Discipleship Dynamics

Part 2 of 2: Economics and Vocational Clarity
with
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Dr. Darrell Bock  
I don’t know how many discussions I’ve had in the last few weeks; I’ve been out on the road for about six weeks running, and literally around most of the half of the country, and I’ve had multiple discussions on what has been seen often as a divide between the gospel and the social gospel.

And, to me, we’ve pulled something apart that God very much has together in this sense, be clear here, and that is that the way in which we care for people actually is a witness and a testimony for what it is that we affirm when we present the gospel.

So, I think of Luke 4 as the example; Jesus goes into the synagogue and he says I’m going to release the captives and he’s delivery why God has anointed him. He’s delivering the message of his calling and what he’s bringing in this new era of salvation. And then, the very next scene in Luke 4, we’re in Capernaum, and Jesus is ministering right and left doing the very things that he’s talking about.

So, that his word and his deed match and go together, and the deeds reinforce the words “God loves you and cares for you and has a wonderful plan for your life”. Sometimes the way we summarize that, probably not the best summary of the gospel, but often times we say it that way, but what do we actually show in the way we engage people that shows that God cares and that God’s people care about who God cares about?

Dr. Charles E Self  
Well, we have a great tradition in scripture and in church history, in both Judeo-Christian general ethos, but also in Christian history. We have a great tradition of leading the way and caring for the people that the world has discarded. And we could go on and talk about the Didache, first century documents saying do not procure abortion or expose your infants. We can talk about second-century letters from our church fathers and mothers speaking about caring for the infirm and the aged and others where they’ve been discarded.

We even have emperors from secular sources – or, shouldn’t say emperors, epistles from secular sources talking about Christians caring for the plague victims all the way through to anti-slavery movements and our current movements. Even the famous fundamental versus liberal split in the church in America from the nineteen teens or twenties to the 1970s. God’s people have never stopped caring. They’ve never stopped doing the good works of Jesus.
We stepped out of public life at times, we didn’t engage in some of the major organs of that communication, but even the most fundamental or conservative theologically of Christians have opened the rescue missions, opened the homes for moms in trouble, cared deeply, and I think it’s important to bring that to light.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah, it’s fascinating that this has come up, because literally yesterday I was reading the New York Times, which isn’t exactly known as a church organ, and in the editorial section, Nicholas Kristof wrote a piece and he called it Respect for Dr. Foster I think was the title.

But his real message was, we need to respect evangelicals more than we tend to. Because, as I travel the world and go into some of the worst places and work with some of the worst human conditions, what I inevitably find there are evangelicals working, who not only work there and not only have gone in, but in many cases are the last to leave.

Even when things get bad they hang around and work through it. What he was communicating was this terrific respect for this kind of care and concern, and it was registering with him that the kind of way in which evangelicals are often stereotyped and that Christians are stereotyped really may not be a full reflection of many of the kinds of people he’s met, which I thought is interesting.

Dr. Charles E Self  I had the honor of catechizing and baptizing a Muslim convert to Christianity in California. He walked into my pastoral office and said, “I want to become a Christian”. I turned and said, “I think we’re in that business. Tell me your story”, and he had been with Doctors without Borders for four years, and he saw the compassion of Christians and he wanted to know why.

Six months later, he was a full follower of Jesus Christ and was baptized. His Zoroastrian fiancé baked a cake that said “Happy Christianing” and she’s now a full-devoted follower of Jesus Christ and he’s practicing medicine in California. It was the experience of Christian compassion that drove him to become a Christian.

Dr. Darrell Bock  And he was work – I take it then he must have been working alongside these doctors as a doctor himself and watching them do their craft that was drawing him?
Dr. Charles E Self Everywhere he saw charity, he said, apart from a few government agencies periodically. He said all the compassion was coming from the Christian ethos.

Dr. Darrell Bock Interesting. Well, obviously this is part of what builds for healthy relationships. I’m not sure where it is in here, but I seem to remember – I don’t know if it’s in this category and another – something about how we relate to the culture as well. Is there something like that in here?

