

# Mentor Requirements

## Our Daily Bread University

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## Student Mentor Requirements

For the Foundations for Biblical Ministry Certificate program, you have committed in your application to seek and secure a trusted mentor during your program. Following is information about your selection of a mentor, as well as a document you should provide to your mentor once he or she is selected.

### Why do I need a mentor?

The fact that you have enrolled in this Foundations for Biblical Ministry Certificate program tells us that you want to learn from others. You have chosen to learn from scholars whose teaching has been captured for the courses in this Certificate program. You also can interact with others in this program through the optional Learning Groups.

We also believe you need a mentor at your side as you move through your chosen study program. Why? A good mentor will walk with you, dialogue with you about the content of the course, but will also help you connect the course content in practical ways to your daily life and work. It is possible for theological studies to seem remote and unconnected to your immediate surroundings. A good mentor will ask the kind of questions that will help you build bridges from your studies to your work for Christ and His kingdom.

### What should I look for in a good mentor?

Obviously, the first criterion is that your mentor shares your faith convictions, at least to the degree that the two of you can dialogue from a shared faith in God and in Scripture.

The second criterion is that your mentor has traveled some part of the road ahead of you and can bring helpful experience and knowledge to your relationship. So look for someone who has some God-given resources like wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, etc.

The third criterion is that your mentor is accessible. Ideally, you should meet face-to-face twice during each course period, and in between you can be mentored through audio or video conferencing. So you need to find a mentor who is able to give you some time over the course of your studies. You may be tempted to seek mentoring from some well-known individual who simply cannot give you the time that good mentoring will require. Don't yield to that temptation! Be realistic about choosing a mentor who is accessible. Your mentor may also be asked to respond to a brief survey from the ODBU program facilitator to provide additional feedback regarding the mentor relationship.

A fourth criterion is that a good mentor understands that the relationship is a conversation, one that neither one of you should dominate. The mentor is not "the sage on the stage," but your "guide alongside." Choose someone who knows how to listen, but who also knows how to keep you from dumping a stream-of-consciousness outpouring that is not true conversation (dialogue).

While mentoring relationships can be long-term, you may want to invite your mentor to join you only for the first segment of your program (four courses) until you and your mentor can see whether this is a mutually fruitful relationship. Obviously, it is very helpful if you are both satisfied with the mentoring relationship and this person can mentor you through the remainder of your courses.

The following are ideas that will assist you in the dialogue with your mentor.

## Student-Mentor Meetings

The following are suggestions of ways in which your meetings could be used to most benefit you as you seek to apply what you are learning to your life and ministry.

### Meeting #1 (During your first week of study for the course)

1. Discuss your overall purpose in pursuing a higher level theological education.
2. Establish goals for growth during this course including areas such as self-discipline, spiritual development, academic accomplishment, ministry focus, etc.
3. Discuss specific ways that this course might be of benefit to you by examining together the learning objectives for the course (available in the course syllabus).
4. Set a means by which you and your mentor can communicate when you are not able to meet face-to-face.
5. Set a date and time, if possible, for your second meeting to occur during or immediately prior to the final week of classes.
6. Pray together.

### Meeting #2 (During the final week of study for the course)

7. Review the goals set at the outset of the course and discuss the degree to which you have achieved them.
8. Talk about specific ways in which this course has affected your thinking, your theology, and/or your ministry.
9. Pray together.

Ready to get started? Pass on the “Potential Mentor Requirements” document to your mentor!

## Potential Mentor Requirements

### What does it mean to “mentor” someone?

You’ve been approached by a student about serving as his/her mentor. What kind of commitment does this entail from you? What does it mean to “mentor” someone? Good mentoring is characterized by three things:

First, good mentoring is a dialogue, a conversation. It’s not a one-way teaching session in which the mentor unscrews the cap on a student’s skull and proceeds to pour in a quantity of knowledge. The means of mentoring is always a dialogue. This dialogue can take place face-to-face, in emails or by telephone. This means that a good mentor can feel when to listen and when to speak.

