



Laura Flanders: ([00:03](#))

I'm going to suggest that every leader needs to live a mentored life.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:10](#))

You're listening to the Faith and Work podcast, where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work.

Joanna Meyer: ([00:20](#))

Hi, and welcome to the Faith and Work podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, the Director of Public Engagement at Denver Institute for Faith and Work. Today we're tackling a topic that is both inspiring and elusive, the topic of mentoring. Here's why I say that. I have seen the life-changing impact that mentoring relationships can have, whether it's in the life of an underserved teen who needs help finding their footing academically, or a younger professional who benefits from having doors open for them in the corporate sector. But I've also seen people hungry to have someone invest in their lives, struggle to make a connection, or be disappointed by unmet expectations that they had for a mentoring relationship.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:02](#))

Maybe you've been asked to mentor someone, but you were unsure about what was expected of you in that role. The misconceptions, or lack of clarity that we have about what it means to mentor, can keep us from discovering the power of intentional growth-oriented relationships in our own personal, professional, or spiritual lives.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:22](#))

Which is why I'm excited to talk to a mentoring expert, today's guest, Laura Flanders. Laura is a certified executive coach who leads Taproot Innovation, a coaching and organizational consulting firm. She has 35 years of corporate and nonprofit leadership experience and directed the training and mentoring program as a faculty member at Denver seminary. Laura has an expansive and empowering vision for mentoring that I hope will encourage you to pursue this intentional form of relational investment in your own life.

Joanna Meyer: ([01:54](#))

Well, Laura Flanders, welcome to the podcast. What a treat to get to see you in this context, my friend.

Laura Flanders: ([01:59](#))

It is so much fun to be with you today.

Joanna Meyer: ([02:02](#))

Well, you are our resident expert when it comes to mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([02:06](#))

Oh oh.



Joanna Meyer: ([02:06](#))

I am wondering, what do you think people mean when they say mentoring?

Laura Flanders: ([02:11](#))

Oh man, it's a big word, isn't it? It's a word that is often made way too big, and we make mentoring way too hard. Your question, what do most people mean when they say they're looking for a mentor? I think we should make the emphasis on most people, because it really depends on who we're talking to. As I'm answering your question, I'll think of most people.

Laura Flanders: ([02:36](#))

There's a great definition that I would start out with, that is by written by John C. Crosby, he founded the Uncommon Individual Foundation, which is an organization that a school that I taught at was on faculty at. We consulted with them and we built a mentoring program for that school. He says that mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction.

Laura Flanders: ([03:00](#))

I really like that definition because it's simple and it's accessible. I often use that definition when I train mentors, which I did a lot for the school that I taught at. Mentors were required, and they had to go through an orientation, and they had to come to the training, in order for the student to be able to begin the program.

Laura Flanders: ([03:25](#))

when they are with me in the room and they are asked to be a mentor, I often saw their nervousness for being a mentor.

Joanna Meyer: ([03:34](#))

Yes.

Laura Flanders: ([03:35](#))

They were really freaked out that they were having to be there. They are full of fear, most of them, because they have this one idea about mentoring. That is the same one idea that most people have when they say they're looking for a mentor, and that is they are looking for someone who can fulfill their, I would call it, their felt need, and typically this felt need is to have a brain to pick. Mentoring is a brain to pick, and ear to listen, and a push in the right direction. But in all reality, I think what most people's underlying need behind that felt need is that they want to be known and understood.

Laura Flanders: ([04:15](#))

I share this definition with mentors and with mentees, because as mentors, we tend to have a bent towards one of those three. I'll repeat it. Mentoring is a brain to pick, and ear to listen, and a push in the



right direction. We have a bent towards one of those three, and we want to embrace that bent, but we don't want to neglect the other two. My bent is push right direction. I used to think I had the spiritual discipline of confrontation, and I've had to learn. I've had to learn how to listen, I'm still not a great listener. I'm learning to listen more, I'm learning to ask better questions. The hardest one for me is to be the brain to pick.

Laura Flanders: ([04:54](#))

I think when most people are looking for a mentor, that's what they think they're supposed to be looking for, when, in all reality, they're looking for somebody who can exercise all three and still honor their bent. I'll always honor my bent. I'm really good at prodding mentees along, not so great at letting them pick my brain; there's a lot behind that, but I've had to learn to do that. So I think that's what most people are looking for, is a brain to pick, but they're is more to it than that, if they really think about it.

Joanna Meyer: ([05:24](#))

Yeah, it's so helpful to have some clarity about what are we often talking about? I know when I have been approached to function as a mentor, I've often felt a lot of pressure.

Laura Flanders: ([05:32](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([05:32](#))

Because when it's not defined well, it can feel like that person is looking towards me for all the answers that they need in life.

Laura Flanders: ([05:40](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([05:40](#))

That may not be true, that may not be what they're looking to, but the undefined nature can be a little bit intimidating.

Laura Flanders: ([05:46](#))

Real intimidating. And, to be honest with you, they might be looking for perfect; they might be looking for a Messiah. I remember one time, I was leading a conversation with a bunch of students that were getting ready to look for mentors, and I asked them, "What are you looking for in a mentor?" One of the students went on, and on, and on. I just looked at them, I said, "You're looking for perfect."

Joanna Meyer: ([06:08](#))

Wow.



Laura Flanders: ([06:09](#))

You're looking for a Messiah. Good luck with that.

Joanna Meyer: ([06:14](#))

Yeah, and I found, maybe some of our listeners are from a Christian setting, like I had. I worked in campus ministry for 12 years, and was involved as a student for longer than that. There was this idea that you would get a discipler, we called it in your life, and it was someone who served a ton of purposes for you. They were those three people, three roles that you described earlier, but they also were your person.

