

“Young women are desperate for mentors to guide them in thriving mentoring relationships that help heal their brokenness. *Organic Mentoring* sheds light on why traditional methods flounder and offers fresh, insightful, and useful suggestions to meet the challenges of mentoring next generation women. This book shows us how to pass on our faith while moving from print to technology in relationships and life.”

—**Elisa Morgan**, speaker, author, *The Beauty of Broken*, publisher, *FullFill*, and president emerita of MOPS International

“When I’ve asked Christian women what they feel they need most of all to thrive as a Christian and survive as a leader, one of the most common answers is ‘a mentor.’ Without mentors, women constantly have to recreate the wheel because they don’t have the benefit of hearing the wise counsel of one who has tread their path before. The trouble is that the generational differences between older and younger women are vast and they prohibit these types of relationships from developing. In their book, *Organic Mentoring*, Sue Edwards and Barbara Neumann address these differences and build a bridge across that generational divide. If you’re an older woman who has longed to impart the wisdom you’ve gleaned from the years but weren’t sure how to go about it, get this book! Sue and Barbara have provided a guide that will help you navigate the mentoring relationship with aplomb.”

—**Halee Gray Scott**, author of *Dare Mighty Things: Mapping the Challenges of Leadership for Christian Women*

“I love this book! I will definitely incorporate it into several contexts, including my seminary classroom teaching as well as personal relationships. Generational differences have clearly stalled the mentoring advantage. *Organic Mentoring* gets us moving again in a world that desperately needs the benefit of intergenerational mentoring. The text provides valuable understanding, plus practical tips and tools offered to leaders, mentors, and mentees. This useful resource will inevitably stimulate healthy, organic relationships with next generation women!”

—**Bev Hislop**, Professor of Pastoral Care, Western Seminary, and author of *Shepherding a Woman’s Heart* and *Shepherding Women in Pain*

“I am a product of mentoring. It changed my life, my family, and my future. The spiritual investment other women made in my life changed the course of history. In God’s Word there are only a few times where the Lord asks women to do a specific thing for him and mentoring is one of them. He doesn’t say how exactly, but the command is clear, not optional. Thankfully, Sue Edwards and Barbara Neumann tell us how, and outline some specifics for successfully mentoring the next generation. They provide a new “mentoring mind-set” with a fresh approach that feels natural and meaningful, and results in something supernatural. Speaking truth into the life of a younger woman doesn’t require a program, it requires authenticity, connection, and understanding the needs of the younger woman. *Organic Mentoring* is the resource every woman needs to accomplish the assignment the Lord has given us. As a former director of women’s ministry for twenty years, I have seen and experienced the struggles with trying to make a mentoring ministry work, and I am so excited about this resource that explains, instructs, and encourages organic mentoring.”

—**Debbie Stuart**, Church and Leadership Development Director for Women of Faith, and former director of women’s ministry at Prestonwood Baptist Church

“*Organic Mentoring* offers crucial insights toward the relational work of the Great Commission in our current generations—mentoring, discipling, teaching, and training. By thoughtfully and practically describing both the disconnects and the common desires between modern and postmodern generations, this book gives us needed clarity to restore vital guiding relationships in this age of technology. The authors ignite our hope to recapture the vanishing blessing of the transforming relationships that help us connect life and truth!”

—**Wendy Wilson**, Consultant for Ministry Development of Women,
Missio Nexus —Professional Services Group

“Sue Edwards and Barbara Neumann have given evangelical women an extraordinary gift in their new book, *Organic Mentoring*. With accurate data, keen cultural insights, and a solid biblical foundation, they give us a fresh understanding of how to effectively mentor the next generation. The section on training will help sharpen leaders’ skills and rekindle their vision for developing meaningful relationships among women. Timely and practical, this book will encourage you to take mentoring to the next level and beyond!”

—**Susie Hawkins**, Bible teacher and author of *From One Ministry Wife to Another*

“We live in a world of Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, where the goal of a conversation is to pass along information in as little time, with as little small talk, as possible. Yet the heart cry is still the same—*walk with me through this complicated journey called life*. Sue and Barbara unwrap and untangle the differing aspects of our generations, help us to understand and respect each other, and thus awaken a desire to pass truth along to the next generation. But they don’t stop with understanding and respect, *Organic Mentoring* sets forth the how-to and the why—the practical tools needed to embark on, and enjoy, this journey with one another. *Organic Mentoring* will take a prominent place on my bookshelf and in my ministry as I, and others, strive to transform lives and grow his kingdom.”