Second, good mentoring requires a sound relationship with the mentee. It stands or falls on the quality of the relationship between the mentor and mentee. This sound relationship requires respect for one another, open communication (freedom to talk without fear), confidentiality, careful listening, and humility on the part of both. A good mentor will take time to build such a relationship.

Third, good mentoring isn’t just chit-chat between friends; it is structured learning. You as a mentor may assume that the mentee simply wants to “learn from you.” The truth is that few mentees have a clear idea of where they want to go in the relationship. It is your task as mentor to set up the mentoring relationship adequately from the beginning. But in the process, you are a facilitator, not “the sage on the stage” as a traditional authority figure.

### How can a good mentor go about doing this?

Adults learn when four factors are present:

- Adults learn when they feel respected.
- Adults learn when the new learning relates to their life experience.
- Adults learn when the new learning has some immediate usefulness to them.
- Adults learn when they are immersed in the learning process.

## **Step 1 is to set up the learning relationship by helping the mentee discover what needs to be learned.**

In this first step you and the mentee decide together what needs to be learned and how this will happen. You need clear goals and a defined task:

- You do this together in dialogue. The mentor doesn't hand the mentee a list of learning objectives, as from on high.
- You do this in a safe, sound relationship respecting confidentiality.
- You do this because it is essential to determine what needs to be learned and how.

While the mentee must set priorities for learning, thus becoming more self-directed, in the beginning the mentor nurtures and develops the mentee's capacity for self-direction. You help that process with questions or you can push the mentee to finish this statement: "At the end of this course, I hope to have learned..." or "I hope to have practiced..."

## **Step 2 is to get out of the way.**

Once the mentee has clear goals and a defined task, your task as mentor is simply to keep the learner on track without getting in the way. You may suggest ways to get the mentee actively engaged, but the learner is now in the driver's seat.

Mentors may feel that they need to jump in with answers as the mentee struggles to grasp something. But it is in the struggle that the mentee learns.

How can the mentor assist learning without short-circuiting the learning going on? We can practice this in three ways:

1. As a mentor, you can listen reflectively, holding up a mirror for the mentee with questions like "What did you mean by...?" Or you can provide feedback: "You did a great job with that. I like the way you..." or "I also thought that..." or "Next time you might try..."
2. As a mentor, you can ask open-ended questions to elicit reflection. These build confidence in the mentee. Here are four important open-ended questions you can ask. These questions move from description to analysis, to application in one's own life, then to resolution:
  - What do you think is happening here? (Description)
  - Why do you think it is happening? (Analysis)
  - When it happens in your life, what problems does it cause? (Application)
  - What do you think we can do about it? (Resolution)

3. A third way the mentor can help learning without short-circuiting it is by tolerating silence. Some people need time to think quietly, but sometimes silence signals boredom, confusion, or discomfort. You as mentor may want to say, “I notice that when we started talking about . . . , you get kind of quiet. I wonder what that’s about. . . .”

### **Step 3 works in tandem with step 2, but makes sure that the mentee is actually learning and not merely talking about learning.**

Good mentoring sets up action-with-reflection (a ping-pong game between ideas and actions). As kids we learned math by doing math problems and we learned from our mistakes. Action with reflection works in any kind of learning experience, from the simplest to the most complex.

- If your mentee is trying to learn a skill (like preaching or teaching), there is no substitute for doing precisely that in front of a live audience. But doing it without the follow-up reflection cuts in half its effectiveness for learning.
- If your mentee is trying to master cognitive material, you can create this action-reflection learning by setting up an incomplete story the mentee has to complete. Or you can come up with a case study or a hypothetical situation, then sit back and let the mentee wrestle with the issues involved.

## **Good mentoring in a nutshell**

The nuts-and-bolts of good mentoring involve dialogue, good two-way conversation in a safe environment of respect and confidentiality, leading to structured learning. Early in the process the mentor leads the mentee to identify what needs to be learned so that goals are clear and tasks are defined. Once that has happened, the mentor gets out of the mentee’s way. As needed, the mentor provides reflective listening (with appropriate questions or feedback), open-ended questions to elicit reflection, or investigation of the reasons for silence. Tandem with that, a good mentor guides the mentee into a ping-pong game between ideas and actions so that learning has relevance in ministry and in daily life.