Laura Flanders: ([06:38](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([06:38](#))

And you look to them for comfort in life, and direction. There is even this metaphor of pouring into someone. I hear that a lot in Christian circles.

Laura Flanders: ([06:48](#))

Oh, yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([06:49](#))

I think-

Laura Flanders: ([06:49](#))

That's a real common phrase, isn't it?

Joanna Meyer: ([06:51](#))

Yeah, pouring into, and I can appreciate it. I think it has some biblical roots, but at the same time, it has a very one up, one down feel, of if I just find the right person who is above me or has something to offer, I will have some unmet needs filled in my life. I've come to realize that's not the best feel for it, which is why we're talking about this conversation, because we want to broaden our concept of mentoring, and also provide a lot of options. Actually, everyone, I think, needs a mentoring influence in their life, which we'll talk about. We want to have a better understanding of what are the innumerable ways we can have those needs met.

Laura Flanders: ([07:25](#))

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I would say that we don't want to approach it for looking for that one perfect mentor. I think that's a big mistake, and I think that's why there's so much pressure in the word itself. What I want to suggest is that, when we think about mentoring, what is really perfect is if we can look back on our life. Imagine being 80 years old, if we get to live that long. What is perfect is if we can look back on our



life, and we can see that we have had, what I call, a constellation of mentors around us, or a community of mentors around us.

Joanna Meyer: ([08:08](#))

Yes.

Laura Flanders: ([08:08](#))

No one person was perfect. I don't think that's even possible. But if there is a constellation, we can call that perfect.

Joanna Meyer: ([08:21](#))

Yes.

Laura Flanders: ([08:21](#))

So when we're looking for one mentor to serve us for a particular need, a particular dimension of our life, I think we should look for good. We should look for somebody who's a good mentor, but if we are looking for perfection, we are not going to find it. Perfect is, really, the constellation of the mentoring. Look for good, not perfect, is what I would say.

Joanna Meyer: ([08:45](#))

As I was thinking about framing this conversation, I was inspired by Amy Gallo's article in the Harvard Business Review, where she identifies four myths that people often have about mentoring. Her first one, you touched on, was that the myth that mentoring is about finding that one perfect person.

Laura Flanders: ([09:03](#))

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([09:04](#))

You've ex you've expanded on that. What do you think are baseline qualities a person should look for, or consider when they're want to ask someone to be a mentor in their life?

Laura Flanders: ([09:12](#))

Oh, that's a good question. I do a lot of consultations for organizations who want to think about creating a mentoring program. I often say to them, no, that's not what I'm going to help you do. I'm going to help you think through what does it look like to create a mentoring culture? One of the first things that I want to do is get together a group of people around that boardroom table, let's say, and talk about their experiences of mentoring. I want to get to, what I call, a baseline definition of mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([09:50](#))



I get them talking about mentoring by asking them to share their mentoring stories. Now, a lot of times you see the whites of their eyes, because some of them may be experiencing, I don't have a mentor, I've never had one, because the word is so big. I don't really necessarily define it too much when I ask them to share their stories. The reason why I have them share their stories, is because I want them to listen to each other's experiences. What happens is that they hear each other's experiences and they maybe begin to understand that there's various forms of mentoring. Mentoring looks different for different reasons, and in different contexts and for different people.

Laura Flanders: ([10:31](#))

Then I want to begin to have them look at those forms and those definitions of mentoring and for what's common amongst them, so we can find a baseline definition that honors the various expressions or experiences of mentoring that we've had. I ask them. I'll spend a good two hours, depending on how many people are sitting around the table; we listen to each other's stories. To help them with that question, who has served as a mentor to you and what were their qualities, I give them some silly questions. I start out with Mr. Rogers, and I ask, maybe you could talk about who loved you into being? That's from one of Mr. Rogers's books, or the movie, I think I maybe got that from. Who loved you into being?

Laura Flanders: ([11:17](#))

Or I might ask them, think about somebody who taught you how to do something? Or who was a good role model for you that primarily you observed that person, maybe more than you talked to them, but you observed them. Or who primarily listened to you rather than overly instructed you? I give them a few prompts, and then we just listened to each other's stories, and it is such a rich experience. Oftentimes there's tears that that act of remembering, and being able to look back into your life, and call someone a mentor that you may not have called a mentor previously. I would call my grandma Rose a mentor to me, now that I have a more broader, richer understanding of what mentoring is.

Laura Flanders: ([12:02](#))

Then after we listen to those stories, then I have them look at some definitions, and you can just go online and Google a whole bunch of definitions. We look to find what is common amongst those definitions. Every time I do this exercise, the answers are the same. What is common in all of the definitions? What you find is that mentoring is relational, mentoring is about growth and here's the kicker, mentoring is an intentional pursuit towards both of those things. That word intentionality is there. Mentoring isn't everything or it's nothing. Not all my relationships I would call mentoring. But if there's a pursuit towards growth, and it is a relational expression, and it is intentional. Intentionality has its different flavors and tones, but if it is intentional towards those things, we can call that a mentoring relationship. You can see everybody around the table just relax when they get that baseline definition of mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([13:08](#))



Then I'll go back and I'll say, okay, there's probably different expressions and forms of mentoring. Does the baseline definition of mentoring honor those forms? My baseline definition mentoring is this: mentoring is a relational practice, in which there's intentional pursuit towards growth and transformation. That's Laura's baseline definition of mentoring. I used it for years at Denver seminary with the team that I worked for, and I've just it with me, and I haven't really edited it much. It's pretty simple. It's baseline. It honors the different forms that might get defined differently, and deeper or broader, but it honors those different forms. The community, then, can all begin to be mentored alongside each other. They can talk about their mentors, and honor each other's stories, and invite those different ways and expressions of mentoring to be experienced.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:06](#))

Yeah. You're alluding to something that addresses one of the second myths about mentoring, the idea that it's a formal long-term relationship.