Dr. Charles E Self Yeah, underneath both vocational clarity, as well as economics and work, this notion of connecting and being culturally sensitive is part of what we are deeply concerned about that we are engaged in and relating to the culture that we’re in, and today, the multiple cultures, so we actually have questions that gauge people’s reactions to people of different cultures, so it’s in the relational category, as well as vocational category.

Dr. Darrell Bock Okay, well let’s shift now to the fourth category, vocational clarity, and now what I think we’re doing is we’re beginning to transition. Most of the stuff we’ve been talking about people would say yeah, okay, I get how that fits into discipleship. You know, some of them like, oh, I probably haven’t given that the attention it ought to deserve, but yeah, I see how that fits. Now, we’re kind of crossing over into what I would consider to be, for many people who think about discipleship, kind of new space.

For one way or another, we have tended to not think about the last two categories we’re going to talk about in the same kinds of ways in relation to discipleship that we have the first three. Just to review; spiritual formation, personal wholeness, healthy relationships.

The fourth category and the fifth, I’ll give them both, and then we’ll go over them one at a time, is vocational clarity and then economics and work. The further we go in the list, the further we may be moving into new territory, but let’s talk about vocational clarity a second. Why is this here to begin with, and then secondly, what are you trying to do in this section?
**Dr. Charles E Self**  
Well, putting the two together to explain the one, I think, is helpful. I believe there is the general call of God, as you do, to repentance and faith and Jesus Christ, and the general all of God to the, what Elton Trueblood called the incendiary community to take the gospel to the world, but then God does have specific vocacion or callings for the people of God, in terms of the areas that they’re called to serve in the world.

And so we want to give people a sense of their calling as something a little bit larger and broader than just how they earned a living. Although, how they earn a living matters deeply to God as well. They can sometimes be the same thing, but not always, so if I meet someone who says, “I’m called to be a pastor,” I will obviously encourage that calling, but they might also be earning a living as an electrician, to which someone may feel called, but I’ll say, “Fantastic, you have dimensions to your calling”, but I want that pastor to feel fully a pastor, whether or not she or he is supported by the income of the church.

So vocation is this broader sense of purpose and calling and the economics and work is the arena where we work it out daily, and that was – by the way, we got a lot of pushback on the fifth dimension. Everybody wanted to put economics and work inside of calling or they wanted not to even include it at all, because they thought of it as secular or just instrumental. So we felt it was important that the gifts that God distributes, the callings he distribute, are bigger than just a current job, and then we wanted to make sure that we gave dignity to every bit of the work that people are doing.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Yeah. In fact, that’s the first entry and that’s where I wanted to go next, and that is I think this says “know the dignity of our labor”. Is that…

**Dr. Charles E Self**  
Exactly correct. This is deep roots in the Reformation, of course, but even the Reformation only went part way. We’re still catching up to Jesus and St. Paul on this. You know, it’s interesting. I’m a church historian and I’ve studied spiritual awakenings and all the wonderful evangelical awakenings we study very quickly create a three-tiered hierarchy without even knowing it; the one-way ticket to foreign missions, the local church pastorate, and then all the others.
What we’re trying to do is say hold it, the one-way ticket to foreign fields and the pastorate, those are important callings, but we want to dignify and elevate all the people of God and really honor the multiple domains of society God may have them serving in.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** Yeah, I think here the key chapters are Genesis 1 and 2 in the idea that really, we were created to be stewards of the creation in which God has put us in. Well, if we’re going to steward the creation, that’s going to require a lot of jobs, a lot of labor, a lot of work, and we’re living out the core calling. I sometimes say that we sometimes separate the creation commission from the great commission, and they both very much belong together.

In fact, the whole idea of wholeness of life and the way God calls us to live in community with each other, within the creation that he’s given us assumes the stewardship that we see in Genesis 1 and 2, and its core.

**Dr. Charles E Self** I’m with you – I’m not only with. Think of the anthropology, the dignity. So, God creates human kind in God’s image. They’re created with a job to do. They do that job as a man or a woman and then in Genesis – that’s Genesis 1, and then in Genesis 2, God makes a world that needs cultivation and even mining, and I just think it’s delightful.

