Discipleship Dynamics

Part 1 of 2: Spiritual Formation and Personal Wholeness
with
Release Date: October 2015
Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture and today our topic is discipleship. And my guest is Charlie Self who runs an organization called Discipleship Dynamics. And Charlie is with us via Skype from Brussels, Belgium, although I take it that's not where you live. Is that right, Charlie?

Correct, I live in Silicon Valley, in California and work full time for the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri.

Okay. And well, that's already an interesting combination. Charlie and I got connected through the Oikonomia Network of the Kern Family Foundation, which involves the Center's commitment to faith and work. And in the midst of that I became aware of something that Charlie has spent a lot of time on in relationship to discipleship in the development of discussion of discipleship and really assessing discipleship, which is always a challenge for people.

And I thought this was so terrific that I invited him to come on and share what he's doing. So tell us a little bit about what you do first of all with the Assemblies of God and then about Discipleship Dynamics and where that came from.

Well, like you, I have the delight of training pastors and missionaries, Christian compassion workers and others serious about their discipleship and about ministry. I'm professor of Church history at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. And have the honor of also doing some teaching and missions, leadership and this kind of thing. And that's how I came about to get connected with the Kern Family Foundation and the Oikonomia Network that we are part of as well as the think tank that we visit every year called the Acton Institute.

So this combination of the privilege of equipping others and getting acquainted with other sisters and brothers that care deeply about whole life discipleship has sort of been the arena that has produced some of these new materials that we're both learning from.

So in Discipleship Dynamics, tell a little bit about that and then you might share a little bit about your colleague who because it's an international operation that you've got going.
Dr. Charles E Self  Yes, it is. Well, we started with the inspiration of the faith and work movement behind us and the need for further understanding of economics that faith work economics integration. That kind of got us thinking how do we take that integration and frame it within the larger crisis frankly of both American and Western Christian, even global, discipleship. What John Blanchard calls a surfeit of superficiality and the dearth of depth. How do we know what a mature disciple looks like? How are we measuring this?

So we started with a small think tank at EGTS. And it was just some professors and spouses getting together to say let's not talk about programs, let's not talk about just the disciplines, but what are the outcomes? What are the biblical outcomes of the person who loves God with all their being and loves their neighbor as themselves and this fulfilling the great commission.

So that has started with some of the outcomes and categories. And then we took this first thinking and we went to over 200 leaders across the country both in and out of our denomination to say, “Hey, are we on track here in the basic dimensions and basic outcomes that we're looking for?” And I'll share more about that in a minute. But really subjected it too, to some thoughtful men and women from different perspectives to make sure we're on track with the aim of saying how do we measure progress so we can celebrate? How do we measure challenges so we can ameliorate?

Dr. Darrell Bock  Now you're colleague who works with you in this is – I'll let you finish the sentence?

Dr. Charles E Self  He's Dr. Johan Mostert. He is from South Africa and he has experience as a pastor, as a community psychologist as a relief and development expert. He was deeply involved in the Mandela immediate post-apartheid era in South African in connecting, helping the church and state and welfare departments bring help to people and help stimulate enterprise. So he's been involved in this in a very ground level perspective. I've also had experience as a business consultant as well as a pastor and a professor. So we've brought kind of our talents and experiences together to make sure that the everyday work of God's people is included in how we assess their discipleship.
Dr. Darrell Bock: Now we'll eventually be displaying this thing that we're going to be talking about in the midst of the podcast. And the title I think it's called Five Dimensions in Forty Outcomes.

Dr. Charles E Self: Yes.

Dr. Darrell Bock: I'm not sure what else to call it. But it really is a wonderful chart layout that has five areas, spiritual formation, personal wholeness, healthy relationships, vocational clarity, economics and work. Those are the five dimensions that you have divided – divided thinking about measuring discipleship into and then each one of those has a subcategory that you are labeling outcomes, which I take is a measurable area, is that right?

Dr. Charles E Self: Yes. In the assessment that the individual receives, they get a measurement for the five dimensions in general and each of the 40 outcomes in particular that get both a percentile measurement and a descriptive narrative measurement and what is a 13 14 page report.

Dr. Darrell Bock: And then I take it that there are materials that help to explain these categories and what you're looking for, that kind of thing. And so I take it that there's an initial assessment and then a person who works with the program develops in the areas that the assessment shows they need to give attention to, is that correct?