Laura Flanders: ([14:14](#))

Oh, okay.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:15](#))

If someone has been in an official, corporate setting.

Laura Flanders: ([14:17](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([14:17](#))

They may have been assigned a mentor.

Laura Flanders: ([14:19](#))

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joanna Meyer: ([14:19](#))

Or maybe you think of the one person that has walked with you for 20 years, that helps you grow. But you would argue there are a lot more different forms of mentoring. Tell us a little bit more about the different types of ways that people can mentor or be mentored?

Laura Flanders: ([14:31](#))

Okay. Let me first express that, before I talk about the forms, let me suggest that there's, what I call, two categories of mentoring. If we think about the whole of our life, and all the different dimensions of our life. We have a relational life, an emotional life, an intellectual life, and so on, and physical life, and all the different dimensions of our life.



Laura Flanders: ([15:01](#))

The two categories of mentoring that I want to describe. One is called balcony mentoring. That's the mentoring that, someone comes alongside you, there's mutuality in learning. They think about and they care about the whole of your life. The primary function of the relationship is interdependence, it goes back and forth. They need one another and they learn together.

Laura Flanders: ([15:28](#))

Then there's a category of, what I call, ground-floor mentoring. That mentoring, mutuality and learning, typically doesn't go back and forth. It's more top-down, from the mentor to the mentee. The learning is often about just one dimension of a human life. It's not necessarily about the whole of life. And the function is more dependent, the learner is dependent on the mentor. Those two categories, I think there's different forms that fit, or fall into those categories. There is probably a trajectory between ground-floor and balcony mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([16:06](#))

The different forms, one of them I call friendship mentoring or peer mentoring. Some people call it companionship in Christ type of mentor. That typically is a form of mentoring that falls in that balcony category. That's my mentor, Arlene. She's nearing 80 years old now. We've been meeting for a long time so, yeah, it has been a long relationship, but it's not very formal. We've grown in friendship with each other, the learning is very mutual with each other. It is a very interdependent relationship. Opposed to, an apprenticeship form of mentoring would be more ground floor. That's typically about your occupational life; for a skill. You ride a long in the cop car, so to speak. You might learn by doing, and that would fall more on the ground-floor type of mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([17:00](#))

Counseling? I think counseling is a form of mentoring. Does that fit more in balcony or more ground floor? It's probably more in the middle. A Counselor probably shouldn't make it too about them and about their own learning, that would be unethical. A good mentor, a good counselor, will think about the whole life and ask questions, thinking through all the dimensions of the human life, as they're trying to help that person get more up to the curve of normalcy.

Laura Flanders: ([17:30](#))

Another form of mentoring could be a spiritual director. In some forms and practices of faith, someone might go to see a spiritual director. That falls maybe a little bit more towards the balcony form of mentoring. Yet again, like a counselor, they shouldn't make it too much about them. The mutual and learning might not be as much as it were peer mentoring, or companionship in Christ mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([17:55](#))

Sponsoring teaching can even be a form of mentoring, even if the teacher never meets one-on-one with the students in the classroom. But if the teacher is real focused towards wanting it to be formational.



Not just an information dump, but a formation experience in the classroom, in the way that she asks the questions of the students, and putting them in groups and having them interact and dialogue. That teacher can create a formational learning experience.

Laura Flanders: ([18:28](#))

I would also say that group mentoring can be- Group can be a form of mentoring as well if it's formational; the leader and the facilitator of the group, and so the peer-to-peer mentoring that happens in a group. Again, mentoring is not everything or it's nothing, but if it is relationally driven, it's about growth and formation, and it's an intentional pursuit towards all of those things, we could call it mentoring. I can get accused of calling everything mentoring, and I don't mean to do that. But those are some forms.

Joanna Meyer: ([18:59](#))

Yeah. I think of two practical examples that I have run across. One, is that ground-floor, focused mentoring. I think of the example of Stephanie Summers, who is a friend of Denver Institute. She's the CEO of the Center for Public Justice. She talks about how she has pursued a community of mentors in her life. She said, "I have a ton of people that mentor, that don't realize that they're my mentors."

Laura Flanders: ([19:22](#))

Yes. Yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([19:23](#))

Because what she'll do, is she'll have a specific issue that she's wrestling with in her professional life that she wants input on, and she'll ask someone for an hour of their time.

Laura Flanders: ([19:33](#))

Perfect.

Joanna Meyer: ([19:33](#))

Find a location that's convenient for them, and have a really thoughtful conversation about the issue or subject matter that she's wrestling with. At the end of the conversation, she'll keep it open and say, "Hey, if I have more questions about this, would you be open to talking more about this particular topic?" She said, I have all of these people that are in a relational network with me, that have made themselves available to help me grow. It's open-ended, it's low pressure.

Laura Flanders: ([19:59](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([19:59](#))



But I've thought about my own life, and I'm like, that's something I could pursue, and I think many of our listeners could pursue a community of people.

Laura Flanders: ([20:06](#))

Yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:06](#))

What I love about it, is it is low pressure; there's not a lot of stakes or expectations on either side. It just opens you up to learning, and conversations about critical things related to your professional skills. The flip side is I think I'm pre-mentoring some of the girls at my church.

