

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

A Mentoring Mindset

(1 Corinthians 9; Luke 9; 2 Timothy 2)

Introduction: Olympic prep...

Next summer, you and I will get to enjoy two weeks of thrills as some of the best athletes in the world compete for gold in Paris at the 2024 Olympics.

All these athletes, right now, are frantically preparing for the Olympic Games.

Actually, those who are serious about winning at the Olympics have been frantically preparing for years, enduring grueling workouts, committing to strength training, skill training, aerobic conditioning, and mobility drills, and dialing in diet and sleep patterns to maximize performance.

They are aiming to be at the top of their game when July 26th rolls around to win that medal. I'll be at the top of my watching game, too. I always try to watch a few of the events. Maybe you do, as well.

If you're an athlete hoping to make a successful run at a medal in the Olympics, it is critical that you train hard and smart. It is also critical that you find a great coach.

You need a coach who knows your event, knows the best training regimens and recovery strategies for that event, and knows what best motivates you to do your best.

In short, you need a Charles Poliquin

If you haven't heard of Charles Poliquin, he's the guy who has coached more athletes to Olympic medals than anyone else ever has, and in events as varied as weightlifting, the long jump, shot put, and running the hurdles.

Poliquin was simply great at taking great athletes to greater greatness. You've got a winning combination when you put a coach like Charles Poliquin with an athlete who is willing to put in massive effort and years of preparation.

The Apostle Paul says that he brought that kind of dedication to living for Jesus.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote about athletes who competed in the Olympic Games in his own day.

[1 Corinthians 9:24] Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize?...[25a] Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. So they do it to obtain a perishable wreath...

Of course, today, Games athletes win a gold medal PLUS million dollar endorsement deals. But the prize that the winners of the Games in the first century won was a wreath made of leafy vines that faded over the course of a few short days.

Back in 1 Corinthians, Paul switched gears to speak about winning a spiritual prize. ***[5b]...but we an imperishable [wreath].***

He ordered his life the way an Olympic athlete orders theirs, and for the same reason: to receive a ***"prize."***

The prize Jesus would give Paul though, was not a fading wreath made of leaves. And it was way more valuable than endorsement deals. Jesus' prize is ***"imperishable."***

So, it made even more sense for Paul to train hard to win the Jesus Olympics than it does for an athlete to win a gold medal.

It makes sense for us, too, to run with purpose, to train like an elite boxer, to discipline ourselves to win the prize Jesus will give to a faithful follower. (vv. 26-27)

Now, I'll clarify here that the **"prize"** in view is not salvation.

God gives eternal life as a gift to the one who believes in Jesus. That gift has nothing to do with what we do for Jesus. It is solely about receiving what Jesus has done for us.

The prize Paul talks about here is a reward Jesus gives to faithful followers who have already received the gift of eternal life.

Today, on the cusp of a new year, Jesus wants all of us who are here today to embrace the Olympic-like preparation necessary to win **"the prize"** He longs to give us.

What a year 2024 will be if I, with single-minded devotion, give my attention, time, energy, to being the man Jesus wants me to be with Kathy, my family, and with you. Same for you, right?

So, this morning, let's embrace the vision of living for Jesus in 2024!

But encouraging you to reach for the prize isn't really my main theme today. I'm casting vision to everyone here for helping others win **"the prize"** by helping them take their next step with Jesus.

You, become a Charles Poliquin for Jesus. Be a great coach. Mentor your brother or your sister in Jesus. Help them make progress in their spiritual life.

This is a profoundly biblical theme. In fact, the dynamic of one believer mentoring another in the faith oozes from dozens of passages in both the Old and New Testaments.

This mandate to mentor is universally applicable to all who follow Jesus because...

...if you've been walking with Jesus for decades, a few years, a few months, or a few days, you've learned something about walking with Him that someone who has not been walking with Him as long needs to know.

It is a given in the church that those who have more experience, have gained some maturity, have learned something about life with Jesus are to help those coming behind them grow.

Christians who have followed Jesus for at least a few days get to be coaches and cheerleaders to those behind them. They get to be mentors to those with less experience so that those less experienced believers will grow and will win the prize Jesus wants to give them.

