

REVIVING *the* VILLAGE

MENTORSHIP

AS A

CATALYST

FOR

CHANGE

BY LOUIS C. JACKSON III

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NEXT Enterprises, LLC
2629 Lindberg Road
Anderson, Indiana 46012
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First Edition 2024

Published by NEXT Enterprises, LLC

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INTRODUCTION:

The Start of Something Beautiful

As my wife, Nikhea, and I stood on the platform of the youth auditorium of the largest church in our city of Anderson, Indiana, we were in shock as we addressed a mixed gathering of clergy, business leaders, nonprofit partners, county judges, volunteers, family, friends, and many others on a Spring Day in late May of 2021. The nonprofit we started in February 2020 had just received its largest donation of \$15,000 to date. It is worth recalling that February 2020 was one month prior to the onset of the global pandemic. When I founded Redefined Life, Inc. in early 2020, I would not have believed you if you had told me that I would receive a check this large. Yet, it was there that my wife and I received the seed capital that we needed to establish the dream God had given us many years ago.

Throughout this manual, I describe and explore our organization's approach to mentoring. Furthermore, I will summarize some of the lessons I have learned over the years from my service in ministry and the social service sector. Some of the principles I've learned might prove useful to ministry leaders who are trying to reach a generation that seems unreachable. Additionally, I think this manual is for community leaders who want to reach out to those society has deemed undesirable and unworthy. For those who want to have a greater impact on the communities they serve but aren't sure where to begin, this manual is for them. These principles that I will present in this book aren't unique to me. However, I believe I am one of many voices that God is using to build his Kingdom in the next generation.

Several years ago, I delivered a sermon as a youth pastor that shaped my approach to mentoring. A pastor friend of mine invited me to speak at his youth group's weekly service. As far as I knew, the service wasn't a special occasion for me to preach. However, my life was changed forever that night. In preparing for that evening, I came across a little story in the book of Acts, chapters twenty, verses seven through twelve.

On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching to them, and since he was leaving the next day, he kept talking until midnight. The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very drowsy. Finally, he fell sound asleep and dropped three stories to his death below. Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left. Meanwhile, the young man was taken home alive and well, and everyone was greatly relieved (*Acts 20:7-12, New Living Translation*).

I was struck by how these six verses tucked away in that chapter served as an allegorical representation of the generation I was called to preach to. The last decade of my life has been spent pondering these six verses, and I still get goose bumps when I read or discuss them. Through my observation of Eutychus in the story, I have come to understand the main character in such a way that I can see him whenever I speak to one of my students, whether in the classroom, the church, or in our community mentoring program.

The story begins with Paul going to a city called Troas. In the same way as any other meaningful preacher, Paul sought to encourage, edify, and equip the church that was located in that area. As Paul was preaching, Eutychus, a young man, came into view. The disinterested Eutychus looked out the upstairs window, became drowsy, and finally fell out of the window... dead. In the story, it says that when Paul understood the young man had died on impact, he stopped preaching and did something I think is the model of all mentorships. During his prayer, Paul laid his body on top of the man, according to the Bible. This resulted in the young man being resurrected. This is a true picture of mentorship at its best! Mentoring today's youth requires us to stop being so busy, and to be present. That story has so much more to tell, but I'll leave it for another time. Reading this story changed my life and how I see my purpose.



MENTORSHIP: THE BRIDGE TO EQUITY AND TRANSFORMATION



In a world where the odds are often stacked against the most vulnerable, mentorship is the bridge that can close the social equity gap. It's not just about guiding someone through life's challenges; it's about standing in the gap, much like Paul did for Eutychus. Mentorship is an intentional act of showing up, lifting others, and helping them discover their God-given potential.

The problem of inequity in our society isn't just systemic—it's personal. It's about individual lives that are slipping through the cracks. While systems and policies are necessary, it is within the personal relationships, the one-on-one connections, where true transformation happens. This is where mentorship comes in. It's the power of investing time, wisdom, and heart into someone else's life, creating a ripple effect that extends beyond the individual to families, communities, and generations to come.

I believe that mentorship is not only a tool for personal growth but a critical strategy for addressing the broader issues of inequality. By investing in young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, we can help level the playing field and provide opportunities that might otherwise remain out of reach. Mentorship is not just an act of charity; it is an act of justice, a step toward ensuring that every young person, regardless of their starting point, has a chance to succeed.

As you interact with others in your circle of influence and community, I pray that you will become familiar with "Eutychus". I pray that God will give you a heart of compassion not only for them, but also for the families that help create the environment where they live. I aim for two things when preaching, teaching, or writing. The first is to always encourage the listener, the second is to always challenge them. The ideas presented in this eBook will challenge everyone to rethink how we interact within our current generation, regardless of whether you are a seasoned pastor, a lay leader in your local church, or a concerned member of the community.

As I write this book, my goal is to energize you to think back to the time when God helped you when you fell "out of a window" into your metaphorical death. Whenever you think about that time, please remember the people who sacrificed themselves in order to bring you resurrection. As we dive deeper into this manual, I will share practical insights and real-life examples from my work with Redefined Life, Inc. You'll learn how group mentorship can become a powerful model for fostering growth, accountability, and change. More importantly, I hope you will be inspired to take action in your own village, to rise up as a mentor, and to help bridge the social equity gap in your own community.

Ultimately, the call to mentorship is a call to invest in the future. It's about being part of the solution, not standing idly by as problems persist. It's about building a community where every Eutychus has a chance to live, to thrive, and to fulfill their potential. So as we journey together through the pages of this book, I challenge you to reflect on your role in your village. Will you be a mentor? Will you help someone rise? Together, we can create lasting change. After all, it really does take a village.

The purpose of this training manual is to equip leaders and mentors within "The Village" to break down barriers, foster meaningful relationships, and empower the next generation. Drawing from both personal experience and biblical principles, this guide offers practical tools for engaging with youth and families in ways that transcend labels, divisions, and societal expectations. By focusing on group mentorship and the power of shared experiences, it provides a blueprint for fostering unity and collaboration. At the end of each chapter, you will find discussion questions designed to help you think through the concepts presented, allowing for deeper reflection and application. Ultimately, this manual serves as a call to action for those passionate about creating transformative, equitable communities through mentorship. Together, we can shape the future—one relationship at a time.



PART I:



THE FOUNDATION

"A solid foundation is the key to building anything that lasts."

— Unknown

CHAPTER I:

BIRTH OF THE VILLAGE: A RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND COMMUNITY





THE JOURNEY THAT LED ME HERE

My journey toward Redefine Life Incorporated has been far from conventional, but it's the story that shaped who I am today. I grew up surrounded by ministry. My great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were all pastors, and from an early age, I developed a heartbeat for serving people. The culture I grew up in was never about living for ourselves—it was about pouring into others, helping them realize their fullest potential.

This calling became personal when my parents, Pastor Louis C. Jackson, Jr. and Beatrice Jackson, planted a church in Anderson, Indiana following the passing of my grandfather. I was 14 when United in Christ Church opened its doors, and if you've ever been part of a church plant, you know it's not easy. My family and I were thrust into the trenches, learning ministry from the inside out. At 18, I accepted my call into ministry, not just because it was part of my family's legacy, but because I felt a deeper calling—one I didn't yet fully understand but knew I couldn't ignore.

During those early years, I started working with the youth in our church. It was a natural fit, but at 18, I was barely older than the kids I was trying to help. I was still growing up myself, making mistakes and learning along the way. It was around that time I met Nikhea, my wife. We grew up together, working side by side in ministry—cleaning, cooking, running programs—whatever needed to be done. By the time we married a few years later, we were a team in every sense, with two beautiful boys, Louis IV (LJ) and Josiah, to raise and lead.

Before I was married, I worked at the Triple L Youth Center, a group home for at-risk boys, which was a turning point in my life. At first, I thought it would be just a job, but it turned into something much bigger. That summer ignited a passion in me for mentorship, and I realized that working with these boys—many of whom came from broken homes—wasn't just a job, but a calling. I found myself living in two worlds: one in ministry and one in social services. Both had their own set of challenges and rules, yet I couldn't shake the feeling that there was something bigger connecting the two.

