer and blessing over the group.

#### 4. Maintain openness and honesty -- Pull the weeds.

- Pulling weeds is never the fun part of gardening, nor is it the fun part of facilitating a group, but it is essential for the protection and growth of the individuals involved.
- Through sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, discern the unspoken issues in the group that hinder open and honest conversation. Ask God for wisdom in how to bring these issues to the surface. Don't allow bitterness or anger to grow between group members. These are like the "deep root" weeds that may look innocent enough and localized on the surface but are difficult to extract without disruption.
- Other "weeds" seem to cover broad areas and look pervasive, but they have a small central root system that is easily extracted. To me those are the weeds of "super-spirituality," or negativity, discontent, legalism, or frivolity, that distract from the real growth work that needs to take place. We'll talk more about these in the next lesson.

### Recognizing a Healthy Group

How can you tell whether a group is a healthy environment for growth?

1. The most obvious is that the members look forward to coming. They are excited to re-connect with others and learn about their lives.
2. They demonstrate love and respect for one another, listening attentively to the responses of each other, affirming, encouraging and empathizing with each other.
3. They demonstrate growth spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually, seeking daily to apply what they are learning in a meaningful way. Spiritually, they are deepening

the intimacy in their relationship with God; emotionally, they are receiving healing from past hurts; intellectually, they are learning wisdom and new communication skills.

4. They “speak the truth in love” to one another, identifying growth areas in others and prayerfully seeking if, when, and how to confront them in humility.
5. They learn how to gratefully receive feedback from others and how to respond prayerfully, with grace and without defensiveness.

## **A Word to the Wise**

When you picture a well-maintained garden, what do you see? Neat rows? Order? Healthy plants stretching to the sky? Don’t be discouraged if your average group meeting seems more like a compost heap than an English garden! Compost heaps also are fertile soil for growth to occur (Long, 1995).

### **Memorize:**

1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 7 <sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

### **Key Truth:**

The facilitator of a small group is responsible for providing a safe and nurturing environment for spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth, but the growth itself comes only from the individual’s relationship with God.

### **Your Response:**

1. How have you grown spiritually, emotionally, or intellectually through your involvement in our small group since the beginning of the year? Be prepared to share that in conversations with prospective mentees for next year.
2. What do you find most challenging about giving “constructive” feedback to someone?
3. By the end of this week complete contacting five people on your list of potential mentees who are now prayerfully considering participation.



**For Further Study:**

*Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Cloud & Townsend, 2003)

*Small Group Leaders' Handbook: The Next Generation* (Long, 1995)

**ESTHER**  **INITIATIVE****Mentoring Esthers****Lesson 4: Dealing with Difficulties**

The best part about mentoring a small group of spiritually mature leaders is just that -- their spiritual maturity. Presumably they have an intimate relationship with God, a working knowledge of the Bible and its principles, and an active prayer life. What could possibly go wrong? The group interaction will always be full of joy, laughter, and encouragement as we share life together, right? Unfortunately each of us is still “a work in progress.” This lesson is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to all the problems that might occur, but a more general approach to tackling some of the more common tactics of the enemy to disrupt and destroy growth. These tips and resources might also be helpful information for you to share with Esthers you are mentoring who lead groups of less spiritually mature women.

**1. Challenging Personalities**

- a. The Talker - These are the women who can easily dominate a conversation with detailed stories of their experiences, or consistently jump in first to answer a question. It can be difficult to judge ahead of time the relevance of their contributions, but the first few group sessions should give you an idea of how long to allow them to continue. Prayerfully look for an opportunity to step in and thank them for sharing, or ask a pointed question that will get to the heart of the issue being discussed. You can also direct a question to another member of the group, but the key is to always treat them with love and respect; you are modeling for the other members of the group how to deal with this situation. Most spiritually mature women are sensitive enough to recognize they are dominating the conversation and apologize, but if your attempts to balance the input are unsuccessful, have a private conversation with her, encouraging her to assist you in making sure the group hears from all of the women. If you are physically in the same room together, a trick that

many facilitators use is to position their body in a way that helps them avoid eye contact with that individual.