Dr. Charles E Self: And one of the things that we've done is we really want to be a catalyst for discipleship rather than a competitor with discipleship curriculum. So this is a snapshot; this is an assessment tool. We're leaving it to the pastor, the elders, the local leaders of a church, the deans, the vice presidents, the presidents of colleges as to the exact way in which they do the discipling. What we want to do is give you a way of getting a snapshot not only of individuals, but here's the wonderful thing. If you invite 100 of your students to do this, if you create a group you get the method data or summary data of the whole group on all 40 outcomes.

So that way you can target as a pastor or teacher or mentor, you can now target your discipleship.
**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Oh, wow, that's great. Well, let's talk about these categories. I mean some of them I think will be relatively transparent or part of I think common discussions on discipleship and then I suspect others of them people will go, "Oh, I never thought about that as part of the equation." So let's go, kind of work through these one at the same time. Spiritual formation obviously is at the core. And you already in summarizing this suggested that really what you're doing is you're building this around the great commandment, love God with all our heart, mind and soul and love your neighbor as yourself as kind of thinking about it in a core kind of way. Am I reading that right?

**Dr. Charles E Self**  
Within the larger mission of God and his assignment to the church to make disciples of all nations Jesus told us what the first and greatest commandment was and that's provided the foundation and then I'll explain the last two dimensions flowing from that. But you're absolutely correct.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Okay. So let's start off with spiritual formation, what kinds of things are we looking at in that area and – I mean you might – we'll probably pursue all of these in the same kind of way by thinking, "Well, that's no surprise. We always think about that when we think about discipleship," and then maybe this other category we don't give quite as much attention to but ought to.

**Dr. Charles E Self**  
Well, I think I mean the eight dimensions are there. Or I think one of the things we asked question was, what kind of actual actions as well as disciplines in other words there are actions to do, but there are outcomes. So for example we'll talk about the believer really being able to not just appreciate the Bible or read the Bible but really understand how to apply the Bible. Loving the word of God in such a way they can apply the Bible to their life issues. So for each of the dimensions we not only state them, but we explain them in one to two sentences. So when we say love the word God, we're talking about being able to not only read the bible, but also apply it to areas of life.

And so as someone assesses this, they may not feel like they know enough about the Word, this will help them dig a little bit deeper or when we talk about people praying without ceasing. We're not dictates how and when and how much to pray, but rather that there's an ongoing conversation with God that we hope in the context of their tradition, their local church and situation that they'll carry on.
I think there aren't a lot of surprises in the spiritual formation area. I think perhaps listening to the voice of God may be a little bit different for some. And we're not talking about hearing voices or spooky kinds of things. But rather that deep, wellspring of the Holy Spirit actually illuminating and guiding Christians into the application of God's Word and really being aware when the Good Shepherd is speaking to them.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So you have categories like enjoy fellowship in the local church, making sure that people are connected to other people. You've already talked about learning the Word of God and hearing the voice of God that kind of thing. Praying without ceasing. There's one here on the end. I'm not sure I can entirely read it, because of the way my reproduction has come out. But it looks like it's — well, I can't — well it looks like solitude. Oh, it's cultivating solitude.

**Dr. Charles E Self**

Cultivating solitude.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Yeah.

**Dr. Charles E Self**

But the ability to be alone with God and enjoy his personal presence, the ability to ponder and meditate his – on his great works. We originally put the word Biblical meditation in there. And we were afraid that people would misinterpret the word meditation.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

Yep, because that has managed to generate controversy.

**Dr. Charles E Self**

And you're looking at a man who before his conversion was a practitioner of transcendental meditation. So I do know the difference between the biblical call to meditate in God's Word and the ungodly call of other religions.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

So you really are looking for the spiritual formation as a very rounded exercise it seems to me where there's both concern about how you develop in your walk, personal walk with God on the one hand then the other dimensions are the more corporate dimensions of fellowship and engagement and that kind of thing.
Yeah, and I think that's so important. Obviously one's salvation rests with the grace of God and personal response of repentance and faith, but upon that response you are incorporated into the Body. And all through our assessment we make it clear that the discipleship is not a solo activity. That's done in consultation with your peers, with your friends with your mentors, with your pastors. And you'll find in all of our descriptions on the website and all the reports that are generated what you'll find is this robust notion that you need to be in what we call an affectionate accountability with other believers.

