

*Interview with Alicia Britt Chole
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“Mentoring: The Eternal Investment”

Alicia Britt Chole is a vivacious and vibrant-looking woman. At first glance, her smile sways the mind to believe she could be in the same age group as those she mentors. Like them, she is inquisitive, insightful, and insistent upon seeking solid answers to life's big questions. Allow her a chance to speak about the subject of mentoring and it will soon become clear that she possesses the wisdom of saints far older. She is smart enough, in fact, to teach the teachers a thing or two about the issue. Because she shares a heartfelt burden for the spiritual upbringing of today's young adults, mentoring is a subject close to Chole's heart. She credits those who set examples for her—strong, godly women who helped build a solid foundation in her life when she was a new Christian. They taught her the value of investing in the eternal and inspired her to draw closer to God through His Word. Today, more than twenty years after those seeds were planted she continues to make an eternal investment in the next generation. Having been mentored and successfully mentoring others over such a length of time uniquely qualifies Chole to teach others healthy practices and principles for mentoring. Her objective is to see a new ubiquitous surge of biblical mentors following the best example ever modeled for mankind: that of Jesus Himself.

WT: Did you have a mentor? How were you guided, and in what ways did it change your outlook?

ABC: God granted me the treasure of mentors from the very beginning. Two weeks after he mercifully interrupted my atheistic existence, He partnered me with a woman who would become my very first mentor. She became a part of my life and still is today. As a college student, my campus pastor was a mentor as well. These two women were women of the Word. They were outstanding Bible teachers who gave me their time, proximity, and a love for the Bible. Through their mentoring, God anchored my amazing supernatural conversion in His eternal Word.

WT: Was it a natural transition to become a mentor yourself?

ABC: The people that poured into my life were convinced that mentoring was Jesus' biblical model. Mentoring is not a function of our personality. It is not a function of our position or some kind of superlative form of Christianity; mentoring is a function of health—healthy things reproduce themselves. So beginning to mentor wasn't anything unusual, it was just a sign of healthy growth and development. But I was still concerned about investing in people, and I still had fears. As a two-year-old believer, I remember speaking to my mentor and asking if she was worried about handing me her mentoring group. I thought she might say something like, “Oh, but you've grown so much and I'm just so proud of you. She was indeed proud of me and had been extremely affirming, but I needed something stronger than myself at this point. My mentor confessed that she wasn't just concerned—she was scared to death to hand me this group! But she knew that mentoring was Jesus' biblical model of ministry and if we were faithful with biblical example, we would be fruitful. With those words, she anchored my confidence not in myself, my experience, or my own abilities, but in God's character and example. Reflecting on

her choices, I realized I had to have more confidence in who God is than I had fear of who I am. That truth has stayed with me throughout twenty years of mentoring.

WT: What is the major challenge that today's young adults face?

ABC: I think the greatest challenge before the learning generation is developing the discipline to reposition their emotions behind truth. Every strength has a shadow. One of the characteristics that has the potential of making this generation great also has a shadow that could sabotage their destiny. The learning generation is experiential, holistic, and communal. They want to live an integrated life. They have a low threshold for hypocrisy or inconsistency. They don't just want to know God, they want to feel God. Because of the authority emotion has in their lives, when they encounter difficulties or obstacles, it is easy for them to let emotion lead them to discouragement, despair, or even to drop out of their dreams. We live in a world that tells us that emotions are truth's vocal twin, that emotions are really the test for truth. If what we feel is in competition with what the Word of God says is true, we often place our trust in our emotions. The fact that the learning generation feels so deeply will enable them to take greater risks, live for greater causes, and fulfill dreams more passionately. However, it is for that same reason that they will have a greater challenge of repositioning their emotions and letting Jesus' truth lead their lives.

WT: You admit to always having been a "questioner" of life's big mysteries. How do you respond to those same kinds of questions from those you mentor?

ABC: My goal as a mentor is not to increase the information people have, it's to increase their dependence on the God of all wisdom. My goal is to guide them towards God, so even with the great questions of life—even if I have some insight or answers—being a great mentor is not being an answer-giver, it is being a question-asker and a director towards truth. What I encourage them to know is that God isn't nervous that they have questions. He does not withdraw from emotionally loaded questions. In fact, He's rather secure! He takes delight in an inquiring mind. The challenge is what direction we face with the questions that we have. Do we ask our questions facing God, or do we ask our questions with our backs towards him? So first, I encourage them to look to God with their questions. Next, I encourage them to partner their speaking with silence and their questioning with waiting. Especially for those of us with busy minds and many thoughts; we need to partner mental busyness with spiritual stillness. We need to wait on God, not because we need answers, but because He's worthy of being waited upon. As we learn to wait—as we exercise the disciplines of stillness, silence, and solitude—God mentors our minds at levels deeper than words can contain.

WT: The problems faced by this young generation have been many decades in the making. What motivates them to see that they can change the world for Jesus Christ?

ABC: As a mentor, the primary way I try to instill a longing to change the world for Christ is by having them focus on the Christ that changed the world. That is not a semantic repositioning of words, it is a critical, fundamental focus as a mentor. We can motivate people by showing them need; that is easy. But there's a tremendous gap between saying, "I volunteer because there is a need," and saying, "I volunteer because there is a God." In a world where need shouts at us from every corner—especially with a generation that feels need so deeply—it is extremely important that we place "the God" before "the need." Because they will drown in the ocean of need if that leads first, even with great intentions and a pure hearts. Rather, the focus should be on following

the Jesus who made a difference; that is my emphasis. What I see as most important is the singular great call of scripture: "Follow Me." That "Follow Me" leads some of us to pulpits, some of us to parks, and some of us to places around the world, but the real core calling is simply, "Follow." If hearts are consumed with a hunger for follow, they are going to be world-changers. God is looking for a generation that is truly more consumed with whom they are following than where they are going.