One issue that kept coming up, whether I was in church or social work, was the breakdown of the family. Fatherlessness was rampant in both arenas, and I couldn't help but wonder—if the church says we have the answer, why are we dealing with the same issues here as in the world? I saw the same struggles in the youth at church as I did with the young men I was mentoring. This realization shaped much of what I would later come to see as my life's mission.



In 2019, while working at Lifeline Youth and Family Services, I began feeling a strong tug to step into something new, something beyond the work I was doing. I loved my job, but God was calling me to leave it behind for something different. This was a big ask, especially since for the first time, Nikhea and I had financial stability. We had two young boys, and I had finally landed a job that provided some security. Despite my reluctance, the pull wouldn't go away, and in December of that year, we took the leap of faith and left my job.

That leap led me to launch Redefine Life Incorporated in February 2020. Just a few months later, the world was hit by a global pandemic, followed by the race riots of 2020. We were living through one of the most challenging periods in recent history, and here I was, with no income and only a fledgling nonprofit. There were moments of doubt, moments when I questioned if I'd made the right decision. But in my heart, I knew that Redefine Life wasn't just another organization—it was part of a much bigger calling.

As a fourth-generation pastor, my path looks different from those who came before me, but the mission remains the same. My goal is to serve, mentor, and help others step into their God-given potential. Redefined Life is a continuation of a generational calling that I am honored to carry forward.



FINDING CLARITY IN THE CALLING



In early 2020, the world faced two simultaneous crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and the resurgence of racial tensions following the killing of George Floyd. These events shaped a unique period of social reckoning, particularly for the Black community, where systemic inequities became glaringly apparent. Amidst the pandemic's devastation and race riots, a new calling emerged to redefine how communities could come together to support each other.

I, along with the rest of the world, noticed the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the Black community and the deep-seated social inequalities that compounded the challenges. As the country grappled with racial justice protests, I found myself deeply moved, not only by the external unrest but by a stirring within to contribute to change.

It all began with an impromptu outdoor prayer service led by my best friend, Antonio Quinones (known as Q). Against the backdrop of pandemic restrictions, Q organized a Good Friday service in Alexandria, Indiana, inviting people to join from the safety of their cars. The service became a surprising success, drawing attention from both the community and local media. This led to further gatherings, and unexpectedly, Q invited me to preach. Though reluctant at first, I embraced the opportunity, and to my amazement, the turnout and the response were overwhelming.

As the pandemic wore on and the race riots intensified, I began feeling a deeper purpose brewing within me. I had always been involved in pastoring and social work, but something about this moment felt different. The unrest seemed to highlight not just immediate injustices but underlying societal fractures—particularly the breakdown of the family structure in Black communities.

According to my research, statistics showed that fatherlessness was a significant issue, contributing to poverty, crime, and a host of social challenges. In 2020, 18.3 million children lived without a father figure in their homes, and this had far-reaching consequences with black young men. Young men from father-absent homes were significantly more likely to engage in criminal activity, struggle with mental health, and fall into cycles of poverty. These startling numbers only fueled my determination to make a difference.

Thus, The Village program was born—a mentoring program aimed at providing group mentorship for young Black boys and their families. This program wasn't just about offering guidance to the boys; it was about addressing the systemic issues in their environments. The idea was to build a community around these young men and their families, offering continuous support through mentorship that would last beyond just one-off events.

On September 12, 2020, Redefined Life, Inc. officially launched its pilot program, The Village. The concept was simple yet powerful: group mentorship would provide these young men with the guidance they needed to break free from the cycle of fatherlessness and social disadvantage. The program operated on the principle that mentorship should be long-term, staying with the boys throughout their school years and into adulthood. This was a direct response to the shortcomings of many social programs that provided temporary support but failed to create lasting impact.

The first year culminated in a celebratory gala in May 2021, which marked a major milestone for the program. The event was a resounding success, with families and community members coming together to celebrate the accomplishments of the boys and the growing impact of The Village.

However, the story didn't end there. As I reflected on the progress made, I realized that this was only the beginning. God had more in store, and The Village program was about to undergo a transformation that would expand its reach and deepen its impact. In the next phase, the program would evolve beyond its original mission, continuing to redefine what it meant to uplift a community.



THE MISSION EXPANDS



As our young organization began to grow, we were fortunate to receive guidance from a consultant at the Indiana Youth Institute. They recommended rebranding from Redefined Life, Inc. to The Village Anderson, a name that better reflected how the community already recognized us. In 2022, we embraced this change, and our mentoring program for young men in grades 6-12 became known as RISE Academy.

However, we soon realized that to fully live out our mission of empowering youth and families through mentoring relationships that foster growth, resilience, and connection, we needed to extend our services to young girls. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 Population Estimates, girls under 18 make up just over a quarter of the total female population, amounting to over 35 million young girls across the U.S. This population is not only substantial but increasingly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

In response to this need, in 2023, we launched You'Nique Academy, a mentoring program tailored to young girls in grades 6-12, further expanding our commitment to shaping a brighter future for all youth in our community.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 The author describes his journey of feeling called to serve youth through mentorship. How can aspiring mentors recognize their own calling or passion for mentoring others? What signs or experiences might indicate this is a path for them?

2 At the age of 18, the author began mentoring while still navigating his own personal development. How can aspiring mentors balance their own growth while effectively guiding others? What challenges might arise from this dual responsibility?

3 The Village program was created as a direct response to social crises like fatherlessness and racial inequality. How can mentors identify and respond to the specific crises affecting their communities? What role can mentorship play in addressing these larger societal issues?

4 The author emphasizes the importance of long-term commitment in mentorship, extending beyond one-off interactions. How can aspiring mentors prepare themselves to stay committed over the long haul, and what strategies can help them build lasting relationships with their mentees?

5 As The Village evolved, the author expanded his program to address the needs of both boys and girls. How can mentors remain open to expanding their vision and adapting to the evolving needs of those they serve? What steps can mentors take to ensure they are inclusive and relevant in their approach?

CHAPTER II:



HEALING THE WOUNDS OF A LOST GENERATION





THE SILENT CRISIS IN TODAY'S YOUTH

In today's world, the youth face a multitude of challenges that may not have been as pronounced in past generations. From social media pressures and mental health struggles to the ever-present realities of broken homes, bullying, and violence, young people are navigating tumultuous waters. The uncertainty of identity, the instability of relationships, and the constant exposure to negative influences on the internet have fractured many young lives. While these experiences can damage faith in themselves, their communities, and even in God, the church is in a unique position to help.

The Bible provides us with numerous stories of individuals whose lives were marked by trauma and transformation. One such individual is Mephibosheth, a young man who, through no fault of his own, found his life shattered. His story resonates deeply with the current generation, reflecting the reality that many youth face today: the feeling of being "dropped" by life. In 2 Samuel 4:4, we are introduced to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, Saul's son. At a young age, circumstances beyond his control left him crippled, forcing him into a life of isolation and shame.

Similarly, many young people today feel abandoned and broken by life's circumstances. Whether due to neglect, family trauma, or societal pressures, their experiences mirror Mephibosheth's fall. These young souls need a community that will remind them of their inherent value and guide them toward healing. As we look at Mephibosheth's journey, we'll explore how God's love can heal fractured faith, and why the church must play an active role in providing mentorship and community support.



DROPPED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Mephibosheth's story begins with a traumatic event. At just five years old, his life was turned upside down when his nurse, out of fear, fled with him after hearing of the death of his father, Jonathan, and his grandfather, King Saul. In her haste, she dropped him, causing him to become lame in both feet (2 Samuel 4:4). Imagine the pain and confusion of a child who once had a future filled with promise, now facing a life of physical limitation and uncertainty.

Being “dropped” represents those life-changing moments that are beyond our control, yet have long-lasting effects. Many youth today feel as though life has dropped them. Broken homes, parental neglect, bullying, substance abuse, and economic hardship are just a few of the modern-day drops that leave scars on their hearts and minds.

But as we learn from Mephibosheth's story, being dropped does not mean being forgotten. The nurse, though she dropped him, did not abandon him. She picked him up and took him to safety in Lo-debar, a desolate place. Similarly, even when life feels overwhelming and circumstances seem dire, God sees us, and He has not forgotten us.

The message to today's youth is simple: You may have been dropped, but you are still here. And because you are still here, you are destined for something greater.





