

Accountability Defines Spiritual Growth and Multiplication

Pastors occasionally connect with me about evangelism and discipleship for their church. It was great talking with a church planter / preacher in another state recently regarding his attempt to preach hoping to disciple his congregation. Together, we contrasted his ability to disciple from the pulpit versus small group leaders facilitating weekly meetings among 9 to 12 people. The size of the small group is determined by the need for accountability. When the participants can “hide” in the larger group, then they tend to stop growing in the Lord.

Another pastor who served as a discipleship strategist in another state called me out of concern for some “creeping” backsliding and occasional doctrinal error among some small groups that were developing their own Bible studies. With this leader, the key was to help him train his small group leaders to hold the leaders accountable for what they volunteer to do, believe, say, decide, etc.

It's truly all about making disciples. Accountability defines spiritual growth and multiplication. And it is far too often overlooked.

We church folk traditionally do a lousy job at holding members accountable. And when was the last time you heard “church discipline” evoked at a business meeting?

Many of us think that since we haven't been held accountable and turned out all right, why hold someone else to a higher standard? It doesn't help that America's high tolerance culture thinks whatever you do is fine, but don't tell me what to do. As if.

If we're making disciples like Jesus did, then there's a different paradigm at work. It all starts with you, the leader as you gather disciples around you. Preferably, these are new believers who don't have years of “baggage” to overcome. Work to get the DNA right in whatever believers the Lord provides in your network (*oikos*).



1 Get involved with those in your group. Model in your life what you want your disciples to be. As Curtis Sergeant, a missionary trainer, once asked, “Are you a disciple that Jesus would want to replicate?” Do you spend time just hanging out? Do you need to schedule additional time for retreats and socials. Be intentional with your meetings. Make teaching points on the fly. It's not a time to lay back, but lead them to grow.

2 Coach by developing commitment in your disciples. This usually comes as they overcome problems. Yes, life is messy. Be an agent of grace and loving kindness. Accountability isn't meant to be harsh or nagging, but reminders of what the person has already committed to do. Challenge them. Give them jobs to do. Jesus sent out the 12 two-by-two and then the 70 for specific a purpose. They didn't meet for a time since they were out on mission. And Jesus saw Satan falling as they went.

3 Empower those in your group to be disciple-makers. Give them the authority to eventually lead on their own. Don't be afraid to challenge the group, but do them yourself. You must “lead from the front” as army commanders like to say. Keep groups small by constantly developing apprentices that can branch your group. Some missions leaders say that groups aren't healthy unless they spin off new groups every six months. Are you holding those in your group accountable to grow and multiply?

4 Explain biblical Truths. Help those in your group to discover God's Truths, but be ready to explain when needed. Trust John 16:13 to be active in which Jesus said that the Holy Spirit guides in all Truth. In the inductive style used in Bible Storying groups, the leader has a purpose for choosing lessons, issues to address, and Truths to celebrate.

5 Support those you're investing in by helping them be good stewards of their time, talents, and money. Be there with an encouraging word. Reinforce positive behaviors and forgive dumb stuff.