We get just enough to awaken us to this amazing creativity that we’re called to, and so even before we get to the granular economics and work in our outcomes, we want people to really – and we had a doctoral candidate, 25 years as a rural pastor, actually watch a measurable change in the blue collar and rural workers when he began to teach about vocation and use our assessment. He had people who were doing fairly hard, repetitive, wage-based work awaken to the Holy Spirit involved with their work, the good they were bringing into the world, and the opportunities to share the gospel.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** Yeah, I like to tell the story, when we get on this topic, about the fact that, you know, when we first hear about the spirit indwelling people, it has to do with the people who worked on the tabernacle and who, you know, who were skilled laborers basically making it possible for the tabernacle to exist. We normally don’t think of pastors in those terms.
My wife is an artist and she reminds – she teaches about this and she said the first thing God has his people do is a community art project.

Yeah, that’s right. [Laughs]

For all the pastors listening, it’s the only time they had to say “stop giving”, too.

Yeah, now is this – there’s something about calling in here, as well, I guess. Am I right?

Yes, it’s a sense of calling. What we really want people to have is a basic sense of calling in mission that’s personal. Now, we can’t tell people when and how God’s going to communicate that, but we really believe that, frankly, that we think both individuals and couples should have mission statements. They should have a sense of the reason God placed them on the earth in this time and in this place, in addition to the general calling of God.

So, that’s an interesting idea. Yeah, and I think, again, I like the way some churches are doing this now. The beginning of the year, many churches – beginning of the school year, many churches will almost commission their teachers like we used to commission and often commission missionaries, that kind of thing, to make a point about what this kind of vocation actually contributes to the society at large. And part of your sense of calling is figuring out what it is God is having you do and how that does contribute to societal wholeness.

Yes, and one church in New England does is 12 times a year for what they call the dozen domains of culture.

Interesting. There’s another one here that looks like – is that biblical integration or something else?
Dr. Charles E Self: Yes. It’s the idea of being able to connect – to consciously have a biblical world view of your daily life and your calling, and we use biblical integration in that we want people to be able to understand how the bible speaks to what they do. Not simply – you’re not doing eisegesis here. You’re not simply trying to find a bible verse to justify your work, but the other way around. How is my work fitting into the biblical worldview?

Dr. Darrell Bock: And then there’s another one, I think it says teamwork, but I’m not sure. Am I right about that?

Dr. Charles E Self: Yes, you’re absolutely correct.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Okay. I’ve never thought about discipleship – teamwork, per se, in quite that way, so…

Dr. Charles E Self: These, again, we want to give credit to the many who’ve contributed, but we really feel that part of you living out of personal vocation is understanding its connectedness and your ability to work with others to achieve an end. You know, teamwork – it’s a fairly contemporary word, but it speaks to the accomplishment of a mission knowing all the parts that each player does. One of the other things you’ll see there is on mission with spouse.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That’s where I was going next.

Dr. Charles E Self: To me, this is a revolution. We really believe God wants to give husbands and wives a shared sense of mission in addition to supporting each of their vocations. It’s a both end, not an either or, and I want to be concrete with you on this. I believe there are a couple of callings. When I do pre-marital counseling, I ask couples why are you getting married and they always have good answers. You know, the Lord has blessed us, we feel called together, we love each other, and I always affirm that.

And you don’t have to have a seven-point plan, but one of the things we believe is there’s something a couple can do together that they cannot do separately. We want couples praying and seeking God about the gift that they and their family are to the world, and so my wife and I have a mission statement together. We each have a separate one and we have a mission statement together.
You know, the whole area of hospitality and how couples host people and make them feel welcome and that kind of thing is an important dimension of this kind of concern where you work together…

And that’s actually one of the outcomes. We have to have hospitality as one of the outcomes, and I’m sorry, I should have sent you a laminated large view of this, but anyway, it’s a good thing it was a conversation and not a TED talk here.

That’s exactly right. We’d be in deep trouble.

But hospitality is one of our outcomes as well. Single or married, is your life open, and are you hospitable?

Yeah, and I think people underestimate how important that can be in terms of relating to others and making people feel comfortable. Well, let’s go to the last one now. Economics and work, this is – I think you’ve already alluded to the fact that this was, in some ways, the most controversial part of it, and I would say it’s the one that people don’t normally put into this category at all, the large discipleship category, so why don’t we do this in two steps. Explain why it’s here and – I’m asking you really to justify why it’s here, in some ways, and then secondly, what you think it gives us by having it here.