LIFE IN LO-DEBAR: THE PLACE OF BROKENNESS

Lo-debar, the place where Mephibosheth found himself, means "no pasture" or "no word." It was a place of desolation, forgotten by society and filled with outcasts and the broken. Mephibosheth, once destined for royalty, now lived in obscurity. The parallels to today's society are clear. Many of our youth live in their own personal Lo-debars—spaces of mental, emotional, and spiritual desolation. Whether it's the violence of their neighborhoods, the isolation they feel from broken families, or the constant rejection they experience, they feel as though they are out of sight and out of mind.

In Lo-debar, Mephibosheth's physical condition represented his internal state. His lameness made him feel unworthy and unwanted, so much so that when King David finally sought him out, he referred to himself as a "dead dog" (2 Samuel 9:8). This is how many young people feel today: forgotten, hopeless, and unworthy of love.

Yet, Lo-debar was not Mephibosheth's final destination, and it doesn't have to be for today's youth either. God's love is powerful enough to reach the most desolate places in our lives. Even if you're living in your own Lo-debar, know that God sees you and is ready to bring you out.





THE KING CALLS FOR YOU: A DESTINY BEYOND BROKENNESS

In 2 Samuel 9:1-13, we see a beautiful act of grace unfold. King David, remembering his covenant with Jonathan, sought to show kindness to any remaining members of Saul's family. When he learned of Mephibosheth's existence, he immediately sent for him, bringing him out of Lo-debar. This is a powerful image of God's grace. David sought Mephibosheth, not because of anything the young man had done, but because of a promise he had made to Jonathan.

The King's search for Mephibosheth illustrates God's search for us. Many young people feel as though they are hiding in the desolation of their lives, unworthy of being found. But God, like David, is actively searching for them, ready to restore them and show them kindness, not because of their works, but because of His covenant love.

When Mephibosheth was brought before David, he was afraid. He assumed the king would kill him because of his connection to the former regime. But instead, David restored to him all the land that belonged to his grandfather, Saul, and gave him a permanent seat at the king's table. This is a profound picture of restoration. Despite his brokenness, Mephibosheth was treated as a son of the king.

For today's youth, this is the hope that the church must offer. No matter what they've been through, God is calling them to sit at His table. They may still carry the scars of their past, but those scars do not disqualify them from God's love. In fact, it is in their brokenness that His grace shines the brightest.



MENTORSHIP AS THE BRIDGE TO HEALING

The story of Mephibosheth is a call to action for the church today. It is a reminder that God's love is more powerful than any trauma, any past mistake, or any circumstance. But it also reveals the importance of community. Just as David sought out Mephibosheth to bring him into a place of healing, we are called to seek out the broken and bring them into the fold.

Youth today are in desperate need of mentors—individuals who will guide them, encourage them, and remind them that they are not alone. Mentorship creates a bridge between trauma and transformation, helping young people see that their current situation is not their final destination.

This is the essence of what it means to be a village. We must show God's love in tangible ways, offering not only words of encouragement but also opportunities for healing and restoration. Just as Mephibosheth's life was forever changed by David's kindness, so too can a young person's life be transformed by the love and guidance of a mentor.



THE KING'S TABLE AWAITS

Though Mephibosheth was crippled, his destiny was to sit at the king's table as one of the royal family. His scars did not define him. Instead, they became a testimony of God's grace. For the youth of today, this same destiny is available. The King has called them. It is up to us to ensure they hear the call and find their seat at the table.

Through mentorship, love, and community, we can help heal the fractured faith of a lost generation and show them that, like Mephibosheth, they are destined for greater.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 Today's youth are facing unprecedented challenges, from social media pressures to broken homes. How can aspiring mentors become more attuned to the silent crises young people experience? What are some signs that may indicate a young person is struggling beneath the surface?

2 In Mephibosheth's story, King David's kindness helped him heal from his trauma. How can mentors similarly help youth heal from their own life "drops" or traumatic experiences? What practical steps can mentors take to create a safe space for healing?

3 Mephibosheth lived in Lo-debar, a place of desolation. Many young people today feel isolated and disconnected. How can mentors recognize the "Lo-debars" in their mentees' lives and actively help guide them out of these places of brokenness?

4 King David restored Mephibosheth by giving him a seat at the royal table. What does it mean for a mentor to "restore" a young person? How can mentors help their mentees realize that their past doesn't define their future, and that they are destined for greater?

5 David's act of kindness towards Mephibosheth wasn't temporary—it gave him a permanent place at the king's table. How can aspiring mentors commit to long-term relationships that provide lasting support for youth, especially in an age where stability is often lacking?

CHAPTER III:



THE VILLAGE WAY: A PHILOSOPHY OF PURPOSEFUL MENTORSHIP





AN UNLIKELY ENCOUNTER

It was a chilly Sunday night at a bonfire when I met a young man who changed my life forever. At the time, I was involved in an experimental youth group where suburban (White) and urban (Black) church youth groups combined to demonstrate the vastness of the Kingdom of God. As you would expect, both sides had to make concessions in order for this experimental youth group to succeed. Among my concessions was attending a bonfire. If you know me, you know I don't like being in the woods. For whatever reason, this particular youth group loved to do things outdoors, and on this particular night, it was cold. Some of the students asked me to meet a young man they had invited who they thought I might be able to talk to. It suffices to say that this young man was black.

Due to their majority Caucasian population, they did not want him to feel uncomfortable at the bonfire, so they invited me. Let me set the scene. We were in someone's big backyard, I believe. The night was dark and cold. In the midst of a lot of adults and teenagers, I asked myself, "Why am I here?" I believe I was the only African American at this bonfire. Even though I became accustomed to being the anomaly, that night felt particularly uncomfortable. In the warmth of the fire, I sat down next to a young man who appeared to dislike being there just as much as I did. The two of us exchanged pleasantries, but we were both too cold and uncomfortable to converse meaningfully. Both of us were unaware that God had put us on a crazy journey that would take us places we never dreamed of going. Through the transformational relationship of mentoring, God began to knit my life to this young man, just as He had done with Elijah and his protégé, Elisha.

Pastor Rondale Broome, the young man from my story, and I have had a relationship for over 20 years. Once a hesitant youth group student, he has grown into a sought-after youth pastor, conference speaker, husband, and father of two wonderful children. Remarkably, Pastor Rondale is now a key leader within The Village, mentoring others and helping guide the very organization for which he was once the prototype.

As I reflect on my remarkable relationship with this young man, I am convinced that mentoring is a two-way street. Just as much as it changes the mentee, it changes the mentor. Mentorship is more than just taking a young person out to dinner. It is also more than giving them a ride to a basketball game. It is more than just giving them money to buy some new Jordans or Brons. It is about investing in them and helping them become a better version of themselves. It is about building strong relationships that last a lifetime. It is about making a difference in someone's life.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MENTORSHIP



In today's fast-paced and often disconnected society, youth are confronted with a barrage of challenges that threaten their personal and academic growth. From a lack of positive role models to the absence of basic resources, many young people—especially those in urban and disadvantaged communities—are left to navigate life's difficulties alone. This is where mentorship steps in, not merely as a tool, but as a life-changing force capable of lifting these young kings and queens to their full potential.

When I talk about mentoring throughout this book, I'm not referring to a mere casual relationship. Mentorship is a purposeful connection between an adult and a young person, rooted in the commitment to guide, support, and uplift. Whether this relationship is formalized through a structured program or arises naturally with a coach, teacher, or neighbor, it has the power to change lives. Formal mentoring programs may come from schools, community centers, or faith-based organizations, matching young people with adults who serve as beacons of support. But regardless of the structure, the impact is the same: mentorship opens doors. It connects youth to resources, networks, and opportunities they might otherwise never encounter—opportunities that help bridge the deep gaps of social and economic inequality.

One of the most profound benefits of mentorship is the way it transforms self-esteem and confidence in young people. Many youth, especially those facing difficult environments, don't believe in their own worth or potential. As mentors, we have the sacred duty to plant seeds of belief, encouraging these young people to dream big, to see themselves beyond their current circumstances, and to know that they are capable of greatness. A mentor doesn't just offer advice; they offer hope.