We haven't mentioned the website, so we probably should do that and in fact this chart is available on the website, so why don't you tell people where the website is.

It's simply www.discipleshipdynamics.com, one word lower case. And you can get a full description of the assessment even where we're improving it every day. So you can now even see part of the sample test and kind of get an idea of what happens before you plunge in and take it yourself.

And there's also a blog on that site, is that correct?

Yes.

Where you discuss what's going on?

We're blogging every week. We're pointing people toward the assessment and then we're beginning – we're going to be asking you to do some writing for us in the coming months. Actually what we're doing with all 40 outcomes we're beginning to solicit from women and men the best three or four page kind of essays on these outcomes with references to materials and resources because we really do want to be a catalyst, you might say a godly broker of the best resources. What I find is we have starving Christians in the midst of plenty.

All 40 of these outcomes, there are great books and videos, resources and yet you need to see them together, I think, and then have your leaders help you gather the materials.
It strikes me that what you're working on in that dimension is a little bit like what's been going on with the theology of work site in building a reference location for issues of theology and work only this is for discipleship.

Absolutely correct. And we expect that there'll be others that build their own assessments and build their own resources, which we would be happy to see.

That's great. Okay. Well, spiritual formation like I said that's probably the – in some ways the most transparent one. It is the first one on the list. You have them, the way the chart looks of course is that you have five kind of loops that one inside the other with the first one being spiritual formation. It's kind of the – I don't know if it's the shell or whatever of this – I'm trying to describe something people will be seeing. But anyway, the second category is personal wholeness. Now what are you after in general and then what are some of the categories that you're dealing with there?

Well, we've been inspired by the work of people like Peter Scazzero and others that make the argument biblically that emotional and relational maturity and spiritual maturity cannot be separated. And so as one grows in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, one also becomes a more whole person and then ultimately better capable of getting along with others. And Dr. Mostert is an expert in psychology. And so what we wanted to do is say where does the Bible speak to what we talk about in terms of psychological wholeness.

And so what I'm really pleased to announce is that we had no anti-psychology pushback when they realized we asked the question, what does the Bible describe as someone we would call psychologically whole. And so we're not just taking a secular reference and finding a bible verse, but asking the question of wholeness and trying – and there's of course much more than we put down, but trying to come up with some things that are understandable.

Now it's interesting here is the lead off when I think I'm reading this right. Is humility, is that right?

Yes, it is.
And I often like to talk about the fact that people don't think about at the core of faith is actually a humility. That when you are trusting God to provide something you recognize you cannot provide for yourself that the very first steps of your walk of your faith are very much grounded in humility.

Well, Lutheran Theologian Gerhard Forde and his great little book Justification of Faith: A Matter of Death and Life says that the most humbling thing about the gospel of grace is the absolutely nothing that we contribute. It's hinting of our arrogance of thinking that we make some kind of contribution other than as Schaefer put it the open hands of faith and receptivity so whether one is Calvinist or Armenian whatever you land on some of those areas, when it comes to the justifying grace of God and the steps of real Christian progress, God gives grace to the – resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Yeah. It's such a core element of the walk. And so it's great to see in a lead off position. Now I'm not sure I can read this next one. It's something self image. Is it –

Healthy self-image.

Healthy self image. Okay.

One of the things that – and in a western culture filled to the brim with narcissism, humility is the antidote to the narcissism that we face every day. On the other hand we're also filled with so much dysfunction, rejection, abuse, the tragic consequences of sin. That lead people to diminish who they're made to be in the image of God and who they're being remade to be in the image of Christ. And so we want people to be able to have a healthy self-appreciation for who they are and that translates into a lot of growth in other areas as well.
Yeah, it's a pretty important category. I'm getting ready to do some teaching on Colossians. And the thing I love about the way Paul opens his letters, of course, is when he addresses the communities, he always calls them saints. And I said you know Paul thinks about saint hood in a completely different way than we tend to think about it. We think about saints kind of the old fashion way; you earn it. But in scripture you're a saint the moment you come to the Lord, because of what it is that he's done and thinking to yourself as a saint is actually a pretty pertinent part of your self-identity that Christ gives you.

