

LEGITIMATE YOUTH BUILDING: THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND MENTORS

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ABSTRACT

The Youth are the pillars of God's Church for the future. The world in which we live is exilic. Parents, Guardians and Leaders in the household of faith should occupy the position of Mentors. They should imbibe in the youth the soundness of doctrine and discipline as demonstrated by heroes of faith such as Joseph, Daniel and Esther. This article therefore addresses the issue the need for parents and mentors instils good moral among young people wherever they find themselves. In the article, there is an attempt to respond to some of the following questions. What role does parent have to play in the lives of the young people to enable them to stand firm in whatever situation they find themselves? What can church also do to argument the efforts of parents in imbibing Christian moral and behavior among young people? Are there lessons from the Old Testament young people's life that the contemporary young people can learn? Can mentoring serves as a motivation for them to live and act according to the bible presets? The article summarize the need for mentoring young people as building legitimate existence in our exilic world.

KEYWORDS: *Legitimate, Building, Mentoring, Youth, Parents, Church.*

INTRODUCTION

Exile remains a personal and a communal reality for many people. The experiences of exile and the convictions still demand critical and creative attentions. Exile, emigrants, refugees and expatriates uprooted from their lands must make do in their new surroundings. In the world today, there is a rift between a human being and a native place; between self and its true home; as well as between the Christian and his worldly surrounding.¹

In the Old Testament, the word 'exile' was employed when the nations of Israel were exiled away from home to the nation of Babylon for a period of Seventy (70) years. Jason Palletier (2020), describe Israel's exile as the template by which all other exile stories conform³. We will call Israel's exile a 'cultural exile' or a 'Literal exile'.² While it is true that the creativity and the sadness seen in what the exile do remains one of the experiences that has still to find its true chronicles in a contemporary world; It is also true that the Bible and its divine history contains heroic, romantic, and triumphant episodes in an exiles life.⁴

Because of the relevance of youth in every exilic surrounding, this article seeks to convey the heroic experiences of Old Testament characters, most especially young people whose lives proved triumphantly true to faith and duty.

Relevant in the world today, lies a wave of challenges and defining moments of armed conflicts, Political Crises, Natural Crises and much more. We should be seen to be clear in what we believe, for our beliefs define our mission and practice. It is therefore vital that we renew our commitment to following God's word... and to truly seek the converting and reviving presence of the Holy Spirit, asking him to do in and through us a work that only he can accomplish.⁵

This Article also seeks to encourage youth and parents towards effective and holistic Christian mentoring. Christian mentoring is a relationship that typically takes place within the context of God's word and the Holy Spirit's direction as the young believers seek the experience of the older believers to continually strengthen their wisdom and experiences.⁶

THE CHRISTIAN EXILE

We are exiles, because *"our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Phil 3:20).⁷ In Paul's letter to the Hebrews he said to them: *"here, we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come"* (Heb 13:14). Many passages of scripture have made it clear to us that this world is not our home, Paul admonished the Corinthians saying: *"... we are not afraid, but are quite content to die, for then, we will be at home with the Lord"* (2Cor. 5:8). Regarding our Life styles here as Christians, Paul admonishes us *"not to be conformed to this age"* (Rom 12:2).

Piper says: the fact that we are exiles on the earth (1 Pt 2:11) does not mean that we do not care what becomes of [our] Culture.⁸ Being Christian exiles [in the world] does not end our influence ... this was the way it was in the beginning – Antioch, Corinth, Athens, and Rome.⁹

WHO GOES TO EXILE?

A good way to understanding the cause or reasons that make one an exile is to take a close reflection on the Israel's Exile. Israel's Exile was an awful and traffic experience covering a series of sad events. Windsor (2017) described the Israel's exile as a series of events, when the Kingdom of Israel – God's Kingdom – was finished. Israel attacked and overrun by enemies. The temple, the place God dwelled with his people, was destroyed, sacked and burned. People were killed and deported. The land of God's promise was deserted¹⁰.

Reason(s)

While some may tie the Israel's exile to historical reasons, political motives, or even blame empires and migrations, the old testaments Prophets have the following reasons to supply:

According to Prophet Moses:

"It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord. The God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt and went and served other gods and worshipped them. gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them. Therefore the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, bringing upon it all the curses written in this book, and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and fury and great wrath, and cast them into another land as they are this day" (Deut 29: 25-28).