The science backs it up. Research consistently shows that positive, stable relationships are at the core of a young person's success. As Robert Blum and his colleagues noted, "Approaches to youth development that enhance connectedness and opportunities for young people are key to adolescent health and wellbeing." In the midst of the alarming national youth mental health crisis, mentorship emerges as a key part of the solution. Studies have shown that mentorship during childhood strengthens mental health, builds resilience, and promotes well-being, equipping young people to thrive.

Moreover, mentorship has the power to break cycles. In many urban communities, young people are trapped in patterns of negative behavior—violence, drug abuse, gang involvement—not because they want to fail, but because they lack the guidance to choose a different path. Mentorship can disrupt this cycle, offering a way out. It can steer youth away from risky behaviors and toward brighter futures filled with purpose. Research shows that mentoring programs decrease rates of juvenile delinquency and improve academic performance among young people growing up in disadvantaged environments.

The importance of mentorship cannot be overstated. It's more than just a responsibility—it's an opportunity. As mentors, we have the privilege of shaping the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and changemakers. By investing our time, energy, and belief in these young people, we can help them become confident, successful, and resilient individuals. Beyond providing guidance, we offer access to resources, networks, and skills that empower them to reach their full potential.

These young kings and queens are not just the future—they are the present. Our role as mentors is to ensure they have every tool and opportunity they need to rise. The power to change lives is in our hands, and it starts with a single, intentional act: showing up.



THE POWER OF FAMILIES: GOD'S FIRST MENTORING PROGRAM

According to The State of the World's Children 2021, a flagship report by UNICEF, families remain the most significant influence on adolescents, even in a world where peers and the internet are increasingly important. Families provide a foundation for the development of values, beliefs, and behaviors. They offer strong emotional bonds, guidance, and a sense of identity that shapes adolescents' self-worth and moral compass. This, in turn, impacts their decision-making and overall well-being. Research shows that adolescents who are deeply connected to at least one parent experience fewer emotional problems, reduced risk of suicide attempts, fewer conduct disorders, better school performance, higher self-esteem, and less involvement in violence or drug abuse.

While youth mentoring programs are vital, we cannot afford to overlook the critical role that families play. Any youth development effort that excludes the family is inherently limited. Families were, after all, the first mentoring institution established by God.



Let's get "preachy" for a moment and return to the Christian foundation. In God's design, the family was created to be the primary space for love, support, guidance, and unity to flourish. The Bible frequently emphasizes the importance of family relationships, underscoring the family as the fundamental building block of society. This can be seen from the very beginning, when God established the first family unit with Adam and Eve. In Genesis 1:28, God commands Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it." From the outset, God intended families to play a central role in His plan for humanity, not only to populate the earth but to raise future generations in a nurturing, God-honoring environment.

In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, God instructs His people on the importance of teaching their children:

"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."

This passage highlights the responsibility of parents to be the primary teachers and mentors of their children, instilling God's laws and values in them through daily interaction. God's vision for the family was for it to serve as the primary vessel of moral and spiritual development.

Moreover, Proverbs 22:6 advises, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." This training doesn't just happen in isolated moments—it's a lifelong journey of mentoring, guiding, and shaping children within the family. God has equipped parents with the unique ability to provide the love, discipline, and wisdom necessary to prepare children for life's challenges. The family, in God's eyes, is the first and most essential mentoring program.

However, today's families are under tremendous stress, which often undermines their ability to function in this role. Factors such as unemployment, poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse disrupt the critical relationships between parents and children. This is exacerbated by the rise of social media and digital distractions, which flood adolescents with external influences. Busy schedules and the pressures of modern life limit the opportunities for meaningful interactions within the family unit. The result is a weakening of the family's ability to mentor, nurture, and guide its youth.

Yet, despite these challenges, families are still the cornerstone of youth development. We need to return to God's original design for the family, where love, mentorship, and unity were at the center. Youth development programs must take a holistic approach that includes a focus on strengthening families. After all, it's not enough to mentor young people in isolation if their home environments are unstable. The best youth interventions will also address the root causes of their struggles, promoting long-term stability within the family structure.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of a healthy family dynamic in Ephesians 6:1-4, where he instructs children to obey their parents and fathers to bring up their children "in the training and instruction of the Lord." A healthy family environment fosters not just discipline but nurturing and teaching in alignment with God's word. Programs that focus on rebuilding families provide a stable foundation for youth to flourish.

Furthermore, the Bible gives us the story of Timothy as an example of how family can serve as the foundation for spiritual mentorship. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul speaks of the sincere faith that lived first in Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Their influence was foundational in Timothy's development as a spiritual leader. This multigenerational mentoring shows how vital family can be in nurturing faith, wisdom, and character.

Family, therefore, is not just a passive element in youth development—it's God's first and most vital mentoring program. When we strengthen families, we strengthen the future. By addressing the challenges families face and providing them with the support they need, we can enhance the effectiveness of youth development programs and create lasting change. As mentors, community leaders, and believers, our mission should always be to help families rediscover their God-given purpose as centers of love, guidance, and growth.

God's design for the family was never meant to be replaced but reinforced. As we work to mentor and uplift youth, we must also work to rebuild and restore the families they come from. Only then can we truly see the lasting change we seek in the lives of young people, and by extension, in our communities and society at large.



COMMUNITY DISCIPLESHIP: THE LOST ART OF GROUP MENTORSHIP

In an increasingly individualistic society, the concept of community discipleship—the practice of mentoring youth in a group setting—has often been overlooked. Yet, throughout biblical history and much of church tradition, group mentorship was the norm. Early Christian communities thrived through group discipleship, where multiple generations and individuals came together to grow in faith, wisdom, and purpose. Sadly, this powerful and effective model of community-based mentorship has faded in modern times, but it remains a critical tool for transforming the lives of young people.





BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GROUP MENTORSHIP

The Bible offers numerous examples of group mentorship, where discipleship was not confined to one-on-one interactions but instead flourished in community settings. In the New Testament, Jesus Himself modeled group mentorship by gathering His twelve disciples and journeying with them in ministry for three years. The close-knit group of disciples allowed for shared experiences, mutual learning, and collective growth. Jesus didn't just disciple individuals; He built a community of believers who would later go on to disciple nations. Mark 3:14 highlights this intentional group mentorship:

"He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach."

This was community discipleship in action—a group of mentees learning together, supporting each other, and being sent out to multiply the impact.

Similarly, the early church demonstrated group discipleship as a central practice. In Acts 2:42-47, we see the church as a community of believers who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." They lived in fellowship, sharing their resources, praying together, and learning together. This wasn't just spiritual growth; it was mentorship in every area of life. Group discipleship fostered unity, accountability, and mutual support.



THE POWER OF GROUP MENTORSHIP TODAY

While one-on-one mentoring can be incredibly effective, group mentorship has a unique power to impact youth on a broader scale. By creating communities of shared growth and accountability, group mentorship offers young people the opportunity to learn not just from their mentors but also from each other. This form of mentorship mirrors the early church's discipleship model and provides an environment where individuals are challenged, supported, and encouraged to grow holistically.

Statistics from modern research highlight the benefits of group mentorship, especially in addressing the social and emotional needs of youth. According to a 2018 study by The National Mentoring Partnership, young people who participate in mentoring programs—particularly group-based mentoring—are 55% more likely to enroll in college and 78% more likely to volunteer regularly in their communities. This underscores the broader impact of mentorship beyond personal development, as it instills in youth a sense of social responsibility and leadership.

Additionally, a study by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership shows that youth who have mentors, especially in group settings, are more likely to develop better communication skills, increased self-confidence, and improved interpersonal relationships. In fact, over 59% of mentored youth are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, which are critical for holistic development. Group mentoring exposes youth to diverse perspectives and experiences, allowing them to learn from the successes and failures of both peers and mentors.



DISCIPLESHIP AS A SOLUTION TO MODERN CHALLENGES

In today's world, young people face challenges that earlier generations could not have imagined—everything from social isolation to the pressures of social media. Group mentorship can be an antidote to these issues, providing community, connection, and a safe space for growth. It's more important than ever to bring back the model of community discipleship.

The apostle Paul encouraged believers to be in community and build each other up. In Hebrews 10:24-25, Paul writes:

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another."

This scripture reveals the importance of communal learning and mutual encouragement, especially in challenging times.

By bringing youth together in group mentorship, we create a space where they can lean on one another and grow in ways they might not be able to in isolation. The ability to learn from others' experiences, receive peer support, and build a network of relationships is invaluable.



