

Why Is Our Discipleship Not Working? The Five Biggest Mistakes in Discipleship

When investing in other people's lives, all sincere discipleship leaders would naturally be inclined not only to impart the gospel but also their own lives with as much love and effectiveness as possible. The anticipated results would be mature, reproducing disciples who have been thoroughly trained and equipped for ministry and the edification and expansion of the Kingdom. Yet our experience in discipling others may tell a different story and yield results that are less than satisfying. While acknowledging that Jesus disciplined the Twelve perfectly, we readily confess our own shortcomings as we enter into vital discipling relationships with others. This workshop will unpack the 5 biggest mistakes that leaders make in the discipling process. We will then identify insights and tools to help us overcome the frustrations and problems that arise when we seek to bring others to maturity in Christ. We will address how our effectiveness and fruitfulness can be multiplied as we seek to model our own discipleship after the pattern of our Lord as revealed in the Scriptures.

Bill Lohnes was raised in the Lutheran Church in the Midwestern area of the United States. In 1972 he married Paula, his college sweetheart, and they began a 30 year career in the Financial Services industry. In 1998, a series of events, including their daughter Holly's witness to them at the foot of their bed, led Bill and Paula to attend a Bible Study in a home. Four years later, after being faithfully mentored by a Christian discipler, John Musselman, Bill surrendered to Jesus as Savior and Lord. In 2002 Bill founded his own investment firm, which is now called Wise Path, LLC, and in 2004 forged the way for their ministry, Narrow Gate EFL, which is dedicated to Investing in Disciples and Equipping Disciple Makers.

John Musselman is the President of the Jackson Institute, a leadership development organization whose mission is to contribute to the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual formation of individuals who are on a passionate quest to be welcomed, received, and acknowledged by God. He studied at the University of Alabama (Honors BS in Mathematics), Reformed Theological Seminary (MDiv), and Fuller Theological Seminary (DMin). After serving on the staffs of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and Perimeter Church in Atlanta, he founded the Jackson Institute in 1991. John has trained leaders in discipling that are now serving Christ in over 22 countries. He has edited John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, A.B. Bruce's classic work, *The Training of the Twelve*, and Thomas Watson's *Man's Chief End: God's Glory*. In addition, he has written *Classic Discipleship*, a manual for equipping leaders in Christian discipleship, and *The Holy Spirit and His Gifts* (these works may be downloaded without charge on the Jackson Institute's website at <http://www.tji.org>).

I. Forming a Discipleship Group Without a Clear Vision

A. What is vision?

1. "Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances" (George Barna).

2. Vision is “foresight with insight based on hindsight” (Barna).
3. Vision is beginning “with the end in mind.” To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination (Stephen R. Covey).
4. “Vision is a picture that produces passion in you” (Bill Hybels).
5. Vision is “defining reality” (Peter Drucker).
6. Vision is “divine instruction” (Charles Bridges).
7. Vision “is compounded of a deep dissatisfaction with what is and a clear grasp of what could be. It begins with indignation over the status quo, and it grows into the earnest quest for an alternative. Both are quite clear in the public ministry of Jesus. He was indignant over disease and death, and the hunger of the people, for he perceived these things as alien to the purpose of God. Hence his compassion for their victims. Indignation and compassion form a powerful combination. They are indispensable to vision, and therefore to leadership” (John R.W. Stott).

B. The Importance of Vision

1. Prevents failure
2. Promotes the glory of God
3. Provides a solid foundation for decision-making
4. Reduces distractions

5. Assists in time management
6. Contributes to effectiveness (doing the right thing) and to efficiency (doing the thing right).
7. Strengthens faith
8. Cultivates dependence on God

C. Characteristics of a Vision

1. Must be realistic
2. Must be simple
3. Must be clear

D. Three Poems

1. *The Builders* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
2. *The Wrecker* (author unknown)
3. *For An Autograph* by James Russell Lowell

E. The Importance of Using Your Imagination

F. What Are We Trying to Produce as We Disciple Others?

1. One characteristic of a well-formed vision: perspicuity (clear in statement or expression)
2. Profile of a disciplined person

G. Four Statements from John E. Haggai

1. Any worthy vision comes from God.
2. You're more likely to discern a vision in the cloistered halls of solitude than in the screaming jostle of the metropolitan concrete jungle.
3. Failure to act on your vision can lead to personal stagnation, a troubled spirit, and a critical attitude.
4. Acting on your vision will usually produce results of beneficial permanence.

H. How to develop a vision for discipleship in your own context

II. Recruiting the Wrong Kind of People

A. The beginning of Christian discipling

1. Luke 6:12-16

2. Mark 3:13-19

B. A Strategy for Selection

1. Guidelines for selection

- a) Each person should be willing to commit himself to the others in the group
- b) Each person should be a Christian
- c) Each person should have a personal commitment to his/her own spiritual growth
- d) Each person should be willing to do a minimum of preparation
- e) Each person should be teachable
- f) Each person should be open to conviction
- g) Each person should be willing to share his/her life with the others in the group

2. Make a preliminary list of the people you have an interest in discipling
3. Ask yourself four vital questions about each person on your preliminary list
 - a) Have I spent time in prayer with the Father to seek His will concerning this person I wish to disciple?
 - b) Is the person I intend to disciple faithful?
 - c) Is the person I intend to disciple teachable?
 - d) Have I perhaps unconsciously selected this person on the basis of his/her wealth, status, community standing, or any other reason that would not be pleasing to Christ? What did I choose this person to join me and the others in the group?
4. Meet with each person whom you believe God has called you to disciple and share with him/her your interest in having them consider becoming a part of your new group.
5. Give each person a copy of your group's Covenant and ask him/her to read it before becoming a part of the group.

III. Embracing Methods and Processes That Do Not Lead to Lasting Human Transformation or Spiritual Reproduction

A. Product determines process

B. Building the “factory”

C. The church as “factory”

D. Identifying the various types of small groups

E. Elements of group life

F. Selection of “factory” and elements for personal transformation

IV. Attempting to Lead a Discipleship Group Without Understanding the Dynamics of Small Group Theory and Practice

A. Two requirements for effective discipleship

1. An understanding of discipleship
2. An understanding of how small groups work

B. The 7 C’s of Healthy Small Groups (Roberta Hestenes)

1. Covenant or contract
2. Commitments

3. Caring

4. Content

5. Communications

6. Crying, Conflict and Congruence

7. Jesus Christ

C. Ways to develop expertise in small group theory and practice

1. Serious reading and study

2. Keen observation (process observer)

3. Personal experience

V. Misunderstanding Biblical Accountability

A. Five principles of accountability

1. Giving an accounting to God is mandatory for all

2. All secrets will be exposed
3. The quantity and quality of our work will be measured
4. Christ will judge us righteously and fairly
5. Our eternal rewards will be based upon His judgments

B. Why be accountable to another person?

C. Principles governing our accountability to another

1. It must be voluntary
2. Establish the boundaries of accountability with your partners
3. Aim for character development as well as performance standards
4. Plan your evaluation time – when and how it will be done

D. Definition of accountability

E. How to design accountability questions

Recommended Reading

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