Well, it’s rooted theologically in John 1:14. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and Jesus lived the life of an artisan and then was, of course, being prepared for his messianic mission, but God became human being forever, and in his human life on this earth, worked for a living, so we define work as all meaningful and moral activity, volunteer, or paid. So whether it’s working at the house or the office, the field, or the factory.

By the way, too much of the theology of work stuff is for middle and upper management or leadership and too little has been concentrated on the everyday work that most people do.

Yeah, that’s a good observation.
Dr. Charles E Self  

So, we really want to catch that, so it’s rooted there. The economy is the moral and social system of an exchange of value. We do not worry, at this stage, about particular fed policy or monetary policy or a command control, free market systems, but the idea that we are to add value. So, as part of the oikonomia or Oikonomia Network, economic wisdom principals, they are all through these sets of outcomes in terms of productivity, in terms of trust, in terms of character, in terms of exchange, but the idea is that we bring value to the world.

So, work and economics, everyone every day, who’s able to get up and do something, is participating in the economy and is doing some kind of work, and so we wanted to honor that as the stage, as it were, where all those other dimensions find their expression.

Dr. Darrell Bock  

Yeah, we tend to think of economics as if it’s about – as if it’s just about money, but really the root of the term goes back to the idea of a healthy kind of management of life that the way in which we mutually engage and support one another with different gifts and different abilities, so that life is filled out and made whole and functions and functions efficiently and effectively, at least in design.

Dr. Charles E Self  

Well, that’s how God designed it, and in order to have a well-honed economy, you have to have virtue, the rule of law, access to markets, mutual trust. There are elements, which, by the way, if you look at these dimensions of discipleship, someone who’s close to Christ, someone who’s becoming whole, someone who’s able to get along with people, someone who’s clear about what they’re doing is going to add value to the world and is going to then be, as you look at the outcomes, an asset to their employer, manage the organizations resources well, work in harmony with the environment.

We have outcomes that you never see on a standard discipleship form, that creation care and a growing economy can go together; that you contribute to whatever group you’re working for. This is what brings glory to God and we rooted all of this in the gospels and the epistles.

Dr. Darrell Bock  

Now, this is the one section of the sheet that I have where I’m having trouble reading any of these outcomes, so what are some of them?
Dr. Charles E Self

That’s what I wanted to mention. An asset to your organization, that you actually are a positive asset, that you are creating value for whoever you work for, volunteer or paid; that you are doing this in harmony with the environment. Now, we ask simple questions all the way from recycling to larger environmental issues, but we’re not being political about this. We’re not arguing about climate changer things. We’re trying to say, “are you caring for God’s world?”

We ask if you’re managing your personal resources well. We actually believe that because oikonomia or oikos refers to household management and so the idea is, are you taking care of your personal resources well? Are you actually aware of how your job fits into the economy?

So these are going to be – these are going to take a little bit longer over the coming years, should Jesus tarry, a little bit longer to get into the consciousness of pastors and disciplers, because they have broader social implications and too often work in economics are seen is merely an end to a tithe or a missions pledge, and we’re trying to give inherent, as well as instrumental value to work.

Dr. Darrell Bock

Yeah, I think this is the important thing is that we actually tend to view our work, and we’re almost programmed to do this by the culture, our work in a very much secular, sacred divide; our work is something we do – it’s our secular job and we earn our money and we’re resources. And then, we use our resources in our ministry, you know, on the weekend or in our free time or in our leisure time, et cetera, and work is this huge – parenthesis is probably not the right word, but almost this huge disconnect in our lives in terms of the way it functions, rather than viewing it as integral.

This is where God has us. God has us there for a reason to not only do things inherently that contribute to society, but also brings us into a web of relationships that have us uniquely placed to represent him where he has us, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and boom, now you’re in a mission.