RESTORING THE LOST ART

Restoring group mentorship as a model of community discipleship means going back to the roots of Christian fellowship and extending this to the next generation. Mentorship should not be a solitary experience. Instead, by returning to the biblical principles of shared discipleship, we can create stronger, more vibrant communities. When the church or community comes together to disciple youth in groups, the impact is multiplied. As Proverbs 27:17 teaches, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

To re-establish this lost art, churches, schools, and community organizations must take intentional steps to create spaces for group mentorship. This can be done through youth group meetings, service projects, or leadership training programs. The goal is to create environments where young people can be mentored collectively, growing not only in faith but in wisdom, discipline, and character.





THE IMPACT ON SOCIAL EQUITY

Group mentorship also plays a critical role in addressing social equity. Many young people from underserved communities lack access to strong networks of support. Group mentorship helps bridge this gap by creating community connections, providing access to shared resources, and fostering a collective sense of belonging. According to research from the American Psychological Association, group mentoring programs are particularly effective in underserved areas, leading to improved academic performance and reduced juvenile delinquency rates. By creating communities of mentorship, we not only help individual youth but contribute to the betterment of society as a whole.



CONCLUSION

The Village's philosophy of mentorship emphasizes the power of intentional, community-driven guidance to uplift and transform the next generation. Rooted in principles of faith, compassion, and accountability, this approach provides a holistic framework for addressing the challenges young people face. By fostering relationships based on trust, support, and shared growth, the village model creates an environment where youth can thrive emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Through mentorship, communities have the unique opportunity to close social equity gaps, inspire resilience, and cultivate future leaders who are equipped to contribute meaningfully to society.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 How has mentorship shaped or could shape you as a mentor, just as it changes the lives of the young people you mentor? In what ways can mentorship become a mutual learning and growth experience?

2 The chapter emphasizes that mentorship is more than casual relationships. What steps can you take to deepen the trust and connection with a mentee to foster long-term, meaningful impact?

3 The idea of group mentorship, modeled after biblical discipleship, is a powerful tool for community development. How can you incorporate or restore the practice of group mentorship in your community or church setting?

4 How can mentorship programs, especially those that focus on group mentorship, be structured to specifically address the social equity gaps affecting marginalized youth?

5 How can mentorship efforts in the community support and strengthen the family unit as God's first mentoring institution? How does this shift the way you view mentoring the youth?

CHAPTER IV:

CONFRONTING A CULTURE OF LABELS AND DIVISION





THE HUMAN TENDENCY TO CATEGORIZE

In John 4:4-9, we see a poignant encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, an interaction that challenges the deeply ingrained societal labels of the time. Social psychologists Shelly Taylor and Susan Fiske have posited that humans are "cognitive misers"—we conserve our mental energy by selectively choosing what we pay attention to, and we do this by categorizing and labeling. While this is a natural mechanism to cope with the overload of daily information, it becomes dangerous when applied to people, reducing them to mere labels rather than complex individuals.

This kind of cognitive shortcut permeates every aspect of society. We divide people based on race, religion, politics, and even trivial distinctions like hobbies. What happens, though, when God places you in a situation that doesn't align with your labels? Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well challenges these divisions and highlights how such labeling prevents community and collaboration, especially in efforts to uplift youth and families. God is challenging all of our social constructs—racism, classism, denominationalism—and is calling us to see beyond the boundaries we've created.





JESUS BREAKS THE BARRIERS OF DIVISION

Jesus' journey through Samaria was not an accident. While most pious Jews of the time avoided Samaria by taking a longer route, verse 4 tells us that Jesus "had to go through Samaria." He didn't have to geographically—He could have gone another way. Yet, He went because there was a divine appointment with this woman, a Samaritan, whom Jews despised. This intentional crossing of cultural and social barriers is a model for how we are to approach our relationships with others—particularly those whom society has labeled as "other."

Before we can confront the barriers that hinder collaboration and community, we must first admit that we have constructed these barriers ourselves. The divisions that existed among the early believers—Jews vs. Gentiles, rich vs. poor, male vs. female—mirror those we see today. Just as Jesus broke through the barriers between Jew and Samaritan, we must break down the walls of division in our communities.



SHARED EXPERIENCES: THE FIRST STEP TOWARD UNITY

The first step Jesus took to confront this division was creating a shared experience. John 4:6-7 says, "Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'" In this moment, both Jesus and the Samaritan woman were at the well because they shared the same need: water. By meeting her at a place where they were on equal footing, Jesus demonstrated the power of shared experience.

Studies show that shared experiences create profound connections between people who would otherwise be divided. By focusing on what we have in common, we can begin to bridge the gaps that separate us. In Romans 3:23, Paul reminds us of one of the most significant shared experiences: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." No matter our background or status, we all share the need for God's grace. This shared spiritual experience is the foundation upon which we can build a unified community.



THE "US VS. THEM" MENTALITY: A HINDRANCE TO COLLABORATION

One of the biggest hindrances to true community and collaboration is the "us vs. them" mentality. In John 4:20-21, the Samaritan woman engages in a debate with Jesus about the proper place of worship: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." This exchange highlights the deep divisions between Jews and Samaritans, and the way these divisions hindered them from seeing each other as part of the same people.

In many ways, we see this same mentality in our modern context. Whether it's political, racial, or even denominational differences, we often categorize people based on external factors, creating an "ingroup" and an "outgroup." These distinctions provide a sense of identity, but they also foster division. We focus so much on these differences that we fail to see the shared humanity that binds us together. In the context of youth and family development, this mentality becomes especially harmful as it prevents communities from coming together to address the systemic issues that affect everyone.

Comedian Emo Philips once told a joke about two men debating their religious affiliations. Despite sharing many beliefs, they eventually reached a point of difference so small that one of them pushed the other off a bridge, labeling him a heretic. This exaggeration points to a sad truth: we often elevate our labels above the well-being of people. Whether it's theological distinctions, socioeconomic class, or race, the "us vs. them" mentality keeps us divided and prevents us from working collaboratively for the betterment of our youth and families.



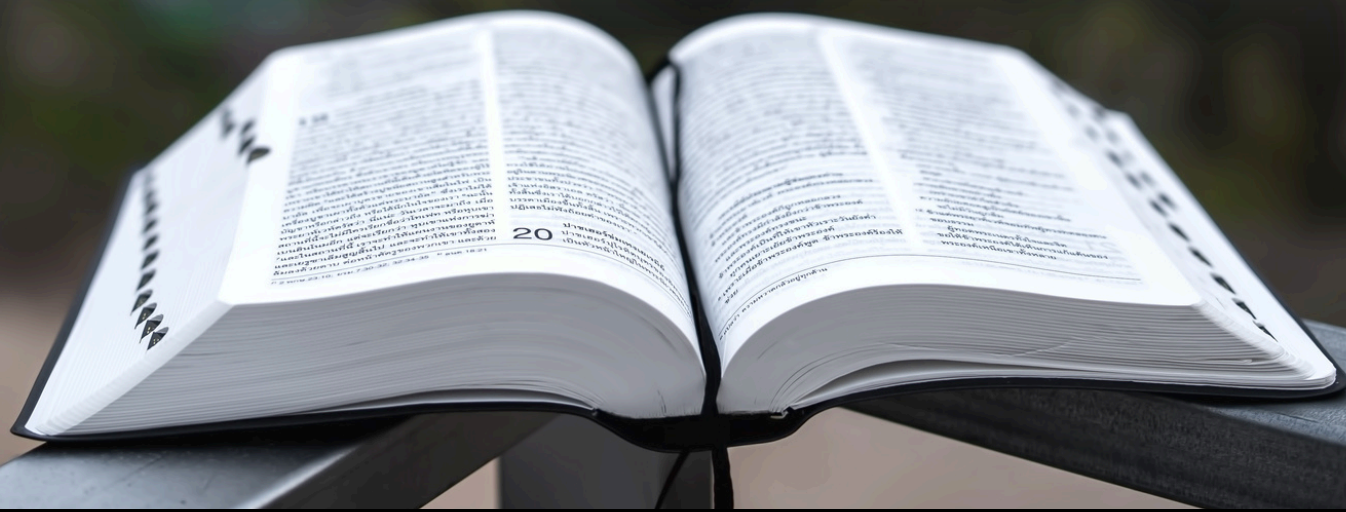


CREATING A NEW GROUP BASED ON RELATIONSHIP

Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman's question about worship was profound: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:23). In this statement, Jesus broke down the religious, racial, and gender barriers that had divided Jews and Samaritans for centuries. He created a new group—"true worshipers"—united not by geography, tradition, or social status, but by their relationship with God.