- b. The Quiet One – These are the women who rarely voluntarily contribute to the conversation, either because they are shy, uncertain of their language skills, or are too busy listening thoughtfully and analyzing to express their thoughts. Be observant about who is contributing and who is not, and specifically ask these quiet ones to speak, thanking and affirming them afterwards. If their quietness continues for several sessions, contact them individually, once again affirming them and asking them if they know why they are reluctant to share. Leadership is about modeling right behavior, but leadership is also about communicating vision and wisdom. If they want to lead, they must learn to speak. (Long, 1995)
- c. The Rule-Breaker – The Rule-Breakers are the women who both know and agree with the rules that have been established for the group, but consistently choose to ignore them personally. The loving thing is to overlook the occasional transgression in the event of an emergency, but if a pattern of rule-breaking becomes apparent, she is demonstrating disrespect not only for you as the group leader, but also for the other members of the group. According to Matthew 18:15, the biblical response is to first discuss it privately with her. This may seem difficult, but it is the loving and biblical response. Later in this lesson we will discuss some sample approaches for that conversation.
- d. The Authority – These are the women who believe they have the answer to every question and they are eager to share that answer with such authority that all discussion and insight ends. Jesus had that kind of authority and wisdom, but unless we have a prophetic word from God, we are wise to speak with more humility, asking “discovery” questions, and encouraging other women to share perspectives and experiences that might shed light and direction on the issue. There is no simple response in such a situation. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal whether she has indeed spoken God’s Word (in which case, all discussion should cease and there should be confirmation from other participants), or whether she is speaking “from the top of her head.” “The tree is known by its fruit” (Matthew 12:33). “When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him” (Deuteronomy 18:22). If the words are contrary to Scripture, it is important that you point that out, giving a reference or quote if possible. If it does not bring peace to your spirit, but you do not know why, as group leader you can express your discomfort, and promise to look into the subject more deeply. Then you have a responsibility to seek the Lord and the wisdom of those you trust. Follow the Matthew 18:15 principle and speak to the individual prior to your next meeting, then correct doctrinal errors in your next meeting.

## 2. Difficult Conversations

Whether your difficult conversation is correcting a rule breaker in a one-on-one meeting, diplomatically intervening in a theological controversy during a session, or calming an angry group member who has been offended by something you or someone else said, the most important guideline for handling the situation is the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19). What does that look like in practice? Treat them with unconditional love, respect, and humility, not just in what you say, but also in your tone of voice, your attitude, your motive, and your body language. That sounds like a lot to remember in the heat of the moment, but if you keep your heart right, the rest will follow.

### a. Biblical confrontation.

Studies have shown that because relationships are so important to women and the fear of broken relationships is so strong, we as women tend to avoid open conflict and confrontation. We typically try to handle relationship problems indirectly by either avoiding or ignoring the individual or complaining about them to others (Edwards & Mathews, 2009). But as we said earlier, Jesus said that if someone sins (engages in wrong doing) against you, the correct response is to go and talk about it, just the two of you (Matthew 18:15).

When might you need to confront someone in the group? If one of the participants repeatedly ignores the group rules that have been agreed to by all, the situation needs to be addressed. The rules are there to build a safe and nurturing environment that communicates love and respect to everyone. With the possible exception of a break in confidentiality, there is no need to confront a first-time offender. Instead, just offer grace and readily accept an apology. A break in confidentiality, dependent on the circumstances might require biblical confrontation if it has destroyed the ability for honest and open communication within the group.

If you have the opportunity to set the timing and location for this type of conversation, the first step is to get your heart right, dealing with any anger or resentment that may have built up, and getting rid of any imaginary conversations you have had in your head.