Laura Flanders: ([20:22](#))

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joanna Meyer: ([20:23](#))

I'm in my mid-forties and single, and I've realized that, for professional women, often those early thirties or a critical window of time. They're either wrestling with questions of marriage and potential motherhood. If they're single, they're realizing that they're moving into leadership in their jobs, and they're not married, and that raises some questions. I've just realized that I can be available to them.

Laura Flanders: ([20:46](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:46](#))

I don't want to act like I have all the answers. I've just intentionally sought them out for a meal, and just kept the door open, and said, "Hey, if this is something you would like to be talking about, I am available."

Laura Flanders: ([20:57](#))

Wow.

Joanna Meyer: ([20:58](#))

For me, that feels good because I'm not tied into a long term relationship.

Laura Flanders: ([21:02](#))

Right.

Joanna Meyer: ([21:02](#))

But I'm available and who knows. I may have some rich friendships with younger women become available, that's mutually beneficial.



Laura Flanders: ([21:09](#))

Exactly.

Joanna Meyer: ([21:09](#))

So those are a few ways I've seen it done, that aren't traditional forms of mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([21:14](#))

Yeah. I think what you're expressing there is, for the most part, you're suggesting that the mentee has a responsibility to drive their mentored life.

Joanna Meyer: ([21:29](#))

Okay, let's talk about that. That's a shift.

Laura Flanders: ([21:32](#))

Yeah, it is a shift. I did this silly little study, with the librarian at the seminary that I taught at for 16 years. We looked at books on mentoring,. Over a 10 year period, from 2009 to 2019, I think it was. We found that she entered the word "mentor" into the title, and "mentoring" into the subject line, and it returned 430 to total books.

Joanna Meyer: ([21:59](#))

Wow.

Laura Flanders: ([21:59](#))

That had been written, over the course of that decade, on the subject of mentoring. Then she added in the keyword "mentee," and only 44 books were returned. Then she added in the keyword "learning," and only, and then another six. So 50 books were returned out of 430, which told us that out of that 430 books, only 50 of them were seriously addressing the act of being a mentee and being a learner, over and against the act of being a mentor. So most books on mentoring are about how to be a mentor, and that has been a beef of mine.

Joanna Meyer: ([22:42](#))

Yeah, yeah. Okay. What, and I really need-

Laura Flanders: ([22:46](#))

Everybody's like, "But when are you going to write the book, Laura?" I'm like, "Well, I'm too busy consulting, and coaching, and teaching."

Joanna Meyer: ([22:53](#))

Let's talk about that, then.



Laura Flanders: ([22:54](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([22:54](#))

You are suggesting that, equally as important in finding someone that is thoughtful, that can be part of these conversations with you, is who you are as a mentee; what you bring to the relationship.

Laura Flanders: ([23:05](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([23:05](#))

Tell us more about that. What makes a good mentee?

Laura Flanders: ([23:06](#))

I'm not even sure I would say it's equally important. I think it's probably most important.

Joanna Meyer: ([23:13](#))

Okay.

Laura Flanders: ([23:14](#))

Scripture does say to go and make disciples, I get that. There's a command to go and make disciples. I think mentoring and disciple, I consider those words synonyms. When I talk about forms, I didn't list the form of discipleship, and we could go into how that word is used. But discipleship is a process word. That word is not in the Bible, but the noun, to be a disciple, is there, the command to make disciples is there. I get that, and that means we're called to be mentors, to be disciples. But there's far more examples of the process of discipleship through relationships, through interaction, and dialogue and back and forth.

Laura Flanders: ([23:58](#))

You see, even in those scriptural examples, the intentionality on the mentee's part; you can't force somebody to learn. As we're raising children in the school systems, or raising children of our own, or we aunt or uncles, or whatever roles we have, we should be teaching this responsibility, to be intentional about being a learner. Be curious, ask your questions, and then how do you want to pursue that?

Joanna Meyer: ([24:26](#))

Yeah, yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([24:26](#))

Are the questions we should be asking each other to encourage that intentionality? I have some compassion over people who get to the end of their life and said they had no mentors, because our



culture doesn't really teach people how to be a learner. We really value just dumping information on people without teaching them how to actually learn.

Jeff Haanan: ([24:54](#))

Hi, I'm Jeff Haanan founder of Denver Institute for Faith and Work, and I would like to invite you to become a part of our new monthly partner community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society, through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you, as a monthly partner, you will receive a welcome box; you'll have exclusive access to private, digital content,; personalized vocational coaching; and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a monthly partner, simply visit denverinstitute.org/give, or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Joanna Meyer: ([25:40](#))

Okay, so let's get practical. Imagine somebody is listening and has this hunger. They're like, "Gosh, I would love some wise counsel in my life. I feel like I need this to grow personally, spiritually, professionally." What do they need to look at within their own life? What are the preconditions to having a satisfying mentorship relationship? From the mentee side, what needs to happen?

Laura Flanders: ([26:02](#))

Ooh. I'm going to suggest they need to look at their existential barriers.

Joanna Meyer: ([26:11](#))

Okay, you have got to describe this.

Laura Flanders: ([26:11](#))

That's a big, big word.

Joanna Meyer: ([26:12](#))

Yes, that is a big word.