In the same way, we are called to create communities centered on relationship rather than labels. Galatians 3:26-28 beautifully encapsulates this: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This radical new identity transcends all the categories that divide us.

To create this kind of community, we must first acknowledge that we have put up walls based on race, gender, class, and religion. Just as Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, we must be willing to meet people where they are—creating shared experiences and relationships that transcend the barriers society has built. In doing so, we create a new group, one united by the shared experience of grace and the pursuit of truth.





THE IMPACT OF DIVISION ON YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The divisions we create in our communities don't just affect us—they have a lasting impact on the youth and families within our communities. When churches, schools, and neighborhoods are divided along racial, socioeconomic, or denominational lines, the collaborative effort required to address the needs of young people is stifled. The barriers between groups make it harder to pool resources, share knowledge, and provide the holistic support that families need.

According to the National Mentoring Partnership, young people who have access to a network of supportive adults are more likely to succeed in school, avoid negative behaviors, and become productive members of society. However, division within communities often isolates families, making it harder for them to access the resources and mentorship opportunities that could help their children thrive. If we are serious about breaking cycles of poverty, violence, and systemic disadvantage, we must confront the divisions within our own communities.



A CALL TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS

As we reflect on the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we see a powerful example of how to confront division. Jesus was intentional in breaking through racial, gender, and religious barriers to reach a woman who, by all societal standards, was considered an outsider. In doing so, He showed us that true community can only be built when we are willing to confront and dismantle the labels that divide us.

In this chapter, we are reminded that it truly "takes a village" to raise a child—but it must be a united village, not one divided by the walls we've created. If we are to see progress in the lives of our youth and families, we must first break down the barriers within our own communities.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 What labels or categories might you unconsciously apply to those you mentor? How can you work to recognize and move beyond these biases to see mentees as complex individuals?

2 Like Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, shared experiences can break down barriers. How can you create moments of shared experience with your mentees that foster connection and trust?

3 In what ways do societal divisions (race, class, religion, etc.) hinder the effectiveness of mentorship in your community? How can you actively break down these divisions within your mentorship efforts?

4 How can mentors intentionally build a community of "true worshipers," where relationships are based on faith and shared purpose, rather than social categories or divisions?

5 How does division in communities—whether racial, socioeconomic, or denominational—affect youth and families? What steps can mentors take to foster a more united, supportive environment for youth to thrive?



PART 2:



THE BLUEPRINT

"Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world."

— Joel A. Barker

CHAPTER V:



THE DEATH OF TRADITIONAL YOUTH MINISTRY





THE STRUGGLE TO THRIVE

When I first became a youth pastor as a teenager with no formal training, I was overwhelmed and frustrated. I struggled to connect with the youth and motivate them, often feeling like I wasn't good enough or equipped for the role. I was constantly searching for ways to improve as a leader and build better relationships with the youth.

Can I be honest with you? In over 15 years of serving as a youth pastor, my youth group never grew beyond 10-15 students. I wasn't put on salary, and I never had a budget for youth ministry. Everything I did had to be grassroots. I had to make do with what was available, which forced me to be creative, resourceful, and determined. I read countless books on youth ministry, but I often felt like I couldn't get over the proverbial hump. Have you ever felt that way?

Despite these challenges, I learned invaluable lessons about perseverance, adaptability, and the power of genuine relationships. Each obstacle made me more empathetic and deepened my connection with the youth I served. These experiences shaped me into a more compassionate and effective leader, with skills that extend beyond the walls of the church. Working with youth and families can be tough on your self-confidence, but I've come to realize that creating lasting change in our communities doesn't require extraordinary resources or grand gestures. It starts with genuine connection and small, consistent efforts.

In recent years, traditional youth ministry as it once existed in many churches has been facing a steady decline. Once seen as the primary vehicle for engaging young people in faith communities, the standard model of youth ministry—structured programs with a youth pastor, weekly services, and organized activities—has struggled to remain relevant in today's rapidly changing cultural and technological landscape.



A SHIFT IN PRIORITIES AND ENGAGEMENT

Several factors have contributed to the decline of traditional youth ministry. First, there has been a noticeable cultural shift in how young people engage with faith and community. In the digital age, where connection happens instantly through social media, many young people no longer see the church as the main space for forming relationships or exploring spiritual questions. The attraction of large, programmatic youth events has been replaced by a craving for more authentic, personalized, and relational experiences.

Second, churches are grappling with the fact that fewer young people are attending services. A 2020 report by Barna Group revealed that nearly 64% of young adults (ages 18-29) who grew up in the church have stopped attending regularly after age 15. These young people often cite reasons such as feeling that church is irrelevant to their lives, disagreements with the church's teachings, or the perceived hypocrisy within religious institutions. This disconnection begins in the teenage years, where many youth ministries fail to address the unique challenges and questions young people face today.





CURRENT STATISTICS ON YOUTH MINISTRY DECLINE

The numbers tell a story of decline across traditional youth ministries:

- **Decreasing Participation:** According to the Barna Group, youth group attendance has dropped significantly over the last two decades. In 2011, around 49% of teens attended youth group weekly. By 2022, that number had dropped to 32%.
- **Less Dedicated Staff:** Many churches no longer have full-time youth pastors. Research from Lifeway shows that about 65% of churches have a part-time or volunteer youth leader, and only 35% have a full-time youth minister. Smaller churches, in particular, struggle to maintain traditional youth ministries, often due to financial constraints and lower participation.
- **Growing Disconnection:** The National Study of Youth and Religion found that only 20% of young people see faith as important in their everyday lives, and fewer than 50% of teens identify as affiliated with a religious denomination. This signals a growing disconnection between youth and institutional faith communities.



THE IMPACT OF DECLINE

As traditional youth ministry loses its hold, the church is increasingly challenged to reimagine its role in the lives of young people. This decline is significant not only because it represents shrinking numbers but also because it impacts how the next generation engages with faith. Many churches are seeing this decline as an urgent call to adapt and innovate.

The decline in traditional youth ministry is not simply a matter of changing preferences but reflects a broader societal shift in how youth form their identities, engage with community, and interact with spirituality. Churches that once relied on programs to foster spiritual growth are now finding that mentorship-based models, small group discipleship, and personalized approaches that build authentic relationships are far more effective.



REIMAGINING YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE

In the wake of this decline, churches are presented with an opportunity to rethink how they engage young people. The growing interest in relational and mentorship-based models, like the HUTS program at The Village Anderson, points to the future of youth ministry—one that is less about programming and more about creating environments where young people feel safe, valued, and empowered to explore faith on their own terms.

The death of traditional youth ministry doesn't mean the end of youth engagement in churches, but it does signal the need for new approaches that meet the needs of today's generation. The future of youth ministry will likely be more focused on deep, meaningful relationships, spiritual formation, and community engagement—approaches that resonate with young people looking for more than just events or programs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 What do you think are the biggest cultural changes that have led to the decline of traditional youth ministry in churches? How has the rise of social media and digital connection impacted how young people engage with faith?

2 Why do you think many young people today find the church irrelevant to their lives? What can churches do to address the unique challenges and spiritual questions young people face in today's world?

3 The Barna Group's research shows a significant drop in youth group attendance over the past decade. What do you believe are the main reasons for this decline? How can churches combat this downward trend and re-engage youth?

4 In what ways can churches shift from program-based youth ministry to mentorship and relationship-based approaches? Why might mentorship be more effective in helping young people form their faith identity?

5 How can churches innovate and reimagine youth ministry to better meet the needs of today's generation? What new models or strategies have you seen that seem promising for the future of youth engagement in the church?

CHAPTER VI:

THE VISION, MISSION, AND STRATEGY OF THE VILLAGE ANDERSON





THE POWER OF VISION

Helen Keller once said, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.” Her words resonate deeply as we reflect on what it means to guide others, especially in the context of mentorship. Vision is more than a set of goals or aspirations; it is the blueprint of our future. Without it, we wander aimlessly, missing out on opportunities to lead, inspire, and create change. For us at The Village Anderson, vision is the driving force behind everything we do, giving us a clear direction in our work with youth and families.