This idea of mentoring permeates the pages of Scripture.

And it has been a part of my own life since I believed in Jesus. My life has been powerfully impacted by the investments of those who have mentored me.

Helping Others Win the "Prize"

My Life, Mentored

I came to Christ as a teenager and soon began attending a church. A few people in that church poured their lives into me and helped to establish me in the faith.

Three men, in particular, became spiritual coaches to me - Charles Poliquins - and to others in our church's youth group. The result was that in the space of two years, I changed from being a teenaged atheist to being a committed disciple of Jesus.

Then, during my college years, I was mentored by a pastor and by people who were involved in campus ministries. They helped me grow in Scripture. They helped me learn how to serve Jesus.

I was also mentored by professors and fellow students when Kathy and I went through the Dallas Seminary experience together.

And since having arrived in San Antonio forty years ago, I've been mentored by many people in this church who have built into me.

Elders have poured their lives into me. It used to be that the Elders were older than me. That's not always the case now, but through the years, younger and older Elders have pointed me to Jesus.

And so have many other men and women in this church. Small groups I've been a part of have provided mentoring for me.

Many of you have helped me take a next step with Jesus and might not have even known you were doing it. But your love for Jesus, your trust in God, and your faithfulness in trials rubbed off on me.

I frankly don't know what I would have done had others not taken me under their wing and guided me at crucial points.

And if you have been blessed with a spiritual Charles Poliquin, if others have mentored you as others have mentored me, well, that experience is thoroughly biblical.

God's plan has always been that those with a bit more experience should guide and mentor the less experienced.

Mentoring, the Biblical Model

Old Testament

For instance, before Moses died at age one hundred and twenty, he mentored a younger man and taught that younger man everything he knew. That younger man - Joshua - did a great job as the nation of Israel's second leader.

Solomon wrote Proverbs to his son - **[1:8] Hear, my son, your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching...** Everyone who has ever read the book of Proverbs has benefitted from Solomon's wise mentoring.

One of the greatest Jewish prophets was Elijah. He left behind a protégé, Elishah, whom he had personally trained to take his place.¹

Mentoring the faith of the less-experienced by the more-experienced was close to the heart of the ancient Jews. The New Testament carries on this theme of spiritual baton passing.

New Testament

For instance, Barnabas mentored his nephew, John Mark. That relationship helped Mark become a valuable servant of Jesus after he had suffered a terrible failure.²

Then, the husband-wife team of Priscilla and Aquila mentored a man named Apollos by expanding his understanding of Jesus.³

We could multiply examples of mentoring relationships. But of all those who mentored those who were coming after them, the greatest was Jesus. He was the Master Mentor.

If you're looking for a life Mission Statement from Jesus, here's about the closest thing you'll find, recorded in Mark's Gospel.

The Master Mentor (Jesus!)

Jesus' Mission (Mark 10:45)

[Mark 10:45] For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Jesus came to earth to live a perfect life, submit to a sacrificial death, and then rise from the dead. By this, He would pave the way for anyone who believed in Him to have eternal life.

¹ For instance, young King Joash was equipped for the throne by the godly priest, Jehoiada; Mordecai trained his niece, Esther.

² See Acts 15; 2 Timothy 4.

³ See Acts 18.

This was the grandest plan ever launched. But, for this plan to work, Jesus would need to collect and to then train followers who would spread the Good News after He was physically gone.

That's why, as you trace the life of Jesus, you find Him spending the better part of the last three years of His life mentoring, equipping, training His followers to be His witnesses.

Jesus' Method: Train disciples who would make disciples

He called them to follow

It all began at the Sea of Galilee when Jesus met two sets of brothers, all of them fishermen: Peter and Andrew, James and John.

After sending a miraculously large catch of fish into their nets, the fishermen were amazed. Jesus told them, **[Luke 5:10] "Do not fear; from now on you will be catching people."**

Those words made quite an impression on the four brothers. They promptly **[11] left everything and followed Him.**

Jesus spent the next three years training them. He went on to call others and to train them, too.

He mentored / disciplined them

Jesus' method was to model the life He wanted them to lead and to then invite them to do as He did.