Laura Flanders: ([26:14](#))

Basically, what are the things about you that keep you from being a learner, from making the ask, from pursuing? One of them might be, I'm a woman, and I work in a male-dominated organization. It's really hard for me to find male mentors who can say yes to me, and I'm not putting them down for that, it is just harder for me. That is a reality of my gender, let's say, in a particular organization, It could also could be my age. I might be 75 years old and my mentors have all been... Well, I might be 85 years old and my mentors are all dying off. It's harder to find a mentor the older we get. Those are existential barriers that I can't really do a whole lot about.



Laura Flanders: ([27:05](#))

But then there's other existential barriers that relate to my character, and who I am, and things that I've struggled with that I might want to consider. It's really hard for me to admit that I don't know something, and there's a big, long story of neglect and abuse in my past that has fed into that. It's hard for me to ask for help, because I wasn't allowed to when I was younger, in my home. I was, maybe, sometimes called stupid, or you don't know what you're talking about. So, of course, I learned how to hide, and to not learn how to ask for help and to demonstrate the fact that I could be a curious person. Those are some. I would call that an existential barrier. That requires the work with a counselor, probably, to look at more of those kinds of things.

Laura Flanders: ([28:02](#))

I'd say do that work to look at those things that keep you from pursuing mentoring, then ask yourself, what can I do to push through that? Yeah, we could talk about the gender mentoring issues later.

Joanna Meyer: ([28:19](#))

[crosstalk 00:28:19].

Laura Flanders: ([28:19](#))

But as a woman, I've learned some tactics of how to pursue mentoring in a way that's respectful and reasonable, in a male-dominated world, which is, primarily my career has been in a male-dominated world.

Joanna Meyer: ([28:33](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([28:33](#))

It's not that way for all women, but it has been that way for me.

Joanna Meyer: ([28:39](#))

You had mentioned that there are examples of mentoring that we see in scripture, I would love to hear from you some examples. One that immediately came to mind was the example of Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro.

Laura Flanders: ([28:50](#))

Oh, yeah. That's a really-

Joanna Meyer: ([28:51](#))

It's [inaudible 00:28:51] relationship.

Laura Flanders: ([28:51](#))



That's probably the first one you would think of.

Joanna Meyer: ([28:53](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([28:54](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([28:54](#))

I just think of Jethro stepping in when Moses was feeling overloaded by the task of caring for the Israelites, and Jethro encouraged him to delegate.

Laura Flanders: ([29:02](#))

Right.

Joanna Meyer: ([29:02](#))

I think, boy, what a leadership lesson from your father-in-law right now.

Laura Flanders: ([29:06](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([29:06](#))

And who knows what the scope of their relationship was like.

Laura Flanders: ([29:08](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([29:09](#))

But I'm like, oh yeah, that's a traditional example of mentoring.

Laura Flanders: ([29:11](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([29:11](#))

What other examples do we see?

Laura Flanders: ([29:13](#))

And that baseline definition I gave you earlier, honors all these different forms that we see in scripture. If it's relational, about growth, and it is intentional pursuit, we see that happening between those two men, right?



Joanna Meyer: ([29:24](#))

Yep.

Laura Flanders: ([29:25](#))

I want to start with Jesus.

Joanna Meyer: ([29:28](#))

Yeah, the master mentor.

Laura Flanders: ([29:29](#))

The obvious answer, but I think that is really an important place to start because Jesus models. He's a perfect model of being a learner, perfect model of being a disciple. Yeah, he is a perfect model of being a discipler too, but I think we have to start with the reality that it says in Luke 2:52, that he grew in wisdom and stature. Our Christology is at play here. What does it mean for Jesus to be a fully human person? Well, it means that he developed, and he placed himself in a humble position to learn and to grow. The word stature probably has to do with skill. In the Greek, that word probably has to do with skill. He had to grow in wisdom and stature.

Laura Flanders: ([30:13](#))

Then, later on in Hebrews 5:8-10, it indicates that he had to learn obedience. He had to put himself into a position where he had to learn obedience. If we look further into that, and I don't want to go into it too deep, that really refers to the suffering he had to endure in his earthly life in order to learn obedience; to fully learn it so that he could have the level of empathy and compassion towards others that he needed to; that he needed to go through that suffering. I think that motivates me more than any example, is to look at Jesus as a human person, and to say he even entered into the life of being a mentee, and to being a learner and a grower. He had things to understand, even though he was without sin, so we can't be quite like him. But he was tempted like we are tempted, and he experienced lots of things that we experience as a human person. So I like to start there first.

Laura Flanders: ([31:15](#))

Then I think, the other examples in scripture, especially when we get into the New Testament, they had Jesus as their example. But I think my favorite example in scripture is Deborah and Barak. The judges were-

Joanna Meyer: ([31:29](#))

Okay, so it is more about [crosstalk 00:31:29].

Laura Flanders: ([31:29](#))



Well, Barak couldn't go out and do his work in the military, he had to take her with her wherever he went. He really relied on her, and I think because she was a woman. I just love the fact that this man, very powerful man, needed a woman alongside him. He needed, maybe, a different lens or perspective. The scripture doesn't really tell us, but he didn't go out to fight unless he was led by Deborah, who is the only female judge that scripture speaks about. I love that one, just because of that.

Laura Flanders: ([32:04](#))

Then we can talk about Paul, obviously.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:06](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([32:06](#))

Paul and Barnabas, Paul to Timothy. He called Timothy his son. He also called Titus and Onesimus, who was a slave, he called him his son.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:15](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([32:15](#))

So there's this indication there that there was a real intentional pursuit there. I love that Paul was also mentored by a woman, by Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:24](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([32:24](#))

He needed to learn scripture a little bit better, and so he was under their tutelage.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:29](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([32:30](#))

I think that's amazing.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:31](#))

Paul's hidden years. After his conversion, he was quiet.