At The Village Anderson, our vision is straightforward yet profound: **to be a community hub that advocates for and provides social equity through developing agents of change.** This vision serves as the guiding light that keeps us focused on our long-term goals and rooted in the belief that we can make a difference. But vision alone is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by a plan, a mission that carves out the path to reach those lofty heights.



A VISION FOR SOCIAL EQUITY

When we talk about social equity, we aren’t just talking about equality—where everyone is given the same resources or opportunities—but equity, which acknowledges that some people need more support to reach the same outcome. The Village Anderson is grounded in the understanding that underserved youth and families, especially those in marginalized communities, face barriers that can hinder their success. We believe in addressing these barriers head-on, providing the necessary tools, resources, and relationships that can make a life-changing impact.

In our Village, social equity is more than just an ideal; it is a mandate. We see the potential in every young person and every family, even when society does not. Through mentorship and community support, we work to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of their full potential. Our vision is to create a community where young people, regardless of their background, can grow into agents of change—individuals who not only thrive in their own lives but who are empowered to make a difference in the world around them.



THE MISSION: EMPOWERING YOUTH AND FAMILIES

If vision is what we aspire to achieve, mission is how we intend to get there. Aloo Denish Obiero once said, “Vision sees the stars; mission carves the path to reach them.” At The Village Anderson, our mission is to **empower youth and families through mentoring relationships that foster growth, resilience, and connection for a brighter future.** This mission is the heart of our work, shaping every decision, interaction, and initiative we undertake.

Mentorship is at the core of our mission because we believe in its transformative power. It’s through relationships that people grow, heal, and flourish. When we talk about empowering youth and families, we are referring to equipping them with the tools they need to overcome life’s challenges, make wise decisions, and build strong, supportive networks. Mentorship offers not only guidance and accountability but also encouragement and hope—especially for those who may not have received these gifts elsewhere.

We know that resilience, the ability to bounce back from adversity, is one of the most important qualities a person can have. Through our mentoring programs, we aim to nurture resilience in the youth and families we serve, helping them develop the confidence and perseverance to face life’s obstacles with strength and determination. At the same time, we focus on fostering connection, both within their families and with the wider community. By building these relationships, we create a village of support—a network that uplifts, sustains, and propels them toward a brighter future.



THE STRATEGY: BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

“A vision without a strategy remains an illusion,” said Lee Bolman, and his words hold true for every organization, including The Village Anderson. While our vision and mission provide purpose and direction, it is our strategy that enables us to bring them to life. At The Village Anderson, our strategy centers on creating a network of small mentor groups, which we call **H.U.T.S.** These groups are the foundation of our work, where mentors and mentees come together to learn, grow, and support one another.

H.U.T.S.—which stands for **Healing, Uplifting, Transforming, and Strengthening**—are designed to provide a safe, nurturing space for young people to thrive. Each HUT consists of at least three trained mentors (also known as coaches), a host site, and up to 15 students, both male and female. These small, tight-knit groups meet once a week for two hours over the course of 30 weeks, offering a consistent, reliable space for youth to connect with mentors and peers.

The structure of the program is intentional. For the first *15 weeks*, the sessions are **curriculum-based**, providing mentees with the skills, knowledge, and tools they need to navigate life’s challenges. We focus on topics such as goal-setting, decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution, all of which are essential for personal growth and success. These sessions are interactive, with plenty of opportunities for mentees to engage in discussions, share their experiences, and learn from one another.

The next *10 weeks* of the program are devoted to **guest speaker sessions**, where community leaders, professionals, and role models are invited to share their wisdom and life stories. These sessions serve as powerful examples of what is possible, showing mentees that there are multiple paths to success and that they, too, can achieve great things. Hearing from individuals who have overcome adversity or made significant contributions to their fields can inspire youth to dream bigger and work harder toward their goals.

The final *5 weeks* of the program are dedicated to **“Youth Experience” outings**, which offer mentees the chance to apply what they have learned in real-world settings. These outings might include community service projects, team-building activities, or visits to colleges, businesses, or cultural institutions. By stepping out of their usual environments, mentees gain new perspectives, build stronger connections with their peers and mentors, and develop a sense of belonging and purpose.



EMPOWERED BY A UNITED COMMUNITY

One of the things that makes The Village Anderson unique is the way we engage the broader community in our mission. Our mentor groups are not isolated efforts; they are supported by a network of committed individuals and organizations that share our vision for social equity and empowerment. These partners—whether they are local businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, or volunteers—play an essential role in helping us achieve our mission.

We believe that true change happens when people come together, united by a common purpose. Our strategy involves cultivating these partnerships, leveraging the strengths and resources of the community to support mentored youth and families in achieving their full potential. Whether it's providing financial support, volunteering time, or offering expertise, each partner contributes to the success of The Village Anderson and the lives we touch.

At the heart of this strategy is the understanding that we are stronger together. No single individual or organization can solve the complex issues facing our youth and families today. But by working together, we can make a significant impact, creating opportunities for growth, healing, and transformation.





H.U.T.S.: A MODEL OF MENTORSHIP IN ACTION

As mentioned earlier, the H.U.T.S. model is central to our strategy. But it's not just a program—it's a philosophy of mentorship that reflects our core values of community, equity, and empowerment. By keeping our groups small and consistent, we foster a sense of belonging and accountability. Mentees are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and personal growth, while mentors serve as guides, cheerleaders, and role models.

We intentionally structure the H.U.T.S. program to be flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of the youth we serve. Every group might look a little different, depending on the mentors, the host site, and the specific challenges or opportunities the mentees face. But the common thread is the commitment to creating a supportive, empowering environment where young people can learn, grow, and succeed.



CONCLUSION: THE VILLAGE APPROACH TO LASTING CHANGE

In conclusion, the vision, mission, and strategy of The Village Anderson are not just theoretical concepts; they are the foundation of everything we do. Our vision for a more equitable society, our mission to empower youth and families, and our strategy of building strong, supportive mentor groups all work together to create real, lasting change. Through the HUTS model, we are not just helping individuals; we are transforming communities, one relationship at a time.

As we continue to grow and expand, we remain committed to our core belief that **it takes a village** to raise a child. And at The Village Anderson, we are building that village—brick by brick, relationship by relationship, and life by life.

For those engaging with this training manual, remember: the journey toward change begins with you. As you read through the chapters and reflect on the discussion questions at the end of each, I encourage you to think deeply about your role in this village. Will you be a mentor? Will you be part of the solution? Together, we can help every young person in our community achieve their full potential.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 Helen Keller once said, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.” As an aspiring mentor, how does having a clear vision help you guide and inspire the youth in your community? What is your personal vision for the role you can play in fostering social equity through mentorship?

2 The Village Anderson aims to create social equity, not just equality. How do you see mentorship addressing the specific needs of underserved youth and helping them overcome barriers to success? Can you think of ways that mentors can help ensure equitable opportunities for all mentees?

3 Aloo Denish Obiero stated, “Vision sees the stars; mission carves the path to reach them.” In what ways does The Village Anderson’s mission to empower youth and families through mentoring relationships resonate with you? How would you contribute to this mission as a mentor?

4 Lee Bolman remarked, “A vision without a strategy remains an illusion.” What do you think makes The Village Anderson’s HUTS model (Healing, Uplifting, Transforming, and Strengthening) an effective strategy for long-term mentorship? How could you see yourself fitting into one of these HUTS, and what strengths would you bring to such a mentor group?

5 The Village Anderson emphasizes the importance of building resilience and connection in youth. As a mentor, how would you help your mentees develop these qualities? Can you share any past experiences where mentorship has helped you or others overcome challenges and build meaningful connections?

CHAPTER VII:

TURNING VISION INTO ACTION: A 3-STEP GUIDE TO LASTING IMPACT





ENGAGING YOUTH: BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Creating lasting change in our communities doesn't require extraordinary resources or grand gestures. It begins with ordinary people committing to making a difference. This chapter focuses on how individuals can engage youth, equip parents, and empower the community in a three-step process rooted in The Village Anderson's mission. Whether you're a mentor, a parent, or a community leader, these steps are designed to help you contribute meaningfully to closing the social equity gap.