—**Cynthia Fantasia**, Pastor, Service and Women, Grace Chapel

“As a ministry leader, I will be recommending this well-written and engaging book frequently. In fact, I’m just going to keep it in stock. Questions about mentoring come up all the time. And every woman who desires to be in a mentoring relationship needs to read this book! It is long overdue. Sue and Barbara have expressed what my heart knew to be true about mentoring. You see, I am a postmodern woman and a casualty of formal mentoring programs. But I’m not ready to give up on mentoring; it’s biblical, it’s necessary, and women desire it. This book is the tool I have been looking for. It corrects mistaken thinking and encourages modern women to move toward a way of mentorship that postmodern women long for. I can’t wait to get this into the hands of my leadership team!”

—**Jodie Niznik**, Pastor to Women, Irving Bible Church

Organic MENTORING

A MENTOR'S GUIDE TO RELATIONSHIPS
WITH NEXT GENERATION WOMEN

SUE EDWARDS & BARBARA NEUMANN



Organic Mentoring: A Mentor's Guide to Relationships with Next Generation Women

© 2014 by Sue Edwards and Barbara Neumann

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To our mentors:

*You poured into two lonely, misguided young women
with little to offer, and God used you to completely change
the direction of our lives.*

To our mentees:

*You gave us opportunity to pass on the beautiful gifts
we received from others and to redeem our broken lives
for the glory of God.*

Pass it on, dear ones, pass it on!

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In normal life we hardly realize how much more we receive than we give, and life cannot be rich without such gratitude. It is so easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements compared with what we owe to the help of others.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
Letters and Papers from Prison

We owe a debt of gratitude to an army of fellow professors and students, authors and leaders, family and friends, who supported us in our quest to better understand mentoring today and to write a resource that we believe will strengthen mentoring relationships. We live in unsettling times of extreme transition. Our seminary students sometimes ask, “How should ministry change in response to the tsunami of transitions evident today? What does God want us to do?” This book was written in response to those kinds of questions and with gratitude for many insightful conversations with young students that influenced this work. Our fervent hope is that *Organic Mentoring* will help mentors navigate the mentoring crisis we are experiencing today and, as a result, multitudes of older and younger women will find relational havens that help them both gain their bearings and stand strong in shifting times.

Thanks is due to particular people who aided us with this project. First, to Sheryl Lackey, Sue’s seminary intern, who secured the next generation responses found at the end of each chapter. They add depth and credibility to our ideas. She also sat through long hours of editing sessions, read-throughs, laughter, and nibbling, contributing valuable insights reflecting her understanding and heart for younger women. The book is better for your input. Thanks, Sheryl.

Thanks to the group of outstanding young women who prompted Barbara’s research. Over the years we gathered in various living rooms to explore thoughts, questions, struggles, and insights into godly living amidst the

challenges of the twenty-first century. Lisa, Shanna, Kathryn, Sarah, Jocelyn, Carol, Holly, Carrie, Kelly, Susan, Kim, Missy, Liz, and Meagan—your preferences, disappointments, and dreams permeate these pages.

And thanks to our beautiful daughters, Heather Edwards Crook, Rachel Edwards Boone, Jessica Neumann Joslin, Kristin Sanderson Neumann, and Juliet Neumann Purvis, who show us daily just how interesting, gifted, and precious young women are. You mentored us in the art of mentoring.

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We also appreciate the great team at Kregel Publications. We've worked together for over a decade, and you've exhibited constant integrity, professionalism, expertise, and Christlike character. No wonder you've been around since 1949! Thanks for the partnership and opportunity to influence people through top quality resources.

Finally, all praise and thanksgiving to God Almighty in the Persons of the Glorious Father, Gracious Son, and Powerful Holy Spirit. May whatever good comes out of the labor of love on these pages go to your honor and glory. Amen.

Part I

Why Something New?

PROLOGUE



Barbara's Story

I vividly remember a time when I desperately needed someone to show the way. I was driving through the Texas panhandle headed north to Colorado. It was night and a wintry storm was visible on weather radar, but it appeared light and I wasn't too concerned. This would be a good time to mention that I am a south Texas girl who knows nothing about winter storms on radar, hence the foolish decision to keep going.