Laura Flanders: ([32:35](#))

Yeah.



Joanna Meyer: ([32:35](#))

For an extended period of time, of years.

Laura Flanders: ([32:37](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:37](#))

And so I assume there is-

Laura Flanders: ([32:39](#))

He was hiding and learning.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:40](#))

Yeah. There were significant years of learning before he entered the public sphere as an apostle.

Laura Flanders: ([32:46](#))

And then Timothy. I love that Timothy, he had a grandma and a mom, who both mentored him.

Joanna Meyer: ([32:54](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([32:54](#))

Lois and Eunice, that Paul speaks about. He commends them for how- Timothy's tutelage underneath those two women. I love that. That role we have as women, as mothers, and aunts, and neighbors, to come alongside people and to mentor them.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:13](#))

Yes.

Laura Flanders: ([33:14](#))

What a gift we have.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:15](#))

I take that seriously, as an aunt, in the lives of my niece. To be honest, my 16-year-old niece is mentoring me. I jokingly say she's my footwear advisor. I've started wearing these fancy white Adidas sneakers. They get dirty just looking at them; you step out the door and they're dirty. My niece has been mentoring me in the care and cleaning of my Adidas, and she takes that very seriously. I am a good student, and I can learn even from a 16-year-old.



Laura Flanders: ([33:40](#))

Well, if we had time, I'd have to hear more about this.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:42](#))

We will talk about that.

Laura Flanders: ([33:42](#))

But that will be over a cup of coffee.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:44](#))

But it is just a model.

Laura Flanders: ([33:45](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:45](#))

That opportunities to learn are not one way.

Laura Flanders: ([33:47](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:47](#))

They're not necessarily one up, one down, meaning a higher wiser person is necessarily speaking.

Laura Flanders: ([33:52](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([33:52](#))

It can happen in lots of ways.

Laura Flanders: ([33:55](#))

In the field of mentoring, that's called downward mentoring. That does not imply that downward means lording over. But when we have a mentor that is younger than us... We don't have to have mentors that are just older or peers, but younger than us; downward mentoring. I think I steal that out of a book called Connecting, by Clinton and Clinton. It's a great book.

Joanna Meyer: ([34:21](#))

Okay, here is the third myth we're going to talk about.

Laura Flanders: ([34:23](#))



Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([34:23](#))

Is that mentoring is for people who are just getting started in their careers. I know that you press into that heavily, that every leader needs to be mentored. Tell us more about that.

Laura Flanders: ([34:33](#))

Oh, every leader needs- Yeah, I remember you and I talked about that over a cup of coffee, didn't we? Did I say that every leader needs? I'm sure I did. Let me rephrase it a little bit though. I'm going to suggest that every leader needs to live a mentored life.

Joanna Meyer: ([34:50](#))

Yes.

Laura Flanders: ([34:51](#))

To go back to that constellations. There's going to be times in our life when we aren't engaging a mentor very intentionally, and that's okay. I wouldn't be too concerned if a mentor or a leader wasn't meeting with a mentor on a regular basis, for a particular season of their life. But I do want to suggest that it is really important that a leader think about this idea of constellation, and also the idea of creating a culture of mentoring around their own life.

Laura Flanders: ([35:32](#))

Also, modeling that to the people that they lead, so they could potentially begin to think about creating a culture of mentoring in their organization. I wouldn't want to follow a leader who wasn't doing that. By culture, I mean it is a kind of person who not only values dependency and independency, but also as a very interdependent person; that give and take is always happening. They've learned to embrace their own limitations, so that they receive from other people. Then that implies that the leader is not only good at teaching and educating and instructing, but also willing to learn and to grow themselves.

Laura Flanders: ([36:21](#))

I worked in higher education on a faculty. You think there's a culture of mentoring on a faculty? They just want to teach. We just want to download, dump, and be top down. It's very hard for a group of faculty to be a group of people that learn and grow. I was fortunate to be on a faculty that was very much like that. We had a culture like that.

Laura Flanders: ([36:43](#))

I would also say that to create a culture of mentoring around our own life and in our organizations, a leader is somebody that is really good at giving help. They're there to help, and to assist, and to equip, but also willing to receive help and to ask or help. How hard is it for us to ask for help? It's really hard. Maybe I'm projecting on the world, but it's hard for me to ask for help.



Laura Flanders: [\(37:10\)](#)

Then I think another thing that a leader that is pursuing building a culture of mentoring, is that they acknowledge not only one part of the organization or even one part of the human person, but acknowledges that the organization is a whole organization. There's all different types of things pouring in from all different dimensions of the organization, and also from the person that they're talking to as a whole person. They should care about that, that that person has a whole life. They're more than just a cog and a wheel. Who wants to follow a leader that can't learn, that doesn't want to ask for help? I don't. That's a dangerous leader, in my opinion.

Joanna Meyer: [\(37:51\)](#)

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: [\(37:52\)](#)

A leader that can't embrace their limitations, isn't going to receive from other people.

Joanna Meyer: [\(37:58\)](#)

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: [\(37:58\)](#)

That scares me, when I see a leader like that.

Joanna Meyer: [\(38:01\)](#)

Totally. And I think it is a quality that encourages an atmosphere of healthy conflict resolution.

Laura Flanders: [\(38:08\)](#)

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: [\(38:08\)](#)

Because to be able to resolve conflict, well, you have to be teachable. Both parties involved have to have a willingness to learn and address areas that they might be at fault in.

Laura Flanders: [\(38:17\)](#)

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: [\(38:18\)](#)

I think being a learner, being in conversation with others that can address our lives.