I agree. Everyone of us wrestle with how we feel about ourselves for any number of reasons. Our fallenness, our nurture, various experiences in life. And I can't think of anymore affirming statement that we were the joy set before Jesus. He goes to the cross. That as David Eckman puts it, that we are worth the blood of Christ. And we are – Richard Lovelace in his Dynamics and Spiritual Life inspired us as well that God does everything the reverse of every other religion. First he calls us saints, places us in heavenly places and then he invites us to voluntarily join Jesus in servanthood to the world and to others, because we're secure not in order to be secure.

Yeah, it's very important. I mean the whole idea of being accepted, the gratitude that's supposed to come as a result of your experience of grace et cetera. All that is extremely important. The next category I'm going to go through all of them, but some of these fascinate – these gratitude. Is that right?

Yeah. To us gratitude is the fruit of humility, and that is you begin to cultivate a mindset, cultivate both verbally and cognitively this understanding that all that we have is from the goodness of God. And of course this comes out of the exhortations of both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, the both the Psalter and Paul's Epistles for us to constantly be giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ for all that he has given to us.

Now the next one I can't – I can't read at all, but it looks like it's got disruptive or something in there or am I missing that? It's manage or mature.

Yes, I'll give you – it's managing our negative emotions.
And on a practical biblical level you read a lot of Paul's writings in particular. It's talking about how we get along with others but how it affects us internally. So we were very serious about exegeting and expounding those scriptures about bitterness, about rage, about anger, about various, various things that can come just as a result of life, as a result of conflict. We're going to have negative emotions. You would have to be dead not to have them. The question is how are we stewarding those? And one of the things we want people to be able to do is to be able to manage what do I do when this emotion comes into my life or how do I regard some of these even long term memories and issues that I have.

And so that was part and parcel of there are actual biblical ways to grow in that grace, to acknowledge. For instance, my wife and I are in the midst of grieving the loss of her father right now. He was a wonderful old man who died in the faith, but we're – that's not so much always negative, but it's a difficult moment. So we want to manage it well. Give ourselves permission to feel and to grieve and to miss him, but also exhort ourselves to keep carrying on the league see of his hard work and dedication.

Or the depth of anger I feel when I see another sex trafficking story or another terrorist bombing. How do I manage that? And so we really want to help people with that whether it's very personal and daily or whether it's sort of global and a larger issue.

You know I think that one of the issues that we have is we particularly when we think about moving from life to the Bible, because oftentimes when we do when we teach is we go from the bible to life is managing the tensions of life in a fallen world.

Exactly.

That the cards that we end up being dealt that we don't necessarily expect or anticipate and then having to cope with what it is that we experience because of the disappointment or frustration or the affects of sin. There's just a wide variety of ways that it comes at us. And part of spiritual maturity is learning how to manage those experiences as they come at us, because they tend not to be announced. You know they tend to just show up. And boom you've got to deal with them.
Dr. Charles E Self: Well, let me share an example that maybe a really concrete one that has helped me. One of the other outcomes is forgiveness that's listed there. And forgiveness is not excusing the sin that's been committed against us, but it's making a choice to treat the other person as if they have not sinned against us just as God and Christ has done that through the cross. On a practical level, all of us are called to forgive and to manage these emotions well. The process by which those emotions affect us more or less can be different.

For example my wife gave an illustration of how she and I respond to life. She goes, "Charlie, something happens you're like a pair of Dockers that comes out of the dryer all pressed and ready to wear. You get over stuff quickly." She goes, "I'm like linen. I need a little more time to iron it out." And then she laughs and goes, "By the way linen lasts a lot longer than Dockers." But her point there was there's – the Bible tell us both, and by the way we work hard and believe that we're honoring God.

So we both forgive and treat the other person when we make the choices of Agape the same. However the internal processing of emotional experiences may be different. What the bible is looking for is not hypocrisy, but it's also not – it's not describing or necessarily defining Christian maturity that everybody works things out the same way and in the same time.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Right.

Dr. Charles E Self: But that we are making those godly choices.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That's a good – that's a good word. That's a great illustration. I'll have to remember that. I'm pretty sure I'm probably Dockers too. My wife is probably also linen as well. It reminds me of those conversations that you sometimes have about temperature in the house. You know is it warm in the house or not? Well it depends on who is doing the asking and who is doing the answering.
Great. Well, let's move on to the third category. This is healthy relationships. So I take it that the difference probably should talk about the difference between some of these. Spiritual formation looking at the just the core ways in which you think about relating to God and relating to others. Personal wholeness is kind of – this may not be the right word. But kind of introspective focus on who we are and how we're engaging. Now the arrow is kind of moving out. Healthy relationships, how are we actually engaging with and how do we engage with others around us. Is that the third category?