Once I was well into the middle of nowhere, the light snow turned into a nasty blizzard. Ice caked on my windshield wipers, rendering them useless. The fierce north Texas wind blew snow across the highway, and eventually the road disappeared. I began to panic as I realized I couldn't continue forward or turn back, and the darkness revealed no headlights in either direction for many miles. I was alone.

My trusty companion, my cell phone, showed no bars. I prayed out loud. Prayer accelerated to fearful pleading as I inched along an imaginary highway. I will never forget the overwhelming relief that washed over me when I made out two red taillights ahead. I was not alone on this road after all! I caught up to an eighteen-wheeler expertly navigating the treacherous highway in front of me. God mercifully gave me an experienced driver to follow to the next sign of civilization where I pulled off the highway and waited out the storm in an eight-room motel. I have blessed eighteen-wheeler drivers ever since.

I can look back to my days as a young woman and see times that a mentor could have made a huge difference in my life. I was raised in a non-Christian, alcoholic home, and was traveling alone on an invisible highway. Although I came to faith in Jesus at age twenty-two, I was still

confused about life and had no one to guide me to solid ground. I yearned to be a strong woman of God, but questions outweighed answers. Who is God? What does He require? How should I think or act in this situation? Available Bible teaching, though sound and insightful, came forth from male voices and perspectives. How do I live my life as a woman devoted to Christ? Many young women continue to ask these questions and seek an experienced guide to show the way. Mentoring is a primary way God provides direction for the young women He deeply loves.

Sue's Story

Like Barbara, I was raised in a non-Christian home, deeply wounded by a dysfunctional mother, scarred, and on the road to disaster, when Jesus rescued me at age twenty-four. I too remember the red taillights ahead that led me to new life in Christ. A neighbor invited me to a women's Bible study and for the next fifteen years, God used women there to heal me. Was it mentoring, re-mothering, coaching, lay counseling, encouraging, advising, or training? Whatever you call it, these terms picture nuances of a powerful relationship between two women as they influence one another to wholeheartedly seek God and fully grow up in Him.

C. S. Lewis captured the essence of this relationship from the older person's perspective when he said, "Think of me as a fellow patient in the same hospital, who having been admitted a little earlier, could give some advice."¹ Those women surrounded me with their love. We did life together, and, yes, they gave me great advice. God used their influence to heal my heart and mind, to nurture a dynamic relationship with Almighty God, to resurrect a broken marriage, to transform my mothering, and to train me with skills that help me today as I teach and mentor, along with Barbara, in a major seminary and in our local churches.

Ditch Worn-Out Mentoring Models

We are experiencing a mentoring crisis today. One key reason is that too many of us older women cling to an outdated formulaic idea of what

1 C. S. Lewis, "Letter to Sheldon Vanauken of 22nd April 1953," in *A Severe Mercy*, Sheldon Vanauken (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1977), 134.

mentoring is all about. When we hear the word *mentoring*, we conjure up a picture that fits our experience as young women. Then we look in the mirror and don't see an adequate mentor staring back at us. Our preconceived ideas about what today's young women want in a mentor convince us we are not enough—but we are wrong. What we don't realize is that younger women today are far more likely to want a relationship with the woman in the mirror than the conjured-up perfect mentor in our heads.

Or we think about our busy lives and determine that we just don't have the time to invest in younger women's lives. That's because we envision a tight, often weekly commitment level, and we cringe. What we don't realize is that younger women cringe too. Most don't want, nor will they allocate, that many hours out of their busy lives either.

Or we assume that we must step into the role of Bible-answer-woman. We think that we will need to prepare lessons from a formal Bible curriculum and teach our charges essentials of the faith—like how to share their testimony or how to memorize Scripture. We don't realize that most young women today are not looking for a Bible-answer-woman. Instead, they want an honest woman with whom they can process life.

Our excuses for not mentoring are based on preconceptions that just aren't true anymore. Young women don't want what older women think they want. And the excuses that flood our minds when we hesitate to take on a mentoring relationship aren't valid today. Sadly, our ideas about mentoring keep us from stepping into young women's lives, leaving too many young women alone on those invisible highways.

Our Flagship Text

We find the answer to our mentoring crisis in God's Word. After leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land, Moses wrote,

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:5–7)

Moses first wrote these words for parents to help them pass on their faith to their children, but they apply equally well to us as mentors mandated to guide our spiritual children on those invisible highways. Moses instructs us to “impress” (*Shanan*) our love for God on our mentees, but to do so in a natural kind of way. The Hebrew word for impress means to whet their appetites for God, to sharpen them spiritually. He tells us to mentor *when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up*. These verses ooze a casual, natural informality.