Dr. Charles E Self

I want to agree with you. I want to challenge all the pastors and seminary students and leaders to think about what we measure in terms of discipleship progress. That’s what this entire thing is about, but, for example, we celebrate more Awana leaders or more Bible study leaders, and we should, or more baptisms. But are we celebrating people who open businesses? Are we celebrating people who get elected to school boards?
Are we celebrating people who bring good to the community as a discipleship function with the understand that all of this is in order that people may glorify our Father in heaven and praise our good works and be drawn to Christ, so I’m not making a water-baptized convert the same thing as, you know, doing accounting well.

They are different, I understand that, but are you doing your accounting in such a way that people notice the asset that you are? Are you getting along with the people where you work in such a way that makes them thirsty to know why you’re happy about the work you’re doing when everybody else is complaining, and really, that’s just one example.

But it’s really dignifying. We’re back to where we started at the very beginning. We really want to dignify and I think Romans 12:1 and 2 is the critical theological nexus here when Paul says to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice and the result of that offering is proving the will of God in what we do and what’s interesting is he ended the sacred secular dichotomy in two verses.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**

I mean, it’s a living sacrifice, so where God has you living is where you’re supposed to be functioning. I mean, that’s the picture that we’re to have. These are interesting categories. I think I can finally read one of them and I think you already alluded to it; understanding your career in light of the economy or how it works in the economy. That’s obviously one of them.

Where you fit is kind of – it’s interesting. We had an identity thing early on talking about spiritual formation and personal wholeness and now we come back to it and we’re really dealing with almost identity again, but in a completely different way and a completely different sphere.

**Dr. Charles E Self**

There was a man who, for 25 years, directed traffic at the San Francisco Airport, because airports are always under construction. He directed traffic, but he did it with white gloves, with gospel music, with a smile on his face, and he made everybody smile when they had to make this turn or that turn. Well later, the newspaper interviewed him and said what are you doing, you’re just directing traffic.
He said everybody comes to the airport stressed. Everybody comes with all kinds of anxiety. If I can reduce their anxiety, bring joy to them, and then you find out he’s an elder in his local church. He said and I’m doing this for the glory of God, for the good of people I mention. It turns out that he actually would have people stop and over the course of 25 years, led many to Christ because he brought joy to directing traffic.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** Wow, that’s a great story. Well, obviously we’re commending this as a wonderful tool of assessment in thinking in really what I would call conquertizing what discipleship is and very practical ways that you can look at and measure and say how am I doing and obviously with 40 different areas to take a look at there’ll be strengths and weaknesses in the process, so what’s involved in this? I take it you take this assessment. You can do it either as an individual or as a community and then do you take it periodically again or what’s the plan?

**Dr. Charles E Self** What we do is individual or group, it’s a very small – you pay a small price. It’s $9.95 for a person and less if you take it as a group, so under $10.00. You take it, that gives you three times you can take it in a year and I would not recommend doing it more than that simply because you want to measure progress and you can’t expect to progress much in any of this in under six months, but the other thing we’re really praying for is for pastors and leaders to invite groups to take it, and what they do is they can issue invitations.

The individual assessment is anonymous and personal to the person, but the pastor gets the data for the whole group and then with their leadership teams, they can actually start targeting those areas that are strong. Obviously there are areas of leadership that you want people to grow in. It opens a conversation and, by the way, this fits into any church mission statement, so we’re not – if you have no discipleship program, we have some churches that are using this to begin one.

In other cases, it can fit into any church mission statement or structure, but the idea is you can target weaknesses and strength. If you change one or two of the weaknesses, you’re probably going to touch four or five other outcomes as well, and improved prayer life and improved work life and improved marriage. Each of these can really affect other aspects. So the idea is that you take it again in 6 months or 12 months.
We’re hoping that seminaries will adopt it for entrance and maybe do it annually to be as part of their outcomes for their seminarians, so they can actually – one pastor wrote back and said Charlie, there’s only one problem. I have no excuses and you expect me to do my job now. Because most of us, frankly, are sort of guessing about discipleship. This is not the final word. This is a penultimate word like every word of a human being, but it’s a starting point for this whole life thinking.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Now, are you guys doing any aggregate collection of data to take a look at what everything – when it all – when everyone participates what that looks like?

