



At the **TABLE** with Keith Anderson

Living the Questions: Field Notes on Mentoring

When I first began the work of mentoring, I looked for manuals, methods, and models—anything that would give me a clear path forward. Over time, though, I learned that mentoring isn't a formula; it's a way of being present. What follows are my own "field notes," drawn from the wisdom of Margaret Guenther, one of my early teachers and companions in this vocation.

1. The Mentor as Learner and Discernment Companion

As a mentor, you and I are both learners. We are students of discernment—paying attention to the movements of God in another person's life and in our own. The questions we hold are simple yet sacred:

- What is happening here?
- Where is God in this person's life?
- What is the story that is unfolding?
- How does this story fit within the larger Christian story?
- How is the Spirit at work?
- And sometimes—what seems to be missing?

Mentoring, at its best, is a slow apprenticeship in noticing.

2. Teaching the Art of Perception

Our task is to help others learn to look, listen, and wait. Perception doesn't come naturally; most of us have been trained by noise—our own inner chatter and cultural busyness. Together we practice paying attention to the ordinary, to what Guenther calls "the near at hand."

Don't rush to fill silence or fix what feels uncertain. The goal isn't to provide answers but to cultivate a trust in the Spirit's quiet work. We remember Paul's words: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly...then we shall see face to face." (1 Cor. 13:12)

3. Learning from Jesus' Way of Teaching

Notice how Jesus taught—through stories, questions, gestures of compassion, and sometimes, silence. Think of his pause before speaking to the woman caught in adultery. His silence became a mirror in which others saw themselves. As mentors, we learn from his pedagogy: restraint, curiosity, and faith in what God is doing beneath the surface.

4. Turning Inward: The Desert Way

We also invite mentees to face themselves, much like the desert mothers and fathers who said, “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”

Many of us want to spiritualize our stories—to smooth over the rough edges. But mentoring helps bring holiness back to the ordinary, reminding us that God dwells amid the grit and grace of everyday life.

5. Asking Questions That Open Doors

Ask questions that invite exploration rather than defense:

- “Could you say a little more about that?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- Rilke said it well: “Do not seek the answers which cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them. The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.”

Mentoring is the art of living the questions together.

6. Offering Gentle Guidance

Sometimes a mentor gives what Guenther calls suggestions rather than assignments—gentle invitations toward practice and accountability. Encourage reading, prayer, or even the decision to stop praying for a time. Suggest fasting, walking, journaling, or creating space for solitude. These are not prescriptions but pathways for holy attentiveness. Often I’ll simply ask, “What might you want to think about this week?”

7. Becoming a Midwife to the Soul

When I first encountered Guenther’s phrase “midwife to the soul,” it startled me. Over time, I’ve come to see how true it is.

The midwife works in the deep and hidden places. She honors vulnerability, trusts the process, and acts with—not on—the one giving birth. She is present, calm, and confident that life is coming forth. Even Scripture gives us this image of God as midwife: “Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.” (Psalm 22:9–10)

8. Trusting That God Is Already at Work

When in doubt, assume that God is already present and active. We do not bring God into anyone’s life—God is already there. Our role is to help another see what is true, to take each person seriously as a beloved child of God, and to keep faith that the Spirit will complete the work that has begun.

Practice:

Before your next mentoring conversation—or in a quiet moment on your own—choose one question from this reflection that stays with you.

- Sit with it without trying to answer it quickly.
- Carry it into prayer, a walk, or a journal.
- Notice what begins to surface when you stop trying to resolve it.

If you’re meeting with someone this week, consider bringing the question into your conversation—not to solve anything, but to listen together for what might be unfolding.



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He is the author of several books, including his most recent: On Holy Ground: Your Story of Identity, Belonging and Sacred Purpose (Wipf & Stock, 2024). His other works include Reading Your Life's Story (IVP, 2016), A Spirituality of Listening (IVP, 2016), and Spiritual Mentoring (IVP, 1999). In his writing, teaching, and mentoring, Keith seeks to set a table for people looking to enter the "amazing inner sanctuary of the soul" in the most ordinary and extraordinary moments of life.

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A Mentoring Way comes out of the work of VantagePoint3, where our entire ministry is committed to helping you grow up in every way into Christ's good work for you. When adults discover more deeply who God is and who they are, they can begin living out what God desires them to be and do. (Eph. 4:14-15)