Then ask God for wisdom. One of the most diplomatic and creative approaches to confrontation in Scripture is Nathan confronting David (2 Samuel 12). God may not give you a parable, but He will also probably not ask you to confront a king! Ask God to give you some positive comments about this person that you can share with them as you open the conversation. How have they contributed positively to the group? Ask Him to show you how their current behavior has impacted the group negatively, perhaps creating an atmosphere of superficiality or distrust or reluctance to be honest. Try to be brief and get to the heart of the issue. Ask God to show you if you have done anything that to contribute to the problem, perhaps not explaining the rules clearly. If it helps you to think about it, you can even write it out, but I would advise you not to read it when you meet.

Trust God to give you the right words to say (Matthew 10:19). Pray for your time together, that the Holy Spirit will guide the conversation and anoint your words. Ask Him to help you to listen to the person with a heart of love and compassion.

Contact the individual and set up a time and a place for meeting, something convenient, comfortable, and private. It is best to meet as soon as possible, because once you ask them to meet, they will likely be both curious and apprehensive and the imagination can quickly magnify the issue and make them defensive when they arrive.

When you meet, be friendly and welcoming, thanking them for meeting with you, perhaps asking them about their day. If they have just received bad news about an illness in their family, or been reprimanded at work, that may be foremost in their thoughts. It's helpful to know that before you begin! Share the positive comments you have about them and their participation in the group.

Ask them to share any comments they have about the group and what they are learning. Perhaps they are having regrets about their participation and their rule breaking is an indirect way of communicating that. Perhaps the meeting time is no longer convenient for them because of a schedule change. Listen carefully to their response, what they are saying, what they are not saying, and what their body language is communicating. Listen to them with your spirit and listen to the Holy Spirit and what He is telling you before responding. If they express negative thoughts, listen! Ask questions to clarify if needed. Be grateful. They are offering you a gift. Learn from what they say, whether you agree or not. They could keep their comments to themselves and tell their ten closest friends, but they are giving you an opportunity to correct the situation. At one point in my corporate training I was asked to attend a "Customer Service" class taught by a major airline company. The course lasted three days, and the major thing I learned after three days was to appreciate negative feedback and those who give it.

Share openly and honestly about the behavior that concerns you, why it concerns you, and how it is impacting the group learning, based on your observation. Use "I statements" rather than "you statements." For example, say, "I feel disrespected when you repeatedly come in late to our session," rather than "You always come in late and the rest of us have to repeat information that has already been shared."

Work together and if possible come to an agreement about the situation. There may be more than one solution, and you may need to offer her the opportunity of giving you an answer in a couple of days.

Close in prayer.

#### **b. Mediating disputes.**

There may be times when issues arise between women in your group either in a group session or afterward and it is important for you to be prepared to respond

before the situation escalates. It is not always easy to judge when to intervene and when to let group members work things out on their own without your intervention.

In the session, there are frequently many different perspectives and experiences on the material being discussed and the women should be able to respectfully present different viewpoints and in the end "agree to disagree." As the group leader, you will have to make the decision about how long to allow the discussion to continue. Are others in the group interested and learning or are they wishing you would intervene and move on to the next question? Is the discussion becoming heated and disrespectful? You have the authority and the responsibility to request that they continue the conversation with one another at another time.

Is the disagreement theological? If so, is this an essential doctrine of the faith (e.g. the deity of Jesus, the virgin birth, the authority of Scripture, etc.)? Or is it one of those issues where there are conservative evangelical theologians on both sides (e.g. end-times, mode of baptism, etc.)? If you are not sure what the "essential doctrines" of the faith are, find out. I earlier mentioned the principle, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Before the discussion within the group escalates, you can give the group that quote, and suggest they each study the Scriptures from both perspectives, and determine what they believe is more biblical, or hold that particular position more lightly to allow them the flexibility to change their position in the future. Then move on to the next item for discussion.