Moses asked parents to speak of their love for God in those natural everyday moments of life, sitting together at home, walking from place to place, to take advantage of teachable times when questions naturally arise. We adapt this concept to mentoring when our relationships take on an informal feel, simply doing life together. We call this new approach to mentoring *organic*, and we’ll unpack the term and how it applies to mentoring throughout the book. What a surprise to find our answer to the mentoring crisis in ancient biblical wisdom.

Generational Slander

If you write a book, interested friends often ask what it’s about and how your work is progressing. My (Sue) home group was enjoying dinner one night, and as we sat around the table, one of the men initiated a conversation about our book by asking those kinds of questions. Talking about your book is a bit like talking about your grandchildren; you welcome their interest and enjoy answering. Soon we were talking about young people, and unfortunately the conversation deteriorated into an exuberant game of “ain’t it awful.”

More has changed in the last fifty years than in the last five hundred years, resulting in a tsunami of required adjustments, particularly by older generations. The Judeo-Christian ethic that permeated the ethos of the Western world has dried up, and the resulting demise of moral standards and the escalation of bad behavior sends many older folks reeling. Christians in my home group work hard to remain positive in the midst of what many perceive as political and economic chaos, but seething attitudes often simmer just beneath the surface.

Our discussion that evening about helping young people triggered explosive comments from several of my dear friends. Comments like “Why should we

have to adjust to them? They are the ones causing the problems,” and “It’s at times like this that I just figure God will save the people He wants to save.” A subtle way of saying “Let’s just let them go to hell.” Raw words spew out of the mouths of mature Christians who know the Bible and love the Lord but are incredibly frustrated with the corruption and collapse of what they hold dear.

Disheartened and perplexed, many of our peers blame young people, understandable but counterproductive. We struggle too, but venting, criticizing, and generational slander won’t honor the name of Christ, bring glory to God, or help us connect with younger generations.

A New Approach Deserves a New Label

Here it is. We propose no label at all. The word *mentoring* conjures up so many stereotypes and hang-ups that we prefer to stop using it or any formal word for the relationship. That’s a more organic approach and may help us older women rid ourselves of expectations that tend to discourage us from “mentoring” anyway.

We enjoy sweet relationships with a number of women in our seminary and in our churches, but they seldom begin with a formal invitation like “Will you be my mentor?” It just happens, and later that woman will introduce us to someone as her “mentor,” which is fine, but we are always a bit jarred by the term. The old tapes in our heads cause us to frown and ask, “Am I doing all I should be doing as her mentor?” And we have to stop and rethink what it means to be those taillights on that invisible road. We have to remember that our traditional mentoring picture is not her mentoring picture. Then we can breathe again and our relationship continues in a natural way that actually works better for us all.

We’ll use the terms *organic mentoring*, *mentor*, and *mentee* in this book because we need to call it something. But we encourage you to move away from formal terms as a first step in adopting a new mentoring mind-set, and we’ll give you plenty of reasons why in the pages ahead.

Why We Wrote This Book

Our passion is to help you understand, feed, and grow other women in the Lord, in light of the massive shift in the perspectives and attitudes of younger women today. As we said, the ways we were mentored simply

do not work with this new female breed. From our own experiences, from concerns peers have voiced, and from what younger women are saying, we felt God leading us to write this resource. We hope that God will use it to help well-meaning older women tweak approaches that unnecessarily sabotage their mentoring efforts.

Older women like us are sensing the change and asking how to address it. In response to this question, Barbara did her doctoral research, under Sue's supervision, on this topic, and this book is the result. As part of her mentoring research, Barbara conducted confidential interviews with young women to discover what they *really* thought about their mentoring experiences. The young women she interviewed told her about what worked, what turned them off, and why many of them desperately want mentors but end up walking away from relationships frustrated. Barbara's findings enlightened and surprised us both. The results promise to revolutionize mentoring relationships, styles, training, and outcomes. It's time to bid farewell to outdated methods and to implement new ones. We wrote this book to share what we learned, hoping to reform the way women mentor today.