That life consisted of a commitment to prayer and a love for God's Word. He led them into a life of love and generosity, and into a life that sought to seek and to serve the least, the last, and the lost.

From the start, Jesus knew that He had limited time to mentor His followers. The cross loomed large. So, training them was always front and center during His earthly ministry.⁴

⁴ Viewed from one angle, the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are largely records of how passionately and how wisely Jesus mentored - the Bible's word for it is "discipled" - His followers.

We could spend years exploring Jesus' training methods together.

But this morning, we'll look at one event that highlighted His commitment to equip those coming after Him, to train the Twelve.

Aside from the resurrection, there is only one miracle recorded in all four of the Gospels. This is it.⁵

Matthew and Mark and Luke and John considered this one miracle SO important that they all included it in their Gospels. It is the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus' Mentoring Example (Luke 9:12-17)

The setting

The miracle took place in the beautiful wilderness of northern Galilee, not far from the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus and the Twelve had been meeting with a large crowd far away from the villages. He had been teaching and had been healing those in physical need.

This scene gives us a glimpse into the giving heart of Jesus. He gave of His time, His energy, His resources to help people in need.

Then, Luke alerts us to a looming crisis.

A Crisis of Resources (v. 12)

[12] Now the day was ending, and the twelve came up and said to Him, "Dismiss the crowd, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; because here we are in a desolate place."

The crowds didn't just need a snack. They needed sustenance. They were miles and miles from home. The situation was desperate.

⁵ The miracle is recorded in Matthew 14, Mark 6, Luke 9 and John 6.

So, fully aware that they didn't have the resources to care for the people, the disciples helpfully pointed out the situation to Jesus.

His response to His followers was surprising / ridiculous / insensitive (you choose) - but emphatic! **[13a]...“You give them something to eat!”**

A Very Predictable Response (v. 13b-14a)

To which they responded, with genuine confusion, **[13b] “We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless perhaps we go and buy food for all these people.” [14a] (For there were about five thousand men.)**

They are clueless about what to do and just as clueless about what Jesus was about to do.

He turned this desperate situation into a mentoring lab.

The training of the Twelve, 101 (vv. 14-17)

[14b]...But He said to His disciples, “Have them sit down to eat (Sit down to eat? To eat what? There's no food!) in groups of about fifty each.” [15] They did so, and had them all recline.

We can only imagine the thoughts going through the disciples' minds as they divided the crowd of thousands into groups of fifties.

They had to have been wondering, “*What is He going to do NOW?*” Here's what He did -

[16] And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them and broke them, and gave them to the disciples again and again to serve the people. [17] And they all ate and were satisfied and the broken pieces which they had left over were picked up, twelve baskets⁶ full.

⁶ The baskets (σπουρις) were large enough to hold a man (Acts 9:25).

As Luke tells this story he doesn't give us one word about the response of the crowd to what happened.⁷

That's because, while this is an event with a “point,” the point was not the effect of the miracle on the crowd. The point was the effect of the miracle on the disciples.

First, by watching Jesus multiply fish and loaves, they learned about His power to do instantly what nature does over time.

Second, by watching Him provide fish and loaves to thousands of hungry people, they learned of His love for people and His driving passion to meet human need.

Third, by assigning them roles as waitstaff they learned that He was inviting them to participate in His great work.

And fourth, by taking the fish and loaves that He gave them and distributing that to the crowds, they got a picture of spending their lives passing along to others what they had received from Him.

Every lesson was important - power, love, and an invitation to participate - and each one was built upon the one preceding. But it is the last one that we're focusing on today.

Jesus' disciples receive many gifts from Jesus. They were to share what He gave them with others. And it was this lesson that Jesus drove home to His disciples at every opportunity for the three years that they were together.

That wasn't very much time, so there was an urgency to His training.

They had to be ready after He finished His mission, so He poured Himself into those who were coming after Him.

⁷ John's Gospel records the response of the crowd, which was to attempt to crown Jesus king so that they could receive an endless supply of food. Jesus rejected that as it was not yet time for Him to be king. He had come to be a Suffering Servant.

He trained them on boats out on the Sea of Galilee, in the synagogues and the temple, in grainfields, with the sick and the lame and the demon-possessed, and while dealing with religious bigots.