If one (or more) of the women contact you personally outside the group sessions and ask to speak to you privately about an issue they are having with another member of the group, biblically, according to Matthew 18:15 your response should be to ask her, "Have you talked to her yet?" You could even give her some basic principles for how to do that, using the principles above. The website [www.peacemaker.net](http://www.peacemaker.net) also has excellent resources. My personal favorite is the "The Four G's: Glorify God, Get the log out of your own eye, Gently Restore, and Go and be reconciled" (Sande, 2014). The first three refer to the one-on-one meeting. "Glorify God." What does God want you to know about this situation and how might He use it to glorify Himself? "Get the log out of your own eye." How have you contributed to the problem? "Gently restore." Go to the person, genuinely seeking peace and reconciliation. Only after those steps have been taken is it appropriate for you as a third party to get involved (Matthew 18:16).

If you are asked to mediate between two group members, make sure that both of the women have agreed to your participation and you have no prior opinion about who is right and who is wrong. One of the most important lessons I have learned about mediating disputes is not to make up my mind about a situation prior to hearing both sides of the story. Prior to accepting the responsibility to mediate, pray. Is this a situation God wants you to handle? If the answer is "yes," then begin to pray for wisdom for yourself, and an open, teachable, and forgiving spirit for each of the women. When you meet, open in prayer. Listen to

both sides, encouraging one of the women to tell her side without interruption. Ask any clarifying questions. Listen to the second person tell her side without interruption. Ask clarifying questions. Listen to the Holy Spirit and ask Him for wisdom. What is the central issue for each of the women? Try to get them to come to a mutually agreeable solution. If feelings have been hurt on one or both sides, apologies are essential and forgiveness is required. If you are a mom of more than one child, you know the principles!! Trust me!! At one time when I was managing a group of professionals I remember thinking that everything I needed to know to mediate their disputes I learned when I was a stay-at-home mom with two small boys. Additional resources are listed at the end of this lesson.

### **C. Personal Crises**

During the course of your mentoring relationship, a group member may go through some type of personal crisis – a death in the family, a major illness, or an unexpected divorce. Even though you are not her pastor, she has opened up her heart and her life to you and it is appropriate for you to reach out to her personally and let her know you are praying for her. Offer to be a listening ear. Be sensitive to what the Holy Spirit may be speaking to your heart about the situation. Many women who have never dealt with this type of situation are worried that they will say the wrong thing and consequently they decide to say nothing. Do not fall into that trap! I learned a very powerful principle for helping people during a time of personal crisis from a lay pastoral care program called Stephen Ministries ([www.stephenministries.org](http://www.stephenministries.org)), an interdenominational ministry that has many biblically sound pastoral care resources available. The principle is the “ministry of presence.” Just sit quietly, pray, and listen. As women we are quick to make cookies or mop the floor, but are often reluctant to sit down and offer a listening ear.

### **Memorize:**

Matthew 18: 15, 16 <sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

### **Key Truth:**

Building strong relationship is an essential skill for mentors, but it is not always easy. It will require prayer, work, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

### **Your Response:**

1. Think of one or two challenging experiences that you have had in your leadership journey and be prepared to share them without names or identifying details. What did you learn from those experiences? What do you wish you had done differently?

2. What advice do you think is most essential for someone just beginning a leadership experience?
3. List the names of the five women whom you will begin mentoring in January of next year. Begin to pray for them especially praying that nothing will hinder them from participating in the group.

**For Further Study:**

*Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* by Stone, Patton, Heen (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999)

*How to Have That Difficult Conversation You've Been Avoiding* by Cloud and Townsend (Cloud & Townsend, 2006)

*Leading Women Who Wound* by Edwards & Matthews (Edwards & Mathews, 2009)





## ESTHER INITIATIVE

### Mentoring Esthers

#### Appendix 1

#### ***Equipping Women to be Difference Makers***

#### ***Information/Application/Nomination Form***

*"The Global Advance Esther Initiative serves to empower women worldwide to become catalysts for God's purposes in their nation." How do we accomplish that? As women, one of the most effective ways to learn is from one another, in small group settings where we can honestly share our hearts and the leadership issues that challenge us whether at home, at church or at work.*

*"Raising Up Modern Day Esthers" is a 12 lesson leadership training program designed to be experienced in a small-group community with reading and discussion on such topics as:*