In Part One, we'll explore foundational issues that explain *why* beloved but outdated mentoring methods are no longer effective. We will look at the cultural changes and fast-paced digital advancements that shape young thought and behavior but weaken the link between generations. We'll explore the new values, preferences, ideas, and problems of the next generation and how these issues impact mentoring. We'll also examine characteristics of typical older women and ways we, the older women, might unknowingly foster a disconnect that cripples what could be a life-changing experience for us both.

In Part Two, we'll get specific. You'll hear firsthand the hearts of young women pining for an older woman's nurture and guidance, but also what *they say* ruins the relationship. In response, we'll show you land mines to avoid and approaches that work today. And, at the end, we'll supply you with resources to pass on to others. Our goal is nothing less than to revolutionize the mentoring world for women, to the glory of God. It's time.

CHAPTER I



A New Problem: Outdated Methods

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Mentoring is such a need in my life. My greatest example for Christian living was my mother. But her world is not my world.

Amanda, age 32

DIFFERENT MENTORING EXPERIENCES

Through the Mentor's Eyes

Sharon scooted between cars, hurrying through the stifling parking lot to make the meeting on time. Although it was only August, she already felt the pressure of a busy fall schedule. She was unsure how becoming a mentor would fit, but involvement in the life of a younger woman interested her. At least she was willing to attend the training meeting and see what it was all about.

Refreshed by the cool air in the room, Sharon greeted friends and found a chair. Looking around at other women, she felt a wave of nervousness rush over her. *Am I even qualified to mentor?* During the next hour, she learned the requirements of the mentoring program, looked over the recommended mentoring resources, filled out a personal profile, and signed up to bring a dessert for the kickoff event. Still the question nagged: *Do I really have*

enough wisdom to do this? Probably not, she thought, but her love for God and young women encouraged her to press on.

Two weeks later at the kickoff event, an eager greeter handed Sharon a bright green crayon and instructed her to find the young woman with the same color crayon as hers—“‘Caribbean Green.’ Isn’t it peppy?” Sharon returned the beaming smile, grateful for a game to help her find her mentee. The energy-filled room lifted her spirits. This was fun! She leisurely worked the room, smiling and displaying her crayon as she went. Having found their color match, many women were already getting acquainted.

“Excuse me. I think you are my mentor.” Turning toward the voice, Sharon discovered a young brunette holding another Caribbean Green crayon. After an enthusiastic hug, Sharon suggested she and Ashley visit the refreshment table and then find a place to sit down and get acquainted. Between bites of brownies and lemon bars, the women discovered they were both married to engineers, had children, were raised in the same denomination, loved to read, and had outgoing personalities. *We have so much in common*, thought Sharon. Next they visited the resource table to select a book to study together and agreed upon a time and place to meet the next week. As Sharon waved good-bye, her heart swelled with joy. She had stepped outside her comfort zone when she agreed to be a mentor, but now she was thankful. It would be rewarding to teach Ashley the things she wished she had known as a young woman.

The next week Sharon devoured the book they had picked out to study. She made notes for discussion and identified two additional Bible verses to examine. She was keenly aware of her responsibility to steer Ashley in the right direction. With her china coffee cups ready on the table, she glanced around the room one more time to verify that everything was in order for this first meeting. Ashley arrived at the appointed hour, and the women chatted for a few minutes about their week. Then Sharon prayed and they discussed the first chapter. Sharon was encouraged by Ashley’s responses to the questions, observing that several important insights surfaced. They closed their time together by sharing prayer requests and scheduled a second meeting the following week. Sharon liked Ashley. She was confident they would become friends and enjoy spending time together. Over the next few days she thought about several additional topics they should study together. She enjoyed being a mentor.

Ashley canceled the next meeting. Sharon called to stay in touch but only talked to Ashley's voicemail. Four weeks later they met again, and Sharon began to wonder about Ashley's ability to keep a commitment. Sharon felt that the mentoring process would not work unless they met regularly. After meeting sporadically over the next three months, Ashley informed Sharon that her schedule was too full to continue. Perplexed and disappointed, Sharon wondered what went wrong. She knew she had done her best to offer Ashley biblical wisdom. She assured herself it wasn't personal, but feelings of failure lingered. Maybe it would go better the next mentoring term.

Through the Mentee's Eyes

"Have you thought about a mentor?" Ashley's friend inquired as she buckled her son into his car seat. "Hmm...I think I would like that. I would love to have input from an older woman who has been down this road and learn how her faith helped her handle the challenges." Ashley gave up her position as a successful corporate attorney to support her husband's lucrative job promotion, which required a move. The changes brought unexpected demands and problems to her new suburban doorstep. Should she join a firm here and continue her climb up the corporate ladder? Or should she join the ranks of stay-at-home moms? Now that both children were in elementary school, her guilt over working subsided, but she longed to explore the ramifications of these critical decisions with a woman who had been there. Ashley considered her friend's suggestion.

