

The Complete Package

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We all know that boys and girls are different, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Our interests may be similar sometimes, but ultimately we were created to be different from one another. So, knowing God created us differently, doesn't it make sense that our needs are not the same?

Ministering to children is a complete package deal. We want to win kids to Christ, help them build an unshakeable faith, and grow them into God fearing young men and women. As a minister, teacher, or leader, can you do all of this with every child that walks through your church doors? My guess is probably not.

In "Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions", George Barna writes, *"We can strive to give our youngsters all the advantages the world has to offer, and motivate them to make the most of available opportunities and resources; but unless their spiritual life is prioritized and nurtured, they will miss out on much of the meaning, purpose and joy of life."*

We have the priority down, but are we missing the nurturing? To nurture is to further the development of. This sounds like the work of a mentor. To mentor is to serve as a teacher or trusted counselor, imparting skills or knowledge to another. This relationship goes beyond the church walls and into the life of the one being mentored. We see this type of nurturing over-and-over in the Bible. Do you recall the relationships between Moses and Joshua, Ruth and Naomi, Elizabeth and Mary and Paul and Timothy? Isn't it interesting that the examples we see in the Bible are specifically male-male or female-female. When Joshua needed encouragement in his faith, it was Moses who charged him to "be strong" (Deut. 31:7-8). When Mary found herself pregnant and unwed, it was her female cousin Elizabeth who mentored her through this time (Luke 1:36-56).

In scripture, we each have been directed to mentor as stated in Titus 2.

"You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us". Titus 2:1-8

Gender specific mentoring is a vital part of raising up the next generation of God fearing leaders and disciples. It completes the package of ministering to children. The ministry needs of a boy are different than that of a girl. The foundation is the same, but complete spiritual growth is what sits on the foundation as well. We all have great tools to help children cope through life situations, but there are there are some issues a boy will face that a woman simply won't understand, or may be too

embarrassed to talk about. There are some issues a girl will face that a man simply won't get, or may be too embarrassed to talk about.

When we have life experience, we have gained credibility with the one whom we are mentoring. Does a woman know what it is like to be a young man trying to avoid the pitfalls of lust in a world of 'girls gone wild'? Can a man share what it's like to be a young woman trying to be modest in a culture bombarding her with images of pop stars in short skirts and skimpy tops?

Children not only need the salvation and sound teaching offered to them through a mixed gender church setting, but they also need the safety of a male-male or female-female mentoring relationship. Just as Joshua needed the encouragement and focus from Moses, and Mary needed the love and acceptance of Elizabeth, our children's spiritual well-being depends on whether we are willing to further their development by imparting skills and knowledge to them. If we cannot be their mentor, then we need to encourage and train our leaders to be mentors. Let us branch out and make sure the children in our church family are being mentored. It is our responsibility to build and keep the next generation of God fearing young men and women as our future leaders.