Laura Flanders: [\(38:22\)](#)

Yeah.



Joanna Meyer: ([38:22](#))

And encourage us; be that push in the right direction.

Laura Flanders: ([38:25](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([38:25](#))

That creates an attitude of teachability.

Laura Flanders: ([38:27](#))

Yeah. Collaboration is a big buzzword right now. You hear, "Oh, you've got to be a collaborative leader," and I really do agree with that. It's been missing in a lot of our organizations, and in order to be a collaborative leader, you have to be a leader that's willing to learn and say, "I don't understand and I don't know, so teach me." It is a buzzword, and there are times when a leader has to say, "I have to ask you to cooperate, we don't have time to collaborate. We're in a crisis, we have got to move, and here's what we're doing." But a leader who does even that well, they do that well because they've been in a posture of listening, in a posture of learning. When they do have to call the shots and ask people to cooperate, they do it with a lot of wisdom.

Joanna Meyer: ([39:13](#))

Cool. A question for you, another myth or final myth is the idea that people mentor only out of the goodness of their heart, that it's a one way equation. It's good for the mentee, and it is a wonderful form of service for the older, wiser mentor. You'd say it's really mutually beneficial. Tell us a little bit more about that?

Laura Flanders: ([39:31](#))

About the senior?

Joanna Meyer: ([39:32](#))

Sure.

Laura Flanders: ([39:34](#))

I think a lot of seniors, I'm almost a senior, I'm turning 60 this year. A lot of seniors that I've talked to, maybe that are maybe a decade older than me, I don't think they understand that they've been mentoring, and that's because we've had a poor definition of it. A lot of them, they have more time and they want to start being more intentional towards mentoring in their elder years. They pursue that intentionality with, typically, one of two attitudes: the attitude of I'm doing it out of the goodness of my heart, or conversely, with the attitude that they have nothing to give. I think what most are going to end



up realizing as they begin to mentor, is that it is a huge gift to them, both in what they can give and in what they receive.

Laura Flanders: ([40:26](#))

I can attest to this. For 16 years I led, what we called, mentor team meetings between students and their two or three mentors. We would get together in my office, and we would have a recap meeting, a celebration meeting, after two or three years together as a team. We called it our mentor team. The mentor was often very emotional at that meeting and would say- I don't think I'm overstating it, I think 90% of those meetings, the mentor would say something like, "Thank you for inviting me to be a part of this, it has changed my life."

Joanna Meyer: ([41:04](#))

Wow.

Laura Flanders: ([41:06](#))

It took the mentee being intentional, to invite them in and to ask, and the mentor making sure that they don't do it out of the goodness of their heart, because that is somewhat of a prideful place. Also, conversely, making sure that they know they have something to give. I think seniors, if they have a better understanding of what mentoring is, and can fight those two attitudes, that I'm here to save the world and I'm doing it out goodness of my heart, and I don't have anything else to receive. Then also, remember, that they do have something to give. I think they can fight that.

Joanna Meyer: ([41:43](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([41:43](#))

But yeah, that's an interesting myth. I wonder if something-

Joanna Meyer: ([41:48](#))

As we're wrapping up our conversation, I want to circle back to something that you had touched on, the idea that it can be challenging to know how to have healthy mentoring relationships when people of different genders are involved. Stats show that, often, women in professional circles can experience disadvantages because it's difficult for them to find professional mentors. What insight would you offer for how to navigate that? Because I think the concern is real, we don't want to be careless about some of the dynamics between men and women and close relationships. How would you encourage us to move past that or handle it differently?

Laura Flanders: ([42:24](#))

It's tricky to talk about. I get nervous talking about it.



Joanna Meyer: ([42:28](#))

Yeah.

Laura Flanders: ([42:28](#))

I don't want to objectify anyone when we talk about this, or making suggestions on how to go about that. I think there is a danger in that objectifying, to treat each other, to put too many rules around each other because of our gender, as a form of objectification. At the same time, people have consciences that I want to honor. It's tricky, but I think with formalized mentoring programs, it's easier. Things are set up, you're assigned of mentor. Here's what you're going to talk about or do, it's usually a set amount of time. The context, the actual physical context where you're going to be meeting, is usually defined and what that's going to look like.

Laura Flanders: ([43:18](#))

Where it gets trickier is, in what I'll maybe label more informal mentoring contexts that happen, as a female in a more male-dominated or male-populated organization, you may not be as invited into those more informal spaces, where informal mentoring or even training of skill can happen. I don't want to get too bent out of shape when I'm experiencing that as a woman. I want to honor the fact that men like to get together with each other, because I like to get together with women. There's something uniquely special about that. But I think what men can do is to pay attention to the fact that that happens.

Joanna Meyer: ([44:08](#))

Yes.

Laura Flanders: ([44:09](#))

It's a cultural thing and it's something that we need to pay more attention to, maybe unlearn it a little bit, and understand; that women might be missing out on opportunities to learn and to grow in those more informal mentoring spaces on the golf course or over a beer. I don't know. Men, if they could pay attention to that, and look for creating more opportunities to invite men and women together in those more informal spaces.

Laura Flanders: ([44:36](#))

I got that. I have received that really well over the years, in the more male populated spaces that I have worked in. I have been really fortunate, but it isn't that I haven't experienced being excluded. Boy, some women might get mad at me for saying this, but I think changing the culture. It is not only on the men to pay attention to, and look for ways to create more spaces where women can be mentored in an informal way. It's also on us, as well, to create it.