- a. Who I am – in Christ, as well as in my family heritage and experiences*
- b. My relationships – with God, with peers, with those I lead, and those I follow*
- c. My leadership – leadership opportunities, servant leadership, team-building.*

#### **Mentoring Groups**

*Each member will commit to the following:*

*Stage 1: Personal training in leadership and mentoring*

*Stage 2: Each member will train five new people in leadership/mentoring skills*

*Stage 3: Each member will coach their mentees as they train five new people.*

#### **Requirements for group members:**

- Committed to prayer and a personal relationship with God*
- Committed to studying God's Word*
- Able to disciple believers*
- Committed to living our values (see attached)*
- Currently serving in leadership in some capacity at church or work*
- Good communication skills in the common language*
- Reliable internet connection if sessions will be online*
- Available at mutually agreeable meeting time for group*
- Willing to make a three-stage commitment – about 3 – 4 hours/session*

## ***Additional Information***

### **Leadership Topics**

Who I Am

- 1. My Identity in Christ*
- 2. Walking in the Spirit*
- 3. Mapping My Life*
- 4. Dealing With My Past*

My Relationships

- 5. Nurturing My Relationship With God*
- 6. Servant Leadership*
- 7. Values, Priorities, Balance*
- 8. Communications, Personalities, Relationships*

My Leadership

- 9. Leading Where God Has Placed You*
- 10. Teamwork – The Key to Leadership*
- 11. Called to Follow*
- 12. Reflecting, Celebrating, Commissioning*

### **Our Values**

- *Prayer and personal relationship with God*
- *Personal study of God's Word*
- *Teachable*
- *Humble*
- *Good listener*
- *Willing to serve others wherever needed*
- *Passionate to grow personally and inspire growth in others*
- *Wise (to discern the options not told the answers)*
- *Honest*
- *Life of integrity (emotional wholeness)*
- *Transparent (no façade in good times and bad)*
- *Trustworthy (respected and trusted by others)*
- *Building community, sharing life experiences*
- *Accountable to authority (respectful, responsible)*

***Please use the form on the next page as a guide for vetting women who will be joining your mentoring group.***



**ESTHER**  **INITIATIVE**

**Mentoring Esthers**

*Application Form*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information: (email or phone): \_\_\_\_\_

*1. In what areas of ministry are you currently involved and what is your current time commitment (per week or per month)?*

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*2. Describe your relationship with Jesus Christ.*

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*3. What spiritual gifts or strengths do you believe God has given you?*

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*I understand there is an expectation that I will lead a group of five women in leadership and mentoring training during stage 2, and a follow-up season of coaching them as they train others in stage 3.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date*

***Please use the form on the next page as a guide to help the women in the mentoring group get to know each other***



## ESTHER INITIATIVE

### Mentoring Esthers

#### Appendix 2

#### Getting to Know You...

Even though we are all women who love Jesus and lead women, we are a very diverse group – so please introduce yourself to the rest of us. We want to know a little more about one another before we start meeting together.

Name:

City and Country:

WhatsApp (if any):

Phone (if needed):

Email (if any):

Facebook name (if you have one):

Name of spouse (if married):

How long have you been married?

What would you like us to know about him?

Children's names, ages and one thing each of them does that makes you smile.

Other family members (grandchildren, parents, etc.)

In two or three sentences tell us a little about your background – your family and your age when you came to know Jesus and how that came about (briefly)

Describe your current work or ministry – what do you do; some of the opportunities and challenges you are currently facing.

Describe something unique about where you live – your nation, city or community:

Several things unique, interesting or funny about your life, family, hobbies, past, or interests.

What do you hope to accomplish through participating in this program?

What concerns or questions do you have about this program?

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you before we begin this journey together?

**Setting up a time to meet**

**Days and times I am most frequently available (e.g. Saturdays - 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.):**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**Days and times I am unavailable:**

Please come prepared to share your responses to the above questions at the first meeting.



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