Clearly therefore, the reason for Israel's exile was sin. As a result, the lamentations that followed their experience was painful:

"The roads to Zion Mourn, for none come to the festival; all her gates are desolate; her priests groan: her virgins have been afflicted and she herself suffers bitterly. Her foes have become the head; her enemies prosper, because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away captives before the foe" (Lam 1:4-5).

FAMILY AND RELIGION

(A) DANIEL

FAMILY. According to the Bible, Daniel is also known as Cheliab, (2 Sam. 3:3) He was the second son of David with Abigail, Widow of Nabal the Carmelite, David's third wife (1 Chro. 3:1).¹¹ Daniel was by no doubts, from a royal family (Dan. 1:3).¹²

Though being the Second Son of David, Daniel was not a contender for the throne of Israel, even after the death of the first Son of David – *Amnon*, the third born *Absalom* and the fourth born *Adonijah*, the throne eventually passed to his younger half brother, *Solomon*.¹³

MORALS. Daniel and his associates had been trained by their parents to habits of strict temperance.¹⁴ They had been taught that God would hold them accountable for their Capabilities and that they must never dwarf or enfeeble their powers.

According to Anderson, Daniel was but a child at the time of the national revival led by King Josiah which he carried out for many years. When King Josiah fell on the field of battle in 608 B.C. and his body was brought home for burial, Daniel was already a youth of Fifteen years.¹⁵ The Tragedy left a deep impression on the adolescent mind of Daniel.¹⁶ Their sorrow was deep and lasting and Daniel was among the remnant of nation's youth who remained true among other young men of royal birth.¹⁷ This education was to Daniel and his Companions the means of their preservations amidst the demoralizing influences of the court of Babylon.¹⁸

Three years after the death of King Josiah was the unfortunate invasion of Judah: *"in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim King of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim King of Judah into his hands"* (Dan. 1:1-2).

The year was 605 B.C. and it was the first of three invasions of Judah by Chaldean Conqueror; Daniel and his companions – the only exiles mentioned by name – were among those taken to Babylon.¹⁹ The Second invasions occurred in 598 B.C. when a much larger group was deported; among them was a young Priest, Ezekiel who later wrote the book that bears his name.²⁰ The final invasion in 586 B.C. was the large group of exiles together with the remaining temple treasures were taken away to Babylon. Then the invading army destroyed Solomon's magnificent temple and the city of Jerusalem.²¹

(B) JOSEPH

Joseph in the Old Testament primary refers to the Patriarch, one of the sons of Israel. Joseph was the 11th of 12 sons, the first by Jacobs Favorite wife, Rachel.²² His name means *"may he [the Lord] add"*. That was a part of Rachel's prayer at his birth (Gen. 30:24). As the child of Jacob's old age and Rachel's Son, Joseph became the favorite and was given the famous *"coat of many Colours"* (Gen. 37:3 KJV; *"long robe with Sleeves"*, NRSV; *"richly ornamented robe"* NIV) by

his father. This and his dreams which showed his rule over his family inspired the envy of his brothers who sold Joseph to a caravan of Ishmaelite (Gen. 37).²³

MORALS. According to the Bible, ‘*Jacob Loved Joseph more than any of his other Sons ----*’ (Gen 37:3). Because he listened to his father’s instructions and loved to obey God.²⁴ One may wonder how Joseph developed a widely different character from the rest of his brothers.

White has this to say concerning the morals of Joseph,

“In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear God, often in his father’s tent, he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive; He had been told of the Lord’s promises to Joseph and how they had been fulfilled.... In addition, he had learned of the Love of God In providing for men a Redeemer; now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his Fathers would be his God..”²⁵

Joseph was raised in a very tense family atmosphere of jealousy and resentment.²⁶ At the age of Seventeen (17) Joseph tended flocks with his brothers and was the one who brought bad reports about them to their father Jacob (Gen. 37:2,12-14). Jacob instructed Joseph to identify the wrong doings of his brothers; therefore Joseph learned in his youth, to be virtuous, honest, and a man of integrity.²⁷ Joseph received direction and mentorship from Jacob easily. This was possible because his father was also his close confidant. He reported to him the evil that his brothers did on the field-either to other peoples farms which they ravaged with their cattle or the women they molested and such like (Gen. 37:1-4)²⁸ At the age of seventeen, Joseph began to have dreams.²⁹ The *dreams* showed his rule over his family while the “*Coat of many Colours*” illustrated a sign of nobility.