Ashley navigated the hallway maze looking for the sign-up coffee for prospective mentees. "Welcome!" smiled a friendly gray-haired woman. "Can I make you a name tag?" Ashley sipped coffee and balanced a pumpkin spice muffin on her knee while jotting answers on a personal profile. Another enthusiastic older woman gathered the young mentees to explain how the mentoring program would work. Then each young woman was asked to sign a covenant promising to meet regularly with her mentor over the next year, speak with and pray for her weekly, and attend a celebration tea with her when the mentoring term came to a close. Ashley hesitated. This level of commitment felt overwhelming. She already struggled to keep up with the demands of her busy life now. She doubted this was realistic. And what was a "celebration tea," and why was it necessary? She felt uncomfortable

but signed the covenant because it was required to be paired with a mentor. She would meet her mentor the following week at the kickoff event.

In the intervening week Ashley had second thoughts. The process impressed her as overorganized. She was nervous about the mentor who would be selected for her. She thought about the older women she knew; some she admired, and some she didn't. For Ashley, age and Bible knowledge did not necessarily qualify a woman to be a mentor. She preferred to meet with a woman she knew, but since she was new to the area, this program seemed the only option.

When Ashley was handed the Caribbean Green crayon, she tried not to wince. Games like this reminded her of middle school. She felt awkward as she looked around the room. This might not work. She wondered if these women could understand her or the challenges she faced. Fortunately she quickly spotted the other Caribbean Green crayon, and the game mercifully ended when she introduced herself to Sharon.

At their first meeting, Ashley arrived with an incomplete lesson, but found Sharon pleasant and eager to help anyway. Sharon guided the discussion and supplied the information Ashley missed. Ashley left without mentioning the inner turmoil brought on by her recent move; it didn't seem to fit the discussion. She was now unsure Sharon was the right person to help her. During the discussion on the book, Ashley did manage to pick up the fact that Sharon lived in the same town her whole life. Could Sharon relate to her struggles with relocation? Would Sharon understand her career dilemma?

Ashley's busy schedule kept her from meeting with Sharon the next three weeks. With the insistent demands of her two children, development of a part-time legal practice, and volunteer work at the women's shelter, there was little time. With a pang of guilt, she put off meeting for another week so she could complete the lesson in the book. Sharon called, but Ashley never found time to return phone calls. The next several meetings were similar to the first. If Ashley had a question, Sharon would point to a Bible verse and tell her the right way to respond. Sharon did not seem to struggle like she did. Ashley was disappointed that after several meetings she still didn't know much about Sharon or her journey of faith.

After three months Ashley lost interest. The book was good, but she could find much of the same information on the Internet or podcasts. She liked

Sharon, but with all she had going on, meeting with her was not worth the time required. She told Sharon she appreciated her help but schedule demands would prevent additional meetings. Ashley realized they would feel awkward if they met at church. Both were embarrassed the relationship did not work out. Ashley would not try this again. She wondered if she could just find an older woman who would meet her at Starbucks and help her process life.

CULTURE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

A Sobering Statistic

Unfortunately, today many mentoring partnerships experience similar outcomes. Barbara's recent research revealed that up to 80 percent of young women abandon traditional mentoring programs in the first six months of participation.¹ What has changed? In the past, traditional mentoring methods served young women well. Multiple women mentored us, and those relationships had profound impacts on our spiritual and ministry lives. Also, we can point to other women in our generation whose lives were changed through traditional mentoring relationships. We hear their stories over and over at celebration teas. So why do fewer young women sign up for these programs now? Why don't they come forward to be mentored?

"I don't know what's wrong with young women today," remarked Donna, a longtime mentor. "They just aren't interested in being mentored anymore." Indeed, the lack of interest in traditional mentoring programs might lead one to conclude that young women have lost interest in being mentored. On the contrary, most young people today *hunger* for mentoring. Leadership consultant Michael Hyatt remarks, "If there's one thing I have learned, it's that young men and women are *desperate* for mentors who will build into their lives." Never has a generation been more open to mentoring and never has the need for mentors been greater than it is now. One twenty-five-year-old recently confessed, "I desperately want mentors. I stalk older women to mentor me. My friends and I are all dry sponges in

1 Barbara Ann Neumann, "An Examination of Mentoring Programs for Serving the Needs of the Postmodern Christian Woman" (D.Min. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2011), 86.

need of encouragement, help, love, and listening ears.” While the younger generation wistfully longs for mentors, perplexed older women pray the next recruiting campaign will bring them in.