*Dr. Charles E Self* Yes, this is how do we love our neighbors? What's the evidence that we're loving our neighbors as ourselves and engaging? And one of the things that we tried to do there was think both generally and specifically about the kinds of relationships that we have. Because we all have the different kinds. We have relationships with authority. We have relationships in marriage. We have relationships that are friendships or professional. So we did our best to consider the different types we have.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And so looking at this, I think this first one looks like love – is that beautifully and usefully or am I –

*Dr. Charles E Self* Lovingly and wisely.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Love what?

*Dr. Charles E Self* Really what it is is love wisely.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Love wisely, okay.

*Dr. Charles E Self* So the idea here in a general sense is that the agape that we are to exercise needs to be exercised with wisdom. We want people to grow and learning how to love wisely. And learning how to love with intelligence.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Okay. And the next one looks like it is the forgiveness category, is that right?

*Dr. Charles E Self* That's a relational category.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right.
The other thing we do there for instance in healthy relationships is we're going to include marriage in this. And one of the things marriage is also included in vocational clarity. And this is a good time to sort of link them if you're single and you take this test, the questions on marriage don't count against your profile.

They're knocked out. One of the theological foundations of this is that both singleness and marriage are signposts of the coming kingdom of God. Singleness is not deficiency. Marriage is not perfection. They are each an expression of the goodness of God. So we have to be really careful to not make historic mistakes, to make singleness superior or the contemporary mistake of making marriage superior. But in either state you're anticipating grain of God.

Yeah, we've just done a podcast on singleness to work on this, because I actually think that dealing with singles is something that the church is generally fairly awkward at. And then secondly, the idea of affirming singleness and what it mean to be single in our world where sexuality is such a dominant category is a very, very important check on the way our culture tends to view these areas.

Great.

The next one I think, is it live in harmony?

Yes, living in harmony with one another. And this is basically when the Bible exhorts us to let the peace of Christ rule. Not only in our hearts and minds personally, but let it rule in the fellowship of the saints. The ability to get along with people it's a very basic one.

Yeah it sure is. I mean it's extremely important in that regard. I'm trying to see if there's another one in here that I can – the trouble is that I got a little printout here of what you've got and the outcomes are in really small print. And you know my eyes aren't what they were.

I have most of them memorized so I can certainly help if you need a little help on those.
Is there one here that says, is it – oh this one looks like it is about sexuality. Is that right?

Managing our sexuality.

Dr. Darrell Bock

Okay.

I want to – let me take a moment on this one. Not a long time, but this is the notion that single or married we must steward our sexual drives and sexual expressions in a biblical fashion. And so we take some time to explain that. And then in the questioning and in the outcome, this – the biblical teaching on sexuality is simple. Hard but simple. You're celibate if you're single. You're faithful if you're married. But underneath that then people are facing all kinds of things. And the Bible has tremendous resources to enable us to walk in that holy calling. But we want you to be able to manage their thoughts, their attitudes, their actions in a healthy way.

Okay and then the one next to it looks like it has something to do – I think it looks like it has something to do with the marginalized, is that right?

This one is caring for the marginalized.

Okay.

One of the things we think is important based on the biblical concern for the poor, the biblical concern for the widow, the orphan, the biblical concern to reach out in Jesus name to those that society does not always honor. We think it's a biblical mandate that we are consciously looking to serve others that cannot return the favor.

I mean it's so important and raised all through the gospels in many passages. And of course James mentions it. It's literally – and of course the Judeo, the Jewish roots of this in the Old Testament and the wisdom literature et cetera is strong. The concern of the prophets, this is an area that I think oftentimes we significantly underestimate.
Dr. Charles E Self Well, I think it gets politicized. We think that caring for the marginalized means a certain tax policy or a certain welfare state or a certain kind of politics. And people can react in different ways to that. Christians included. I've been around the world, so have you. So Christians have different political opinions. The Bible doesn't have a diversity of opinion about whether we should care and care in action. I think first John – John's first letter to me is the most brilliant synopsis. "If you have the means to do something and neglect helping that person, how can you describe the love of God as being in you." There's wisdom in how we do that. There's a sense of what means we do have. But he's really getting at the heart of the matter. Are we willing and – are we able and willing to do something for the poor?