



Mentors for your ABF –December 08

Are you an ABF Leader for a 40 and under life stage? Do you sometimes feel insufficient to help your peers in your ABF with major life issues impacting marriage, parenting, work, etc.? If so, you are not alone. I was in this position and I would like to share with you a possible solution that God brought to our ABF and I know he could do the same for yours. It's called **Mentors!**

My name is Treg Gilstorf and I am the ABF Leader for a Life stage ABF called Family Matters at Hope Church in Mason, OH. We average about 35 people on a Sunday and we are made up of parents of young children ages 1 to 12. If you are in this life stage or beyond you know this can be a tough stage of life. Most couples have multiple young children to manage, life is busy and hectic, and this is the time most marriages breakdown.

Some people may be blessed with wise Christian parents who assist them during this stressful phase of life, but for those who don't, where can they turn? For many issues they would normally turn to their church family (their ABF), but these are difficult issues and times for all the ABF members in this life stage, so wise counsel may not be as easy to find. This is where having Godly Mentors associated with your ABF can help. In the following I will provide answers to the three most common questions I am asked when I talk to ABF leaders about mentoring and they are "top of mind" as I just spoke on this topic at the ABF Conference a few weeks ago with ABF Leaders from around the nation.

What are the characteristics you should look for in mentors?

The answer to this question can vary depending on the life stage and make-up of your ABF, but I will use my life stage as an example and you can customize to satisfy the needs of your ABF. First, you want to find a couple that has already made it through your current life stage. In our case, we looked for a couple where their children are adults. Second, look for a spiritually mature couple in your church. This could be someone on the elder board or a pastor in the church who has a heart for mentoring. Third, look for a couple that is outgoing, enjoys children since this is a big part of your life stage (spiritual grandparents), and has good interpersonal skills. The teaching gift is a bonus as the Mentors can be a part of your teaching rotation and based on their relationship with the ABF can teach on topics where they know there is a need.

Now don't get frustrated if you can't find a couple that you would give an "A" rating in all these areas. You aren't looking for perfect people because if you are you will never find them in this world of sinners, but you want this relationship to be a good fit on both sides. I would recommend establishing a pilot period for your mentors. Commit to a 6-month or one-year trial period and at the end meet to discuss if this is a good fit for both parties. Also, don't forget to pray for God's guidance on this search. You will be amazed at how God will help you fulfill this need. I feel truly blessed for the mentors in our community and God brought us the perfect couple for our group.

How do you recruit Mentors for your Community?

First, pray about it. If you believe the Lord is leading you to a particular person(s), then begin by asking a potential mentor(s) to teach in your ABF or to be facilitators for a retreat for your ABF on marriage, parenting, spiritual growth, etc. Invite the potential mentors to a social activity with your community. From there you can evaluate the connection with your ABF members and the mentor(s) connection with your ABF. If you sense God's leading, invite the mentor(s) over for dinner to discuss the possibility of mentoring. Remember that the concept of mentoring is something that you may have been considering for some time, but this may be a new idea for your prospects, so just ask them to prayerfully consider the idea. Make sure they know you aren't looking for a commitment at this point only if there is interest.

How do you facilitate the relationships between your ABF members and your mentors, so that people feel comfortable going to the mentors when issues arise?

Let me begin by saying, "Be patient", it takes time for your new mentors to develop a level of relationship with your ABF members for the ABF members to feel comfortable going to them with major life issues. Here are some ideas to help facilitate the relationship development process.

- Announce to the ABF the mentors role within the ABF
- Ask your mentors to give their testimony on a Sunday and share their heart for the ABF and mentoring
- Have your mentors teach a series on marriage, parenting, etc. where they can share the value of their experience
- Invite your mentors to your social activities
- Include your mentors on your leadership team
- Ask your mentors to rotate through the small groups in your ABF and/or the prayer groups
- Have a social where two or three couples meet for dinner with the mentors

Don't forget to be patient! Relationships take time.