

3 Reasons to Stop Doing One-On-One Discipleship

By Jim Egli*

I've quit doing one-on-one discipleship and so should you. Let me tell you why.

First, let me explain that I used to love doing one-on-one discipleship and I did it for years. I've taught on how to do it across the United States and in other countries. I even co-authored a great one-on-one discipleship book that has sold over 100,000 copies and been translated into a few other languages. (I'm not slamming this as an outsider!)

But then something unexpected happened. I invited a friend of mine named Mark into a one-on-one discipleship relationship. We met for coffee at Barnes and Noble's and began working through the book *Beginning the Journey* which Ralph Neighbour and I wrote. It was going great and we were both enjoying it and he said, "Could I invite my friend Brian to join us? He could really use this." I said, "Sure." So the next week Brian joined us. Brian loved it and asked if he could invite someone else.

Before I knew it, my one-on-one relationship with Mark had morphed into a mini-group of four and I was startled by how much better everything went. Interaction improved, encouragement multiplied, and learning went to a new level. The group which had been great, got even better. I'm a slow learner and it took me a while to figure it out, but about ten years ago I ditched one-on-one discipleship to do small discipleship groups and have never looked back. Here are three reasons why you should do the same:

3 Reasons to Stop Doing One-On-One Discipleship

1. *One-on-one discipleship is unbiblical.*

For some reason when most of us hear "discipleship" we picture a one-on-one relationship. I'm not sure why because it is not the dominate Biblical model. You don't see Jesus investing significant one-on-one time in a follower. His core group was three people—Peter, James, and John. "But what about Paul and Timothy?", you might ask. Actually, it wasn't just Paul and Timothy. Paul had Silas at his side when he recruited Timothy and then others like Titus and Luke joined the entourage. Even in the famous "one-on-one" verse—[2 Timothy 2:2](#)—look closely at what Paul says, "And the things you have heard me say *in the presence of many witnesses* entrust to reliable *people* who will also be qualified to teach others." (NIV, italics added) Paul clearly implies that he related to Timothy in a group setting and he calls him to do the same with others.

2. *One-on-one is less effective.*

It is a much better use of my time to invest in several people at once than it is to invest in one individual at a time. It's not only more effective for me and for the kingdom, it also works better for the young believers or the emerging leaders that I am working with. They are challenged, supported, and encouraged by the others in the group. Another thing I like about it is that no longer does everything depend on me. For example, right now I am meeting weekly with four other guys very early on Wednesday mornings at Einstein Brothers Bagels. Two weeks from now I will be out of town but they will meet anyway.

3. *There is less chance for mentor discouragement.*

If you have trained very many people to do one-on-one discipleship of new believers, I am sure you have encountered the problem of discouragement. This happens when a man or woman in your church invests months in a young Christ-follower who then reverts to drugs or for some other reason falls away. It is then very easy for that mentor to feel like they wasted their time or perhaps that they failed or did something wrong. However, if they are working with a mini-group of several people, success will be blended with the setbacks, and sometimes the person who pulls a backslider out of a gutter or out of a funk will be another new believer. I've seen dramatically less discipleship discouragement with mini-groups than with one-on-one.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that no one should ever do one-on-one discipleship. Sometimes it seems to be the only alternative you have because of someone's schedule or other conditions. One-on-one can be great and effective. There is just something very much more effective for you, for the person you are concerned about, and for the advancement of God's kingdom.

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