A Disconnect

“My church has a mentoring program, but I wouldn’t touch it with a ten-foot pole.”

Alisa, age 34

The Christian community has long valued mentoring as a means to pass the faith from one generation to the next. Christian women in particular seek to carry out the mandate of Titus 2:2–3 and mentor in order to teach and train younger women in their midst. Faithful women take this responsibility seriously and labor diligently to make it happen. If young women search for mentors and older women stand ready, what is the disconnect?

The disconnect is largely cultural. Those born after about 1965, including most of the women who seek mentors, grew up in a culture remarkably different from their parents’ culture. During this time major advancements in technology changed the ways people experienced virtually every aspect of life. As a result they see, understand, and engage the world differently than previous generations. They are the product of a culture dominated by computers, the Internet, global connections, high-speed communication, continual entertainment, instant answers, constant contact, and endless information. Ideas and methods preferred by their parents and grandparents appear cumbersome and even strange to this group. Most women in this generation find traditional mentoring methods out of touch with the way they think and live. What worked for their mothers simply doesn’t work for them. They want mentors but have completely different expectations for how that relationship will look.

What’s Different?

Programs don’t work for us.

Tiffany, age 28

“The society that molds you when you are young stays with you the rest of your life.”² Even though people are individuals within that generation, they pick up common ways of thinking and living that stay with them. Value systems set in childhood are tough to dislodge. For example, many who lived through the Great Depression, the oldest generation now living, hesitate to throw away anything that could possibly be used later, “just in case.” Growing up in a time of scarcity, often without basic necessities, this generation considers it irresponsible to toss out a plastic butter tub that could store leftovers. My (Barbara) eighty-nine-year-old mother recently moved to an assisted living home. When my sister and I cleaned out her clothes closet, we found dozens of belts, some dating back to the 1960s. We giggled as we tried them on, waltzing down memory lane. “They’re still good!” protested my mother when we packed them up to give away. Conditioned by her childhood, she wanted to hang on to them because she might need them some day.

The younger generation has also been shaped by the characteristics of their age. When members of the younger generation toss something, their great concern is that it be recycled. They look for organic or biodegradable products that will not harm the environment. Care of the earth is a high priority, and they will most likely carry this concern throughout life. Get used to those recycle bins and going “green.”

Each generation believes its way of thinking and being is the right way to live. When various generations attempt to work together, inevitable clashes over values and the best way to accomplish a task will surface. If unresolved, parties usually go their separate ways. When young women snub traditional mentoring methods, they send a clear message that they have different ideas about mentoring relationships. We can shake our heads, judge the other to be wrong, and walk away, or we can seek to understand the different points of view and design an experience that works for both generations. Understanding differences does not mean one must abandon her values or endorse a questionable ideal; it does mean she must undertake an honest attempt to respect, build bridges with, and be open to the other. If we

2 Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 2.

understand, we can move away from a right/wrong mentality and create mutually satisfying relationships despite our differences.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

People of different backgrounds and ages have always experienced challenges in their personal and work relationships. Generational conflict lurks in the shadows behind Paul's advice to young Timothy: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." The situation described in 1 Timothy 4:12 indicates older people in the church discounted Timothy's instruction and leadership because he was young. Paul calls Timothy to rise above the fray and provide a godly example for everyone in the church.

A prescription for godly relationships between older and younger follows: "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat . . . older women as mothers . . ." (1 Tim. 5:1–2). Not only were the older saints to respect their young leader, but Timothy was also to honor the older ones in his speech and conduct. It is God's desire that both generations love and respect the other as He does.

You might be thinking, *That's great, but can I love them from afar?* Paul does not give us that option. Ephesians 4:1–3 further reveals God's heart. "As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." When we live in this manner, we take steps toward each other, not away. We seek unity instead of separateness. Paul is saying that humility enables us to lay aside our own preferences in order to facilitate peace. God desires that dividing walls come down and women of diverse backgrounds link arms and walk together. Both generations have much to contribute to the other, and when we walk through life together, both of us experience a fuller life.