According to Swindoll, by giving Joseph this elaborate full-length coat, which was a sign of nobility in those days, his father [Jacob] was boldly implying “you can wear this beautiful garment because you don’t have to work like those brothers of yours.”³⁰

OUT OF HEBRON

Another special mentoring tool employed by Jacob upon Joseph was to send him out of Hebron “*so he sent him out of the valley of Hebron. And he went to Shechem....and there he was wondering in the field...*” (Gen.37:15).

Hebron was a beautiful valley surrounded by hills, a beautiful location both for comfort and security; Hebron meant a lot of things to Joseph. Hebron was where he had grown and lived for the first fifteen years of his Life.³¹ At Hebron, the graves of his Patriarchs were there. The ancient alters stood there. the alters of Abraham, Isaac and even Jacob which was foundational to his own spirituality and communion with the invisible God, were all that made Hebron significant to Joseph. Hebron was not just a place. It was “*a bosom*” of love for him.³² To be sent out of the valley of Hebron and to wonder about in the open fields under the scorching heat of the sun was a harsh beginning for Joseph.

(c) ESTHER

Esther was the daughter of Abihail and Cousin of Mordecai (Esther 2:15). Esther, was named *Hadassah* at birth (Esther 2: 7); she was born during the time when Israel was in captivity being a consequence to disobedience. Her uncle Mordecai raised her after the death of her parents who claimed the title of her father.³³ “*And he brought up Hadassah, That is Esther, his uncle’s*

daughter: for she had neither Father nor Mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful. Whom Mordecai when her Father and Mother were dead, took for his own daughter” (Esther 2:7).

MORAL. Mordecai was a pure Jew. His great grandfather was one of the original Jews who were deported to Babylon four generations before... *Mordecai* was descended from the family of *Kish*- a family that can be traced all the way back to Saul's father, *Kish*.

If Mordecai did adopt Esther, his cousin as his own daughter when her parents died, this shows both his keen sense of responsibility and his compassion.³⁴ Orphans are shown to be close to God's heart throughout Scripture and a good follower of God should be seen to show love and compassion to orphans especially relatives.³⁵ (Exo. 22:22-24; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 10:17-18; 68:5; 82:3). She was taught the love for her nation Israel, reason why when their lives were threatened, she declared fasting to cry unto the lord risk her life for the sake of her people, thus the statement “If I perish I perish.”

Reformation Era.

According to Earle Cairns, John Wesley kept a close relationship and link with members and organized his converts into groups. Subsequently, in 1742, the groups or societies were subdivided into classes of ten to twelve under a lay leader who had spiritual oversight of the class.³⁶ This was an idea of group mentorship during the reformation era. The reformation era also witnessed people like Martin Luther and John Calvin who wrote many letters to care for the spiritual needs of those under their charge.³⁷ Within a similar time, there was a counter-reformation, where it was observed, that there was a “deep spirituality within the Catholic Church.”³⁸ What makes this era unique was the enlightenment people possess at the time and were able to read and respond to what they acquire. He maintained that:

Ignatius of Loyola is probably the founder of the modern retreat movement, and his famous spiritual exercises are the basis for many today. During the same period, we also encounter Teresa of Avila, one of the first to map out the stages of growth in the spiritual life in her book.

Interior Castle. Her contemporary, John of the cross, developed through his mystical poetry an understanding of what is often called “the dark night of the soul”, that experience when God seems to have abandoned us but is, in fact, drawing us even closer to himself. His words have guided many since to find peace in the midst of darkness.³⁹

He asserts that the Puritan Preachers of the 17th c came to the scene in the seventeenth century; these preachers and pastors such as Richard Sibbes and Thomas Godwin were also concerned with spiritual growth.⁴⁰ Understanding Tony will suggest two things, mentoring and discipleship, though much emphasis is given on spiritual growth, which has to do with discipleship.

The Tony reports that:

John Bunyan wrote his famous book the *Pilgrim's Progress*, which so wonderfully describes the Christian journey. Richard Baxter wrote two influential books, *The Reformed Pastor* and *The Soul's Everlasting Rest*, both of which begin to describe the growth and care of the soul. In the 18th century, John Wesley introduced the class system to nurture those converted during the revival, which came to Britain during his ministry. The class system was essentially an exercise in-group spiritual direction, as it called individuals to meet together regularly, give an account of their growth in God, and seek greater personal holiness.⁴¹

The writings of John Bunyan, Richard Baxter and introduction of nurturing of the new converts by John Wesley were all geared towards helping and equipping the pilgrims, pastor and new converts to be established, rooted and become firm as the disciples of Jesus.