**Dr. Charles E Self**  
Yes, we just now have enough that we’re beginning to crunch those numbers and we’ll begin to publish the results of sort of the first few hundred that have taken this and kind of where we’re finding people, so we’re able to do that in the aggregate, again, without violating individuals obviously.

But we’re able to do it in the aggregate, so starting in about three months, you’ll start seeing on the website publishing of those results of kind of where our participants are, as a whole group, and eventually, we’ll be able to break out subgroups as well by both denomination, by gender, by other things, because you take an initial survey when you take this.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
And I take it that another thing that is doable here, as you’ve said, the websites, that at least one of the intentions become a resource for each one of these areas, so that as you publish that data and you begin to locate, well, we do better here, we’re pretty good here, but man oh man do we need work over here. You have resources that can be applied to those areas.

**Dr. Charles E Self**  
Right now, even in the reports, at the end of every single outcome, there are recommended resources, so we mention a couple of denominational things, but we go past our own denomination and tradition. And you’ll find the language here broadly evangelical, not denominational, and recommended resources on prayer, recommended resources on studying the bible or economics and work, and so we always have three or four recommended resources as well, and we’re going to be adding to that as we go.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Now, is that listing annotated or simply the list of the titles?
**Dr. Charles E Self** Right now, it’s going to be annotated. Right now, it’s a listing at the end of the outcomes.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** I see.

**Dr. Charles E Self** Part of what we’re hoping – by the way, the other thing that’s unique about this, the seminary has licensed it to Johan and myself to run as a business, and so it has to be self-sustaining in the next few months, as the…

**Dr. Darrell Bock** I know what that life’s like.

**Dr. Charles E Self** As the grant money ends, it’s going – what we’re excited about is, to be honest with you, it’s only a few hundred people a month and we can pay for all the backend programming and pay for people to write for us and just one to two thousand personal assessments a month, which is just a few churches, will begin to really generate resources that we can pour back into it.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** Now, if you don’t mind my asking, what kind of a grant did you get to launch this?

**Dr. Charles E Self** Well, we got two grants actually from the Kern Family Foundation to launch this; the first one to kind of do the national listening and then a second one to add to that to do both the development of the site and the current grant we’re under to do the regional introduction to this, as we’re going to key leaders and introducing it around the country, so a combination of grants actually.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** And was it two grants over two years, or was it a longer period of prep?

**Dr. Charles E Self** This was actually over a total of three years now.
Dr. Darrell Bock  Okay, well that’s great. Well, it’s a wonderful project, Charlie. I mean, it really is marvelous. The moment I saw this chart and you passed it out at the event that we were at together in January, I went man oh man I want to talk about this, because it’s just such a helpful way to open up the conversation and get people to think about it. The tool has, I think, wonderful potential and so we’re really, really pleased to be able to talk with you about discipleship dynamics. I’ll let you give the website again, so that people can go and check it out for themselves.

Dr. Charles E Self  Well, it’s www.discipleshipdynamics.com and we would love to get feedback and love to keep learning, so if there are recommended resources, you can send emails to us and we’ll keep adding and keep growing, and we’re beginning to gain some traction. It’s kind of – I’d say the one great challenge is to realize it really is as simple as an assessment tool, but it’s as challenging as an accountability tool.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah, exactly, and just to help people, since we kind of struggled through visualizing this chart for people; although we plan within the podcast to display it, if they want to take a look at this particular chart, 5 dimensions and 40 outcomes, where would they go on the website to do that?

Dr. Charles E Self  They can go on the website and literally click on – there’s a place they can click on to see the dimensions, see the outcomes. It’ll say learn more and you can click on one of those buttons and they can find it right away.

Dr. Darrell Bock  That’s great. Well, then they can fill in all the blanks that I so poorly supplied as we were talking about this, but anyway, again, thanks for taking the time to be with us. We really appreciate you doing this and it’s just been a real joy to talk about this today, and we do hope that it’s encouraged people to think about discipleship. Thank you for being a part of this.

Dr. Charles E Self  It’s my honor to be part of your family there and I’m glad to share with you a partnership and stewardship.

Dr. Darrell Bock  Exactly, and we thank you all for joining us on The Table. We appreciate your being with us and we hope you’ll be with us again soon.