WHERE DO WE START?

But bearing with one another in love and facilitating peace can be challenging. Where do we begin? How can we bridge the gap that undermines

our generational relationships? Understanding the values and preferences of each generation is a good place to start. The following are some of the generational tendencies we unpack in this book:

- Older women value programs, structure, and organization. Younger women value organic, flexible approaches.
- Older women believe you must be a positive role model. Younger women believe you must be yourself.
- Older women prefer to teach or impart wisdom. Younger women want to process life and learn from real experiences.
- Older women prefer to learn through instruction. Younger women prefer to learn through stories, experiences, and lived-out truth.
- Older women respect and trust those in authority. Younger women respect and trust only those who have proven worthy.
- Older women value privacy. Younger women value transparency.
- Older women see distinct standards for how one should live as a woman. Younger women believe there is no one right way to be a woman.
- Older women choose the mentor for the mentee. Younger women prefer to choose their own mentor.
- Older women see one mentor for each mentee. Younger women prefer to learn from multiple mentors.
- Older women prefer scheduled terms that start and stop. Younger women want an ongoing relationship and are content to build it over time.
- Older women use technology in limited ways. Younger women depend on technology to manage life.
- Older women embrace contractual commitments. Younger women continue only if the experience is valuable.

A quick scan of this list verifies what many of us already know—the generations often have a substantially different outlook on life. You'll find these different perspectives reflected in next generation responses at the end of each chapter.

This admittedly oversimplified description of the two generations attempts to capture broad trends. When assessing people it is tempting to stereotype individuals unfairly and miss unique individual characteristics. The authors recognize there are exceptions in both groups and this list will not accurately describe everyone; however, Barbara's research shows these are typical preferences that impact the practice of mentoring and explain the decline in mentoring relationships.

AN URGENT NEED

When the busyness of life and stress of ministry catches up with me, I (Barbara) often retreat to my backyard garden. I take particular pride in my tiny strawberry patch. Unfortunately, a nocturnal creature appreciates it as well and steals the ripe berries just before I can harvest them. To foil my four-footed adversary, I placed netting over the strawberries. One morning I went out to harvest berries and found a frog caught tight in the netting. There was no struggle left in his limp body, and I could tell he had given up. He didn't appear to be the likely strawberry thief, so I cut him loose and he gratefully wobbled off.

Just like that frog, many mentors are caught up in an outdated model. They struggle to make it work and eventually give up because they don't know what needs to change or how to change it. For over three decades, we've mentored women and led ministries with women. During recent years, we've observed that demand for mentors is higher than ever but traditional endeavors sit idle due to lack of young participants. And when young women like Ashley do participate, far too many leave unfulfilled and disappointed. We grieve when mentoring relationships fail unnecessarily. Parties limp away wounded and the church suffers.

It is incumbent on mature women of God to break through the impasse and bring young women back to vital mentoring relationships. We must find ways to retain one of the most valuable tools for spiritual growth. Join us on a journey to discover how to create vital mentoring relationships that work today. The first step is to understand and appreciate younger women. Read on.

I keep trying to be involved in traditional Bible studies and mentoring relationships, both in my church and in other Christian organizations. I really do try! But my attempts keep coming up dry, for so many of the reasons mentioned in this chapter. Either I get creeped out by the idea of being forced to “share” with a mentor I don’t know, or I find the material for a “Bible study” wearisome, repetitively about “proper women’s roles,” or I join a Bible study to find it stiff and isolating. Sometimes I actually join and stick it out, but most often I just shy away from joining something that has all the trappings of being a disaster, or I end up dropping out because my incredibly busy schedule simply cannot absorb an event that is not truly feeding me.

In the end, though, I don’t feel good about not being involved or about dropping out. I keep wanting to tell someone, though I’m not sure who, that I’m not trying to be difficult. Would anyone believe that? I’m not sure they would. I feel difficult. And it’s lonely.

Mariah, age 36



Before now, for several years when I was going through mom’s death and trials in court, I sought out women to talk with but found none. I was usually sent to the pastor of the church when all I really wanted was someone to listen and care about me. There was one lady from my hometown I would get to talk to every once in a while, but when we did get to meet, it was so refreshing to my soul. I cherish it to this day. However, it is difficult when you live in different states. I just remember craving that kind of relationship, but God is sufficient and took care of me Himself.

Stephanie, age 31

