**5 Common Discipleship Mistakes Every Christian Must Avoid**

**By Paul Worcester**

It’s exciting when someone comes to faith in Christ, and it’s an honor to walk alongside a new believer as he or she learns and grows.

Yet, there are some harmful things to avoid in a discipling relationship.

1. NOT GETTING THEM CONNECTED TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” —1 Peter 5:8

Who do lions go for first? The young and those separated from the pack. If the person you’re discipling doesn’t get fully connected to biblical community they won’t make it.

Ways you can get new people connected:

Bring them to social events.

Be a good host when they come to a ministry event. Introduce them around or ask another leader to help them get connected. Challenge your leaders to look for opportunities to get others connected during large group meetings.

Be inclusive about unofficial hangout times.

Send them a personal text or phone call whenever possible. Just chill with them.

Go over the biblical need for fellowship.

Help them with their time management and challenge them to make fellowship a priority.

Get them to go on trips: fall retreats, conferences and summer projects.

Be patient but persistent in inviting them to stuff. Keep praying that they get involved.

2. ZOOMING TOO FAST THROUGH THE BASICS

This is such a common problem in ministries that emphasize discipleship.

So much growth can happen so fast in someone’s life that we may look back on the person they were a year ago and not even recognize them. However there can be a danger in that if we aren’t careful.

It can be easy to see how far the person you are discipling has come and give yourself a big fat pat on the back and then plateau.

You never move on from the basics. I still check up on how our staff member’s quiet times and Scripture memory are going. We still talk over the simple basic aspects of following Christ.

Our goal in disciple making is not teaching lots of information. It’s transformation. We don’t “move on” beyond the basics until we are convinced of true progress in the bottom line essentials of what it takes to have a vibrant walk with Jesus Christ.

That is why no matter where someone is when they get involved in our ministry we take them through the basic training objectives. We want them to start practicing “The Big 5: Foundational Habits for Discipleship.”

When our staff were planning our first summer discipleship project, we were listing off all kinds of awesome stuff that we could train our students in when all of sudden someone said, “If they get to the end of the summer and aren’t having quiet times, we’ve failed.”

That is when we came up with “The Big 5” concept, and our student leaders use these questions each week to keep them moving in the basics.

If someone is having trouble getting the basics down, we take time to do a quiet time with them. We help them get a verse pack and actually memorize a verse together. We’ll ask them to pray over our prayer list together.

If they need to start sharing the gospel more, we can take them with us on a gospel appointment. We have a strategy that we got from Brian Zunigha called “Never Share Alone.”

Once they are gaining momentum, we always include “The Big 5” as a part of our discipleship meeting conversations.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. — Matthew 7:24–27

The key phrase in this passage is “puts them into practice.”

Jesus doesn’t really care how much we know. He cares what we are doing with what we know.

3. NOT CHECKING IN ON KEY AREAS

We have to remember we are working with sinners in a fallen world. Believe in people, but don’t expect those you are working with not to fail royally on occasion.

You can’t just assume that everything is fine. You have to ask good questions about their lives. Dig into things a little bit. No one I know doesn’t have some area they need to grow in.

You have to model being open and honest to those you meet with. I always share how The Lord has helped me in the area of personal purity with guys I meet with and that lends the conversation towards openness.

You don’t get what you expect. You get what you inspect. What got me started in Scripture memory was meeting with Max Barnett. He had a list of verses to memorize, and he checked up on my twin brother and me in this area each week.

I didn’t want to be the twin that didn’t have his verse memorized. It’s easy to see your disciples with “rose colored glasses.”

You want them to succeed and to become leaders, so it’s easy to ignore issues that come up and just hope they go away. Usually they won’t unless someone helps them with it.

When you treat someone as if they hung the moon it actually does a disservice to them and causes them to start believing their own press and become arrogant. You want to encourage them and believe in them, but you don’t want to flatter them.

You want to give them the vision for how they can constantly grow and improve.

4. NOT ASKING FOR HELP AND FEEDBACK

You are not on your own to figure out how to most effectively help the person you are meeting with. We all have someone above us that can help us problem solve and most strategically invest in the person with whom we are meeting.

“A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others” —Proverbs 12:15.

How to most effectively disciple those you are investing in should be a constant conversation you are having with the person discipling you.

Don’t you want to be doing this right? You are talking about helping develop the most important aspect of someone’s life.

A great thing to do is to give a short description of how each person you are meeting with is doing, share your ideas for how to help them and then ask their advice.

5. ONLY HELPING WITH THE SPIRITUAL, NOT THE PRACTICAL

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” —2 Timothy 2:2

A key word in this passage is faithful.

People must learn to live wisely and be faithful in every area of life. People need help being faithful in the areas of time, studies, work, money, relationships, decision making and so much more.

Life is not separated into sacred and secular. All you do in your practical everyday life affects your spiritual life and visa versa. We need to train people to live an integrated life as a disciple.

The next phrase that stands out in 2 Timothy 2:2 is the phrase “able to teach.”

People need to have the social and emotional maturity to be able to share Jesus and disciple others. They need to be able to teach.

You may need to train your disciples in some basic people skills or leadership skills if they are truly going to be able to multiply.

Can they effectively pass on to others what you have given them? If not, you may be able to train them in that.

After all, the goal is for them, in turn, to be able to do for others what you’re doing for them—walking with them as they become more Christlike and mature in the faith.

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This article may not be written by an Apostolic author, but it contains many excellent principles and concepts that can be adapted to most churches. As the old saying goes, “Eat the meat. Throw away the bones.”