And, sure enough, in the end, after three years of being mentored by Jesus (and of course, after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost), Peter, James, John and the rest were thoroughly equipped to take the world by storm - and we read that story in the book of Acts.

The heart of Jesus to make disciples of His followers inspires us to BOTH follow Him (take our own next steps with Him) AND to imitate His mentoring ways (help others take their own next steps with Him).

The original apostles got it. They did a great job of training others as they had been trained.

They were spiritual Charles Poliquins before Charles Poliquin was born. They lived to help others win the prize. They passed on the torch.

Listen to the vision for mentoring we hear in these words from Paul to a young man whom he personally discipled, Timothy.

Giving Away What He Gives Us

Paul Passed the Torch (2 Timothy 2)

[2 Timothy 2:2] The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.⁸

Look at the generations of disciples in view here. **Paul** learned from **Jesus** and then he taught Timothy. **Timothy** is to teach **others** who can build into still **others**.

As I count it, that's five generations within the span of a few years of the Jesus movement getting started. And that is the way a movement gains traction and makes progress.

One slightly more experienced disciple discipled another slightly less experienced disciple. A brother or a sister with a heart to help, passes along what they have learned about following Jesus to someone else.

I wonder how many mentoring generations there have been since the days of Paul and Timothy. How many times has the torch passed from person to person to make it from Paul to you? No doubt, it has been thousands.

But here we are about to enter 2024, and the torch has passed. And WE now get to pass it on to others.

YOU - Pass the Torch

What you have received from Jesus, pass it on...

You get to pass on to others what you have learned from and about Jesus.

You know the path to eternal life, having believed in Jesus. So, you can tell that story to someone you know.

You have walked with Him. You have learned something of His ways - His power, His love. You can tell someone else about that, too.

You have taken some "next steps" with Jesus. Steps into a life of faith and prayer and service. You are participating in Jesus' great work. You can invite someone else to join you in this.

You have learned something about prayer, something about Scripture, something about generosity, about love, about sharing your faith, and about service.

A few minutes ago, I mentioned the universality of this mandate to be a mentor. So, I'll say it again.

⁸ See also Titus 2:3-8, where mentoring relationships are assigned to older women and to older men as they deal with younger women and younger men.

Every disciple is to pass on what they have learned about Jesus to someone, because whether they have been walking with Jesus for a long time or short, they have learned something about Him that someone who has not been walking with Him needs to know.

And you'll notice where the Bible places the responsibility for seeing to it that this kind of mentoring takes place. Scripture places it squarely on the shoulders of the older, the more mature.

It is not up to the younger to reach up for help (although some younger people will do so). It is up to those who have made more progress to reach back.

So, at this time, I want to share a tool with you that I believe can help you become a great "next steps" coach, mentor to your friends. We'll call it a "passing it on" tool.

A "passing it on" tool

Embedded in its teachings, stories, and characters, Scripture highlights many graces that we who follow Jesus are to exhibit.

We are to value these character traits, behaviors, and attitudes - and here at Northwest we do value all of them!

But the Elders believe that there are a select few, core, biblical values that especially describe our church's historic and current passions, giftings, and aspirations.

So, over the past several months, the Elders have given a lot of time and attention to thinking and praying about the values that our church holds dear.

We have limited ourselves to listing six values and have reframed and rephrased those values.

The values we list in the brochure you received this morning aren't new to Northwest. Rather, they have proven over the years to "fit" who we are, and they describe who we aspire to be.

These values are not primarily theological.⁹ They address lifestyle, not doctrine. But they are all key to life in this church.

With every passing year, we try to integrate these values into our church's culture. We intend to live these values out. Our "next steps" with Jesus almost always have something to do with taking steps into these values.¹⁰

And, as you can see in the brochure the values relate to prayer, Scripture, relationships, generosity, evangelism, and service.¹¹

This little brochure can be a tremendous help to you if you want to help a friend take a next step with Jesus. You can simply walk through the values, as listed in the brochure, with your friend.

I recently spent a few weeks meeting on Wednesday afternoons with a good friend doing exactly this. It wasn't complicated. It was fun.

Every week, we would go over one of these core values, look at the Bible verses associated with it, talk about how to apply it in our lives, and pray together.

