By Mac McFarland

“I’m going blind,” the youth leader said, as she prayed with 40 other young people crowded into the living room of our home in Eugene, Oregon.

It was a prayer session like others that have taken place as part of a home-based Network outreach to youth pastors during the past year.

Cookies...and Prayer

The evening sessions begin with the ever-popular sharing of cookies baked by my wife, Barbara. Some participant then introduces a discussion topic, which often represents an issue being dealt with by youth leaders. The questions include such subjects as sexual behavior, career decisions, or the church’s role and effectiveness in a post-modern society. After a Bible study, the evening ends with a prayer time.

During one of those sessions, the youth leader whose vision was deteriorating asked the group to pray for healing. We moved her to the center of the room and began laying on hands. A young man began to pray for her healing, but broke into tears and confessed as he prayed that he didn’t have faith that she could be healed. Others began to make similar confessions and prayed for that type of faith in their lives. It was a powerful, moving evening.
I began to realize how truly weak I was; how much my identity was tied to the size of my youth group.

Because these two men were willing to share their lives with me, and by God’s grace, I have been privileged for more than 35 years to mentor students and youth leaders. The relationships these two men built with me formed the foundation for how I want to encourage others.

**Principles of Healthy Ministry**

These men helped me to understand three elements that characterize a successful ministry.

- **First**, they showed me a process to find the “toolbox” of programs and ideas that helped me to run the ministry.

- **Second**, they took the time to help me develop a biblical philosophy or purpose that is consistent with God’s Word.

- **Third**, and most important, they modeled a character lifestyle that allowed the Holy Spirit to give me God’s power and character to run a ministry, based upon my being weak and God being strong.

In 2 Timothy 3:10 (NIV), Paul reminds Timothy of these three key elements that he shared through a mentoring relationship:

> “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance…”

Notice how it begins with God’s Word (a tool in the toolbox) and leads to a successful ministry. It also means knowing our purpose in life and ministry (biblical philosophy). Then, Paul lists some of the qualities—faith, patience, love, endurance—that must be in the life of those who oversee a ministry (Christ-like character).

My role in the National Network of Youth Ministries is as a “pastor at large.” That means I am privileged to encourage and consult with young men and women around the country to develop these three areas in their lives and ministries. Through the Network, I am able to give youth leaders resources for ministry (the toolbox).

Some of these ministries have opened their lives and ministry so I can help them develop a biblical
philosophy of ministry (the purpose). And a few men and women have asked me to mentor them in becoming Christ-like people in life and ministry (character).

Paul directs us to do this: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

As Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, the ultimate reason we entrust others with these things is, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”

I encourage everyone who is in ministry to take to heart the teaching of Christ: that we are to share our lives with each other so that the gospel can be shared around the world.

God has done some powerful things through our local Network in Eugene. Prayers like that prayed by the girl going blind take place in our home. At last report, her vision was improving!

**Going to the Next Level**

About a year ago, Barbara and I asked youth leaders in our area whether they would be interested in undertaking more philosophy and character development. The number who came weekly to our home to be mentored blew us away. Around 45 youth leaders—and sometimes as many as 100—packed our home to spend consistent time in God's Word and to be held accountable in their personal lives. It’s all about biblical philosophy and Christ-like character.

I believe God is blessing these leaders because they are placing more emphasis on being “character-healthy.” They have set some lofty goals for reaching our city. The Eugene/Springfield youth ministries have seen more than 600 students come to Christ this school year. Praise the Lord!

Every youth leader has strengths and weaknesses. Some youth leaders are stronger in the area of having a full toolbox, other leaders have a great biblical philosophy, and a number of youth leaders have been mentored to develop healthy character. Are you sharing your strengths, and recognizing your weaknesses?

I encourage you to network with other youth pastors—not just to meet together once a month—to develop mentoring relationships that allow you to be tools sharpened into what God has designed for your life and ministry.

Iron sharpens iron.

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**It’s all about biblical philosophy and Christ-like character.**

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**Mac McFarland, along with his wife, Barb, serves as Pastor at Large for the National Network of Youth Ministries and has been a Network member since it began in 1981. For consulting or questions, you can e-mail Mac at macmcfarland@worldnet.att.net, or phone him at (541) 343-8024.**