The first step toward creating change is engaging youth where they are. The foundation of mentorship is trust, and for many young people, trust must be earned. Through our HUTS, The Village Anderson, focuses on creating safe spaces where youth feel heard, seen, and valued. But how can the everyday person build these kinds of relationships?

1 Meet Them on Their Level

Engaging youth requires understanding their world—what excites them, what challenges they face, and what dreams they hold. Whether you're a teacher, coach, or volunteer, start by listening. Instead of imposing your worldview, take time to ask questions and genuinely listen to their concerns and aspirations.

2 Consistency is Key

Building trust doesn't happen overnight. Many young people, especially those from marginalized communities, have experienced disappointment when adults come and go from their lives. The key to successful engagement is consistency. Show up regularly, be dependable, and demonstrate through your actions that you care. Mentors in our HUTS are advised to build long-lasting bonds by even simple gestures, such as attending school games or following up on conversations.

3 Create Opportunities for Leadership

Youth need to feel empowered, not just guided. Provide opportunities for them to take leadership roles, whether in community projects, mentoring younger kids, or leading discussions in group settings. At The Village Anderson, we encourage youth to see themselves as agents of change, capable of influencing their own lives and the world around them.



EQUIPPING PARENTS: STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY UNIT

The second step in this process is equipping parents. Parents are the primary influence in their children's lives, but many face significant barriers—financial strain, lack of access to resources, or even personal trauma. Supporting parents strengthens the family unit, which is foundational to youth success. As part of our approach, The Village Anderson aims to:

1 Provide Resources and Education

Parents need practical tools to support their children's growth. Workshops, seminars, and online resources that cover topics like financial literacy, effective communication, and mental health awareness can help parents navigate the challenges they face. Partnering with local organizations or offering these resources through community centers or churches can increase accessibility for underserved families.

2 Create Peer Support Networks

No parent should feel isolated. Organize small peer support groups for parents, where they can share experiences, seek advice, and provide emotional support for one another. These groups, like the HUTS model for youth mentorship, create a sense of belonging and accountability that can empower parents to become more engaged in their children's development.

3 Encourage Parental Involvement in Youth Programs

Invite parents to be part of the process. Whether through attending youth mentorship sessions, volunteering at community events, or participating in family-oriented activities, parental involvement helps reinforce the positive messages their children are receiving. This partnership between youth programs and families builds stronger relationships and provides a holistic approach to mentorship.



EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY: COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR SOCIAL EQUITY

Finally, real change requires community-wide involvement. Empowering the community means rallying local leaders, businesses, and organizations to support the vision of social equity. This step is crucial because it expands the impact of individual efforts and creates a sustainable ecosystem of support. When I started The Village Anderson, this was an area that particularly interested me. Growing up in church, it was easy to become isolated within our own circles. If we're not careful, we can take the "be in the world, not of the world" mindset too far, distancing ourselves from the very communities we aim to serve. For any mentoring approach to be sustainable, it must have the support and involvement of the community. Here are a few things we strive to do to ensure that.

1 Foster Local Partnerships

Engage local businesses, churches, and nonprofits to support mentorship programs. Whether through financial donations, volunteering time, or offering expertise, these partnerships are vital for scaling mentorship efforts. For example, a local business might sponsor *Youth Experience* outings, while a church might provide a venue for weekly mentorship meetings.

2 Host Community Events

Organize events that bring the community together around shared goals of supporting youth and families. These events can serve as opportunities to raise awareness, recruit new mentors, or simply celebrate the achievements of mentees. Events like these foster a sense of pride and ownership within the community and remind everyone of their collective responsibility in raising the next generation.

3 Advocate for Policy Change

Empowering the community also means advocating for systemic change. Use your voice to address issues like educational inequality, lack of affordable housing, or gaps in mental health services. By working together, communities can push for policy changes that provide more equitable opportunities for youth and families.



A COLLECTIVE CALL

Implementing The Village Anderson's vision for social equity doesn't happen in isolation—it happens when individuals, families, and communities work together in a concerted effort. By engaging youth, equipping parents, and empowering the broader community, we can build a village that uplifts every child and family. As you move forward, reflect on the role you can play in this process. Will you be the mentor who offers guidance, the parent who seeks support, or the community advocate who fights for change? It takes all of us to make a lasting impact.

I am convinced that there is one key entity that perfectly embodies the three-step approach I've discussed in this chapter: the Body of Christ, the Church. When the Church is functioning as it should, it has all the necessary components to create lasting impact in our communities. However, there's an important challenge we must face—there are certain traditional approaches we need to reevaluate, and in some cases, let go of altogether.

In the next chapter, I'll explore one of these approaches: traditional youth ministry.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1 How can you create meaningful relationships with the youth in your community? What are some practical ways to meet them on their level and build trust over time?

2 Why do you think consistency is so crucial in mentorship? How have you seen inconsistency affect relationships, particularly with young people, in your own life or community?

3 What are some common barriers parents face that prevent them from being fully engaged in their children's development? How can we, as individuals or organizations, provide practical support to help them overcome these barriers?

4 How can local partnerships (with businesses, churches, and nonprofits) strengthen mentorship efforts? Can you think of any organizations in your own community that could contribute to this mission?

5 In what ways can the community advocate for policy changes that impact social equity for youth and families? How can you personally get involved in these efforts to create lasting, systemic change?

CHAPTER VIII:

THE VILLAGE LIVES ON: A CALL TO ACTION





THE RECAP

The journey of writing *Reviving the Village: Mentorship as a Catalyst for Change* has been one of discovery, challenge, and hope. From the early days of mentoring at-risk youth to the foundation of Redefine Life Incorporated, the mission has always been clear: bridging the social equity gap through intentional mentorship and community engagement. The stories shared, the lessons learned, and the principles discussed throughout this book demonstrate that mentorship is not a one-way street but a transformative process that reshapes everyone involved—mentors, mentees, and entire communities.

This book has laid out the importance of building a village, a system of support that mimics the divine wisdom found in scripture and in the life of Jesus Christ. The power of community, the role of intentional relationships, and the responsibility to uplift others are the pillars of a thriving village. Every reader who has journeyed through these chapters now carries the torch of this mission forward.



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

But this is not the end—it's only the beginning. The issues our youth face today, the barriers to social equity, and the challenges of the underserved remain urgent. In this moment, a new chapter begins, not just for those who have read this book, but for every village rising across communities. The vision is simple yet profound: to be agents of change, to transform lives through mentorship, and to create spaces where every young person feels seen, heard, and valued.

We must continue to build on the philosophy of purposeful mentorship, carrying forward the lessons of love, grace, and guidance that Jesus demonstrated in His time with His disciples. As mentors, leaders, and members of our communities, we must take an active role in shaping the future—not just for our own families, but for the generations that will come after us.

So, what comes next?

I challenge you, the reader, to take up the mantle of mentorship. Whether you're a parent, a teacher, a coach, or a community leader, your village needs you. Our youth need you. The call to action is simple but profound: be a mentor, and in doing so, become an agent of change.

Start small—find one person you can pour into. Build a relationship. Share your wisdom, your time, and your heart. And then, multiply that impact. Join hands with others in your community and create your own “village”—your own network of mentorship and support. In doing so, you'll be part of something far greater than yourself.

Mentorship isn't just about closing the social equity gap. It's about creating a legacy that transcends generations, about restoring hope and offering pathways to a brighter future.



THE VILLAGE LIVES ON

As I reflect on the work that has been done and the work that remains, I am filled with hope. The Village Anderson and countless other organizations stand as proof that when we come together, we can change lives.

But it's not the organizations or the names that matter. It's the people—the mentors, the mentees, the communities. It's you.

The village lives on in every act of kindness, every moment of guidance, and every time we choose to invest in someone else's future. And as long as we continue to pour into others, to uplift and empower the next generation, this movement will never stop.

As you close this book, remember that you are part of something larger than yourself. The challenges ahead may be great, but the rewards are greater still. **Be bold. Be courageous. Be the mentor you wish you had.**

Together, we will build villages that stand the test of time—villages that reflect the heart of Christ and the power of true community. The journey continues, and the best is yet to come.