The Role of the Church in Mentoring: Mentoring in the Church has to do with accountability. Being accountable means that members of the Church care enough for one another to hold each other responsible for developing a relationship with God, growing in His likeness, and accomplishing his work in the world.⁴² To him, the objective of mentoring is to hold people accountable so that they may develop to their full potential.⁴³ In a related report Phil A. Newton lists churches who mentored as the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42), Antioch (Acts 11:22ff) (Acts 13: 1-4). He added that several local churches were identified, trained and sent workers to other communities beyond their own, giving a model for the future generation.⁴⁴ Apart from being accountable, he suggests that sometimes a laity with mentoring ability can be called to give a mentee straight talk about an improper attitude, about a wrong choice, about unresolved problems. This, therefore, is to inculcate the right attitudes among young people and to hold them accountable for their allegiance to God.

Mentoring and Discipleship

On how long discipleship has existed, Bill Hull argues that passing on wisdom to the young for the purpose of character formation has always been around. He affirms it meets the human need for friendship, guidance, and intimacy. He concluded, it is also crucial for accomplishing a task, achieving a long-term goal, and for spiritual people doing the will of God.⁴⁵

Addressing mentors or spiritual guides, Hull opines that through history, mentors or spiritual guides have helped temper people's tendency to be lazy, lose focus, or give into temptation; but on the other hand discipleship has provided the following human needs: relationship to nurture, apprenticeship for competence, accountability for tasks, submission for shaping, and wisdom for decision making.⁴⁶ While one may agree with his opinion, it should be noted that there can be no successful mentoring without relationship, accountability and wise decision making. So when you talk of mentoring you are invariably talking about discipleship. Despite his former statement, he acknowledges that mentoring is closer to the core meaning of discipleship because discipleship is about one person following another and becoming like that person.⁴⁷

Need for Spiritual Mentoring today

While on the need for mentoring, Kreider posited that there is an urgent need for spiritually mature men and women to mentor young Christians, helping them to clarify what really matters in life and work.⁴⁸ Commenting on the danger of lack of mentors he bluntly and confidently says, without the spiritual fathers and mothers to raise the next generation, we are in grave danger of dying out.⁴⁹ On the scarcity of mentors he laments, spiritual fatherlessness is a weakness in the Body of Christ today; a great vacuum has been created by the scarcity of godly fathering.⁵⁰ On the other hand, he described spiritual parents as spiritual fathers and mothers who can be called mentors, coaches, or disciplers; because they help, their daughters and sons negotiate the obstacles of their spiritual journeys.⁵¹

Kreider defines spiritual parents thus: "Spiritual father and mother who help a spiritual son or daughter reach his or her God-given potential."⁵² According to David Watson, discipleship means knowing Jesus, loving him, believing in him, and committed to him.⁵³ On the principle behind discipleship, he declares that it involves one person influencing another, which results in

a change of heart and mind.⁵⁴ Mentoring thus, does not only change the mind, it changes the vision, values, and morals. Then he advocates “ship” added to the end of a disciple means “the state of” or “contained in.” Therefore, discipleship means the state of being a disciple. To him, the term discipleship has a nice ongoing feel, a sense of journey, the idea of becoming a disciple rather than having being made a disciple.⁵⁵ The Greeks use the word “*mathetes*” which is being translated as a “disciple” and used as “leaner” or “one who is a diligent student.”⁵⁶ He opines that when a disciple finished his training, he was expected to reproduce what he had learned by finding and training his own apprentices.⁵⁷ The most important part of a disciple’s life was his life in Christ and in the community of Christ.⁵⁸ He ends that following Jesus is personal, which is why God designed discipleship as one person helping another person to follow Jesus.⁵⁹ Chap Clark, et al., in their book “*Youth ministry in the 21st century*” state that Deuteronomy 6 describes generational discipleship lived out through both the church and the home. They insist that without strong discipleship among the parents and kids, each generation drifts further from a Christ-centered life.⁶⁰ God’s intent in this passage creates an educational process for families to disciple each generation.⁶¹ This is a time in history that made Israel blossom and was in great prosperity and blessings as they transmit values from generation to generation.

