

## **“A Living Faith: Mentorship and Trust”**

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Proverbs 3:1-8

Jessica didn't think that she had a story to share about her faith. She had grown up in a Christian home, always “believed” in God, never had any what she would call “life-changing” events happen to her. She thought her life was typical and honestly thought it would be boring for someone else to hear about.

Perhaps you have thought something similar about your life story, or your faith journey.

Then, Jessica heard someone stand up in her church to share their story, and this changed everything. This person seemed to have a very similar story to hers, and she no longer felt alone. She began thinking differently about her life. Perhaps sharing her story might help someone else.

Jessica grew up in Amarillo, Texas with an alcoholic stepfather who verbally, physically, and emotionally abused her mom. She will probably never forget the night that her mom called her and told her

not to come home because she was afraid of what her stepfather might do to her.

It wasn't long after this event that her stepfather was divorced from her mom and in jail for assault.

Growing up without a positive male role model or an example of a woman being respected in a relationship left Jessica's heart scarred. She longed to be loved, but simply could not trust others, in particular men.

As crazy as it might sound, Jessica started doing just what she had seen her stepfather do. During college, she got involved in the party scene, drinking a lot of alcohol. She also got involved in unhealthy relationships with men who became abusive with her emotionally and physically.

How often we hear this story of a person following in the pattern of the prior generation even when they have been hurt by that generation's actions.

At one point, Jessica realized that a relationship was unhealthy when it dawned on her that she probably shouldn't have to always wear long sleeve shirts to cover the bruises on her arms made by a guy she was dating.

She made a wise decision and left him, moving back home with her mom.

Jessica felt like something was missing in her life, so she started going back to church. However, going to church and being with people who were supportive of her actually left her even more conflicted inside because it highlighted the double life she was living.

In one arena she was working in guest services at her church, smiling and greeting those who came to worship. In the other arena she was still partying, drinking, and hopping from one unhealthy fling to another.

The inner conflict got so stressful that she felt she needed to choose one direction and gain some integrity. She resolved to get away from the party scene and dedicate her whole life to living the way God would want.

She knew that making new friends at church with people who were committed to a different set of life standards was going to be helpful for her. She recognized that she needed the kind of accountability available that people from church could offer, but it was very challenging to trust anyone.

Over months of time she is now learning that there are good people out there who genuinely care for her and can be trusted, so Jessica is gradually opening up to them.

She continues to take step after step growing deeper friendships with people from her church.

In the past year, she started leading a women's dinner group Bible study in her home. This group of women intentionally create a time every week to share life's struggles, and hold each other accountable to live a life of faith in God.

She is learning from this group how powerful and healing relationships of trust can be, something she has never had before.

Through this community of support, Jessica said she has found that God *“provides unconditional love to those who feel unlovable, forgiveness to those who have burned bridges here on Earth, and is a father to those whose fathers have betrayed them.”*

What a healing experience Jessica has discovered through relationships of trust.

Listen to what it says in Proverbs.

## **READ PROVERBS 3:1-8**

The book of Proverbs is full of words of wisdom offered to help people live life well.

This particular proverb talks about a healthy response to good teaching.

When we discover some good teaching, that honors the way that God made the world, the writer of this proverb says that a good and healthy response is to listen to the teaching, and more than simply listen, to allow the teaching to sink in and become part of us. This is a wise way to live.

Beginning right there, we can all take an assessment of our lives and acknowledge that it isn't as simple as it sounds.

There might be wise teaching from people around us, from potential mentors, and it is hard for us to hear because of who that particular person is. Perhaps there is baggage in our relationship with them.

You know what I mean. Maybe it is a former spouse and there lingers awkwardness. Perhaps it is a parent who abused you. Maybe it is a friend who once betrayed you and threw you under the bus.

Perhaps the way that the teaching is being delivered feels too forceful and you just don't want to listen, or perhaps not forceful enough so that it seems not very important.

Maybe like Jessica, the teaching is hard to hear because we bring our own baggage, like a difficulty trusting because we have been hurt in the past.

All kinds of things can get in the way for us to really hear important teaching, or listen to a mentor.

The author of this proverb also says to let your heart hold the teaching because this will improve your life and enhance your experience of living.

This is perhaps the hardest part — to allow the teaching or message a place to simmer within you — to internalize it and allow it to become part of you, shaping your character.

Any good and worthy teaching is certainly worthy of impacting your character, but this takes time and you have to choose to allow the teaching a certain kind of space in your life.

This is echoed from the ancient writings of Deuteronomy, where people were encouraged to take good teachings and bind them around their heads and weave

them into their clothing and places them in boxes on the doorposts of their homes. The whole point was to place these words of wisdom to all around a person so that it would eventually sink into their character and become a part of them.

Loyalty and faithfulness are also mentioned as important in this passage.

Loyalty, in the wisdom tradition of Proverbs, speaks to the commitment that binds one's life to a group of people, to one other person, a mentor, a teacher, or even to God.

In this tradition, loyalty assumes that the one to whom a person is loyal will prove trustworthy and act in ways that enhance the other's well being.

Then it says that it is not wise to trust wisdom that is centered in personal desires. It will lead us astray. But fully trusting in God will always produce the character that is pleasing to God. We may not fully understand God's ways, but trusting God is healthy for our soul.

The passage is talking about God being our mentor, the one who shows us the path to a truly abundant life — a life that is lived intentionally with God as the focal point.

We walk this journey of faith deliberately acknowledging God and looking to God for guidance. As we do, God provides for us an example by which to live.

There is an interestingly relationship between trust and the ability to internalize good and sound teaching from a mentor.

This makes sense too, doesn't it? If we don't trust someone, we simply won't allow the nuggets of their wisdom to impact our lives.

Trust is a foundation of relationships, and in particular relationships that matter most.

It took months and years of time for Jessica to begin learning how to trust others, and her inner transformation seemed to happen in proportion to the amount of trust she was able to give to those in her study group.

Perhaps that is the way that we grow in the most meaningful ways — by building trusting relationships over time.

I would say that this is also the bedrock for growing our church — one trusting relationship at a time.

Perhaps this will be, as Proverbs 3 says, "healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body."