Laura Flanders: ([45:14](#))

There was a time when I realized that I was being excluded too much, and I needed to be with more of the men in those more informal spaces. I just started creating the context for myself and making the



invitation. There was one time, I remember, I found a leadership article and I sent it to two of my male colleagues that were on faculty with me, who are into leadership like I am. I said, "Hey, there's this great article. Would you guys be willing? Lunch is on me! we'll go over to Breckenridge Brewery, buy you a beer and lunch, and I would like to just sit and talk about this article. I really need a chance to just interact with some other people who are leadership nerds like me," and they took me up on it. We had a great time.

Joanna Meyer: ([45:59](#))

Good for you.

Laura Flanders: ([46:00](#))

Yeah. I think as women, we need to also make the invite. It's tricky, and I want to honor the different conscience that different people have about the rules that they have in their life. Even if I think they're silly rules for me, they might not be for them, And I don't necessarily know the reasons why they have their rules. It's tricky.

Joanna Meyer: ([46:20](#))

Yeah. That's generous of you. That idea of just being proactive, and maybe anticipating if someone might have a concern about how and when a mentoring type conversation might happen.

Laura Flanders: ([46:31](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([46:31](#))

There ways around that.

Laura Flanders: ([46:32](#))

Lots of ways.

Joanna Meyer: ([46:32](#))

Of picking up a place, and being clear about what your objectives are, and just being thoughtful about, as a woman, the tone that you set in that conversation.

Laura Flanders: ([46:40](#))

Yeah.

Joanna Meyer: ([46:40](#))

You can keep it very professional, not overly personal.

Laura Flanders: ([46:43](#))



Right.

Joanna Meyer: ([46:43](#))

Or delving into deep relational connection. There's just ways to manage that well, and I think women would behoove themselves to be open and intentional in pursuing input in whatever form it can take.

Laura Flanders: ([46:52](#))

Yes, yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([46:54](#))

Yeah. Well, as we're wrapping up our conversation, Laura, I would love to give you the final word. I think often our guests have the greatest vision and passion about the topic we're discussing. I'm wondering if you would give us a charge.

Laura Flanders: ([47:06](#))

Oh boy.

Joanna Meyer: ([47:10](#))

To be open to mentor or mentee relationships; that mentoring would become a way of life.

Laura Flanders: ([47:15](#))

Oh, yeah. Boy, a charge. That's a big word. Thank you for that. How generous of you to let me do that. Let's go back to your very first question: what do you think most people mean when they say they're looking for a mentor? I suggest that most have a felt need that leads them to looking for a brain to pick. Do you remember that I said that?

Joanna Meyer: ([47:37](#))

[inaudible 00:47:37].

Laura Flanders: ([47:37](#))

I said that, and I think this is a right and true need. I don't want to overlook that need, but I honestly think that for most, that for both mentors and mentees alike, that our most deepest need is the need to be known and the need to know. So my charge is for us to think about the act of listening as a space of peace-making and as a space of hope. What can we do to be better question-askers, for sure. We need to have something to listen to, so we need to be people that have a skill of asking a good question.

Laura Flanders: ([48:19](#))

Also the skill of listening. It is truly a peace-making activity, in a world that needs way more peace. There is this concept I have been chewing on, from a well-known piece of writing by the late theologian Nelle Morton. She wrote this beautiful essay called Beloved Image. As we know, we are all made in the image



of God, and she uses this expression. She says "Hearing to speech, a kind of listening or hearing that evokes speech out of the person we are listening to."

Laura Flanders: ([48:58](#))

Michael Polanyi says, "We know more than we can tell, so can we be the kind of mentor, and can we be the kind of mentee that's brave enough, when we get to the place we've been listened to; that we can get to the place where we're being heard to speak, and we can begin to tell that which we already know, in a way that's more explicit. That is a gift to your mentee, if you can listen in that way.

Laura Flanders: ([49:28](#))

My charge is learn how to ask a good question, and learn how to listen, and it will be a lifelong thing. It's a lifelong goal. I'm still trying to learn how to ask. I was at a mentoring conference [inaudible 00:49:43], and Roberta Heston, as guru of mentoring, said "I cannot, still, ask a very good question." It was so wonderful to hear this guru of mentoring, admit that she's still learning how to ask a good question, and then how to listen to the answer. That's my charge.

Joanna Meyer: ([50:00](#))

What a beautiful picture.

Laura Flanders: ([50:01](#))

Be a peacemaker.

Joanna Meyer: ([50:03](#))

Laura Flanders, thanks for inviting us into the model of relating that leads to greater maturity, effectiveness, greater love for God, our prayers.

Laura Flanders: ([50:13](#))

Yes.

Joanna Meyer: ([50:13](#))

That we would see more of these mutually beneficial relationships form for God's glory.

Laura Flanders: ([50:19](#))

Amen.

Joanna Meyer: ([50:19](#))

And for the good of our neighbors and communities.

Laura Flanders: ([50:23](#))

I love it. Thanks Joanna.



Joanna Meyer: ([50:27](#))

What an encouraging conversation with Laura Flanders. Today's show notes will link to the article from Harvard Business Review by Amy Gallo, that demystifies mentoring. I also encouraged you to check out the 5280 Fellowship. The fellowship is a nine-month intensive program for emerging leaders, focused on faith, work and culture. If you're intrigued by the sense of intentional relationships and digging deeper into living before God in all of life, the fellowship is an amazing opportunity to do that. There will be details in the show notes, or you can go to 5280fellows.com. The application will start March 1st and runs through May 31st. Thanks for joining us today. Make God strengthen, empower, and inspire you in your work.

Joanna Meyer: ([51:12](#))

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