FUNDAMENTAL CONVICTIONS OF YOUTH MENTORING

According to Collins and Palletier, a good mentor is a person who is credible and has a high level of integrity⁶² they practice mutual respect⁶³. A good mentor should be seen to be able to also assist in areas of personal growth and development.⁶⁴

The activities of wise and loving guidance, of mentoring, assumes four fundamental convictions.⁶⁵

(a) Creational Covenantal theism:

The God of Miraculous redemption and covenant faithfulness and love is the maker of heaven and earth. His works form and frame reality, and because all things owe their existence to his loving creation and sustenance.⁶⁶ Parents, Guardians and Christian Mentors should therefore be aware that we are all creatures of God living in the Universe (Bible Text).

The youth or mentee should be led to know that we are a creation that sings one song to the praise of its Maker and redeemer all of life is our Creator and Redeemer’s invitation to joyful delight, service and praise.⁶⁷

(b) Instruction and Direction in a Loving Relationship:

Parents, Guardians and Christian Mentors should be those who can call out to say: “*Listen my son, to your fathers Instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching*” (Prov. 1:8). The instruction and direction are offered and received in the context of a loving relationship.⁶⁸ In Proverbs, the Bible contains a rich supply of scriptures of loving relationship through which instructions can flow from parents to their children, from guardians to their wards, and from Christian Mentors to their Mentees. Proverbs says:

“My Son, if Sinful men entice you, do not give in to them; if they say come along with us, lets lie in wait for innocent blood, lets ambush some harmless souls My son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their path” (Prov.1:10-15). *“My Son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commandments in your heart” ... My Son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do*

not resent his rebuke; because the Lord discipline those he loves as a father the Son he delights in".(Prov. 3:1-12).

The Bible Scripture also personifies wisdom as a *woman*, as *mothers*, and as *fathers*, to instruct their children and to guide them. "*Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold*" (Prov. 3:-14) "*Long Life is in her right hand; and her left hand are riches and honour*" (Prov. 3:16). "*She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, those who hold her fast will be blessed*" (Prov. 3:18). This field and setting for mentoring makes compassion, Sympathy, loving care, and hospitality critical virtues and factors in [Christian] mentoring.⁶⁹

(c) "Fear" of the LORD: Critical qualification for mentors

A Major critical Virtue and Major qualification for Christian mentors is the "Fear" of the LORD. There can be no legitimate character building among youth if their parent, guardian or mentors fall short of the critical virtue. For Proverbs, *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...*(Prov 9:10) "*Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God*" (Prov 2:5) "*To fear the LORD is to hate evil, to hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech*" (Prov 8:13) "*Do not be wise in their own eyes, fear the LORD and shun Evil*" (Prov 3:7).

Thomas T. wrote:

The fear of the LORD produce a new way of looking at all of life, for it sees each moment as the Lord's time, each relationship as an opportunity to express the Lord's Justice and Love, each duty as the Lord's Command, and each blessing as the Lord's gift; and each dimension of creation as a potential place of the Lord's Calling. Because the fear of the lord give rise to the desire to please the Lord in all things, it leads the God-fearer to attentive and dependent obedience to all that the lord has commanded. So the Law of the Lord is a delight to those who fear him, to truly wise mentors first, and then to their Students and followers and friends⁷⁰.

(d) Wisdom: As a gift, As a Discipline.

Wisdom is both a gift from the Lord and the result of discipline seeking. The Biblical understanding of wisdom is distinctive, for wisdom is not only the fruit of discipline seeking; it is preeminently a gift from the Lord.⁷¹ Above all, we must not forget the role of the Holy Spirit in any Christian mentoring relationship. Jesus said: "*...when he, the Spirit of truth is comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come*" (John 16:13)

CONCLUSION

The Youth are the pillars of God's Church for the future. The world in which they live is exilic. Parents, Guardians and Leaders in the household of faith should occupy the position of Christian Mentors. They should imbibe in the youth the soundness of doctrine and discipline as demonstrated by heroes of faith such as Joseph, Daniel and Esther.

All who will assume the position of Youth Leaders or Christian Mentors should be seen to know what the scripture teaches. The Bible says: "as Iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). Therefore, Christian mentoring sharpens the faith of the mentee as well as strengthen the faith capacity of the mentor.⁷² A basic element of Christian mentoring is about

helping people to become more and more like another person, and that person is Christian⁷³
Christ our LORD, eternally remains the embodiment of a holistic and legitimate existence.

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