We had a great time, became better friends as we met, learned from the Bible and from each other, and grew in our faith.

So, as we close, after having looked at a lot of Scripture and having heard the mandate to mentor, here's the verb.

Conclusion:

You could do the same thing with a friend.

- If you're a parent, you could use this tool with your kids.

⁹ You can find our core theology in our Statement of Faith.

¹⁰ The Elders invite you to take time to read and to think through the values listed here. If you wish to "go deeper" in your understanding of these values, please request another resource that includes a bit more content than is available here.

¹¹ See Appendix at the end for the statement of the Values.

- If you are married, you could study these values with your husband or wife, learn to apply them, and grow closer together as you grow in Jesus.
- If you've got a friend who is a relatively young Christian (relative to you), you could work your way through the values using this tool to help establish him or her in the faith.
- If you regularly meet with a group of friends, taking a few weeks to discuss and apply these values by using this tool could promote life change in all of you.

This tool isn't inspired (Scripture is!), and it isn't exhaustive!

But, at the end of the day, after having spent time with someone studying, discussing, praying about, and applying these biblical values, a life could very well be transformed.

And if someone begins to...

...regularly ask God to do what only He can do in prayer.

...base his or her attitudes and actions on the instructions he finds in the Bible.

...engage in loving, "masks-off" relating.

...practice generosity with their time, energy, and treasure.

...gain open doors to share the love of Jesus by meeting needs in Jesus' Name.

...serve Jesus in the arena of their giftedness and passion...

...well - I call that a "Next Steps" victory for Jesus.

OUR CORE VALUES

WE VALUE...

...DEPENDENT PRAYER

God wants us to ask Him to do things that are beyond our ability, so that by His answers we will make impact for Him that is disproportionate to our size and strength.

THEREFORE, we put a primary emphasis on dependent, expectant prayer, so that everyone will see that God is the One making all the difference.

Scripture: Judges 7; parables of leaven, mustard seed (Luke 11:31-33); parables about prayer found in Luke 11 and 18; Ephesians 6:18-20.

...COMMITMENT TO THE BIBLE

We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that its teachings and instructions are essential to finding life with God and to human flourishing.

THEREFORE, we base our lives on its truths rather than on the prevailing winds of culture which may dismiss, disallow, and reject it, advocating for its teachings graciously and confidently.

Scripture: Ezra, Nehemiah, Amos 8:11ff..., Acts 2-6 (early days of the church), 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20-21.

...GENUINE RELATIONSHIPS

Entering into genuine, “masks-off” community with others is central to our growth, health, and witness for Jesus.

THEREFORE, we passionately pursue life-changing relationships with all, and especially with those who have different life stories than our own.

Scripture: Acts 13 and 15; Romans 14, where Paul addresses the validity of diversity of opinion about matters where the Bible is not clear; 2 Corinthians 3 (the image of Moses wearing a veil); the “one another” passages we find in the New Testament.

...ETERNALLY FOCUSED GENEROSITY

God has lavished us with spiritual riches in Christ and gives us the privilege of investing our earthly resources to advance His eternal kingdom purposes.

THEREFORE, eager to hear God’s “*Well done!*,” we embrace contentment with what we have as we seek out creative ways to further His purposes within our church, across our community, and around the world.

Scripture: Matthew 6:2-6, 19-21, 25-33; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19.

...GRACIOUS EVANGELISM

In today’s increasingly secular culture, Christians must accept the challenge to find loving ways to gain a hearing for the Gospel.

THEREFORE, we embrace the opportunities God gives us to meet pressing needs in Jesus’ Name as we share the good news that everyone who believes in Jesus receives the free gift of eternal life.

Scripture: Luke 16:1-13; Acts 1:8; Galatians 6:10; Colossians 4:6; 2 Tim. 4:5.

...EMPOWERED UNLEASHING

Every Christian is called by God to the high privilege of serving Jesus in their sphere of giftedness and passion.

THEREFORE, at our church all are unleashed to serve, whether in the ministries led by the Elders and staff or in a ministry that is outside the scope of those ministries.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-12; Colossians 4:17; 1 Peter 4:10-11.